

*Women and the business of print*

Paula McDowell

In 1691, at the age of twenty-five, Tace Sowle succeeded to the London printing business of her father Andrew Sowle, and went on to become the leading Quaker printer of her generation (fl. 1691–1749).<sup>1</sup> Immediately after taking over her family press, she expanded its production, with her name appearing in nearly 300 imprints during the first fifteen years of her career. The Sowle press was the primary channel through which the Society of Friends' works were issued, and Tace Sowle printed the major works of the founders of Quakerism (including George Fox, Margaret Fell Fox, and William Penn, to name only a few). She served as the primary printer of Quaker women's writings, one of the largest categories of women's published writings in this period, and she also oversaw the distribution of Quaker books. For the first half of the eighteenth century, then, Tace Sowle served the largest Non-conformist sect in England not only as the primary printer but also as the primary publisher, warehouser, collecting agent, and adviser on market demands. By the end of its 150-year history, the Sowle press and its successors comprised one of the longest-running printing-houses in the nation, and it was under Tace Sowle's management that the house saw its greatest development.

Tace Sowle's personal talents mark her as an exceptional individual, yet this essay will show that as a woman directly involved in the print trades in this period she was one of many. There was a vast network of women printers and publishers in Britain (especially London), and women participated in the new print culture not only as authors and readers but also as printers, booksellers, hawkers, ballad-singers and others. This essay stresses the *range* of women's activities intersecting with print, arguing that women had more power in early print culture than we have known and of a different kind than we have attended to. Women at all levels of the press helped to shape literary tastes, cultural habits, structures of feeling, and public opinion. What some contemporaries

perceived as the problem of the 'women of Grub Street' was much larger than twentieth-century literary critics have understood.

A consideration of women's *diverse* roles as makers of print culture also has implications for our notions of early modern 'authorship'. Authorship is not a solitary activity; rather, writer, reader, printer, and publisher are all part of a 'communications circuit'.<sup>2</sup> This essay suggests the benefits for feminists of a new 'synthetic' model for the study of the literary marketplace, a model linking women print-workers, writers, and consumers. Networks of female involvement merit study, and furthermore, categories within the print trades overlapped. Some women writers also sold books or managed circulating libraries, while some women printers were also authors. The current division of scholarly labour separates those who study texts' ideological content and form (literary critics) from those who study texts' physical production and distribution (publishing historians). But, as three literary and publishing historians working collectively write:

the synthesis of what have until now been separate inquiries – one into women's history in the book trade, and the other into women writers – could prove especially fruitful in increasing our as yet piecemeal information about women working together, and could end the gap between 'book as object' and 'author's text' which is constructed by a literary study which ignores the processes of production.<sup>3</sup>

Women makers of print culture were not only writers and readers, and they were also not only literate elites. While most women writers were of privileged educational background and social rank, women of all classes were affected by print, and in turn, helped to build the nascent literary marketplace. A synthetic model broadens the class spectrum of women we study, and it also opens up women's involvement in a broader variety of texts. To consider 'print culture' from a printer or publisher's point of view is to confront a different textual landscape than literary critics have constructed. It is to gain a new understanding of what were (and were not) the century's dominant forms of printed materials. Whereas today, students of eighteenth-century literature are most likely to study novels, one publishing historian estimates that the proportion of all fiction (new titles and reprints) to total book and pamphlet production for the years 1720–9 was only about 1.1 per cent, rising to 4 per cent by 1770.<sup>4</sup> And while feminist critics have concentrated on women writers of poetry, drama, and especially fiction, a study of women's wider textual involvement suggests that eighteenth-century women as a group were more likely to participate in newspapers and periodicals; religious

and political writings such as prayer-books and tracts; schoolbooks, almanacs, and chapbooks; printed visual materials such as engravings, woodcuts, and music; and even the everyday 'stuff' of the print trades, jobbing printing such as posters, tickets, and handbills. To consider women's involvement in these genres is not to avert our gaze to 'marginal' forms. Rather, it is to direct that gaze to some of the most mainstream print genres of this period – and in so doing, to contextualise creative and imaginative genres and, sometimes, to recognise class biases in literary critical traditions of intelligibility and value. As Dianne Dugaw writes in her essay on popular prints elsewhere in this volume, 'Varieties of printed texts set before us categories of class structure.'<sup>5</sup> A full understanding of 'women and the business of print' would include all women and all kinds of printed materials. As (for the most part) professional and academic readers of texts, our reading hierarchies may not be the same as those of the women we study.

This essay begins by outlining women's work in the various sectors of the print trades. It then reviews the evidence for women's involvement, suggesting the special methodological challenges in tracing women. It concludes by suggesting some exciting avenues for research at this point of intersection among scholarly fields (feminist literary criticism and publishing history and media studies). A dramatic rethinking of women's place in early print culture is possible even on the basis of the evidence we already have. New critical paradigms and new directions in archival research will further our understanding of women's founding role in the literary marketplace, the emergence of a political public sphere, and the origins of modern secular feminism in England.

#### WOMEN IN THE PRINT TRADES

Over the period from 1695 to 1774, the English press underwent some of the most important changes in its history. Before 1695, the guild which oversaw the book trade, the Worshipful Company of Stationers of London, held a royal charter granting its membership sole right to print, publish, or traffic in the printed word. Printing was confined to London and the two university towns, there were strict limits on the number of printers, and texts had to be licensed before they could be printed. During the Civil War period, press controls temporarily collapsed; political upheaval and increased literacy rates had contributed to an unprecedented demand for the printed word. In 1662, the Printing or Licensing Act would revive the principles of government censorship,

yet the press would never again be as effectively controlled as it had been prior to the 1640s. In 1695, the Licensing Act was allowed to lapse for good, ending pre-publication censorship and limits on the number of master printers. The situation after 1695 was not that of a 'free press'; government and trade restrictions still limited what could be printed and by whom.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the early eighteenth century was a period of anarchic expansion in the print trades. Whereas before 1695 there were only twenty-four legal printers in all of England, by 1705 there were between sixty-five and seventy printing-houses in London alone.<sup>7</sup> At every level of the press this combination of phenomenal expansion and diminished institutional control was conducive to the participation of women.

The eighteenth-century publishing trades were centralised by modern standards; despite a significant opening-up of provincial markets, London remained the centre of production. As John Feather explains:

The dominance of London publishing was unbroken . . . because it was so strongly entrenched. The provincial trade did indeed undergo revolutionary developments, and was to be of great importance to the London publishers, but it provided a distribution system rather than becoming a rival producer . . . By about 1730, printers were established in most major towns throughout the country. These printers were not engaged in book production, but in newspaper and jobbing work.<sup>8</sup>

The trades were also still family-based. For all but the wealthiest families, home and workshop were the same location, and businesses were passed down through families by intermarriage. In most households, women assisted in the family business as a matter of economic necessity. Tace Sowle's mother, Jane Sowle, worked alongside her father, and Tace's sister Elizabeth was also trained in the family trade.<sup>9</sup> In the upper echelons of the print trades, most women were related to male (or sometimes female) 'freemen' (members) of the Stationers' Company, and this institutional status gave them several rights. The widow of a freeman automatically became a member of the Company herself. If her husband was not in debt, she could retain the family equipment and rights, bind apprentices in her own name, sign contracts, and be granted loans. Theoretically, any woman could obtain the freedom of the Stationers' Company in her own right by apprenticeship or redemption (purchase). In actual fact, however, the number of women who entered the trades by these means was minute. Furthermore, an increasing number of men and women worked outside the regulation and protection of the Stationers' Company altogether. The large number of women who

worked as booksellers, for instance, is in part due to the fact that Company membership was not a prerequisite of this aspect of the trade.

Eighteenth-century printing businesses were small by modern standards. A typical establishment might consist of a master printer and his wife (or a widow and a manager), two pressmen per press, a compositor, apprentices, and servants. Two hand presses per printer was the norm. Several widows and daughters of printers carried on family businesses; for instance, Elizabeth Leake, the employer and later mother-in-law of printer-author Samuel Richardson, continued her husband John Leake's business as a printer. Richardson later inherited Elizabeth Leake Senior's 'Printing Presses and Letter Utensils of Trade' by marrying her daughter, also called Elizabeth Leake.<sup>10</sup> While Richardson's exceptional success as a printer made it unnecessary for his own wife to work in the printing-house, even he did not separate home and workplace until very late in his career. Another printer's widow, Hannah Clark, succeeded her husband in 1691 and went on to have a career as a printer that was four times as long as her husband's. While Stationers' Company records date women printers' careers from the time that they were widowed, women like Elizabeth Leake Senior and Hannah Clark must have worked alongside their husbands in order to acquire the skills that enabled them to carry on successfully on their own. When printer Thomas James died in 1710, his wife Elinor continued printing for nine years until her own death in 1719. It is clear from Mrs James's own writings, however, that this woman printer-author viewed herself as a printer *during* her husband's lifetime as well as after his death. In one of her published broadsides, James described herself as 'in the element of Printing above forty years'.<sup>11</sup>

Operating a printing business involved more than manual labour; it also involved training and disciplining apprentices, obtaining financing, and settling accounts. Women printers often juggled these duties with raising children. John Dunton praised one Mrs Green, a printer's wife in Boston, for managing part of Mr Green's business. He also noted that, thanks to Mrs Green's efforts, 'Mr Green enjoys the comfort of his children without knowing any thing of the trouble of them.'<sup>12</sup> Tace Sowle was a skilled compositor, and by her twenties she was also an experienced accountant. When she began negotiating with the Quakers concerning the printing of George Fox's *Works*, she pinned down details such as edition size, font, and paper, and proved unwilling to budge concerning the price: on 11 March 1698, Quaker representatives reported that they had 'treated with Tace Sowle about printing [the second



volume] but not having agreed with her'. Later that month they gave in to her demands. She promised to do the job only 'at a price not exceeding one penny per sheet', 'and if she can afford y<sup>m</sup> lower she promiseth she will'.<sup>13</sup> One of the most challenging tasks Sowle faced immediately after taking over her family press was settling her elderly, 'nearly blind' father's accounts. At twenty-five, she attended a meeting of Quaker central organisation, showing this august body of 'antient men Friends' 'several Accounts of Books sent to Barbados and Bristol some Years since and not paid for'.<sup>14</sup>

Given the convenience of having a printing-press in one's own home, it is not surprising that some women printers were also authors. Elinor James wrote, printed, and distributed some seventy broadsides and pamphlets between 1681 and 1716. She may have 'written' these works not with a pen but directly at the printing-press with type. James's papers comment chiefly on national political issues (the Exclusion Crisis, the Revolution of 1688, the East India Companies, the Jacobite invasions, and the South Sea Company, to name only a few). But they also comment on issues relating to the print trades: the disciplining of apprentices, the price of paper, the disadvantages of a free press, and the drinking habits of London journeymen ('for what benefit have you in starving your wives and children, and making yourself sots only fit for hell?').<sup>15</sup> As we shall see, another printer-author, Elizabeth Powell, wrote and printed three newspapers between 1716 and 1720. Like James, Powell used her papers as a forum for public political commentary and complaint. Like James, too, she was arrested for publishing her views.

Printing was not the only aspect of production in which women were employed. Women also worked as engravers, illustrators, and binders, or manufactured printers' supplies such as paper, ink, and type. Bookbinding, in particular, was a 'feminised' area of the print trades. Involving sewing skills most women already had, and so poorly paid that it was an unattractive profession for men, it attracted many women despite a gendered division of labour and thus differential wages for men and women.<sup>16</sup> Several women established reputations as engravers or illustrators. Mid-century printmaker Mary Darly retailed her own prints and those of other engravers, and co-produced an exhibition catalogue with her husband.<sup>17</sup> The century also saw several women typefounders. In the 1770s, Sarah Baskerville carried on her family foundry 'in all its parts, with the same care and accuracy that was formerly observed by Mr Baskerville'.<sup>18</sup> From 1778 to 1809, the two Elizabeth Caslons (mother and daughter-in-law) managed the historic Caslon foundry for thirty-

one consecutive years. Contemporary sources acknowledge the role played by the Caslon women in the success and survival of the foundry, praising their skill not only after they were widowed but also, in the case of Elizabeth Caslon Senior, 'during the life of her husband'.<sup>19</sup>

Outnumbering women producers, however, were women distributors of printed materials. Women worked as booksellers, newspaper and pamphlet-shop owners, and as hawkers of broadsides, ballads and tracts. The terms 'bookseller' and 'publisher' covered a wide variety of functions, including the relatively small number of booksellers who performed services comparable to our modern 'publisher' (financing production, arranging for printing, and overseeing marketing and distribution). There were great variations in power and status among booksellers, who ranged from major publishers to small-time retailers who eked out a living 'haggling over a shop counter'. While some women booksellers did own copyrights and functioned as publishers, most were small-time shopkeepers whose stock included a wide range of non-print items as well as books. While Tace Sowle was a major distributor rather than minor retailer, even her list of stock included 'books on physic, *A Diurnal Speculum*, *A New Discourse on Trade*'; 'Bibles, Testaments, Concordances, Spelling-Books, Primers, Horn-books; with Writing-Paper, Paper-Books, &c., and Marriage Certificates on Parchment, Stamp'd'.

As chief distributor for the Quakers, Sowle warehoused and shipped several thousands of printed items every year. She shipped works to Quaker meetings and to booksellers in 'Cityes and Great Townes', not only throughout Britain and Ireland but also in continental Europe and 'foreign partes beyond the seas' (the American colonies and the Caribbean).<sup>20</sup> Atypically for a printer, she also retailed books herself. (One of her shops was in Gracechurch Street, next door to the Quaker meeting house.) She employed 'mercury-women', or wholesale pamphlet-sellers, to assist in large-scale distribution, and hawkers to cry smaller topical items in the streets. Quaker missionaries carried her tracts with them on their journeys; as early as 1700, Sowle's books reached political and religious authorities as diverse as the 'Governours of New England and New York' and the 'Czar of Muscovy'.<sup>21</sup> Sowle also spent time marketing Friends' works, binding trade lists into books she printed, and printing the first Quaker bibliography, John Whiting's *A Catalogue of Friends Books* (1708). (This also served as an effective 'sales catalogue' for her press.) Over the course of her fifty-eight-year career as a printer-publisher, Tace Sowle acquired an expert knowledge of



market demands and, as we shall see, made publication recommendations to Quaker central organisation. Even at this time of continuing censorship, the Quaker elders typically acted on her advice, sometimes even giving her discretion to print 'what more she sees meet'.<sup>22</sup>

Today literary scholars tend to marginalise so-called 'ephemeral' forms such as newspapers and pamphlets. These forms of writing are topical, cheaply produced, and small in scale. They are also often anonymous, and they do not conveniently fit into literary critical paradigms emphasising authorial subjectivity. Yet newspapers and periodicals were a major growth area in the eighteenth-century press, and throughout the period, the pamphlet, not the book, was the dominant form of print communication.<sup>23</sup> Some of the century's greatest literary works were first published as pamphlets or in periodicals; Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad In Three Books* (1728) first appeared as 'an unprepossessing little pamphlet of fifty-two pages, bearing no author's name'.<sup>24</sup> To understand the importance of pamphlets and newspapers is to begin to understand the importance of London 'mercury-women', whose cluster of shops at the Royal Exchange, Temple Bar, and other sites were among the most important wholesale outlets of the press. Mercury-women distributed to smaller retailers large quantities of topical items that needed to move quickly. As one contemporary source explains, 'Those people which go up and down the streets crying News-books, and selling them by retail, are also called Hawkers and those Women that sell them wholesale from the Press, are called Mercury Women.'<sup>25</sup> Tellingly, the only name showing in the imprint of Pope's *Dunciad* was that of a mercury-woman, Ann Dodd. (Dodd was serving here as a 'trade publisher', a distributor who allowed her name to be printed on a work for a fee and handled the work's distribution, but who did not own the copyright.) It would have been Dodd's shop that was the site of the *Dunciad*'s initial publication: 'On the Day the Book was first vended, a Crowd of Authors besieg'd the Shop; Entreaties, Advices, Threats of Law, and Battery, nay Cries of Treason were all employ'd to hinder the coming out of the *Dunciad*: On the other Side, the Booksellers and Hawkers made as great Efforts to procure it.'<sup>26</sup> The two Ann Dodds, Senior and Junior, were among the most important London mercury-women in Pope's day; also in this rank were Elizabeth Nutt and her daughters Catherine, Ann, and Sarah. Together, the Dodd and Nutt women served as the main newspaper suppliers of the nation's largest city before 1750, distributing leading newspapers and oppositional papers such as the *Daily Post*, the *London Evening Post*, the *London Journal*,

the *Craftsman*, *Common Sense*, and *Mist's Weekly Journal* as well as a wide variety of pamphlets and tracts.

The least-known, yet furthest-reaching links in the distributive networks of the London press were itinerant hawkers who cried papers and sang ballads in coffee-houses, marketplaces, and streets. Hawkers had regular routes that they travelled daily, first calling on mercury-women or printers' wives to see what materials were ready, then selling the papers they had purchased at a discount. While many hawkers were impromptu employees, some women were locked into this poorly paid, risky line of work for years. Hawker Frances Carver, 'alias Blind Fanny', was arrested in 1718 for singing illegal political ballads. Twenty-five years later, she was committed to Old Bridewell prison for selling unstamped newspapers.<sup>27</sup> Throughout the century, anyone involved in manufacturing or distributing printed materials could be prosecuted as that work's 'publisher', and subjected to the same penalties as the author. Because hawkers often distributed political materials, these women, although frequently illiterate, were more subject than any others to repeated arrest. (Hawkers could also be arrested at any time for 'vagrancy' on the order of a Justice of the Peace.) Despite their precarious situation, though, hawkers' labour was at once commercially indispensable and unique. As itinerants, they could move through public places, following crowds and attracting them with their voices. Their voices were thus an important site for the coalescence of an older oral and newer print culture that characterised this century. Hawkers attracted customers by means of their oral advertising of a pamphlet or song, then sold the printed text as a backup copy.

Hawkers and ballad-singers are also an example of the overlap of production and distribution that characterised the literary marketplace, for these distributors were also 'makers' of texts. Several ballad-singers are known to have 're-written' ballads orally as they cried or sang them. Elizabeth Robartson re-titled 'Honour and Glory, or a Poem On her late Majesty Queen Ann's Birth-day' with the more provocative title, 'the High Church Ballad you may sing it but I dare not'. In so doing, she politicised and commercialised an innately harmless printed text of her own accord with her voice. Discrepancies between ballad-singers' oral versions and the printed texts they marketed sometimes had subversive political implications. Robartson was sent to a 'House of Correction' not for selling the 'Poem On . . . Queen Ann's Birth-day' but rather for advertising it by a 'false Title'.<sup>28</sup> These oral/print discrepancies also have implications for our models of early modern 'authorship'. Who was the

author of the subversive meanings Robartson used to market this poem? Hawkers shaped literary and political street culture with their voices, and they also shaped the literary marketplace by convincing printers what to print or reprint. When printer Catherine Clifton was examined by government authorities for her role in producing the seditious ballad 'The Tory's Wholsome Advice', she claimed that 'it was done by a printed Copy which was delivered to her together with a written Copy of the same by one Ann a Ballad Singer whose name she does not know, nor her Habitation, and gave her in Exchange a hundred other printed Ballads'.<sup>29</sup>

While hawkers functioned as makers as well as distributors, and some women printers were also authors, several female authors supplemented their income by marketing books. Poet and novelist Elizabeth Boyd used the profits of her writing to help set herself up in a more dependable line of work than authorship. In the preface to her *The Happy Unfortunate; or the Female Page: a Novel* (1732), Boyd advertised the stock of her pamphlet-shop in St James's where she sold 'Papers, Pens, Ink, Wax, Wafers, Black Lead Pencils, Pocket-Books, Almanacks, Plays, Pamphlets, and all manner of Stationery Goods'. Memoirist Laetitia Pilkington for a time supplemented her income by retailing prints and pamphlets, and even prolific novelist Eliza Haywood had a brief spell as a publisher in Covent Garden 'at the sign of Fame'. Later in the century, Ann Yearsley used the profits of her poetry to set herself up as the proprietor of a circulating library in Bristol. Along with established classics and newer works by women writers, Yearsley retailed 'Perfumery, Essences, Patent Medicines, etc., cheap as in any part of the kingdom'.<sup>30</sup> A synthetic model of literary production reveals points of overlap among women producers, distributors, and consumers of print in ways that a focus on individual authors does not. As publishing historians are now suggesting, 'relationships *within* the print business . . . are often obscured by forms of specialisation . . . the areas of overlap were both more complex and far-reaching than is usually acknowledged'.<sup>31</sup>

#### LOCATING THE SUBJECT

Why have feminist scholars known so little about these *other* women of print culture until recently, and what are the special challenges we face in learning more about them now? This section will consider the evidence for women's involvement in the print trades, illustrating where women do and do not appear in the records, and 'the need for a critical

interpretation of what th[e]se sources offer'.<sup>32</sup> Two chief kinds of book trade evidence are Stationers' Company records and imprints; both are characterised by a misleading gap between what women actually did and how it was recorded. Maureen Bell has described what she calls the 'iceberg effect' of the Stationers' Company records. Women's recorded presence represents only the tip of their actual involvement, and, as far as married women's activity is concerned, 'the existence of the man effectively blocks out any record of activity by the woman'.<sup>33</sup> While Jane Sowle worked in her family printing-house at least as early as the 1680s, her name does not appear in Company records until 1704 when she bound an apprentice in her own name. Even in the case of Tace Sowle, who managed the business for fourteen years before she was married and another twenty-six years after she was widowed, the conventions of the Stationers' Company must be understood. If we did not have Quaker records, we might judge that Tace began managing the Sowle press in 1695 – the date that she was formally recognised by the Company as a master printer. Yet, as we have seen, by 1695 Tace was already a highly experienced printer who was then negotiating with the Quakers concerning the printing of their founders' works. Gaps in the records have been exacerbated by some historians' assumptions: for instance, that women whose names do appear were temporary caretakers of their *husband's* business. As Bell writes, 'the assumption has usually been that the woman was of minor importance, both in the day-to-day running of the business and in the development of the business over time' (p. 13). The amount of work that remains to be done with Stationers' Company records, recognising and reconstructing women's careers, may be suggested by the fact that the standard history of the Company contains only a few passing references to women – despite covering a period of 556 years.<sup>34</sup>

Imprints too tell a partial story, indicating copyright owners and selected retailers but not necessarily who was in charge of a business or shop on a daily basis.<sup>35</sup> Tace Sowle was in charge of her press for fifty-eight years, yet for various reasons, her name appeared in her own imprints only twenty-seven of those years.<sup>36</sup> While on the one hand, the names of women active in the trade did not always appear in imprints, on the other hand, women whose names do appear were not necessarily active in the manner we might think. Some women inherited copyrights or businesses but were never active except as a 'vehicle by which property exchanged hands between men'.<sup>37</sup> Other women inherited businesses but turned them over to a manager. One of the wealthiest



women whose name appears in imprints, Catherine Lintot, inherited her father Henry Lintot's copyrights (including his law patent worth £30,000) and within three years had sold her way out of the business. Other women were active in the trade, but not in the manner their imprints might suggest. The names of Abigail Baldwin, Sarah Popping, Rebecca Burleigh, and Elizabeth Morpew are omnipresent in imprints as 'publishers', yet in most instances these women did not own the copyrights of the works they sold and they had never met the authors. As in the case of Dodd and the *Dunciad*, above, these women were serving as 'trade publishers', intermediaries who allowed their name to be printed on topical, satirical, political, or otherwise risky works for a fee and who served as a layer of 'cover' between the author, the copyright-owner, and the law. Dealing in cheap print, and serving as go-betweens, trade publishers were 'inferior to the regular bookseller in caste'.<sup>38</sup> (Again, like bookbinding, this 'inferior' category includes many women.) The 'S[arah] Popping' whose name appears in the imprint of a pamphlet by Pope almost certainly had no direct dealings with Pope; her name also appears in the imprints of works published against him the same year.<sup>39</sup>

The autobiographies of several tradesmen also contain valuable comments on women printers and publishers, but even praise can be interpreted in a number of ways.<sup>40</sup> John Dunton praises printer's widow Ann Snowden for not nagging him to pay his delinquent bills.<sup>41</sup> But is his praise a constative statement, which reports a fact, or a performative statement, which tries to *do* something (that is, bring about the state to which it refers)? If Dunton was reporting a fact, should we read his statement as indicating Snowden's good nature, poor business sense, or wisdom in recognising that Dunton was bankrupt? In reconstructing what women like Snowden, Popping, and Lintot did and did not do, we need to recognise the variety and degrees of women's involvement in the print trades – and beware of over-reading, as of under-reading, the sources we do have.<sup>42</sup>

While women print-workers were systematically excluded from some categories of records, other records show great promise for feminist research. A new angle of vision reveals new questions that can be asked of familiar archival sources (family records, newspapers) as well as of less familiar sources such as State Papers pertaining to press control. Family records such as wills provide information about personal connections and relations, and can even provide insight into women's roles. Wives typically served as their husbands' executors; in so doing, some compiled inventories of their family business. Elinor James's daughter, Jane James,

married a printer as her mother had done. When her husband died, she made a detailed inventory of their printing business, from which we can learn that, like her mother, she had a hands-on knowledge of the trade.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, Jane James's father, Thomas James, did not designate her mother Elinor James as his executor, but rather gave this job to his gentlemen friends. While Thomas James did leave Elinor James the family printing-house, he did so only on the harsh condition that she not 'molest my Executors in the Execution of this my Will'. In particular, he instructed his executors not to let his wife touch his splendid personal library of books.<sup>44</sup> Wills reveal unexpected interpersonal relations, and they also reveal connections between women in the trades. Quaker printer Jane Bradford instructed her executor to seek Tace Sowle's advice in putting her grandson out to apprentice.<sup>45</sup> (In her own will, Sowle left thirty pounds to the London Quaker Women's Meeting to use at their discretion for the benefit of the poor.<sup>46</sup>)

While family records illuminate personal relations, newspapers allow us to reconstruct women printers' and publishers' careers. Newspaper advertisements typically provide far more detailed publication information than is available in imprints; whereas imprints provide the names of one or two distributors, advertisements list all distributors, allowing students to trace distribution networks and to reconstruct individual women publishers' careers.<sup>47</sup> Women print-workers often used newspapers as a forum for public expression, and newspapers also record some of these women's arrest for expressing their views. The career of printer-author Elizabeth Powell can be reconstructed from newspapers available on microfilm. In July 1715, Powell's husband had been forced into hiding to avoid arrest for treasonous publication. Eight months later, Mrs Powell started what she had intended to be a weekly newspaper: the pointedly titled *Orphan*. In the first and only issue of the *Orphan*, Powell painted a propagandistic picture of her situation, 'an Afflicted Woman struggling for Bread for herself, her Children, and her Distressed Husband, is Banished, stript of his Subsistence, and his Wife and Children left Poor and Bare to shift for themselves' (no. 1, 21 March 1716). Three days later, she was arrested 'for printing an Impudent and scandalous Libel against the Government'.<sup>48</sup> She was later released from prison, probably 'in Commiseration to the extream Poverty of her and her numerous Family'.<sup>49</sup> Two weeks after her release, Powell started a second paper, for which she was also arrested on the very first issue. The motto of the second paper, the *Charitable Mercury and Female Intelligence*, was, 'To speak ill of Grandees, is to run ones self into Danger; but



whoever will speak well of 'em must tell Many a Lye' (no. 1, 7 April 1716). Three years later, Powell published a third weekly, the *Orphan Reviv'd*: or, *Powell's Weekly Journal* (1719–20). While this newspaper was less outspoken, Powell was arrested for a third time in 1720 for reprinting a treasonous pamphlet, *Vox Populi, Vox Dei*. During the period of her imprisonment, she used the public space of the *Orphan Reviv'd* to garner public sympathy. Newspapers allow us to reconstruct this woman printer-author's political and publishing choices – and even, sometimes, her personal character.

As the example of Mrs Powell suggests, female as well as male book-trade workers were prosecuted for distributing illegal printed materials. Accordingly, one of our best sources is State Papers pertaining to press control. Now also available on microfilm, these papers may include arrest, examination, and trial records; the reports of government press spies on women printers and publishers; or petitions written to government officials by women print-workers or by others on their behalf. Women typically petitioned for their own or a family member's release from prison. These documents offer valuable opportunities to study the ways that women understood their publishing activities in relation to their businesses, families, and the state. Petitions also provide insight into gendered constructions of women's work. When Catherine Clifton was taken into custody for printing 'The Tory's Wholsome Advice', her husband Francis Clifton, himself a notorious Jacobite and frequent offender, wrote to the Secretary of State's office apologising for her actions and representing her as having 'inadvertently' printed a seditious text that he would never have condoned.<sup>50</sup> In actual fact, as we have seen, Catherine Clifton quite self-consciously purchased 'The Tory's Wholsome Advice' from 'one Ann a Ballad-Singer', and printed it herself in a matter of hours. Discrepancies such as this one, between what one woman printer did and how her husband represented it to another man, alert us to the need for caution in interpreting these records – and to the exciting possibilities for feminist reassessment of archival materials.

#### CHANGING THE SUBJECT

New critical paradigms and interdisciplinary collaborations are helping feminists to rediscover archival sources, and in turn, new archival findings are giving rise to new, more inclusive critical models. We now have some broad surveys of women in the book trades, yet we still lack

individual case studies of all except a very few women printers and publishers.<sup>51</sup> We need studies of women's specific job duties, trade status, independent economic power, and publishing careers. The eighteenth century was a transitional period in the print trades (and in women's positions), and we also need studies of *changes* in the nature and extent of women's work. We need to know more about the effects on particular groups of women of capitalisation and professionalisation: was the shift from family industry to capitalist industry good or bad for women print-workers, and what was the relation between socio-economic shifts and narrowing notions of ideal feminine behaviour? While in 1700 the labour of women in book-trade households was typically vital to the success of the economic family, by 1800 the economic efficiency of book-trade wives was less crucial to the success of family businesses. Changing economic conditions gave rise to new ideological notions about women's nature and roles, and the idea that a prosperous tradesman 'kept' his wife eventually prevailed. Women print-workers helped to spread new gender ideologies, and they may also have been personally affected by the new ideological conditions they helped create. While most feminist publishing historians see a gradual decline in women's power in the print trades over the century, future studies must place the topic 'women and the business of print' in more specific situations with respect to regional variation, job sector, family background, and social class. New provincial markets, for instance, may have opened up job opportunities for some women print-workers at the same time as changing patterns of trade organisation were closing down opportunities for others.

While we need to explore the possibility of uneven development for women in the print trades, we also need a deeper understanding of the gender-related barriers *all* of these women had to negotiate. Even an eminently successful businesswoman like Sowle still had to navigate barriers of gender; ironically, Sowle's personal name was a potentially disabling reminder of the misogynist adage, 'a woman's best ornament is silence'. (The name 'Tace' stems from the Latin *taceo*, 'to be quiet'.) There may have been personal as well as economic reasons why the first publication recommendation this young woman made to the (all-male) Quaker elders who oversaw publication decisions was that Elizabeth Bathurst's works be reprinted in the form of a collected edition. One of Bathurst's works was a powerful defence of women's speaking, *The Sayings of Women . . . Briefly collected and set together, to shew how the Lord poured out of his Spirit . . . not only on the male, but also on the Female* (1695). Sowle may have been acting here as a woman reader as well as a businesswoman –

recognising the proto-'feminist' potential of her press, seeing another woman's writings into print, and shaping culture through her choice of texts. As usual, the elders listened to her proposal and gave their consent, 'she first Acquainting Charles Bathurst and his wife of it'.<sup>52</sup> Tace Sowle was in one sense dutifully quiet (that is, private) as her name required, yet in another sense, she was as 'public' as any woman in England. Printed texts with her name on them reached three different continents by 1700. We need to understand the relationship between the restrictions women like Sowle faced and the (sometimes astonishing) facts of their real achievements.

We need studies of relationships between women in the print trades, and between women printers, publishers, writers, and readers. Sowle printed more than 100 works by women writers. Some of these women were fellow Quakers (for instance, Bathurst, Anne Docwra, Margaret Fell Fox, Mary Mollineux, and Elizabeth Stirredge). Others were not, such as the leader of the Philadelphian Society, prophet Jane Lead. Sowle was directly responsible for seeing at least one woman's works into print, for as we have seen, it was she who suggested a collection of Bathurst's works. A more inclusive model of women's textual involvement will reveal other links between women printers, publishers, writers, and readers – links that may be proto-'feminist' or otherwise ideological as well as economic.

A greater awareness of the 'communications circuit' also helps us to understand women's writings. As the publishing historian John Sutherland has argued: '[T]he material facts of literature's making are neither contextual nor subtextual but, in a primary and inherent sense, textual'.<sup>53</sup> Elinor James's broadsides take on new intelligibility and value when we learn how their material production shaped their textual content. Similarly, Quaker women's autobiographies become less negatively 'formulaic' when we understand the conditions of their production, reproduction, distribution, and use. Recognising women's roles as printers and publishers also helps us to understand contemporary *men's* writings – particularly, some gentlemen's concerns regarding women's involvement in the press. An expanding press offered English women large-scale access, for the first time in history, to the closest thing their culture had to a 'mass medium'. Access to print was potentially a vehicle of power – whether the woman involved was a printer, hawker, ballad-singer, or author. Women printers and publishers, as well as writers and readers, influenced literature and culture, and it behoves us to consider how our critical models permit recognition of

their achievements. As indirect beneficiaries of these women's contributions to the literary marketplace, to the institutionalisation of a critical political press, and to feminism, we need to study these other female 'makers', whose lives, to an even greater extent than those of women writers, were profoundly affected by, even organised around, the new opportunities of print.

## NOTES

Special thanks to Kristin Bailey and Sharon Groves for commenting on an earlier version of this essay.

- 1 Information in this paragraph is derived from my account of Sowle in James K. Bracken and Joel Silver (eds.), *The British Book Trade, 1475–1700*, (Columbia, SC: Brucoli Clark Layman, 1996), pp. 249–57.
- 2 This is Robert Darnton's phrase in 'What Is the History of Books?', *Daedalus*, 3 (1982), 65–83.
- 3 Maureen Bell, George Parfitt, and Simon Shepherd (eds.), *A Biographical Dictionary of English Women Writers 1580–1720* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1990), p. 293.
- 4 James Raven, *A Chronological Check-List of Prose Fiction Printed in Britain and Ireland* (New Haven: University of Delaware Press, 1987), p. 10. See also John Feather, 'British Publishing in the Eighteenth Century: a Preliminary Subject Analysis', *The Library*, 6th ser., 8 (1986), 32–46.
- 5 See ch. 12, p. 265. For further discussion of the variety of women's writing, see also ch. 13.
- 6 On laws pertaining to the publishing trades and key developments such as the end of perpetual copyright in 1774, see John Feather, 'The English Book Trade and the Law 1695–1799', *Publishing History*, 12 (1982), 51–75.
- 7 Michael Treadwell, 'London Printers and Printing Houses in 1705', *Publishing History*, 7 (1980), 5–44 (p. 5).
- 8 John Feather, *A History of British Publishing* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 97–8. See also Feather's *The Provincial Book Trade in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- 9 Elizabeth Sowle later married William Bradford, one of the family apprentices, and emigrated with him to America, where they became the first Quaker printers in the American colonies.
- 10 Will of Elizabeth Leake, Guildhall Library, London, MS 9172/Box 118, proved 13 April 1721.
- 11 *Mrs James's Advice to All Printers in General* (c. 1715), rpt. in John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, 9 vols. (London: printed for the author, 1812–15), 1, 306–7.
- 12 John Dunton, *The Life and Errors of John Dunton Citizen of London* (1705), 2 vols. (rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, 1969), 1, 106.
- 13 Friends Library, London, Meeting for Sufferings Minutes (hereafter MSM), 25 March 1698.



- 14 Friends Library, Morning Meeting Minutes (hereafter MMM), 13 April 1691.
- 15 *Mrs James's Advice to All Printers in General*.
- 16 Women were relegated to lower-paid areas such as folding and sewing the printed sheets, while men did the binding in leather and other materials. By 1800 women were paid approximately 10s.6d. per week while men earned 17s.–18s. (Felicity Hunt, 'Opportunities Lost and Gained: Mechanisation and Women's Work in the London Bookbinding and Printing Trades', in Angela V. John (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800–1918* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 71–93 (p. 74).)
- 17 The catalogue, published with Matthew Darly, was *A Catalogue of Darly's Comic Exhibition at No. 39, in the Strand* (n.d.). Mary also published *A Book of Caricatures* (1762).
- 18 Advertisement 6 April 1775, quoted in Talbot Baines Reed, *A History of the Old English Letter Foundries* (1887), rev. edn by A. F. Johnson (London: Faber & Faber, 1952), p. 284.
- 19 Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, II, 357, my emphasis. See also: T. C. Hansard, *Typographia* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, & Joy, 1825); C. H. Timperley, *A Dictionary of Printers and Printing* (London: H. Johnson, 1839), pp. 744, 834–5; and Reed, *A History of the Old English Letter Foundries*, pp. 244–7.
- 20 Friends Library, MMM, 29 November 1697.
- 21 Friends Library, MSM, 25 February 1698 and 20 January 1709.
- 22 Friends Library, MMM, 27 November 1698.
- 23 Feather, 'British Publishing in the Eighteenth Century', 38.
- 24 Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope: a Life* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press and W. W. Norton, 1985), p. 457.
- 25 Blount's *Glossographia*, quoted in D. F. McKenzie, *The London Book Trade in the Later Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Sanders Lectures, 1976), p. 25.
- 26 Richard Savage, quoted in Mack, *Alexander Pope*, p. 457.
- 27 Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), SP 35/11/21, fol. 59, 11 February 1717/18, and *London Evening Post*, no. 2487, 18 October 1743. For a portrait of the ballad-singer Mrs Parker, see below, p. 267.
- 28 PRO, SP 35/11/21, fol. 59, 11 February 1717/18.
- 29 PRO, SP 35/21/77, fol. 210, 25 May 1720.
- 30 Mary Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton: the Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley, 1753–1806* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), p. 209.
- 31 Michael Harris, 'Scratching the Surface: Engravers, Printsellers and the London Book Trade in the Mid-Eighteenth Century' in Arnold Hunt, Giles Mandelbrote, and Alison Shell (eds.), *The Book Trade and Its Customers: Historical Essays for Robin Myers* (Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies, 1997), pp. 95–114 (p. 110, my italics).
- 32 Maureen Bell, 'Women in the English Book Trade 1557–1700', *Leipziger Jahrbuch zur Buchgeschichte*, 6 (1996), 13–45 (p. 16).
- 33 Bell, 'Women in the English Book Trade 1557–1700', 15. For a summary of these records, see Robin Myers, *The Stationers' Company Archive: an Account of the Records 1554–1984* (Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies, 1990).

- 34 Cyprian Blagden, *The Stationers' Company: a History, 1403–1959* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960).
- 35 The most convenient way to get at imprints now is via the English Short Title Catalogue, an online catalogue listing materials printed in Britain or its colonies from 1483 to 1800 as well as materials printed in English anywhere in the world during those years. Records provide publication details such as copyright owners, selected retailers, format, and sometimes, printers.
- 36 For the first fifteen years of her career, imprints showed 'T. Sowle', but after she was married, imprints began showing her mother's name. After Jane Sowle died, imprints began showing 'assigns of J. Sowle' (that is, Tace), and after Tace's husband also died Tace continued to use this imprint for another thirteen years. (During these years she was apparently choosing anonymity.) Not until 1736, when she turned seventy, did she return to her initial custom of using her own name in imprints. Taking on a partner, she began using the imprint 'T. Sowle Raylton and Luke Hinde', and did so until her death another ten years later.
- 37 C. J. Mitchell, 'Women in the Eighteenth-Century Book Trades' in O. M. Brack (ed.), *Writers, Books, and Trade: an Eighteenth-Century English Miscellany for William B. Todd* (New York: AMS Press, 1994), pp. 25–75 (p. 44).
- 38 Michael Treadwell, 'London Trade Publishers 1675–1750', *The Library*, 6th ser., 4 (1982), 99–134 (p. 102).
- 39 The Pope pamphlet on which Popping's name appears is *A full and true account of a horrid and barbarous revenge by poison, on the body of Mr Edmund Curll, bookseller* (1716).
- 40 See Dunton, *Life and Errors*; Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*; Thomas Gent, *The Life of Mr Thomas Gent, Printer, of York; Written by Himself* (1746; London: Thomas Thorpe, 1832); and James Lackington, *Memoirs of the First Forty-Five Years of the Life of James Lackington* (London: printed for the author, 1792).
- 41 Dunton, *Life and Errors*, I, 251.
- 42 The same is true for dictionaries of trade personnel. We need to understand the editorial principles of these compilations and the nature of the records on which they are based. See D. F. McKenzie, *Stationers' Company Apprentices 1701–1800* (Oxford Bibliographical Society Publications, NS 19 (1978)); H. R. Plomer, *A Dictionary of the Printers and Booksellers who were at work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1668 to 1725* (Bibliographical Society, printed at Oxford University Press, 1922); H. R. Plomer, G. H. Bushnell, and E. R. McC. Dix, *A Dictionary of the Printers and Booksellers who were at work in England Scotland and Ireland from 1726 to 1775* (Bibliographical Society, printed at Oxford University Press, 1932); and Ian Maxted, *The London Book Trades 1775–1800: a Preliminary Checklist of Members* (Kent: William Dawson & Sons, 1977). Cf. Jan Fergus's discussion of the difficulties posed by primary sources, ch. 7 below, pp. 158–9.
- 43 Will of Thomas Ilive, Guildhall Library, MS 9052/Box 42, proved 5 January 1725; inventory by Jane Ilive included with will.
- 44 Will of Thomas James, PRO, Prob. 11/515/109, proved 9 May 1710.



- 45 Will of Jane Bradford, Guildhall Library, MS 9172/Box 109, proved 1 October 1715.
- 46 Will of Tace Sowle Raylton, PRO, Prob. 11/774/354, proved 2 November 1749.
- 47 For an example, see Beverly Schneller, 'Using Newspaper Advertisements to Study the Book Trade: a Year in the Life of Mary Cooper' in Brack, *Writers, Books, and Trade*, pp. 123-43.
- 48 *Flying Post*, no. 3779, 24 March 1716.
- 49 *Weekly Journal*, 31 March 1716.
- 50 PRO, SP 35/24/75, fol. 225 [1720].
- 51 For a list of recent studies, see 'Guide to Further Reading'.
- 52 Friends Library, MMM, 13 July 1691. The title of the edition, printed by Sowle in 1695 and reprinted at least five times before 1800, was *Truth Vindicated By the Faithful Testimony and Writings Of the Innocent Servant and Hand-Maid of the Lord, Elizabeth Bathurst, Deceased*.
- 53 John Sutherland, 'Publishing History: a Hole at the Centre of Literary Sociology', *Critical Inquiry*, 14 (1988), 574-89 (p. 584).

## CHAPTER 7

*Women readers: a case study**Jan Fergus*

What is perceived as 'popular culture' is often subject to strong criticism. In our own time, we are accustomed to denunciations of cinema and television. In the eighteenth century, moralists denounced the novel as a similarly dangerous popular entertainment and closely associated the genre with women, much in the way that soap opera today is assigned to a female audience. Modern scholars have tended to echo those eighteenth-century moralists who identified reading novels as a particularly female activity. But this identification is inaccurate, like many of the stories told about popular culture in general and about the eighteenth-century 'rise' of the novel in particular.

The classic story of this 'rise' is Ian Watt's: for him, the novel's development from Defoe to Richardson and Fielding reflects social and intellectual change. Watt locates a philosophic and economic individualism in the novel that he associates with the middle class and traces back to Locke; these features dictate what he sees as the novel's characteristic technique, 'formal realism'. Watt's views have influenced debate on the novel since *The Rise of the Novel* was issued in 1957. Feminist critics have been successful in drawing attention to the works of women novelists, whose contributions to and interventions in the genre are excluded from Watt's story. Cultural critics have further enlarged the field of discussion, pointing out that novels were read against other forms that often were more widely popular, like chapbooks or periodical essays or journalism. Some critics have even reversed Watt's premise, arguing like John Bender that the novel's development does not reflect social change; instead it enables change. But because critics continue to challenge Watt, his account circulates still.<sup>1</sup>

J. Paul Hunter documents ways in which newer evidence qualifies Watt's influential assumptions about class, literacy, and gender within the audience for the eighteenth-century English novel. This evidence undermines the "triple rise" thesis . . . that that rise of the middle class