‘One of the Finest Poems of that Nature I ever Read’: Quantitative Methodologies and the Reception of Early Modern Women’s Writing

Marie-Louise Coolahan

In a letter to Charles Cotterell on 18 March 1662, Katherine Philips reported her reception of an elegy in French by Henriette de Coligny, relating that it was: ‘One of the finest Poems of that nature I ever read’. She identifies for particular praise the ideas and style of the French original: ‘the Thoughts are great and noble, and represent to the Life the vastness of her excellent Soul; the Language is pure, and hardly to be parallell’d’.

Philips’s letter unfurls two layers of international reception: Cotterell’s receipt and endorsement of the poem as well as her own. This is a single case of the cross-channel circulation and critique of a woman poet. But we know that Coligny was widely read in other countries. Her Poésies (Paris, 1666) is listed in 10 per cent of the eighteenth-century Dutch library catalogues analysed by Alicia Montoya. The WomenWriters database (described below) yields further references: her authorial reputation is alluded to in one eighteenth-century Russian, one Dutch and five French sources; her Poésies in one eighteenth-century and one early twentieth-century source.

This chapter proposes some preliminary methodologies for researching the reception of early modern women’s writing on a large scale, in order to open up a transnational perspective on its circulation and influence. Writing of this period was not confined within borders; writing by women was translated and received in locations beyond as well as within national literatures – and national boundaries themselves fluctuate in history. The chapter considers the value of quantitative research and analysis, and the challenges of maintaining a balance between the quantitative and the qualitative in this field. Finally, it interrogates the ways in which the study of reception can open up broader questions about the perception of gender and authorship in the period.
The chapter stems from my involvement in the ‘Women Writers in History’ research network, which is focused on the reception of women’s writing across Europe prior to 1900. This network began with the work of the Dutch scholar, Suzan van Dijk, on the reception of women’s writing in the Netherlands. From 2009 to 2013, it expanded, thanks to EU funding under the COST programme, to include over 100 researchers from 25 countries. The project seeks to share records of the transmission, translation and reception of women’s writing across Europe in an online, open database, called WomenWriters (online since 2001 and subject to ongoing development). The emphasis here must be on ‘open’, because ‘database’ often connotes conclusion, a closed repository of information. This online digital tool is constantly in flux, never comprehensive nor complete, and the information it contains is eclectic because it depends upon the time and research interests of those who input their data. Current coverage of English women writers is not at all comprehensive, but that of women writers who were read in the Netherlands is. The online tool is intended as a starting-point for research, not a definitive resource from which statistics should be extracted. Furthermore, its capacious timeframe highlights the pitfalls of a solely national focus; the shifting, contingent frontiers of sovereign boundaries underline the value of a transnational approach to reception in Europe.

The ‘Women Writers in History’ project is concerned with questions of reception, rather than the recovery of women writers, or the history of women’s reading (although both are recorded). Which women were read? Where and how were they read? Its quantitative focus, and concentration on literary reception rather than production, aim to move beyond case-studies, which – although yielding excellent results in qualitative terms – are not so efficient in accessing the bigger picture of women’s participation in, and impact on, the literary field across Europe. The original research project was designed by scholars working primarily on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The increasing dominance of print in this later period, combined with the twenty-first-century electronic distribution of sources such as periodicals and library catalogues, mean that a range of resources focused on those centuries is useful and available and, furthermore, that methodologies for handling such material are being developed.

But there are particular problems, specific to the early modern period, in researching reception on a large scale. Current methods of accessing, retrieving and analysing large quantities of data on reception have been skewed toward the later period. For example, Continuum’s ‘The
Reception of British and Irish Authors in Europe’ series, edited by Elinor Shaffer and ongoing since 2002, has been a landmark in making literary scholars aware of the importance of reception and also of the European contexts for anglophone authors. Of 20 monographs now published, only two have female subjects (Virginia Woolf and Jane Austen, with a volume on George Eliot under way). The series begins with the eighteenth century; none of its authors pre-date 1700. Therefore, while this is an excellent large-scale scholarly project, it highlights the gap in our knowledge about reception in the earlier period.

The Reading Experience Database (RED) has developed an inventive approach to mixing the qualitative with the quantitative. RED has a sophisticated system of data entry that is not unlike ‘crowdsourcing’, although with scholarly safeguards built in. Volunteers contribute reception data (defined by RED as ‘a recorded engagement with a written or printed text – beyond the mere fact of possession’) by filling out a structured form, which is then verified by a member of the team and added to the online database. But RED also reflects the greater accessibility of later sources for this kind of research. Promising coverage from 1450 to 1945, the figures reflect the greater ease of accessing information about reading experiences in later periods. Hence, as of September 2014, a period search for 1450–1499 produced only four records; for 1500–1599, 241 records; and for 1600–1699, an exponential leap to 1,196 records (RED currently stores over 30,000 records in total). Of course, this is partly due to the expansion of print culture over time but it is also a matter of methodology. While the data-gathering aims for quantity – in harvesting large numbers of records – the sources are more qualitative and individual. They break down into two kinds: relatively well-known diaries (e.g. Margaret Hoby, Samuel Pepys) and accounts of individuals’ readerly annotation practices (e.g. Gabriel Harvey); and secondary sources on the history of reading (e.g. Stephen Dobranski’s Readers and Authorship in Early Modern England). These sources, although relatively few, are well chosen and systematically mined. The results are reliable but not yet representative of the wide range of reading practices for which there is surviving evidence.

How, then, might we begin to meet the challenges of conducting quantitative research on the reception of early modern women’s writing? Digital resources have much to offer beyond simply surrogate facsimiles and transcriptions of texts. An electronic resource like Early English Books Online–Text Creation Partnership (EEBO-TCP) can throw up new perspectives. Anders Ingram has used George Sandys’s A Relation of a Journey (1615) as a case study in order to outline the
possibilities. Ingram discusses the limitations of conventional research strategies in achieving ‘the accumulation of any significant quantity of evidence’, outlining the obstacles posed by searching for annotations or marginalia as well as the serendipity often involved in locating contemporary references to having read the text. Notwithstanding the great strides made by scholars like Heidi Brayman Hackel and William Sherman, we might well concur with Ingram’s impatience: ‘One is left with persistencc, chance, or perhaps the direction of a colleague working in a related field.’ Supplementing these methods, Ingram exploited the Text Creation Partnership’s provision of full-text search capability in EEBO, using the search-term ‘Sandys’, in order to show that a greater breadth and quantity of near-contemporary references can recalibrate our understanding of a text’s reception. Noting some important caveats – neither digital resource is yet complete; only explicit uses of the search-term are permitted; only print sources are digitised and the digital artefact cannot capture material features – Ingram’s experiment nevertheless produced surprising references and cross-references. These allowed him to reframe the contemporary reception of Sandys’s travel narrative according to three distinct categories: as genteel literature; as an authority on countries Sandys had visited; and as a source of accurate, current information on those countries.

Following Ingram’s method, if we enter ‘Orinda’ (the pseudonym by which Katherine Philips was known) as a search term in EEBO-TCP, 252 matches are produced in 55 works printed between 1667 and 1700. (By comparison, Ingram’s search for ‘Sandys’ produced 692 hits including 50 contemporary works referring to his Relation.) We might discount the more obvious hits such as those occurring in Philips’s own Poems (1664 and 1667), Cowley’s 1663 Verses, written upon several occasions, and Thomas Flatman’s 1674 Poems and Songs (these latter are well-known admirers of Philips who wrote poems in her praise). Among the more intriguing of the matches is a 1686 listing of ‘Orinda’ as one of the ‘Other good Tulips’, in the section on ‘Agriculture and Husbandry’ in Blome’s The Gentleman’s Recreation. More significantly, her poem to James Butler, ‘To my Lord Duke of Ormond … on the discovery of the late Plot’, is cited by Richard Lawrence in his 1682 treatise on the economy and government of Ireland, The Interest of Ireland. Here, Philips is cited as support for Lawrence’s contention that Ormond (commander of royalist forces in 1640s Ireland) had been resolutely loyal to the king:

Fighting for a Prince in no capacity to support him, much less to reward him; yet when his Princes State and Affairs were at the lowest
ebb his Loyalty was at hihgest [sic], at full Sea, rejecting the greatest proffers of Liberty and Estate from the Parliament, and chose Poverty in Exile with his Prince before it; as is elegantly express’d by *Orinda*, fol. 150.

You who three potent Kingdoms late have seen
Tremble with fury, and yet stedfast been,
Who an afflicted Majesty could wait
When it was seemingly forsook by Fate,
Whose settled Loyalty no storms dismayed,
Nor the more flatt’ring mischiefs could dissuade.16

Evidently, Philips’s poem remained in Irish circulation as late as 1682. Moreover, it was considered of sufficient authority to warrant citation as historical evidence. The mutual benefits of networking in Restoration Dublin are revealed as Lawrence trades on Philips’s reputation in order to bolster that of Ormond (in the process, reversing the gender and social hierarchies of their own time). This subtly alters our understanding of Philips’s reception; rather than engaging with her writing on an aesthetic level, Lawrence uses her poem as a primary historical source. It is clear, then, that EEBO-TCP can generate new references for further research, notwithstanding the caveats raised above. In this case, it adds value by producing new contexts for our understanding of Philips’s reception.

Sticking with electronic resources, we might consider how national library catalogues now facilitate quantitative data-retrieval – for example, information about print translations of women’s writing. Although the translation of a text into another language can offer only a partial view (it does not account for the multilingual competencies of early modern readers), translation is one proof of a text’s reception and penetration of the literary field beyond the author’s country of residence. An electronic resource like the *Universal Short Title Catalogue* – a union catalogue of all books printed in Europe, 1450–1600, recently awarded funding to extend coverage into the seventeenth century – can be useful, in conjunction with national library catalogues, in identifying early modern print translations. As examples, the USTC records two Italian translations (1588 and 1594) of the religious rule (the text that prescribes monastic life) authored by St Clare (originally composed in 1253), John Bale’s 1548 Wesel edition of Elizabeth I’s translation of Marguerite de Navarre’s *Le Miroir de l’Ame pécheresse*, and a 1518 Portuguese translation of Christine de Pizan’s *Le livre des trois vertus*.17
As national libraries move toward digitisation, links can be created, as with that to the Portuguese Pizan translation. The current WomenWriters list of 13 receptions for Teresa de Jesus’s *La vida* [*Life*] (derived from a pilot-search in these catalogues) includes translations into English, French, Italian and Latin. The range of publication locations – English translations published in the Low Countries, a Latin translation in Germany – reminds us of the transnational complexion of catholic vernacular translation, in particular. These examples are suggestive; information relating to such well-known figures as Elizabeth I and Teresa can be found in scholarly publications, but new possibilities open up as the coverage offered by such catalogues expands.

One print genre with great potential as a large-scale source for studying reception and the reputations of women writers is the bio-bibliographical compilation – the large-scale work concerned with women as cultural producers. Boccaccio’s fourteenth-century *De mulieribus claris* (*Famous Women*) was the originator of this genre. In an English context, Renaissance catalogues of learned women are generally considered to begin with Thomas Bentley’s *Monument of Matrones* (1582), which included Queen Elizabeth’s translation of Marguerite de Navarre’s *Miroir* and her prayers, Katherine Parr’s *Lamentation of a Sinner* and *Prayers or Meditations*, Lady Jane Grey’s *Exhortation to her sister Katherine*, Elizabeth Tyrwhit’s *Morning and Evening Prayers*, and Dorcas Martin’s translation of *An Instruction for Christians* from the French. Such works aim to balance the qualitative with the quantitative, the exceptionalist view of the eminent woman with the impulse to present her in the plural.

Thomas Heywood’s *Gunaiketion: or, Nine Booke of Various History Concerning Women* (1624) is consistent with Boccaccio in including learned women from classical myth, scripture and documented women of antiquity. He reserves versifiers for a chapter revealingly subtitled, ‘Of Poetresses and Witches’. A work like this is both a reception document in itself – attesting to named women’s reputations in England in 1624 – and an archive of classical women’s earlier reception by male poets; Heywood quotes from Martial’s poetic appreciation of Sulpitia, from Ovid’s poetic locution of Sappho and his verse in praise of Perhilla.

By the time of publication of Bathsua Makin’s *Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* in 1673, such compilations were themselves undergoing generic change. Makin’s anonymous work advanced a clear agenda to present named women’s intellectual achievements as support for her broader social and pedagogical argument for female education. Although she is international and historical in scope, her emphasis is patriotic. Among those eminent in ‘Arts and Tongues’,...
she includes Lady Jane Grey, Margaret Cavendish, Lucy Hastings and Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia. She updates Heywood’s list of poets to include contemporary women writers. Her list of 16 English poets (Anne Bradstreet, Katherine Philips, Mildred Cecil, Ann Bacon, Elizabeth Hoby Russell, Katherine Killigrew (‘the four daughters of Sir Anthony Cook’), Mary Sidney Herbert, Jane Grey, Arabella Stuart, Queen Elizabeth, Elizabeth Cecil Wentworth and Ann Cecil de Vere [identified as Lord Burghley’s daughters]) substantially outweighs the two Italians named (Lorentia Stoza and Vittoria Colonna).21

But this kind of source is not transparent. The bio-bibliographical compilation is itself a genre produced in a particular context. By the eighteenth century, there was a new vogue for celebrating ‘eminent ladies’, George Ballard’s work being the best-known English exponent.22 Danish, German and English catalogues were engaged in what Hilde Hoogenbaum terms ‘national preening in the international competition for notable and learned women, especially writers and women learned in languages’.23 The evolution of the genre is equally a history of Enlightenment ideas and their envelopment in constructions of the nation-state. The prestige accruing to nations that could boast scholarly women engendered an international battleground fought out in such works. There is a competitive edge, in these compilations, to the claims made for numbers of learned women; a named female author could serve as a metonymic figure for a particular country, its enlightened and civilised milieu, and its international standing.

Early modern auction and private library catalogues constitute another rich resource for the reception of women writers.24 The distinction between reading and ownership is an important one; unfortunately, to own a book is not necessarily to have read it. Nevertheless, provenance and possession offer important evidence of a text’s circulation. Book ownership can tell us where a text ended up, who purchased it, who had it copied and what company it kept in an early modern book collection. The 1686 printed auction catalogue, Bibliotheca Baconica: or, A Collection of Choice English Books ... formerly belonging to Mr. Francis Bacon, lately deceased, is arranged alphabetically, without the genre, format or language divisions often found in library catalogues. It includes works on theology, history, natural history and travel as well as poetry and romance. Interspersed are a translation of Madeleine de Scudéry’s Clelia (1655), four works by Margaret Cavendish (Plays, Poems, Grounds of Natural Philosophy [all 1668] and World’s Olio [1671]), and Katherine Philips’s Poems (1678).25 The manuscript catalogue of books owned by Frances Egerton, Countess of Bridgewater, itemises Mary Wroth’s
Urania (1621), Anna Wigmore's A Ladies Present to a Princesse or Godly Prayers (1627), Diana Primrose's A Chaine of Pearle (1630), and Mary Sidney Herbert's translation, A Discourse of Life and Death (1592), in addition to Heywood's Gunaikeion. But we may not like the statistics produced by such research. Female-authored works represent six of 183 (3.27%) listed in Bibliotheca Baconica; four of the 241 books (1.66%) in the Countess of Bridgewater's catalogue. A 1575 list of 62 books (55 print and seven manuscript) belonging to the Coventry mason, Captain Cox, includes a single female-authored work: 'The castle of Ladiez', Christine de Pizan's City of Ladies (1.6%). Of the total 106 located copies of books that were once part of the Staffordshire gentry-woman Frances Wolfreston's collection, only two (1.89%) are by women writers: Catherine of Siena's 1519 Here Begynneth the Orcharde of Syon and Dorothy Leigh's The Mothers Blessing (c. 1619/20). By comparison, Tatiana Crivelli's work on the eighteenth-century Italian literary academy, the Accademia degli Arcadi, finds that women made up 4 per cent of the membership and, when we consider that the approximate female membership of the Royal Society stands at 5 per cent, the figures may not look so out of kilter.

These catalogues also raise important questions about authorial attribution and the perceived significance of gendered authorship. Titles provided in auction catalogues are often 'heavily abbreviated and sometimes garbled', so the absence of a female author's name may not reflect ignorance on the part of the bookseller as to her identity. A further obstacle to the identification of female authors is presented by summary descriptions of packets and parcels of books. These constitute just over half of Montoya's corpus of 254 catalogues; she suggests that such parcels comprised 'the non-prestigious literary genres which were often the domain of women writers ... novels and other inexpensive reading matter (unbound plays, for instance)'. The Bridgewater catalogue does not name any of these four female authors; in fact, Sidney Herbert's translation is attributed to the author of the French original: 'A Discourse of life & death by Morney [Philippe du Plessis-Mornay]. Excluding this attribution, of the 241 titles, 123 are attributed. The sample of female-authored titles is too small to draw conclusions, but it is clear that titles took precedence over authorship. About half the books in the catalogue are listed with authorial identifications, suggesting that authorship in itself was not its predominant focus.

Whether texts are anonymous, pseudonymous or accurately attributed, early modern practices raise important questions about gender, authorship and reception. In some cases, it may well be that the author's
gender is not necessarily an issue for the early modern reader at all. Social proscriptions, of course, could be an inhibiting factor and some women who ducked identification were received as male authors. Perhaps the best-known seventeenth-century example is Madeleine de Scudéry, a translation of whose *Clelia* is listed anonymously in *Bibliotheca Baconica* (Cavendish and Philips are named authors). Dorothy Osborne, whose letters show that she enjoyed *Artamène*, sending it to her fiancé William Temple and directing him to forward those copies to Lady Diana Rich when finished with them, also read Scudéry’s *Ibrahim*. But the author’s practice of publishing anonymously or under the name of her brother, the dramatist Georges, complicated her reception. Despite Osborne’s consistent references to the books’ author as male, she was aware of the rumours of female authorship, writing in September 1653: ‘They say the Gentelman that writes this Romance [*Artamène*] has a Sister that lives with him as Mayde and she furnishes him with all the little Story’s.’

Montoya’s study finds that her *Ibrahim ou l’illustre Bassa* (1641), *Clélie* (1656–62), *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus* (1649–53), *Les Femmes Illustres* (1642) and *Conversations sur divers sujets* (1680) are all titles frequently found in eighteenth-century Dutch library auction catalogues, but attributed in a gender-neutral way to ‘Scudéry’. Manuscript culture, as we shall see, further complicates the issue.

The resources hitherto discussed (with the exception of Bridgewater’s manuscript catalogue) represent only print culture. Most texts that are being digitised and made electronically available are printed texts. Though understandable – digitisation of manuscripts is expensive and more labour-intensive – this presents a partial and skewed picture, privileging print culture to a level not warranted by the realities of textual transmission in the period. Current digitisation practices run the risk of replicating the one-sidedness of earlier generations of scholar-editors. We know that women’s writing of this period circulated more often in manuscript than print. Indeed, manuscript circulation in itself can be a measure of reception. On a basic level, the quantity of manuscripts in which a woman’s work is compiled is a useful gauge of its having been read. Accordingly, Katherine Philips is considered by Peter Beal the most successful woman writer of the seventeenth century. Likewise, the scribal publication of the Sidneian psalms – the latest tally at 18 surviving manuscript copies – testifies to their influence.

Manuscript miscellanies are rich in reception context. The juxtaposition of a woman’s text with others is suggestive of the ways in which it was read or used. The mode of copying – excerpting, revising, splicing together with other texts – can change the female-authored text
in ways that reveal how it was valued and what it communicated to contemporary readers. The formal presentation manuscript dedicated to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, in 1572 contains both Bartholo Sylva’s Italian encyclopaedia, the ‘Giardino cosmografico coltivato’ and Anne Vaughan Lock’s Latin poem in praise of Sylva, demonstrating (as Susan Felch writes) that the female author’s reputation ‘carried some weight at court as well as in her reformist community’. On a less elite level, the manuscript miscellany of Anna Cromwell Williams, a member of the gentry and distant relative to Oliver, contains poems by her mother, Elizabeth Cromwell, and mother-in-law, Battina Cromwell, alongside verse by Francis Quarles, many prayers and other genres of religious prose. This manuscript is predominantly religious in character and compiler-centred; these female-authored poems are preserved for their familial connections and juxtaposed with the popular devotional texts of the day.

The copying of a text into a manuscript is itself an act of reception; the contexts in which it is copied can illuminate the dynamics within which women’s writing made an impression. For example, the English parliamentarian Robert Overton put his political allegiances to one side when, in 1671–2, he adapted poems by the Anglo-Welsh and royalist author, Katherine Philips. As a memorial for his deceased wife, Ann, Overton compiled a manuscript testament in which he cut-and-pasted poetry by Philips (as well as John Donne), recasting its political orientation as well as redirecting its subject matter of friendship and loss. His reception and recycling of Philips’s verse is an act of engagement on both aesthetic and practical levels.

The early modern reader’s sense of the usefulness of a woman’s writing is often foregrounded when we study manuscripts. An anonymous catholic prayer manual of 1685, probably compiled by a priest, includes among Latin and liturgical texts, and ‘An Act of contrition translated out of Portuguese’, a quotation from St Teresa’s Life supplied in English and Latin and introduced: ‘S. Teresa was wont to use this aspiraon w.n she heard ye clock strike’. Another English manuscript containing Catholic spiritual exercises was written for a specific reader – possibly the Katherine Digby whose signature is dated 1657 on the flyleaf – as evident from the frequent marginal notes addressing the reader with instructions. Again, La vida is cited here: ‘In the life of S Tiresia we reade how y when she heard the Priest in the Creede of the Masse recite the wordes, Cuius regni non erit finis, of whose kingdome there shall be no ende … she did exceedinglie ioye in her soule to heare it.’ The compilation in seventeenth-century English devotional manuscripts
of extracts from Teresa’s writings points to their transnational utility. Here, the unusual degree of authority and celebrity mean that the very name, Teresa, signals devotional piety. For the recusant reader, the female author’s name and the pragmatic purpose of her writing are commensurate.

The nature of the miscellany – a collection of various works by different writers – presents its own challenges. Prime among them is attribution. The authors of constituent texts are sometimes noted in the host library’s catalogue but rarely are they advertised on the opening pages of the early modern manuscript: the miscellany must be read in order to find authors’ names. But for most manuscript compilers, authorial attribution is inconsistent. Entirely anonymous texts are frequent, suggesting again that gender consciousness may not be a feature of early modern reception. The lack of an attribution to a woman may suggest that female authorship in itself was not important to that compiler-receiver. Even women writers may not have been interested in the connection of a female author to a work. Elizabeth Ashburnham Richardson’s adaptation of and meditation on Mary Sidney Herbert’s translation of Philippe de Mornay’s *A Discourse of Life and Death* (printed 1592) is titled ‘A discourse of ye teadiousnes of life and profitt of death’, neglecting any acknowledgement of Sidney Herbert’s role as author/translator. Without such an acknowledgement, we cannot know that this is the reception of a woman’s writing by another woman writer – and were it not for the eagle eyes of modern feminist scholars, we would not know that it is.

In certain print contexts, such as the pseudonymous Joseph Swetnam/Esther Sowernam contribution to the *querelle des femmes*, gendered attribution was central to the dynamic of debate. The rhetorical value of positing or ventriloquising the female voice has aroused scholarly scepticism. The more neutral pseudonymous attribution, ‘by a Lady’, of three Philips poems in a 1663 Dublin miscellany signals coterie relationships. The volume itself, it has been argued, mimics manuscript practices. Clearly, different agendas are at play in the politics of authorial attribution. We should bear in mind that, just because female authorship is a category of interest to us, that does not necessarily mean it was a category of interest to early modern readers. Ultimately, however, this is an argument for more quantitative research in order to approach more definitive answers.

The *modus operandi* of manuscript culture can hamper the search for women’s texts and their reception, but it is rich in the kind of contexts that tell us much about how women’s writing was used and received.
Print culture is becoming ever more amenable to this kind of study, as exemplified by Michelle O’Callaghan’s _Verse Miscellanies Online_, Adam Smyth’s _Index of Poetry in Printed Miscellanies, 1640–82_, or the _Digital Miscellanies Index_, which is focused on the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There are ways of tracking poetry in manuscript; we might look to the Folger’s _Union First-Line Index of English Verse_ or Margaret Crum’s ever-useful _First-Line Index of MS Poetry in the Bodleian Library_ to learn about the compilation, recycling and adaptation of verse. Supplementing May and Ringler’s index of Elizabethan poetry, the enhanced digital version of Peter Beal’s _Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts 1450–1700_ facilitates the tracking of how particular texts were transmitted and altered in manuscript. What’s more, the digital version includes 79 female authors. A resource such as the Folger’s _Union First-Line Index_ can produce new juxtapositions. The connections between texts can be more immediately apprehended. For example, ‘How vain a thing is man’ (the first line to Philips’s poem, ‘The Soul’) produces 14 results, only four of which are by Philips. The refrain, ‘Ask me no more’, most associated with Thomas Carew, yields 68 records – 38 attributed to Carew but another 30 to various authors, including anonymous authors, and Hester Pulteney.

Network analysis offers a fruitful methodology for tracking the manuscript circulation of prose, particularly letters. Some digital projects are coming onstream that will support this kind of analysis. The Beta version of _Early Modern Letters Online_ (EMLO), a union catalogue of correspondence relating to John Aubrey, Jan Comenius, Samuel Hartlib and others, is publicly available. This supplies metadata and is not comprehensive with regard to women’s letters. However, its calendars supply information about those who are mentioned in letters, making it particularly useful for the study of reception. The ‘Circulation of Knowledge and Learning Practices in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic’ project launched, in June 2013, an innovative digital corpus (‘ePistolarium’) of 20,000 letters written by and sent to seventeenth-century scholars who lived in the Dutch Republic. This also promises to allow scholars to visualise in inventive ways the networks traced by those letters. These projects are promising resources for researching the circulation of women’s writing. Hartlib’s circle, for example, included women, and it is currently enjoying a considerable renaissance in terms of scholarly attention.

Correspondence can not only provide evidence of a writer’s reception but also of the connections between writers. For example, the Dutch scholar Anna Maria van Schurman wrote in Hebrew from Utrecht to
Dorothy Moore in Dublin in 1640, placing her in a specifically English female scholarly tradition:

I am delighted to have heard about you and your reputation ... I thought that no clever woman had remained in England after the death of Jane Grey and Queen Elizabeth. ... and I am determined after hearing about you to establish contact between us for the sake of wisdom and exchange of knowledge.\textsuperscript{52}

As de Baar has noted, van Schurman’s singling out of Elizabeth and Jane Grey as illustrious women of England was presaged in a letter she had written to Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia – exiled in The Hague – on 7 September 1639.\textsuperscript{53} Carol Pal also notes this letter and points further to van Schurman’s citation of Jane Grey as ‘exemplum in her debate with [theologian, André] Rivet over female learning’, in a letter of 6 November 1637.\textsuperscript{54} From the perspective of reception, van Schurman’s letter to Moore is evidence of Grey’s reputation; moreover, it actively perpetuates it. It also attests to Moore’s international standing. Pal (whose study of van Schurman’s cultivation of a community of female scholars maps her connections with Marie de Gournay, Marie du Moulin, Katherine Jones, Lady Ranelagh and Bathsua Makin as well as Princess Elisabeth and Moore) speculates that van Schurman initiated the contact on reports from her mentor, the theologian Gisbertus Voetius, Princess Elisabeth and John Dury. She shows that it was on van Schurman’s specific recommendation that Moore was included in Johan van Beverwijk’s \textit{Van de Wtnementheyt des Vrouwelicken Geslachts (On the Excellence of the Female Sex)} (1639).\textsuperscript{55} Certainly, the letter to Moore demonstrates the determination to forge intellectual connections with other women. Its positioning of Moore in a socially elite genealogy of women’s intellectual achievement, and in a national frame that elides the finer points of identity in seventeenth-century Ireland, is instructive. I have argued above that we should be wary of imposing our own categories of interest on the circulation of writing in the period (and that applies equally to the post-independence interest in Irishness) and alert to the possibility that gendered authorship should not be assumed an issue for early modern reader-compilers. But clearly, for van Schurman, gender is an issue. She draws here on a rhetoric of exceptionality as the basis for her construction of female scholarly community.

Moore (later Dury) operated in internationalist Protestant circles, but Catholic networks are equally rich in evidence of the reception and transmission of women’s texts from manuscript to print. Moreover, they can shed light on these questions of gender and authorship. Female-authored texts that were useful to the Counter-Reformation
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project were translated and circulated across Europe. For example, the large-scale martyrrological history published by the Spanish bishop of Tarazona, Diego de Yepes, includes Elizabeth Sanders’s account of the Bridgettine nuns’ expulsion from Syon Abbey – evidence of textual circulation far beyond England.56 But Catholic networks were not engaged with women’s writing as a category of interest in itself. The earliest circulation of the first-hand accounts of martyred priests authored by Dorothy Arundell and Elizabeth Willoughby was anonymous. The first attribution to Arundell of her narrative of the death of John Cornelius (d. 1594) occurred over 70 years after it had been written, in the Italian Daniello Bartoli’s Dell’istoria della Compagnia di Giesu: L’Inghilterra. Willoughby’s narrative of Hugh Green’s (d. 1642) execution was first attributed to her a century after the martyr’s death in Richard Challoner’s 1742 Memoirs of Missionary Priests.57

It is worth considering here the relationship of text, author and function. Van Schurman consciously identified learned women in order to make connections between them; for her, gendered authorship was a category of interest. Similarly, the agenda pursued by authors of bio-bibliographical compilations is a gendered one: to retrieve eminent women from history. But the auctioneer aims to shift books; the Catholic martyrrologist gathers testimonies of religious persecution; the manuscript compiler wants to make new texts, or create a new collection of texts. For those who prioritise function, gender is unimportant; for those who are interested in gender, it is important that the quality of the woman’s text (or scholarship) be established.

As long ago as 2000, Sasha Roberts asked:

To what extent can the history of early modern reading be more than anecdotal? Given that histories of reading are constituted by the study of particular examples of reading practices, readers, and their books, how do we argue from the case study to larger trends?

Her answer was that we need both, quantitative analysis ‘to reveal patterns’, qualitative case studies as the ‘building bricks of cultural history’.58 The tension is not a new one; Hoogenbaurn’s longitudinal study of bio-bibliographical compilations of women’s writing finds that German and Russian compilers preferred quantity, whereas English and French writers plumped for quality. She interprets the distinction in national terms:

nations that were still building their national literatures chose quantitative narratives to measure the growth of their domestic versus imported literature, while the two nations at the center of literary
production argued mainly with each other on the merits of selected women writers.\textsuperscript{59}

This anxiety over how to weigh quantity against quality perseveres in relation to academic scholarship today, as it experiences concerted moves toward quantitative modes of measurement. The issue for us, as scholars in the twenty-first century, is designing appropriate metrics for establishing both the quantity and quality of our research. It seems to me that this is analogous to the methodological challenges I’ve been outlining here. Should research be evaluated according to the volume of publications or the depth of their influence, and how is the latter to be measured? The assessment of impact often cannot be reduced to numbers: as Montoya cautions, widely read books ‘may have exerted little literary influence or may have been less influential than little-read but particularly prestigious individual titles’\textsuperscript{60}

What is the promise entailed in a project like ‘Women Writers in History’? What new knowledge can be produced by quantitative research on the reception of women writers? On a basic level, such research aims to aggregate case studies, to accumulate information about reception. We might be mindful here of the concerns of digital humanities scholars that there must be an added value beyond simply presenting ‘big data’. Quantitative research is always aimed at qualitative analysis; at harvesting greater amounts of data in order to generate new research questions, perceive new patterns and interpret them in new ways. ‘Distant reading’ as advocated and practised by Franco Moretti (who has arguably done more than any other literary scholar to pioneer quantitative literary research) has aimed to harness data in order to understand overarching currents – whether the causes for cycles in novelistic production or the meaning of the gradual shrinking of novel titles over time.\textsuperscript{61} This kind of research offers the possibility of defining both the typical and the exceptional in early modern women’s writing. By collecting all kinds of data regarding the reception of women’s writing, and subjecting it to, first quantitative, then qualitative analysis, we may be able to see more clearly what is ordinary and throw into relief the extraordinary. The case for quantitative research rests on the production of new evidence of reception, in larger numbers, in order to begin to sift through and evaluate it. This is also a means to examine the impact of women writers in different regions and countries and across different time-periods. The woman writer’s sphere of influence could be more culturally, geographically and temporally diverse than the disciplinary contours of national
litterature suggest. We need to find methods of harvesting quantities of evidence in order to understand the ways in which writing produced by women, as a collective category, was received – whether positive, negative, or one of the shades in-between.

Notes


3. WomenWriters database, http://neww.huygens.knaw.nl/works/show/7937, http://neww.huygens.knaw.nl/works/show/2669 [accessed 1 August 2013]. All references, in WomenWriters, to Dutch private collections are excluded here as they are presumed to duplicate Montoya’s findings, cited above.


5. For information about the COST phase, see http://www.womenwriters.nl/index.php/COST_Action and http://www.costwwih.net/ [accessed 1 August 2013].

6. The database can be found at http://neww.huygens.knaw.nl/. It is currently being redesigned as a virtual research environment; see http://www.womenwriters.nl/index.php/COBWWWEB [accessed 1 August 2013].


10. The three-volume The History of Reading, eds Rosalind Crone, W. R. Owens and Shafquat Towheed (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), although inclusive of the early modern period, illustrates the point. Volume II is limited to the period 1750–1950. Of twelve essays in Volume I, one each is apportioned to the medieval and early modern periods; two of the eleven essays in Volume III are applicable to the early modern period.
11. EEBO-TCP: http://www.textcreationpartnership.org/tcp-eebo/ [accessed 1 August 2013].
17. Universal Short Title Catalogue; www.ustc.ac.uk, USTC Citation Nos 822816, 822817, 659959, 344392, respectively.
18. Link provided at http://neww.huygens.knaw.nl/receptions/show/24612 [accessed 1 August 2013]. See also Gallica, the digital library created by the Bibliothèque nationale de France: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ (in French); http://gallica.bnf.fr/?lang=EN (in English).
254 Dutch auction catalogues analysed by Montoya, almost 600 titles were identified, authored by 126 French, 62 English, 11 Italian, eight Spanish, five German, one Spanish-Mexican, and one Circassian-French women writers (‘Dutch Library (Auction) Catalogues’, pp. 194, 210–11). However, as the global figure of total number of titles is not provided, it is not possible to calculate the overall proportion of female authors.


32. Hackel, Reading Material in Early Modern England, p. 278.


40. Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC, MS V.a.488, Part II, fols 17v, 4v.

41. For example, the anonymous scribe notes, in a separate box inserted in the margin: ‘both this, and that which followes I haue colected out of a holy and aproved Author not seeking to hould any order, but choosing heere and ther out of many booke what I thought might be most profitable to you.
and if ther be falts they are mine in the writing'; Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC, MS V.a.473, p. 115.

42. Folger MS V.a.473, p. 34.


53. Mirjam de Baar, “‘God has chosen you to be a crown of glory for all women!”’ The International Network of Learned Women Surrounding Anna Maria van


