

## Women in the book trade in the 18th century: an untold story

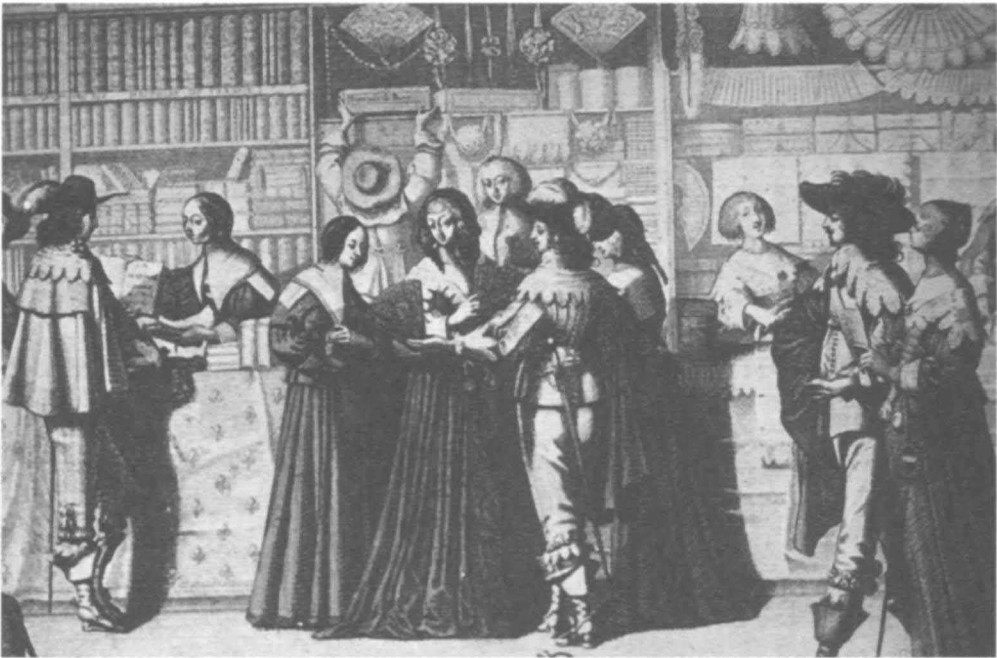
It was long accepted as a truism by historians of the book trade, particularly in France, that the role of women in the printing, publishing and distribution of books under the *Ancien Régime* was negligible, and limited to that of printer's or publisher's widow, a mere figurehead for an enterprise effectively run by a foreman until the widow found a suitable husband to assume control of her late spouse's business. The inadequacy of these assumptions became evident with the development of women's and family history: scholars like Olwen Hufton highlighted the pivotal role of women in the family economy first suggested by Léon Abensour in his extraordinary *La femme et le féminisme avant la Révolution* (1923), as well as their often precarious, twilight existence as widows and spinsters outside the protective influence of the family.<sup>1</sup> These studies have provided a context for the investigation of the role of women in the book trade in Britain and France: in this paper I will review the recent research in this area, with detailed illustration from French archival sources.

One of the first things to point out is that sources of evidence are limited and skewed for a number of reasons. Most obviously, women were largely excluded at an institutional level from this key area of social and economic life, and therefore rarely figure in archives such as those of the *Compagnie des libraires* in Paris. There was a panoply of laws, regulations and traditions designed to exclude women from the trade of printer/publisher, whose journeymen were amongst the highest paid under the *Ancien Régime*. By tradition of the Parisian Booksellers' and Printers' Guild women were not allowed to become apprentices; though I have not found any actual regulation to this effect, this exclusion of women from the male trade seems to have gone unchallenged. Such was not the case in Britain, where the Stationers' Company formally admitted women to apprenticeship as early as 1666,<sup>2</sup> but few women rose to prominence in the trade through this route. A recent study by Tamara Hunt showed that out of 71 women apprenticed in the course of the century and registered by the Stationers' Company, only one was formally given her freedom, contrary to the norm for male apprentices. Twenty-seven others were freed by patrimony (their fathers being members of the Company), and were probably only involved in family businesses.<sup>3</sup> The Guild of St. Luke in Dublin

<sup>1</sup> Hufton 1975 and 1984.

<sup>2</sup> See M. Hunt 1982, p.44.

<sup>3</sup> T. Hunt 1996, p.48-9.



Engraving by Abraham Rose

specifically excluded girls from apprenticeships.<sup>4</sup> They could never, then, become free of the Guild, which was a privilege reserved for men.

All such provisions were designed to prevent the 'dilution' of the trade and the maintenance of its skilled status: female wages under the *Ancien Régime* were not generally calculated with an independent existence in mind, as women, even if working far from home, were considered to be dependants throughout their lives, and were paid a fraction (perhaps a third or a half) of the celibate male's wage.<sup>5</sup> Guilds therefore made every effort to resist female labour, as it would undercut male employment and would be readily exploited by employers seeking a competitive edge.<sup>6</sup> As a result 'official' sources such as trade directories, advertisements, guild membership lists and biographical dictionaries do not adequately reflect women's involvement in the trade; for example, contemporaries noted the fact that Andrew Brice, an Exeter printer, had a large number of female printers working in his office, but their lives, status, and training remain officially unrecorded.<sup>7</sup> For evidence of women's involvement we have to look to more incidental or anecdotal documents: contemporary journals or memoirs, police and prison records, or even visual records, rare though they are. For the French trade the documents in the Anisson collection at the Bibliothèque Nationale relative to the policing of the book trade proved particularly fruitful for

<sup>4</sup> Kinane 1991, p.10.

<sup>5</sup> Hufton 1984, p.359; Kinane 1991, p.11.

<sup>6</sup> Kinane 1991, p.11 details examples of such opposition in the Dublin trade in the 19th century.

<sup>7</sup> Barker 1977, p.88.

research: statements submitted by printers and booksellers in the major census of 1701, police and spy reports, letters of complaint against colleagues or family allow us to see something of the daily lives and work of the wives, widows and daughters of the book trade, a complex reality.<sup>8</sup> I will now try to give an overview of what we know about these three broad categories of women.

## Married women

Unpublished research by Dr. C.J. Mitchell of the University of Melbourne, Australia, using the ESTC, suggests that about 50% of book trade businesses across Europe were run as family undertakings in which the woman worked, with 10% in the hands of women alone, usually widows.<sup>9</sup> It is clear that in this early modern period the family business took precedence over all else, and the wife, and eventually daughters of a bookseller played a major part in running the shop, selling to the public and keeping accounts. It would indeed be surprising if things were otherwise, when shop and family home shared the same quarters, the journeymen and apprentices traditionally lodging with the family, at least up to the middle of the 18th century.<sup>10</sup> The merchant or artisan's wife in 18th-century France or Britain was not a homemaker in the modern sense. As Olwen Hufton underlines, for such a woman 'cleaning, washing or mending clothes with any frequency, even cooking and child-rearing were fairly marginal aspects of her existence in the demands they made upon her time';<sup>11</sup> in many different social categories the wife's contribution as earner or worker in trade and industry was essential to the economic survival of her family.

In his study of the middle and lower bourgeoisie in France, Abensour had indeed constantly underlined how husband and wife worked side by side as a unit; almost all the legal documents signed by merchants in the archives which he consulted for Paris and the Ile de France were countersigned by their wives.<sup>12</sup> Babeau in his *Bourgeois d'autrefois* commented that in Orléans the daughters and wives of merchants were everywhere to be found behind the counter, trading, doing accounts and writing; that in Rouen, the mothers and daughters looked after all the correspondence; that in Bordeaux, mistresses in book-keeping instructed the daughters of merchants.<sup>13</sup> Such practices had been common over a considerable period of time. Maureen Bell records some of the many references made by John Dunton to wives and daughters of the book trade active in the retail end of the business in 17th-century London, or with responsibilities for finance and accounts.<sup>14</sup> Scholars such as Beech in her work on

<sup>8</sup> See Sheridan 1992, for a fuller account of this archival material.

<sup>9</sup> Hufton 1984, p.365.

<sup>10</sup> T. Hunt 1996, p.54 indicates how the increasing tendency in late 18th-century England to employ apprentices who lodged outside the master's house probably helped to exclude women from the workplace.

<sup>11</sup> Hufton 1975, p.11.

<sup>12</sup> Abensour 1923, p.168.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted by Abensour 1923, p.175.

<sup>14</sup> Bell 1996, p.18 from Dunton 1818.

Charlotte Guillard, 16th-century printer-bookseller,<sup>15</sup> and Zemon Davis in her study of women in the trades in 16th-century Lyons,<sup>16</sup> have also concluded that the women in the families of masters frequently received extensive training in technical, legal, financial and managerial skills within their family businesses.

Many of our examples of the contribution of wives suggest that women associated with the book trade may have had a higher than average level of literacy and learning. Constantia Grierson acted as partner to her husband, the King's printer in Ireland, and there are many contemporary accounts of her amazing learning: she had a knowledge of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French and higher mathematics, and she worked both as a compositor and a printer.<sup>17</sup> John Lackington, the London bookseller, wrote of his second wife Dorcas:

My new wife's attachment to books was a very fortunate circumstance for us both, not only as it was a perpetual source of rational amusement, but also as it tended to promote my trade: her extreme love for books made her delight to be in the shop, so that she soon became perfectly acquainted with every part of it, and (as my stock increased) with other rooms where I kept books, and could readily get any article that was asked for. Accordingly, when I was out on business, my shop was well attended. This constant attention, and good usage, procured me many customers; and I soon perceived that I could sell double and treble the quantity of books if I had a larger stock.<sup>18</sup>

In some of our examples the wife was not just the associate, but the prime mover in the firm. Sarah Slack and her sister of Newcastle, in the north of England, inherited their father's printing and publishing business: having married one of his apprentices, Sarah continued her active role, and after the death of her husband she extended the business to make it one of the most important in Newcastle, while raising a family of four or five children.<sup>19</sup> John Dunton, referred to above, asserted that his wife 'managed all my affairs for me'.<sup>20</sup>

The Anisson archives also offer evidence of French wives working as effective partners with their husbands in both the retail and the printing end of the business. One letter of complaint from the bookseller Jean Noël Leloup to the *Lieutenant général de police* written in 1750 describing a quarrel between his wife and the widow Bienvenu, another bookseller, about an alleged theft by a domestic servant, places women at the centre of the retailing operation: the detailed account makes it clear that Madame Leloup had 'to come out from her counter', where she was running the family's bookshop on the *Quai des Augustins*, to pursue the matter. Similarly, in the printing trade, Jacques Collombat, printer of the *Calendrier de la Cour*, in all the documents he published between 1716 and 1731 in relation to a dispute with Laurent d'Houry, printer of a rival *Almanach*, consistently associated d'Houry's wife with him as a leading figure in the business.<sup>21</sup> Some of these women had

<sup>15</sup> Beech 1983, p.356.

<sup>16</sup> Zemon Davis 1980, p.143-4.

<sup>17</sup> Gies 1940, p.1424-1426, and T. Hunt 1996, p.52.

<sup>18</sup> Lackington 1794, p.326, quoted by Barker 1997, p.95.

<sup>19</sup> Barker 1997, p.94.

<sup>20</sup> Dunton 1818, vol.I, p.79, quoted by Bell 1996, p.18.

<sup>21</sup> Bibliothèque nationale, Collection Anisson, ms. français 22077, f.143-76 (henceforth f.fr.)

acquired their skills in their father's business: the *veuve* Duchesne, daughter of André Cailleau,<sup>22</sup> and Marie Galle in Grenoble, left widowed with six children in 1696 on the death of the printer Claude Faure, who ran the business and trained her eldest son to help her, thanks to the fact that she had learnt to print in her youth.<sup>23</sup>

There is abundant evidence to show how such women took over the running of their husbands' businesses in the event of a protracted absence:<sup>24</sup> many archival sources in Britain and France, relating to the interrogation, imprisonment or disappearance of booksellers and printers who had transgressed, offer examples of the wife's ingenuity not only in running the shop and keeping the family going, but also in pleading on behalf of her husband. In one letter in the Anisson collection the wife of David, the main publisher of the *Encyclopédie*, who is absent – presumably out of caution – in Amsterdam, asks for an interview with the minister Malesherbes, known to be sympathetic to the *philosophes*, regarding the revocation of the *privilège* for the *Encyclopédie*: she continued to run the business after the death of her husband, and is mentioned by Lottin (1789) as a benefactress of the widows of the guild, less fortunate than herself. In 1749 James Esdall of Dublin had to flee to London when a pamphlet by Charles Lucas which he had printed was condemned as 'seditious libel' by the House of Commons, and his wife Anne took over the management of the firm.<sup>25</sup>

Similar stories can be found right back through the preceding century, and Maureen Bell, in two admirable articles on Elizabeth Calvert, has detailed the major contribution made by the wives, and subsequently the widows of the 'Confederate', opposition publishers in England, many of whom were executed. Having been gaoled herself, Calvert was forced to appeal to the paternalism of the authorities in words that are echoed time and again in letters in the French police archives: she begs freedom to attend to 'a charge of children whom are in a deplorable condicion by reason of the want of their poore mother now in prison'. She escaped execution in a period where many printers died for lesser offenses.<sup>26</sup> Bell shows how the booksellers in Britain played on the paradoxically stronger position of a married woman who was regarded by the law as under civil subjection to her husband, a 'feme covert', and could therefore plead incompetence as having acted on the instructions of the conveniently absent spouse.<sup>27</sup> One bookseller (Frank Smith the younger), in response to a customer's enquiry for an opposition pamphlet, replied 'when my mother or my Sister comes, you may have as many as you will; for No body can touch them'.<sup>28</sup> Margaret Hunt, in her article on the London 'Hawkers, bawlers and Mercuries', speculates that the semi-clandestine, insecure but also highly-charged atmosphere in which opposition pieces were produced in early 18th-century Britain offered a strong inducement for all members of a family, including women and girls,

<sup>22</sup> Kay 1983, p.38.

<sup>23</sup> F.fr. 22127, f.12.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. M. Hunt 1984, p.54, who shows that other women family members might also step into the breach.

<sup>25</sup> Kinane 1991, p.10.

<sup>26</sup> Bell 1992, p.23.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>28</sup> *Observer* 1, p.164-5, 4 and 5 July 1682, quoted by Bell 1992, p.32.

to become involved.<sup>29</sup> The same appears to be true of France, for example in Jansenist circles; the Anisson collection, as well as the *Archives de la Bastille* bear witness to a significant number of women arrested for involvement in the printing or dissemination of Jansenist pamphlets.<sup>30</sup> The case of Marie-Madeleine Musier, recounted below, suggests that wives were seen by the authorities in France as responsible partners with their husbands in any transgression, and also illustrates the involvement of young women in illegal activities.<sup>31</sup>

## Widows

Although there was wide variation between countries and periods, somewhere between 9 to 14 percent of households in Western Europe were headed by women in this period, the majority of these being widows.<sup>32</sup> Their position in the book trade is relatively well documented, as it appears that throughout Europe the widow of a printer/publisher was entitled to take over her husband's business by inheritance, and women's names feature on the title pages of books from the 1480s onwards.<sup>33</sup> These women did not necessarily enjoy the full rights of mastership, however, particularly the right to pull the press; and in France, for example, the widow of a printer/publisher was precluded from taking on new apprentices under her own name.<sup>34</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis has emphasized a similar exclusion in the silk-making trade in 16th-century Lyons, which guaranteed that 'mastership was to go from male to male and not pass through the female line'.<sup>35</sup> A widow in France was debarred from running a business if she remarried outside the trade, though, on the evidence of Barker's study, a similar regulation in England does not seem to have been enforced as stringently.<sup>36</sup>

In both countries, stereotypes have been perpetuated by historians concerning these women, in particular that of the 'remarrying widow' who would quickly seek out a qualified journeyman or the son of a master to take over where her husband left off.<sup>37</sup> On the contrary, the evidence from Britain suggests that, from the latter part of the 17th century, remarriage was not the favoured choice of widows,<sup>38</sup> and this was certainly the case in France, where, as we have seen, the remarrying widow had

<sup>29</sup> M. Hunt 1984, p.50.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, f.fr. 22101, f.143; 22100, no. 26; 22175, no. 105.

<sup>31</sup> See below, 'Never married women' and also f.fr.22101, f.130: 'Ces deux libelles contre M. le Chancelier ont été distribué par la fille ainée d'Ormancey raison pour laquelle le Pere et la Mere ont été exilés a 100 lieues de Paris'.

<sup>32</sup> Hufton 1984.

<sup>33</sup> Gies 1940, p.1421.

<sup>34</sup> See Saugrain 1744, p.212-214; this was not the case in England. Cf. Bell 1996, p.19ff.

<sup>35</sup> Zemon Davis 1980, p.156.

<sup>36</sup> Barker 1997, p.92.

<sup>37</sup> Hufton points also to the hysterical obsession in the literature of the period among middle and upper-class males – Richardson's 'Letter from a gentleman, strenuously expostulating with an old rich widow, about to marry a very young gay gentleman' (1741) being the best example – that their widow might squander their wealth on a gigolo figure who excited her sexual appetites (Hufton 1984, p.373). No doubt the nature of the second marriages of those widows who did succumb would make an interesting theme for research.

<sup>38</sup> Barker 1997, p.98; Bell 1996, p.18-19.

much to lose. The impression which catalogues of the trade give of only a small proportion of 'active' widows remarrying is confirmed by a printed document in the Anisson collection under the title 'Liste alphabétique de Mesdames les Veuves, Existantes au 1er janvier 1748'.<sup>39</sup> A total of 64 widows who succeeded their husbands are listed, and detailed information on the length of their masterships is given for 61 of these, right up to the 1770s. Only three of the total number remarried, i.e. approximately 5%;<sup>40</sup> the average length of widowhood spent 'in office', as it were, was 23.2 years, the longest being 52 years. Thus the vast majority of booksellers' widows who took on a succession in the mid to late 18th century would appear to have remained at least nominally at the head of their businesses until their death.

Of the twelve widows in the list who were also master-printers, eight resigned from that mastership, some in favour of a member of the family, others selling the place to an outsider, while still retaining their bookshop. Not only was it clearly more difficult for a woman to run a printing house, where she might have no expertise, and have to deal with difficult workmen, than to manage a bookshop; but because of the strict limitations imposed on the number of printers allowed in Paris the widows were undoubtedly able to command a high price from journeymen hoping to accede to the mastership. But there are also many examples in these archives of widows who did take the principal role in running a printing as well as a retail business. We have already mentioned the *veuve* Bienvenu, whom we saw working in her shop on the *Quai des Augustins*; on at least three separate occasions she is condemned for printing unapproved and subversive material 'furtivement dans des lieux cachez où elle tenoit une Imprimerie clandestine', or for selling same in her bookshop.<sup>41</sup> On the third occasion, in 1747, she is declared to be deprived in perpetuity of the right to function as a bookseller,<sup>42</sup> but must have succeeded in having the sentence commuted, for she is listed in Lottin as a bookseller at the time of her death in 1776, after 34 years at the head of the business. None of the documents mention a foreman or *Directeur* who would undoubtedly have shared the blame if he existed, as happened in the case of, the 'exacte et avisée veuve Duchesne',<sup>43</sup> immortalized by Voltaire, whose works she published – along with those of Rousseau, his arch rival. In 1767 Pierre Guy was arrested for smuggling six packages of prohibited books, both philosophical and pornographic, into Paris.<sup>44</sup> He was described in the reports as a trader associated with the widow Duchesne, bookseller, and living close by her premises. Marie-Antoinette Duchesne, who had been recently widowed in 1765, was to continue at the head of her large and flourishing business in the *rue Saint Jacques* up to her death in 1793. Guy was clearly not a qualified journeyman, but he seemed to be recognized as manager for all aspects of the business. Although her house was searched on this occasion, and letters addressed

<sup>39</sup> F.fr. 22079, doc.14, p.28 (printed).

<sup>40</sup> In a statistical analysis of 805 wives of booksellers, printers, and binders in 16th-century France, S. Postel-Lecoq found that 12% contracted a second marriage in the trade (Postel-Lecoq 1988, p.262).

<sup>41</sup> F.fr. 22092, f.58; see also f.4.

<sup>42</sup> F.fr. 22092, f.58.

<sup>43</sup> Besterman 1974, vol.xxxii, p.447, D14554.

<sup>44</sup> This was not by any means an unusual mixture in this period, and the works inventoried included Voltaire's *Traité sur la tolérance*, Rousseau's *Contrat social*, Helvétius's *De l'esprit*, and a rather less memorable *Art de bien baiser*.

to her seized, Duchesne was not interrogated, and the police authorities held Guy responsible.<sup>45</sup> But in point of fact Guy had also been chief clerk to Nicolas-Bonaventure Duchesne for 13 years prior to the latter's death, and his relationship to the widow in the following 10 years was not materially different. He had no financial interest in the business, but worked for wages, and when he retired in 1775 he was given a pension of 200 *livres* by his employer.<sup>46</sup> The widow Duchesne was, then, the head of the firm in the same way as her husband had been before her.

A *libraire* from Strasbourg, Marie Salomé Fatty, widow of Georges-Rodius Stochdorph, *marchand libraire*, was noted for her escapades in the subversive trade; in 1771 she was arrested at the *Hôtel Plâtrière* in Paris for having smuggled several packages of subversive books into the city, and was imprisoned for the transgression.<sup>47</sup> But nothing daunted, she was again arrested in 1773, and having been taken to the Bastille was found guilty of running a bookshop stocked with 'livres contraires à la Religion et aux bonnes mœurs'. Because of the repeated and blatant nature of the offence she was sentenced to be put in the stocks at the *place de Grève*, with placards on either side declaring her crimes, and then banished for nine years from the cities of Paris and Strasbourg. A relative of hers, Jean-Daniel Riss, was also arrested for having been involved in the business, 'en tenant gratuitement les Registres de débit et la correspondance', but in his case there was no doubt at all who was the primary agent in the affair with total responsibility for the business.<sup>48</sup>

At an earlier period, in an appeal to the comte de Maurepas, the *veuve* David, Marie Clousier (again the daughter of a bookseller) explains the apparent transgression of printing two pamphlets without an *approbation* or *privilège* by the fact that she was ill and taking the waters in Passy at the time of the search, and her foreman was simply not aware that she had been granted an *approbation* and *privilège* for the first, and a *permission tacite* for the second.<sup>49</sup> Although such excuses were commonplace where mistakes had been made, it does appear that she, not the foreman, took the leading management role in her business.

The widow in this relatively prosperous, property-owning category had, as Olwen Hufton has pointed out, perhaps the most enviable lot of all women in this society: with control over her property and children, she was arbiter of her destiny. She could choose to be pursued as a prize in the marriage market, or make the most of her freedom – as the majority of her peers in this period appear to have done.

## Never married women

The incidence of what was called spinsterhood varied enormously in the period by country and region, and was related to the economic condition of the labouring sector: for example, falling real wages in late *Ancien Régime* France both pushed up the

<sup>45</sup> F.fr. 22098, f.184-189.

<sup>46</sup> Kay 1983, p.38.

<sup>47</sup> F.fr. 22101, f.239.

<sup>48</sup> F.fr. 22101, f.222.

<sup>49</sup> F.fr. 22065, f.366.



age of marriage and multiplied the number of never-married persons, while the situation in Britain the same period was in complete contrast.<sup>50</sup> Jean Dupâquier indicates that 14 percent of the generation born in France from 1785 to 1789 remained unmarried, a significant proportion of the population.<sup>51</sup> Until recently, the women in this category have received little attention from historians. In general, theirs was not a happy lot, and particularly not in the book trades. In France they could not gain entry to the guild by patrimony; the daughter of a master could confer rights on a suitably qualified husband similar to those conferred by a printer/publisher's widow on remarriage, but she had no legal right to enter the trade or run a business herself.

But again documents in the Anisson collection show that girls were not totally 'absent' from the trade: as we have noted, it was not unusual for single young French women to be given training and work in their father's book or print shop. Thus the daughter of a book-trading family could be arrested or interrogated in the event of a contravention. One particularly revealing 'Interrogation' is that of the youngest daughter – just 16 years old – of Jean-François Musier, bookseller, who had been arrested while serving behind the counter and taken to the Bastille on 25 March 1759. Five pieces printed without permission were found in her pockets, about which she was questioned, and professed her ignorance; it was suggested to her that:

dès que la répondante se mêle du Commerce de la Librairie sous les yeux de ses père et mère et qu'elle ne peut nommer les personnes à qui ont été achetés les imprimés qui se sont trouvés dans ses poches, il est évident que les Père et Mère de la répondante les ont fait imprimer pour les débiter.<sup>52</sup>

The young girl showed astuteness and courage in resisting this kind of questioning, and was clearly well versed in the business and the implications of being caught for illegal trading. The extent of the family involvement is further illustrated later in the document when it is pointed out to her that her mother's niece, who lives with them, has frequently gone to the Palais de Justice to sell and distribute the prohibited pamphlets, again highlighting how young single women were playing an important part in the family's legal and illegal trading.<sup>53</sup> Likewise in Britain, evidence of the role of daughters often emerges from the silence of official records when families were caught for printing opposition pieces: Tamara Hunt shows how Alice, Catherine and Sarah Nutt were active in their mother's business and took over whenever she was arrested.<sup>54</sup> In contrast to their counterparts in France, however, these daughters were made free of the Company in 1740.

Where there was a shortage of family help, other women were sometimes employed: for example on 7 March 1761 an interrogation took place of Françoise Alaneau, who is described as the 'fille de boutique' of the widow Auclou, bookseller, with whom she resides. She is over 70 years of age, and a native of Vannes in

<sup>50</sup> Hufton 1984, p.356-357.

<sup>51</sup> Dupâquier 1979, p.60-61: quoted by Hufton 1984, p.357.

<sup>52</sup> F.fr. 22093, f.471.

<sup>53</sup> See also f.fr. 22101, doc. 97, which refers to the arrest of a 'Dlle Morin parente et fille de boutique du Sr. Buttard'.

<sup>54</sup> T. Hunt 1996, p.49.

Brittany, and she is accused with several others of having *L'oracle des philosophes*, a prohibited work by the abbé Guyon, printed in the provinces, and distributing copies in Paris.<sup>55</sup> She is accused of a similar misdemeanour three years later.<sup>56</sup> Likewise Elisabeth Fleury, shop assistant to Simon, printer to the Parlement, is arrested in 1771 for selling and distributing a pamphlet defending the Parlement against royal absolutism.<sup>57</sup> Employees such as these were unlikely to come from families in the trade: they were probably from rural backgrounds, and started out in the household of their master/mistress with the hope of saving an adequate dowry from the pittance they were paid. Overall, as noted earlier, these archives indicate that the distribution of pamphlets, especially in an opposition context, was the province of women, and this conclusion is strongly supported by evidence from England.<sup>58</sup>

In France some single women from families of booksellers, not necessarily daughters in a direct line, were trading under their own name; such was the case of Catherine Amaury, bookseller in the Palais de Justice, a native of Paris, aged 32 years, who was arrested in 1771.<sup>59</sup> She was presumably a relative, though not a daughter, of Gabriel Amaury, bookseller, who died in 1735, and she had, of course, no statutory right to be trading at all. There were many such women, both single and widowed, selling in the Palais de Justice, whose activities would appear to have contravened the regulations, but who were tolerated as long as they did not deal in illegal merchandise: we can see one young woman standing behind her stall in a contemporary engraving.<sup>60</sup> But the temptation for these small retailers to indulge in the sale of counterfeit editions and subversive books, the more lucrative end of the trade, was strong; when they were caught at these activities they risked the wrath not just of the *Lieutenant de police*, but also of the guild which would put them out of business.

It seems to have been fairly widely accepted in French provincial towns, in spite of the regulations, that single daughters might succeed to their father's business: some of them, in letters to the authorities, stress that they took over a shop which had been run by both mother and father, like Claude Grangier, a native of Dijon, aged 46 years; they may have felt that they had some natural right of succession to the mother's place. Grangier pointed out that her family had been in business in the town for more than 160 years.<sup>61</sup> Even a girl who married outside the trade, like Jeanne-Antoine Rigoine, daughter of the late Claude Rigoine, printer and bookseller in Besançon, who was the wife and then widow of a surgeon, went on running the bookshop for 46 years.<sup>62</sup> Local police authorities seem to have shown a large measure of tolerance towards these women, for many of whom their small business almost certainly represented the only opportunity of earning a half-decent livelihood.

<sup>55</sup> F.fr. 22094, f.210.

<sup>56</sup> F.fr. 22096, f.374-376.

<sup>57</sup> F.fr. 22101, f.144 and 147.

<sup>58</sup> See Bell 1996, p.27-8.

<sup>59</sup> F.fr. 22101, f.143 and 145.

<sup>60</sup> See p. 198.

<sup>61</sup> F.fr. 22125, f.209; see also f.fr. 22129, f.379.

<sup>62</sup> F.fr. 22126, f.318.

It was not only in the retail trade that the daughters of the family learnt the business; in June 1763 an unmarried woman, Rosette Marie, writes to the Vice Chancellor requesting a patent which would allow her to replace her late brother, a printer in Port-au-Prince who had been granted a patent for the Island of Haïti. When he had taken up his place, she recounts, he had taken his sister with him; like him she had been trained in the art of printing in their father's business in Nantes, and since their arrival in Port-au-Prince they have run their business jointly. After her brother's death, the Governor allowed her to continue as printer, and she is now requesting a new patent from Paris to confirm her position.<sup>63</sup> We do not know the outcome, but the authorities may have been more willing to sanction the appointment of a woman in the New World, where many female emigrants enjoyed such opportunities, than in the closed-shop environment of Paris.<sup>64</sup> This case gives the lie to the assumption, widely held by historians of the book, that women never composed or pulled the presses under the *Ancien Régime*.

There is some evidence that single daughters, even in Paris, occasionally tried to keep an involvement in printing despite the fact that their father's business would have gone to a male successor or his widow; in a declaration of 1704 Charles Huguier, a journeyman printer, who had been operating under the name of the widow Vaugon, states that the widow's sisters, named Le Mercier, have been operating independently in the printing business, and he adds that they frequently print under their own names, in clear contravention of the regulations.<sup>65</sup> In the provinces, single women did sometimes take over their father's printing house, though this appears to be less common than in the bookselling side of the trade; these would be small businesses, which they would run with help from family or friends, sometimes taking on a journeyman if business warranted it.<sup>66</sup> Such women could barely scratch a living out of a much reduced business.

The position in Britain was somewhat more favourable, with single women having the right to succeed and apparently being accepted as 'masters' by the Guilds. For example in Bristol, where the two estranged Farley brothers ran rival newspapers, both dying in 1753, one left his print business to his wife, the other to his niece Sarah. The two newspapers were run by these women for the next 20 years, with fierce commercial rivalry: when Sarah's business was sold following her death, it was renamed *Sarah Farley's Bristol Journal* by its new owners.<sup>67</sup> The Quakers, who preached the equality of women, count a number of women among their famous printers. The eminent Andrew Sowle trained his daughters in his shop: Tace obtained the freedom of the Stationers' Company in 1695, and succeeded to the family business; a well-known figure in literary London, she became official printer for the Society of Friends in 1740. Her sister Elizabeth married William Bradford, one of the first printers in America.<sup>68</sup> In Dublin, where up to a third of the women inheriting in

<sup>63</sup> F.fr. 22124, ff.318-319.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Hudak 1978.

<sup>65</sup> F.fr. 22064, f.123.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, f.fr. 22127, f.384.

<sup>67</sup> Barker 1997, p.94-95.

<sup>68</sup> Gies 1940, p.1424.

the trade were other than widows, Mary Pepyat ran the substantial family printing and bookselling business for twenty years after the deaths of her two brothers; she was appointed official printer to the City of Dublin for the period 1740-1759.<sup>69</sup> However, as in France, it does seem that women were, in general, more likely to take over a retail business rather than a printworks; interesting research carried out on Northumberland and Durham shows, for example, that the majority of circulating libraries in the period were run by women, for reasons that deserve further investigation.<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

Considering that there were also many women of lower status involved in peripheral, often illegal and dangerous aspects of the trade,<sup>71</sup> I hope it will be clear from this brief survey that women played a role in the 18th-century book trades far beyond that traditionally ascribed to them. We have drawn an outline of their activities and place in this strongly developing area of the pre-revolutionary economy, but much remains to be discovered. It is worth noting that at the time of the French Revolution more than one project sought to redress the formal – and senseless, they suggested – exclusion of women from the printing trades. A Parisian printer, Deltufo, having set up an ‘Ecole Typographique des femmes’ to train young women in the art of composition in his own printworks, appealed to the *Convention Nationale* for support to continue and extend the project. Despite the traditional neglect of these young women’s education, he asserted that they were dextrous, able and prompt to learn; however, their training would be useless without the help of the Convention, because

les ouvriers de l’ancien régime ne leur pardonneront jamais de s’être prêtées [...] à un plan qui anéantit en partie l’espèce d’*apanage* dont les ouvriers imprimeurs ont joui jusqu’à présent.<sup>72</sup>

In 1790 Madame de Bastide had already suggested an even more ambitious project to set up a free school of printing for women, extending its curriculum to all aspects

<sup>69</sup> Kinane 1991, p.10.

<sup>70</sup> Barker 1997, p.89-90.

<sup>71</sup> It is not possible to develop here the cases of Magdelaine de la Touche, widow of Pierre le Vacher, who is fined 2000 livres in 1721 for two different offences involving the illegal stocking of printed sheets (f.fr. 22081, f.151); of Louise Ratillon, 56 years old in 1765, widow of a type-founder, who is subjected to interrogation for having stitched 200 copies of Voltaire’s *La philosophie de l’histoire* for the bookseller Merlin (f.fr. 22097, doc.69); of the widow Chardon, herself the daughter of a bookbinder, who was found with 105 quires of the *Espion chinois*, by Ange Goudar, on the landing outside her door, also in 1765 (f.fr. 22097, doc.101) – all of them women who were in no position to refuse work on the grounds that it might not have a royal permission, if indeed they could read the title pages at all. Poverty is a recurrent theme in their pleadings on arrest. In studying the cases of the lowest of all in the pecking order – women like ‘la de Neel’, who distributed notices announcing the arrival of ships in Rouen (f.fr. 22084, f.236), or ‘the woman Truchau’, who sold (apparently stolen) songs in 4 page broadsheets (f.fr. 22066, doc.6), one gets a sense of the desperate efforts these women made to fight off destitution for themselves and their families.

<sup>72</sup> See *Les femmes compositrices* 1862, p.8.

of the trade, including type-casting. She saw no problem in women competing with tradesmen who were frequently, she implied, inadequately educated for their work.<sup>73</sup> There is little evidence that these initiatives bore significant fruit, but they do indicate an explicit consciousness of women's exclusion from this major area of cultural transmission as the old regime drew to its close.

It would be useful to find journals or letters by some of the shadowy women we have encountered in various areas of the trade, which might allow us more insight into their interests and motivations, but, of course, all we have learnt indicates how little time they would have had available for recording their lives. Few would seem to have had a particular commitment to the growing female reading public, with obvious exceptions such as Ann Baldwin, who brought out *The female Tatler* in 1709, the first periodical written, printed and published by women, for a purely feminine public. She and others deserve further attention which will draw them out of the shadows.

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<sup>73</sup> De Bastide, 'L'Imprimerie des femmes', in Duhet 1981, p.87-93. I am grateful to Dr. Jean Bloch for bringing this text to my attention.

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