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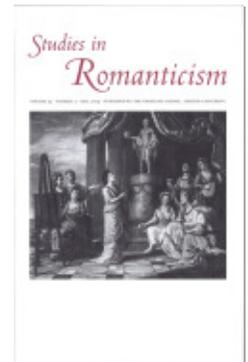
Do Women Have a Book History?

Michelle Levy

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MICHELLE LEVY

Do Women Have a Book History?¹

WRITING IN 2012 ABOUT THE EXTENSIVE SCHOLARSHIP STILL NEEDED ON women writers of the Romantic period, Anne Mellor urged that “we need broader studies of women’s participation in the entire range of print culture in the Romantic era.”² The first half of this essay explores the theoretical and methodological strategies by which we can begin to answer Mellor’s call, by developing a woman’s book history for the Romantic period. In doing so, I have been inspired by Mellor’s example of significantly broadening the canon, as she has done throughout her career, in both her critical and editorial work.³ Franco Moretti’s related model of “distant reading” has also guided my approach, particularly his contention that in order to grasp a literary field as a whole, scholars must devise strategies that allow us to zoom out to take in a wider view.

The second part of this essay offers a specific case study of women’s publishing history of the period, exploring an unexamined archive of the correspondence of 80 women with four publishing houses. The survey of this collection begins not only to broaden but also to revise our understanding of women’s involvement in literary culture, putting pressure on received understandings of the print marketplace and women’s professionalism within it.

1. Building Bridges: Book History and Feminist Literary History

Robert Darnton’s 1982 essay “What is the History of Books?” proposed what became a highly influential model for conceptualizing such a history,

1. My title echoes Joan Kelly-Gadol’s landmark essay, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 137–64, and Anne Mellor’s own essay “Were Women Writers ‘Romantics?’”

2. In “Thoughts on Romanticism and Gender,” 346.

3. Mellor’s influential anthology, co-edited with Richard E. Matlak, *British Literature 1780–1830*, contains author entries for nineteen women and selections from an additional eight, the broadest representation of female authors of any contemporary anthology; likewise, her *Mothers of the Nation: Women’s Political Writing in England, 1780–1830* covers a very broad range of women writing in a wide variety of genres.

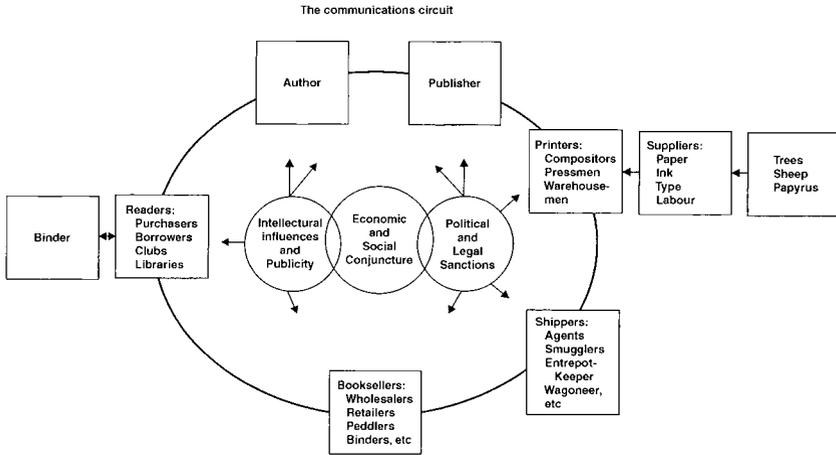


Figure 1: Robert Darnton, “The Communications Circuit,” in “What is the History of Books?,” 68.

that of the “communications circuit” (fig. 1), a model depicting a circuit from author to publisher, printer, shipper, bookseller, reader, and back to author, as a means of describing the operation of the book trade in England and France during the print-era.⁴ One of the most profound contributions of Darnton’s model for literary scholars has been to re-embed authors within the larger fields of activity by which books were made and sold, distributed and read. As we know, the fantasy of the isolated writer was propagated by several Romantic poets, who figured themselves as did Shelley, as “a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds.”⁵ Book-historical approaches have been instrumental in debunking this mythology of solitary genius, as literary scholars have productively used Darnton’s theory to examine the social networks that enabled the production and dissemination of printed books. Darnton’s famous diagram is, however, silent on the question of gender (as it is with respect to other important identity categories, such as class). What happens if we overlay gender onto this diagram? It becomes immediately apparent that whereas men (albeit of different classes) have occupied all positions along the circuit at all times, women have rarely done so. Scholars have begun to bring gender to bear on Darnton’s model, with results that suggest

4. Robert Darnton, “What is the History of Books?,” *Daedalus* 111, no. 3: Representations and Realities (Summer, 1982): 65–83.

5. Percy Shelley, “A Defence of Poetry,” *Essays: Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, 2 vols., ed. Mary Shelley (London: Moxon, 1840), 1:14.

the importance of heeding historical and geographical variations. Some early modern feminist historians have usefully appropriated Darnton's model, in part because it has helped to draw out women's various contributions to print culture in a period when fewer women appeared in print as authors. Thus Maureen Bell, Paula McDowell, and Helen Smith have documented women's active participation in producing and disseminating texts, as printers and hawkers, publishers and sermonizers, compilers and collectors.

However, other early modern feminist scholars have contended that book history's focus on the printed book has tended to marginalize women. Margaret Ezell, for example, has repeatedly called attention to manuscript culture as a socially significant form of literary dissemination throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and one in which women engaged not only as authors but as editors and translators, patrons and copyists. Consideration only of printed books by women during the early modern period yields a highly distorted picture. As Jill Millman observes, "women's writing . . . when seen through the records of published books, produced a strange picture of women's literary history. The few women to actually have their work printed in the early modern period are very rich, very radical, or related to Sir Philip Sidney."⁶ To provide a more representative account of women's writing, feminist scholars had to look beyond print, beyond traditional genres, and finally, beyond notions of solitary authorship, as early modern women's writing is rarely the product of a single individual.⁷

Some of these insights, however, appear to be of limited utility to understanding the practices of later eighteenth-century book culture. According to Isobel Grundy, after the early eighteenth century, women's "part in the actual production of books shows no sign of growth," and even shows signs of decline.⁸ Whatever involvement women had in the book trades in the seventeenth century seems to have waned by the eighteenth, when it is largely dominated by men: of the thirty-eight publishers listed in *The British Literary Book Trade, 1700–1820*, only one is a woman (Anne Dodd), and her firm ceased trading in the 1750s. While further isolated examples have

6. Millman, "Introduction to The Perdita Project Catalogue 1997–2007" (Adam Matthew Digital, 2008), <http://www.perditamanuscripts.anddigital.co.uk.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/Introduction/Content/EssayContent.aspx>, accessed 12 January 2014.

7. One of the most important theoretical interventions is Margaret Ezell's concept of "social authorship," describing a set of literary practices by which handwritten texts were socially produced, circulated, and read. See her *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

8. Grundy, "Women and print: readers, writers and the market," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain 1695–1830*, eds. Michael F. Suarez, S. J. and Michael L. Turner, Vol. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 146, DOI: 10.1017.

been found and likely more will be uncovered, the asymmetry that is present by the 1750s—with women featuring so prominently in the categories of author and reader whilst being so underrepresented in other categories—is unlikely to be significantly reversed. In our period, then, Darnton's diagram cannot be readily deployed to expand our understanding of women's involvement in print.

However, women's apparent absence from the circuit draws out one obvious but unnoticed effect: that they were compelled, exclusively, to negotiate with men. Men and women of this period occupied such disparate economic, social, and cultural positions that this asymmetry of roles demands greater scrutiny than it has hitherto received. At the same time, just as early modern feminist scholars like Ezell have articulated some fundamental shortcomings in book historical models, it may be that Darnton's circuit is too rigid to capture the full range of women's involvement in the production and dissemination of literary writing even during the print era. Because the circuit assigns discrete roles to various skilled trades or professions, as essentially a model of the commercial book trade, it obscures the overlapping and intertwined nature of the more informal practices by which many books were produced and circulated.

Thomas Adams and Nicholas Barker's 1993 refinement of Darnton's model (fig. 2), tracing the five events in the life of a book—publishing, manufacture, distribution, reception, and survival—by emphasizing activities rather than discrete roles, may help to excavate women's actual involvement with print, as gendered agents potentially occupying informal/fluid/overlapping roles. Just as many early modern women moved between activities of authoring, editing, collecting, copying, and circulating, my preliminary research suggests that many Romantic-era women were proxy-publishers of books, assuming financial risk and responsibility for marketing and distribution even if they were not professional publishers. A model that acknowledges how various roles along the circuit could be blurred or even collapsed is needed to capture the nature and extent of women's involvement in the period's literary culture. The fruitful potential for a conjoined feminist book history to reshape both the fields of feminist literary history and book history (and our understanding of the period generally) also lies in attempts to quantify women's contributions to the rise in printed output that characterized the closing decades of the eighteenth century. An important body of work has emerged over the past 15 years, by scholars including William St. Clair, James Raven, and Richard Sher, which seeks to measure and account for the print explosion that began around 1775. However, all of the explanations that have been advanced for the print boom, such as changes in copyright law, innovative bookselling practices, shifting demographics, and rising literacy rates, fail to address the

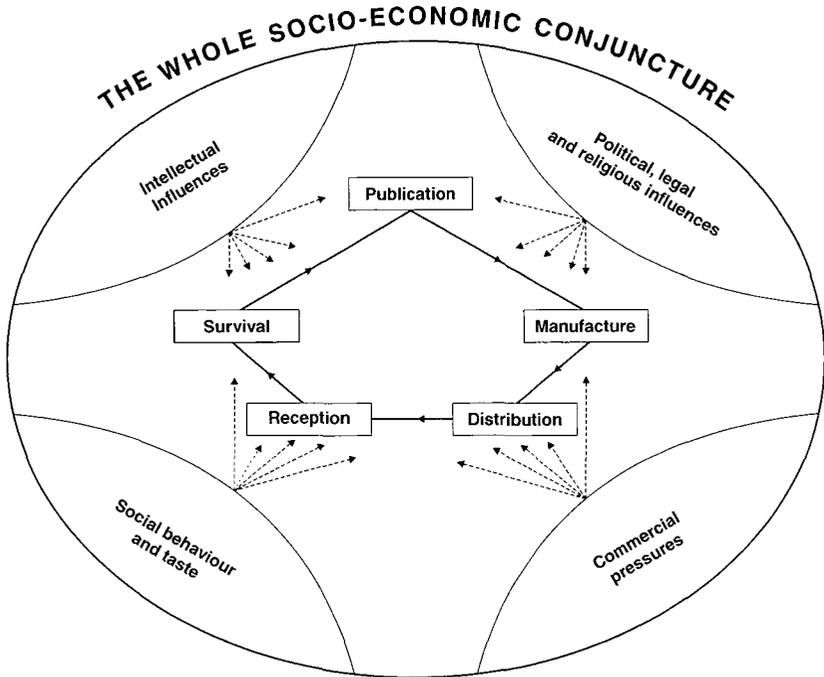


Figure 2: Thomas R. Adams and Nicholas Barker, "The whole socio-economic conjuncture," "A New Model for the Study of the Book," in *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society*, 14. Reproduced courtesy of the British Library.

signal role of gender directly. Only one chapter (out of 49) in Volume 5 of *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain 1695–1830*, Isobel Grundy's "Women and Print: Readers, Writers and the Market," is explicitly devoted to gender. Here Grundy asks, "What difference did women make to the book trade during the long eighteenth century?" and concludes that much remains unknown.⁹ Indeed, we lack answers to basic (albeit challenging) bibliographical questions, such as the extent to which women fueled the expansion of the press. What we do know about the one genre that has been extensively studied, the novel, is that women were instrumental to its (quantitative) rise: during the period 1780 to 1820, new novels by women outstripped those of their male counterparts.¹⁰ More research is

9. Grundy, "Women and print," 146.

10. For a detailed analysis of the publication of novels during the period, including a breakdown by gender (providing for the large number of anonymous works), see the introductions in Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling, eds. *The English Novel*,

needed into women's contributions to other genres such as poetry, as well as their (probable) dominance in emergent genres like children's literature. At the same time, more elusive socio-historical questions emerge, such as why so many more women began to write and print their works at this particular historical moment? What circumstances allowed for the incredible success, both commercially and critically, enjoyed by some women writers? If, as both Susan Staves and Paula Backscheider have contended, by the end of the eighteenth century women had, for the first time, achieved widespread public acceptance as authors, what enabled this change?

The prominent model advanced by feminist literary historians to explain these successes is professionalization: women seeking and achieving remuneration for their work and respect from both lay and professional readers. Since Cheryl Turner's account of how women sought to *Live by the Pen* first appeared nearly twenty years ago, scholars have provided rich portraits of the careers of individual women, narrating their committed efforts to write their way to economic independence. In 1991, Jan Fergus's *Jane Austen: A Literary Life* revoked nearly two centuries of belief in Austen's genteel amateurism by documenting her dedication to her narrative craft and her ambition for print (and profit), and in 2005, Betty Schellenberg's *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* pointed to women's emergent professionalism over half a century earlier, in the mid eighteenth century.

One important source of information about women's motivations for and experience of authorship has been accounts of women's relationships with their publishers. These studies tell us a great deal: about women's motivations for print; about their bargaining savvy (or lack thereof); about the financial agreements that were negotiated and the business models adopted by publishers; about the division of labor between authors and publishers; and about the nature of the social and professional interactions between male publishers and female authors. Scholarship on the publishing careers of individual female authors—on Jane Austen (by Mandal; Sutherland); Frances Burney (by Justice; Pink; Thaddeus); Maria Edgeworth (by Butler; Gallagher); Felicia Hemans (by Feldman; Wolfson); Mary Robinson (by Pascoe); and Charlotte Smith (by Batchelor; Stanton)—has tended to cement this view of women's professionalism. Indeed, work on women's

1770–1829: a Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles, 2 vols. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). For further analysis of this data, see Michelle Levy, "Women and Print Culture, 1750–1830," Volume 5 of *The History of British Women's Writing, 1750–1830*, ed. Jacqueline Labbe (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 31–32.

publishing careers has resulted in a scholarly consensus of sorts: that by the late eighteenth century most serious women writers rejected manuscript culture and instead embraced print publication; that they turned to print to earn money and public acclaim and, frequently, to intervene in public affairs; and that they actively (and astutely) managed their financial affairs and public images. This positive assessment of women's professional engagement with the business of print has been bolstered by the favorable portrait that has emerged of Joseph Johnson's publishing circle, whose sociability extended to the many female authors he published.

But the tiny segment of female authors considered thus far is unlikely to be representative of the whole (just as Johnson is not of publishers). Exclusive attention to these female authors has obscured our understanding of the many women who did not attempt to "live by the pen," or enter print with high aspirations, or experience the same congeniality with their publishers, or even seek to print their writing.¹¹ Recent scholarship has uncovered evidence of how women struggled to earn an adequate living from writing: how subscription was widely used as a means of raising funds for indigent women¹² and, as Jennie Batchelor has shown, how circumstances frequently obliged women to make appeals to the Royal Literary Fund for donations. While many women aspired to professional status, only a small minority achieved it: most women made little from their writing; shifted from publisher to publisher and from genre to genre, in an effort to see their work into print; struck poor deals with their publishers; and failed to see their works reprinted. Even those writers who enjoyed popularity during their lives, such as Jane Austen, are illustrative: she spent more than eleven years trying to break into print; published her six novels with two different publishers (and had contracted with a third); and earned just over £600 in her lifetime and £110 for *Pride and Prejudice*, a very bad bargain for what was her best-selling novel. While it may be true that "Austen wrote when opportunities for women to publish had never been greater," this meant neither that getting into print was easy, nor that women profited from printing their writing.¹³

I believe it is necessary to broaden our understanding of women's en-

11. See Jennie Batchelor, "'Connections, which are of service . . . in a more advanced age': *The Lady's Magazine*, Community, and Women's Literary Histories," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 30, no. 2 (2011): 245-67, in which she points out how writing by women in periodicals like *The Lady's Magazine*, which relied "upon a network of amateur anonymous or pseudonymous 'Female Correspondents,'" fails to conform to received conceptions of female authorship (267).

12. Levy, "Women and Print Culture," 37.

13. Jan Fergus, "The Professional Woman Writer," *Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, eds. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2.

agement with literary culture, and to do so we must move beyond the dominant model of the professional author, beyond the book as the central object of study, and even beyond print itself. The single-author model that we have inherited—another consequence of reading the male Romantic poets on their own terms, and thus being constrained by “romantic ideology”—emphasizes autonomy and even genius in earning economic and cultural capital, ignoring the actual conditions of literary production and dissemination. Once again, Darnton’s model reminds us that most authors were not nightingales singing to themselves in the dark but social and economic actors, writing for audiences whom they hoped would enjoy and purchase (or rent) their books (or periodicals or pamphlets).

There are, however, both disciplinary and evidentiary challenges to moving away from a single-author model. Literary studies—both in its pedagogical and research methodologies—has traditionally been oriented around individual writers and the close reading of their texts. But here again, the discipline of book history and its more recent incarnation in methodologies of distant reading, such as those developed by Franco Moretti and others, has real promise. Indeed, Moretti reminds us that one of the chief insights of book history has been to broaden our understanding of the past by embracing social history, by shifting our attention “from the extraordinary to the everyday, from exceptional events to the large mass of facts.”¹⁴

Finding traces of “the everyday” can be challenging, however. Fortunately, collections do survive that can provide glimpses into this past, even though these collections were formed with an entirely different purpose in mind. Enter William Upcott, an antiquary and autograph collector, whose collecting mania, along with an extensive correspondence, was inherited from his father, Ozias Humphrey (who died in 1810). Upcott’s collection grew apace, and by 1816 he was fully immersed in what he termed “autographic mania.”¹⁵ His mania was fed by the connections he made during his nearly thirty-year tenure as librarian at the London Institution from its founding in 1806 to 1834. His chief source of autographs appears to have been publishers, with whom he had both personal and professional relationships. In the catalog of the collection he compiled in 1836, he describes how “many of the most eminent Publishers kindly permitted me to select from their preserved Correspondence letters,” and this is almost certainly how he was able to amass thousands of letters, some historical but many

14. Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005), 3.

15. Upcott, “Autobiography of a Collector,” *Gentlemen’s Magazine*, 2nd ser., 25 (May 1846): 476.

more from contemporary individuals.¹⁶ We have this description of his self-styled “Autograph Cottage” at 102 Upper Street, Islington, from a contemporary: “every inch of wall was covered with paintings, drawings, and prints . . . not only every drawer, shelf, box, and cupboard was crammed, but every table and chair groaned under its load of books, portraits, autographs, and newspaper cuttings.”¹⁷ A nineteenth-century hoarder if ever there was one, Upcott managed to sell few of his manuscripts during his lifetime, and upon his death in 1845 he had in his possession some 32,000 letters. Many of these letters he had organized into thematic grangerized collections, with volumes containing hundreds of letters extra-illustrated with engraved portraits.

While many of these collections have since been pilfered and unbound by collectors for choice specimens, Upcott’s collection of 444 letters by 237 “Distinguished Women” is intact.¹⁸ Upcott’s chief sources of letters for this collection, particularly for living women, were four publishing houses active in the period: Cadell & Davies, James Lackington, Henry Colburn, and Vernor & Hood. Of the 237 women represented in Upcott’s collection, 80 of them wrote 172 letters to these four publishing houses (since more than one letter is included from several women):

Table 1: Composition of Upcott’s 4 vol. “Distinguished Women” by Publisher

Publisher	# of women with whom they corresponded	# of total letters written by women
Cadell & Davies	26	53
James Lackington	11	28
Henry Colburn	26	40
Vernor & Hood	17	51
TOTAL	80	172

Significantly, too, while the archive includes many well-known authors, there are many more who are unknown to us today (and were likely not well known then): precisely those whose letters publishers were unlikely to retain. In addition, the foundation of Upcott’s collection—the

16. Upcott, *Original Letters, Manuscripts, and State Papers, collected by William Upcott* (London: Maurice, Clark, 1836), no page.

17. “The Late William Upcott,” *Gentlemen’s Magazine*, 2nd ser., 26 (May 1846): 473.

18. “Original Letters, collected by William Upcott of the London Institution. Distin-

autograph—means that he did not scrutinize the contents of the letters. This is extremely useful, insofar as most of the letters are unimportant in terms of biographical or historical significance, but are extremely revealing of mundane or workaday correspondence between women and their publishers. The archive thus provides a sample of both unusual quantity and depth and is remarkable for the simple fact of its ordinariness.

The four publishing houses included in the archive also render it a sound testing ground for examining women's publishing history during the Romantic period. These publishers reflect the entrepreneurial spirit that we know to have been so instrumental to publishing success in the period. James Lackington was the Jeff Bezos of the late eighteenth century, revolutionizing the book trade as the self-proclaimed "Cheapest Bookseller in the World" at his discount bookstore, "Temple of the Muses," in Finsbury Square (a short distance from the London Institution at Finsbury Circus). Cadell & Davies, who may be best known now for its infamous rejection of *First Impressions* "by return of post," published "many of the most important and enterprising works of the late eighteenth century,"¹⁹ and the firm is especially noteworthy for its publication of some of the most influential female authors of the period, including Frances Burney, Hannah Cowley, Hannah More, Charlotte Smith, Ann Radcliffe, and Helen Maria Williams. Henry Colburn, who traded for nearly five decades (between 1806 and 1853) published almost one thousand titles during this period; his "output alone," according to Peter Garside, "makes him one of the most significant publishers of his period."²⁰ While he became known during the 1820s as the publisher of silver-fork novels, he was also notorious for his unscrupulous business practices and his "puffing engine": John Sutherland describes the scale of his advertising budget as "breathtaking."²¹ Finally, Vernor & Hood, a smaller house, were successful purveyors of fine engravings and reprintings of valuable old books, as well as more humble species of popular literature.

The correspondence of eighty women to these four houses extends our knowledge of the kinds of engagements women had with publishers; it also offers insight into the operation of firms for which complete financial re-

guished Women," 4 vols., British Library Add, Ms. 78686–78689. The Collection is dated 1824.

19. Michael Sadleir, "Review of *The Publishing Firm of Cadell & Davies: Select Correspondence and Accounts, 1793–1836*," *The Library* 19, no. 3 (1938): 365.

20. Garside, "Colburn, Henry (1784/5–1855)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, May 2006, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5836>, accessed 25 January 2014.

21. Sutherland, "Henry Colburn Publisher" *Publishing History* 19 (1986): 61.

cords have not survived.²² In the following pages, I offer a sampling of the evidence, which collectively supports three conclusions. First, it is apparent from the correspondence that publishers were overwhelmed by submissions of manuscripts, and that the marketplace for *women's* writing in particular was extremely crowded and competitive, such that we may have overestimated the ease with which women had access to print and underestimated, if possible, women's desperation to find print outlets for their writing. The second and related point is that many women were involved not merely in genteel negotiations with their publishers over questions of format, price, and payment—the basis for the portrait of professional female engagement with publishers that has emerged to date—but were faced with an intensely competitive market, and thus forced to become more directly and personally involved in the business of making and selling books. These letters suggest that many women became, in effect, their own publishers and publicists, responsible for managing both the printing and the marketing of their own writing. And finally, letters in the archive show that the line between the personal and commercial in these relationships was at best indistinct, indicative of what Moretti has called “the messy realities of social history,” a phrase that aptly describes the interactions between male publishers and female authors.²³

2. The Competitive Print Marketplace for Women

Dozens of letters within this archive are requests for consideration of a manuscript, and they make it evident that publishing houses were inundated with manuscripts by women. Not infrequently, women complain that this is their third or fourth or fifth attempt to secure a response; they express surprise, indignation, and frustration at the silence with which their submissions have been met. Anne Plumtre's sister wrote to Lackington not only to express her dismay at his refusal to publish her sister's latest work, but also to admonish him for the delay in delivering the bad news (and thereby expressing a sentiment not unknown to academics today): “permit me to remind you that it is somewhat hard on the proprietor of the MS to be kept thus long in suspense, since if you will not make an arrangement for it at last, the whole six months which you have now had in your hands is time entirely lost in the disposal of it.”²⁴ While James Raven notes that “it is simply not known how many manuscripts were refused,”

22. According to Sutherland, “Henry Colburn,” Colburn's records were destroyed in the Blitz, 83n33.

23. Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London, New York: Verso, 2013), 158.

24. “Original Letters,” Vol. 3, British Library Add, Ms. 78688.

this archive suggests that the refusal rate was extremely high.²⁵ Women also experienced considerable difficulty in securing the return of their rejected manuscripts. Alethea Lewis for one sought to save herself the trouble of retrieving and resubmitting her rejected manuscript to another publisher, trusting Messrs. Vernor and Hood to use their best judgment in sending it on to “the house of your choice.”²⁶ The problem, as Vernor & Hood explained it to Ms. Lewis (and as others publishers explained it to other women), was that the publishing houses were overwhelmed by submissions and already felt themselves overcommitted.

This archive also challenges the assumption that even moderately successful authors established ongoing relationships with a publishing house, when in fact their dealings were often short-lived, surviving no longer than the very-brief shelf life of a single printed work. Indeed, this archive presents the well-known careers of women like Austen, Hemans, and Smith in a new light, as we are reminded that even they had to work assiduously to retain their publishers. Paula Feldman reports how diligently Hemans sounded out her publishers for their advice on making her writing attractive to a larger readership.²⁷ Writing to Mr. Cadell, Sr. in 1798, Charlotte Smith also shows herself willing to please by remarking that she has included poetry in her most recent novel, “as you seem’d to express a desire that the work might have that variety.”²⁸

Women involved in journalism were also prepared, perhaps to an even greater degree, to write to order. Two of the publishing houses in this archive had magazines, founded (at least in part) to support the marketing of their books: Vernor & Hood published *The Lady’s Monthly Museum* from 1798–1832, Henry Colburn *The New Monthly Magazine* from 1814 and *The Literary Gazette* from 1817, as well as other magazine ventures. In seeking employment by writing for these magazines, women were ready to deliver writing in any genre, on any topic and of any length, as required. Charlotte Nooth, for example, in seeking to work for Colburn’s newly minted *Literary Gazette*, explains herself ready “to review books in French, Italian, or Spanish” and to “supply some intriguing details concerning India”; she is also competent to “translate with ease & rapidity” and has on hand “a good

25. James Raven, “Book Production” in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 199.

26. Letter from Alethea Lewis to Vernor & Hood, October 4, 1802, Vol. 2, “Original Letters,” British Library Add, Ms. 78686.

27. Feldman, “The Poet and the Profits: Felicia Hemans and the Literary Marketplace,” *Keats-Shelley Journal* 46 (1997): 154.

28. Letter from Charlotte Smith to Messrs. Cadell, January 16, 1798, “Original Letters,” Vol. 4, British Library Add, Ms. 78689.

deal of MS poetry to throw in” besides. She is also willing to conform to the political flavor of the journal:

I suppose you have heard of the footman who said to his new master “pray sir, what *religion* would you please me to be of?” I beg leave to ask just the same question with regard to politics, since altho’ the subject may never be directly treated, literary disquisition always derive[s] *richness* from being slightly tinged with the hue of party.²⁹

I have been unable to discover whether Nooth ever became a contributor to the *Gazette*; though one of the ironies of her political flexibility was that the *Gazette* sought to distinguish itself from the partisan *Quarterlies* through its party neutrality.

The statistical reality that undergirds these examples is that many and possibly most women who printed a single stand-alone work did not print again: of the 714 known poets in Jackson’s bibliography of *Romantic Poetry by Women*, 490 women, or a full 68% of the cohort, published only a single volume of verse.³⁰ Likewise, most titles were not reprinted. According to James Raven, the novel was an ephemeral production, with fewer than a quarter of the 3677 novels published between 1770 and 1829 being reprinted even once.³¹ It seems likely that many of these women dropped out of print not because they had no more to say, but simply because they could not find a publisher willing to take the risk of printing a second work.

3. Women as Producers, Publishers, Marketers, and Distributors

Most women sought the certainty of modest profit over the possibility of potentially greater return, and thus attempted to sell their manuscripts outright, or to have the publisher front the cost of an edition. However, this archive suggests that many publishers appear to have been unwilling to do so. One of the consequences of this overstrained market appears to be that, with seeming regularity, women were forced to become their own publishers. The tedious and risky nature of self-publication likely explains why women were willing to accept even paltry sums for the outright sale of copyright.

Many of the women represented in this archive published by subscription, and their letters bear out Burney’s sense of the burdensome nature of

29. Letter from Charlotte Nooth to Richard Valpy, January 10, 1814, “Original Letters,” Vol. 3, *British Library Add, Ms. 78788*. Valpy offered to negotiate with Henry Colburn on Nooth’s behalf.

30. Levy, “Women and Print Culture,” 39.

31. Garside et al., “*The English Novel, 1770–1829*,” 1:35, 63; 2:97.

these arrangements.³² Women had to become booksellers (before they had a product to sell) by finding subscribers and collecting the subscription price from them, not an easy task when many subscribers were geographically diffuse, and others were reluctant to part with their cash for a book that might never materialize. (Charlotte Smith wrote to Cadell that “in cases of Subscription An Author is always consider’d as a kind of literary beggar.”³³) Women also had to become investors, fronting the costs of the printing, dealing with printers, even to the point (in one instance) of supplying the printer with paper. Women had to distribute their books, another thankless task given logistical difficulties and high costs of shipping, which women sought to mitigate through many contrivances—by sending books with friends visiting town, for example. Finally, since most women were usually left with a surplus of copies after having disposed of all subscriber copies, they had to seek out other means of selling their books: by advertising, by sending copies to reviewers, and by approaching commercial booksellers in the hopes that they would take a few copies to sell in their shops on commission.

If this archive presents compelling evidence of many women’s active involvement in the making, selling, and distribution of their books, it also reminds us of the overlapping nature of other roles within the book trade, such as the fact that publishers were also booksellers. This fact further complicates our understanding of the relationship between women and publishers, insofar as it reminds us of the power these booksellers possessed as a result of their easy and discounted access to books, which held enormous economic and cultural value for women. Women frequently called upon their publishers to purchase or exchange their unwanted books, and to supply them with new books, whether their own titles or those of others, whether for their own pleasure or for research, for themselves, or as gifts to others. On occasion these books are requested as loans, other times as purchases, and other times as *gratis* copies.

But this was a two-way street, and publishers frequently made gifts to authors whom they were eager to encourage or retain. While many women undoubtedly welcomed these gifts, the archive suggests that others were made uneasy by them. Joanna Baillie wrote to Colburn asking that he no longer send her the *New Monthly Magazine*, undoubtedly his way of urging her to contribute to the periodical, or otherwise currying favor with her. She tells Colburn that she had already asked this of Mr. Campbell, the editor, and that she “will feel herself hurt if [her request] be not complied

32. Emma Pink, “Frances Burney’s *Camilla*,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40, no. 1 (2006): 63–64.

33. “Letter from Charlotte Smith to Thomas Cadell,” 14 May 1799, *Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*, ed. Judith P. Stanton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 323.

with."³⁴ When Anna Seward received twelve copies of Joshua Smith's *An authentic narrative of the causes which led to the death of Major André* from the printer, in an edition which included her own monody, she wrote, "while I am grateful for your bounty, I blush for its *extent*," possibly indicative of discomfort at the sense of obligation such generosity might create.³⁵

4. Female Authors and Male Publishers: Mixing the Personal and the Professional

The letters also reveal the complex intertwining of personal and professional relationships. Several established authors, including Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Porter, and Lady Morgan, were willing to ask for special consideration on the part of friends who were seeking publishers. Women sought advice from their male publishers on a range of topics, and frequent mention is made of their disputes with other publishers, often accompanied by requests for assistance or intervention. Oftentimes multiple requests are made for advances, an indication of the growing reluctance on the part of publishers to part with their money until profits had been realized. Women also sought payments that cannot properly be termed advances. Mary Leslie, a regular contributor to the *Lady's Monthly Museum*, asks Vernor & Hood "whether I am at present to be favoured with another small remittance [that] . . . cannot be said to be owing," while reminding them that "[i]t is in aid of a limited income & for the furtherance of the education of four interesting children, that I attempt to write."³⁶ Judith Stanton has shown how often Charlotte Smith importuned her publishers for assistance also not strictly owed to her by invoking her dreadful domestic circumstances.³⁷ Publishers could be generous in responding to these requests, and we know that publishers often wrote letters in support of applications to the Royal Literary Fund on behalf of authors.

The personal nature of these relationships, the intimate details that women often divulged (many women discuss their physical ailments, often in detail), likely made it difficult for some publishers to deny the requests made of them. Not surprisingly, the retirement or death of a partner often occasioned the severing of existing relationships, likely because the new partner wished to make a clean break before a personal tie was developed

34. Letter from Joanna Baillie to Henry Colburn, December 24, 1821, "Original Letters," Vol. 1, British Library Add, Ms. 78686.

35. Letter from Anna Seward to Mr. Leigh, Bookseller, June 24, 1808, "Original Letters," Vol. 4, British Library Add, Ms. 78689.

36. Letter from Mary Leslie to Messrs. Vernor and Hood, March 2, 1811, "Original Letters," Vol. 2, British Library Add, Ms. 78687.

37. Stanton, *Collected Letters*, xvi-xviii. See also, for example, Smith's letter to Thomas Cadell, Sr. 14 January 1788, in *Collected Letters*, 12-14.

anew. Charlotte Smith complained bitterly that Thomas Cadell, Jr., who took over after his father's retirement in 1793, was not so easy with his terms as his father had been.³⁸ One of the most woeful narratives in the archive is found in Mary Pilkington's letter to Vernor & Hood after the death of Mr. Hood in 1811, letters that record her shock and pain after she is summarily dismissed from her position as a long-time correspondent for the *Lady's Monthly Museum*. She seeks out his widow to implore her assistance, though Mrs. Hood indicates that she can do little.³⁹ It is in these letters that the particular vulnerability of women, and the asymmetry of gender relations within the publishing world, becomes apparent.

The disadvantages women faced in their dealings with male publishers helps to make sense of the decision made by several of the most successful female authors of the day—women like Felicia Hemans and Maria Edgeworth, who were also highly competent managers of their family's economic affairs—to ask men to act as their literary agents. We might also better judge the success of women like Hemans and Smith in terms of their willingness to seek and implement the guidance offered by their publishers, men who were highly knowledgeable as to the state of public taste.

Through my examination of this collection of women's correspondence with publishers I have sought to provide an example of how feminist literary history and book history might join forces. For one thing, attention to models of book history like the communication circuit urges us in new directions, leading us to seek examples of women's involvement in book-making and circulation beyond the roles of author and reader and drawing awareness to the complex social and economic conditions that impacted their writing careers and mediated their entry into print. At the same time, rethinking the communication circuit in terms of gender compels us to confront the gender asymmetry that existed within commercial publishing and to examine more closely the complex relationships between women writers and their male publishers. Moreover, gender complicates some of the fundamental assumptions embedded in the communication circuit, which, by assigning discrete roles to various groups, obscures the overlapping roles that many individuals, and it seems many women, played within the print marketplace.

Finally, in order to tell a women's book history, even during the high print era of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the continuing preoccupation with the book and with print must give way to new information about the work of women's writing in the period, the impor-

38. Stanton, *Collected Letters*, xvii.

39. Letters from Mary Pilkington to Vernor & Hood, September 4 and 30, 1811, "Original Letters," Vol. 3, British Library Add, Ms. 78688.

tance of women's contributions to periodicals and other ephemeral print media, the role women played in circulating the writing of others and bringing it to press, and the ongoing vitality of manuscript circulation even alongside an explosive print culture. To imagine women in all these new positions we will need new conceptions of female authorship. While many women aspired to and achieved professional status, many more women did not, as they struggled to find publishers, to earn money from their writing, to win readers, to help others print their works, and to achieve public respectability. Many women wrote neither with lofty ambitions nor for posterity; instead, they wrote for their children or friends, for the moment or the season. If women are going to have a Romantic book history, we need to continue to expand Anne Mellor's life work, to tell all the stories of women's writing practices both within and beyond print.

Simon Fraser University

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