

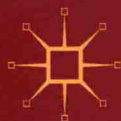
# MATERIAL CULTURES OF EARLY MODERN WOMEN'S WRITING

Edited by Patricia Pender and Rosalind Smith



EARLY MODERN LITERATURE IN HISTORY

*General Editors: Cedric C. Brown and Andrew Hadfield*



# **Material Cultures of Early Modern Women's Writing**

Edited by

Patricia Pender

and

Rosalind Smith

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*Early Modern Literature in History*

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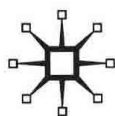
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# Introduction: Early Modern Women's Material Texts: Production, Transmission and Reception

*Patricia Pender and Rosalind Smith*

The material conditions that influenced early modern women's writing are crucial to understanding what women wrote and how their work can be read. Like all material artefacts, early modern women's texts do not reach readers in isolation, but emerge through complex systems of production, transmission and reception. Criticism of early modern women's writing in the last decade has increasingly emphasised their engagement with different generic forms and modes of circulation, expanding the parameters of the field beyond literary interpretation of the texts themselves to an engagement with their intricate textual histories. The current volume builds upon this work to produce a wide-ranging account of the rich and diverse material cultures through which early modern women's writing was produced, transmitted and received. It focuses on the ways in which this writing was culturally mediated: how it was originally packaged and promoted, how it circulated in its contemporary contexts, and how it was read and received in later revisions and redactions. In doing so, *Material Cultures of Early Modern Women's Writing* aims to illuminate not only the ways in which we read, analyse and value early modern women's writing, but also to expand our understanding of the production, transmission and reception of early modern literature more broadly.

Collectively, the essays in this volume draw upon recent developments in the history of the book in order to rethink the bases upon which we formulate early modern women's authorship, publication and circulation. They engage with new models of production and publication developed by Matt Cohen in his fascinating, original monograph *The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England* (2009).<sup>1</sup> Cohen situates texts within broadly defined contexts of production, combining the particular material condition of an individual

text with its cultural and historical context. In Cohen's terms, the material qualities of a text, such as typography and ornamentation, are 'treated as standing in a mutually constitutive relationship with language, literary history, the immediate conditions of production of a text, and things like ideas, belief, and tradition'.<sup>2</sup> Further, rather than focusing on the single original act of publication, Cohen analyses what he terms the 'publication event', an approach that emphasises the performative elements as well as the provision of information in publication, and extends a text's publication to its retransmissions beyond the original publication moment.<sup>3</sup> Used in *The Networked Wilderness* to break down traditional divisions between European American and Native American textual production, we apply this approach in this volume to rethink early modern women's participation in the complex networks of exchange through which their works were transmitted and received. Rather than static instances of single publication, conceiving early modern women's writing as publication events taking place in multiple modes over time means that each instantiation of a text operates both discretely and 'in terms of its relation to simultaneous and past representation in other media'.<sup>4</sup> The ways in which these texts might relate to each other range from imitation and appropriation to subversion and contest. According to this model, publication is not singular, closed and controlled; rather, it is open, multiple and heuristically volatile.

This model of publication events compliments other formulations of early modern textuality that view texts as material artefact, textual collage, social network and collaborative enterprise.<sup>5</sup> In all of these, publication is viewed as 'choral', involving typesetters, printers, booksellers and readers as well as authors.<sup>6</sup> Such approaches, by placing originary authorship in productive relation with both initial and subsequent instances of circulation and exchange, allow the idea of early modern women's writing itself to be interrogated and expanded. The field of early modern women's writing has never been richer in terms of volume and variety of texts and authors, but our assessment of what constitutes a woman writer often remains tied to an identifiable female voice and a more or less original text considered in its first context of production.<sup>7</sup> In rethinking textual production and publication in early modern women's writing, this collection builds upon recent work that is interested both in the historical work of women's literary labour and the function of gender in textual production.<sup>8</sup> It considers literary activities that have hitherto been considered 'extra-authorial', such as women's patronage, editing and even translation, as well as writing that



is produced in multiple redactions and configured as women's writing only partially, or in certain publication contexts. As Cohen argues,

[r]egardless of one's understanding of the author function and no matter how present the author is at the scene of printing, books have always needed a series of producers, each of whose power can predominate over reception or deployment at different moments in the production, circulation, and consumption process.<sup>9</sup>

This emphasis on multiple textual producers is particularly useful in opening up early modern women's studies beyond literary readings of ostensibly autonomous authorship to include the often surprising range of alternative roles women played in early modern literary culture. In addition, it shows the association of gender and authorship to be dependent on complex material histories of production that shift over time, uncoupling a static model of historical woman writer and text and replacing it with one that views this relationship as temporally, spatially and textually contingent.

A new focus on materiality is key to our collection's investigation of the relationship between women and writing in the early modern period. Over the past four decades, the material turn in early modern studies has opened up important new avenues for literary research.<sup>10</sup> The study of canonical male authors in particular has benefited from analysis of the complex range of material conditions that contributed to the production of their canons.<sup>11</sup> As yet, however, little work has been conducted on the material contexts affecting early modern women's writing. Significant exceptions include the invaluable textual introductions to critical editions of now-canonical early modern women authors such as Lucy Hutchinson, Aemilia Lanyer, Elizabeth Cary, Mary Wroth, Mary Sidney and Elizabeth I,<sup>12</sup> as well as those emerging into canonical status, such as Anne Askew, Elizabeth Tyrwhit, Anne Lock and Katherine Parr.<sup>13</sup> While earlier studies dealing with early modern English material tended to favour either the medieval (Summit 2000) or the eighteenth-century end of this period (McDowell 1998),<sup>14</sup> an emerging strand of scholarship on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Englishwomen's writing has begun to include material concerns as a crucial part of its methodological repertoire. Of note in this context is work on the material practices of early modern women's reading by Heidi Brayman Hackel and Edith Snook, and recent monographs by Patricia Demers, Kimberley Anne Coles and Helen Smith that explicitly locate women's writing in relation to its modes of production and consumption.<sup>15</sup> Equally

valuable in this regard are essay collections and anthologies on women's participation in early English manuscript culture that trace its circuitous routes of coterie transmission,<sup>16</sup> and those on women's religious writing that pay particular attention to its varied material forms, such as prayer books, scriptural collage, letters and marginalia.<sup>17</sup> A number of studies of the material conditions affecting early modern literary culture more broadly have begun to include a significant proportion of essays on women's writing, counterbalancing a previous tendency to include one or at most two essays dealing with such apparently secondary material.<sup>18</sup> A glance at the current state of play in the wider history of the book, however, suggests that early modern women's contributions to this history remain largely marginal to the otherwise progressive and generative counter-narratives this body of scholarship continues to produce.<sup>19</sup>

*Material Cultures of Early Modern Women's Writing* addresses these gaps on several different levels. At the most immediate, local level of early modern women's studies it aims to shift questions of production, transmission and reception from the periphery to the central subject of analysis, providing new case studies of the materiality of women's texts from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. At the level of early modern literature more broadly, the collection explicitly genders the relationships between literary texts and material cultures, demonstrating how the very differences that constitute the field of women's writing can work to challenge and refine existing understandings of publication, authorship and authority in the early modern period. At the macro level of the history of the book, and specifically through its confrontation with normatively masculine models of early modern textual production, the collection underscores the necessity for this wider history to consider women's sometimes distinctive modes and methods of textual engagement. If early modern book history has been relatively successful in incorporating insights from the study of non-canonical male textual producers, its record with accommodating the potentially different modes of women's textual engagement has been significantly slower. In presenting a sample of women's textual engagements from across the long early modern period, *Material Cultures of Early Modern Women's Writing* thus aims to complicate our existing understanding of three significant fields: early modern women's writing, early modern literary culture, and the ongoing development of the history of the book.

In asking 'what constitutes evidence in book history?' Cohen sheds light on a residual bias in current methodologies: 'For most book historians', he writes, 'the emphasis on textual materiality has seemed to preclude the study of communal, mnemonic, and ritualized information.'<sup>20</sup>

As Germaine Warkentin has argued, 'the book historian is grounded in ... solid materiality', and thus 'book history assumes the basic bibliographical requirement of marks made upon a material base for the purpose of recording, storing, and communicating information'.<sup>21</sup> As Cohen points out, however, the focus on textual materiality exists alongside, and indeed contributes to, a troubling 'undertheorization of materiality' itself. In Cohen's admirably understated phrase, 'alternative bases for book history might be imagined'. In response to this challenge, these essays take as their objects of analysis the physical materials of early textual production, oral performances and redactions of various texts, and modern developments in data collation and retrieval. In doing so, they ask what possibilities these new methodologies might open up for our understanding of early modern women's publication practice in England, by expanding our conceptions of field, context and publication mode.

At the same time, this collection suggests that it is equally important to bring literary and rhetorical analysis, particularly from a gendered perspective, to bear on the conventional wisdoms of Western book history. Book historical narratives that are currently emerging as canonical or commonsense can, we believe, benefit from literary-critical reading practices this history has in some cases left behind. Book history will sometimes ignore the rhetorical claims and literary impact of the books it studies, while conventional literary criticism can often take for granted the book as a self-evident, and singular, material artefact. Essays in this volume examine not only discrete material practices, such as patronage, editing or translation, that early modern women engaged in, but also how such specific textual engagements were represented rhetorically to their immediate and subsequent audiences. Bringing literary-critical and book-historical approaches together, the collection raises challenging questions about the efficacy of existing categories of production, transmission and reception in accounting for the range of early modern women's textual engagements.

The material focus of this collection provides an opportunity to showcase new critical approaches to the physical artefacts and production processes of early modern women's texts. Questions we have asked ourselves in this enterprise, and have asked our contributors to consider, include: how does our understanding of early modern material culture shift if we take into account the diverse practices of literary production and participation used by women in the period? What new categories of analysis need to be developed to better reflect the full range of women's modes of textual engagement? And how do theories of gender – both