

Queering the Language of Dynasty in Imprints and Bibliographic Metadata

Elise Watson

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Elise Watson is a postdoctoral researcher for the Universal Short Title Catalogue project at the University of St Andrews, where she works on data related to gender, France, and the Low Countries. In 2022, she completed her PhD, entitled “Hidden in Plain Sight: Printing for the Catholic Community in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic.” Her work, published in *Studies in Church History*, *Yearbook for Dutch Book History*, *Tijdschrift voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, and Brill’s *Library of the Written Word* series, focuses on intersections between printed ephemera, gender, book collecting, and early modern Catholicism. Her collection *Gender and the Book Trades*, edited alongside Jessica Farrell-Jobst, will be published with Brill in 2024. She is also the Managing Editor of Brill’s Book History Online database.

ABSTRACT

Queer history and queer bibliography have taught us that names matter. This paper uses queer history and methodology to rethink nomenclature related to the early modern conception of the family printing dynasty and show how heteronormative assumptions manifest in metadata and other forms of bibliographic description. It asserts that classification and the creation of metadata have never been neutral acts. Drawing on radical challenges to systems of knowledge organization made by librarians from the 1970s onwards, it suggests that such systems can and should restructure around new ideas of family that take into account queer lives, histories, and language. For the early modern period, this means acknowledging that dynastic structures that were frequently non-normative, deviating from the traditional business inheritance from father to son. To demonstrate the shortcomings of current metadata practices and the potential for reassessment, this paper utilizes three case studies related to the vague use of the terms “widow” and “heir” in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French, Flemish, and Dutch imprints. It presents practical solutions in making metadata more accurate, including a new perspective on the print workshop as a space of collaboration, an expansion in roles expressed within a record, and increased emphasis on interoperability and open linked data. Rethinking systems of power—

and acknowledging the labor that cataloging and metadata creation entail—allow for a queer bibliography that acknowledges the messiness of identity and legacy but is also precise and accurate.

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Representation on our own terms has been historically denied to queer people. Historical studies of queer and gender-nonconforming individuals, such as the fourteenth-century sex worker Eleanor Rykener and the eighteenth-century London bookseller and eccentric John de Verdion, have demonstrated that naming has power and this power matters.¹ Even in 2023, laws in fourteen different states in the United States consider forcing schools to use trans students' deadnames.² The importance of names is well known to book historians and bibliographers. In the early modern period, the vast majority of books included an imprint on the title page or a colophon at the end stating the primary creator(s) of the book, whether this was the printer, publisher, bookseller, or all three. While books were produced collaboratively by a community of workers, the name in the imprint or colophon carried disproportionate power and influence. Recently, new approaches in critical, feminist, and queer bibliography have begun to question, problematize, and pull apart this singular and hegemonic perspective.³ J. D. Sargan has recently

¹ Kadin Henningsen, "'Calling [herself] Eleanor': Gender Labor and Becoming a Woman in the Rykener Case," *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* 55, no. 1 (2019): 249–66. John de Verdion was an eighteenth-century London bookseller; mentions of de Verdion in secondary literature almost exclusively refer to him by his birth name and gender assigned at birth, although he resolutely rejected both of these during his life. See, for example, Graham Jefcoate, *Deutsche Drucker und Buchhändler in London 1680–1811: Strukturen und Bedeutung des deutschen Anteils am englischen Buchhandel* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 91; Nicola McLelland, "The History of Language Learning and Teaching in Britain," *Language Learning Journal* 46 (2018): 8.

² Hannah Schoenbaum and Sean Murphy, "14 States Consider Laws Forcing Schools to Use Trans Students' 'deadnames'—The Ones They Were Born with and Chose to Change," *Fortune*, March 22, 2023, <https://fortune.com/2023/03/22/what-is-deadnaming-trans-kids-children-lgbtq-schools-14-states/>.

³ For example, in reference to the relationship between authorship and bookwork see Lisa Maruca, "Introduction: Printing Production Values," in *The Work of Print: Authorship and the English Text*

noted that those who work on recovery studies within book history are challenged not only by how queerness makes records less likely to survive, but how the terminology and expectations around queerness are themselves different.

This article takes up Sargan’s challenge “to read *through* the gaps” for the handpress book era, and to go beyond the identification of individuals into rethinking systems of language around them.⁴ By using the tools of critical cataloging and critical bibliography, in particular queer approaches, it is possible to make bibliographic metadata from this period both more inclusive and more accurate. This requires a new approach to the assumptions historians and bibliographers make about the early modern book trade: that the dynastic nature of the business meant that the role of master printer always followed a patrilineal route from father to son. Deconstructing these assumptions by focusing on the intentionally vague language sometimes used in imprints on the title pages of these books, in particular the identities of “widow” and “heir,” reveals a wealth of other actors that the resulting metadata erases.

The building of a system of bibliographic metadata, in essence data about data about books, is at its heart concerned with two practices: creating a standardized, consistent description of a book and also making that description flexible and interoperable.⁵ Because of the contradictions inherent in this definition, metadata creation has never been a neutral act. Since the 1970s, the blossoming of the critical cataloging movement and the rise of critical librarianship—which examines how technologies of power, such as catalogs, construct our relationship with knowledge and meaning—have profoundly influenced the library sector.⁶ As a

Trades, 1660–1760 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 3–27; see also the work of Kate Ozment in using feminist bibliography to rediscover women’s roles in the book trade: Kate Ozment, “Rationale for Feminist Bibliography,” *Textual Cultures* 13, no. 1 (2020): 149–78.

⁴ J. D. Sargan, “What Could a Trans Book History Look Like? Toward Trans Codicology,” *Criticism* 64, no. 3 (2022): 571–72, emphasis original.

⁵ Jen Wolfe, “Playing Fast and Loose with the Rules: Metadata Cataloging for Digital Library Projects,” in *Radical Cataloging: Essays at the Front*, ed. K. R. Roberto (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 70.

⁶ For a fascinating and careful documentation of some of these changes, specifically to Library of Congress Subject Headings, see Steven A. Knowlton, “Three Decades since *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Study of Changes in the Library of Congress Subject Headings*,” *Cataloguing and Classification*

discipline, bibliography is inextricably linked with this structuring of knowledge. A recent special issue of *Criticism*, edited by Lisa Maruca and Kate Ozment, described “New Approaches to Critical Bibliography and the Material Text” with articles on Indigenous, Black, feminist, trans, and queer bibliography, among many others.⁷ Maruca and Ozment define critical bibliography as the intersection of critical theory and bibliography, pursuing liberation bibliography as a necessary end and outcome of this work.

Working with books from the handpress era presents an immediate problem to this methodology: what could queer metadata have to do with subjects that are not obviously or visibly queer, or whose names are not even discoverable at all? However, as Bonnie Ruberg, Jason Boyd, and James Howe argue, “To queer metadata, queer thinking must be brought to bear on the conceptual models and tools of object description as well as its content. Indeed, the messiness of queerness provides a new vantage point from which to challenge the norms that dictate how meaning is derived from data.”⁸ It does seem contradictory to make intentionally messy a descriptive vocabulary that is designed to classify items into tidy searchable categories. However, this ignores the fact that these categories were never simple or clear. As Emily Drabinski has noted, classification and cataloging decisions have a rich history of being framed as “neutral” acts, but they have always been ideological.⁹ This can manifest in various ways: as the preservation of orthodoxy or the embracing of social movements and progress. While reinforcing existing power structures and hegemonies can passively alienate users, knowledge

Quarterly 40, no. 2 (2005): 123–45; Emily Drabinski, “What Is Critical about Critical Librarianship?” *Art Libraries Journal* 44, no. 2 (2019): 49–57; see also B. M. Watson, “Critiquing the Machine: The Critical Cataloguing Database,” *TCB: Technical Services in Religion and Theology* 31, no. 1 (2023): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.31046/tcb.v31i1.3216>, and its corresponding database, <https://critcat.org/>.

⁷ Lisa Maruca and Kate Ozment, eds., “New Approaches to Critical Bibliography and the Material Text,” special issue, *Criticism* 64, no. 3 (2022).

⁸ Bonnie Ruberg, Jason Boyd, and James Howe, “Toward a Queer Digital Humanities,” in *Bodies of Information: Intersectional Feminism and the Digital Humanities*, ed. Elizabeth Losh and Jacqueline Wernimont (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

⁹ Emily Drabinski, “Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction,” *Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 83, no. 2 (2013): 94–111.

structures can also be a powerful political tool.¹⁰ In *Revolting Libraries*, from 1972, Bill Hinchcliff offers a remarkable manifesto of radical librarianship, with a list beginning “Abortion. Absent fathers. Alienation. Apathy. Awareness. Barriers. Bibliography. Blackness. Bullets. Bureaucracy. Card catalog.” and finishing “Struggle. Study quietly. Survival. Teachers. Teargas. TV. Violence. War. Welfare. Whiteness. Womanhood. Working class.” At its conclusion, Hinchcliff asks, “If these are not our concerns, why *do* we profess to be librarians?”¹¹

Instead of feigning neutrality, Drabinski argues, queer analysis allows creators to acknowledge that systems of knowledge organization have always been biased and to see the generation of new ones as a valuable subjective act. Queerness is always changing, and so these labels will necessarily become outdated and need to change as well.¹² This is not a detriment but rather a necessary process. This call to action has already been taken up by the Trans and Queer Metadata Collectives, two projects that bring together interdisciplinary perspectives on description and classification.¹³ Alongside the work of those in libraries, archives, galleries, and museums, historians and literary scholars are developing projects to remake and transform descriptive and enumerative bibliography. Since 2018, the Women’s Print History Project has pioneered thoughtful methodologies in representing gendered metadata.¹⁴ The Black Bibliography project utilizes an innovative combination of descriptive bibliography and linked

¹⁰ K.R. Roberto, “Inflexible Bodies: Metdata for Transgender Identities,” *Journal of Information Ethics* 20, no. 2 (2011): 56-64.

¹¹ Bill Hinchcliff, “Heads,” in *Revolting Librarians*, ed. Celeste West and Elizabeth Katz (San Francisco: Booklegger Press, 1972), n.p., emphasis original. Excerpts from the collection, including this piece, can be seen at <https://users.ox.ac.uk/~bodl0842/revolting/index.html>; several pieces also reference the foundational work of Sanford Berman, especially *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1971).

¹² Drabinski, “Queering the Catalog,” 101–2.

¹³ Trans Metadata Collective, <https://transmetadatacollective.org/>; Queer Metadata Collective, <https://queermetadatacollective.org/>.

¹⁴ Kandice Sharren, Kate Ozment, and Michelle Levy, “Gendering Digital Bibliography with the Women’s Print History Project,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 54, no. 4 (2021): 887–908; see also the “Project Methodology” section on the Women’s Print History Project website, <https://womensprinthistoryproject.com/blog/page/12>.

data networks not only to bring attention to Black print culture, but to how bibliographic and cataloging practices must change to recognize this work fully.¹⁵

While a newly galvanized focus on inclusive metadata has impacted the field of library and information science, and these digital bibliographies are pioneering new approaches, many short-title and library catalogs that cover the early modern period have yet to adopt this methodology fully. Most databases still classify volumes published by individuals who describe themselves as the widows and heirs of master printers by the name of the printer himself, even when there are hundreds or thousands of these records unrelated to him. While the widow publisher who took over after her husband's death is a steadfast trope of book history, her status prior to widowhood is never interrogated, nor is her familiarity with the business that allowed her to take it over so completely.¹⁶ Qualitative and quantitative studies therefore replicate early modern terms uncritically without considering whether they accurately describe dynasty and inheritance. This article seeks to identify the weaknesses in this heteronormative language and point to some solutions in how queering this bibliographic metadata can make it more accurate and inclusive. It does so by beginning from a place of inclusion, assuming a communal model of production. Though this is a broader problem, this article will address the handpress period, approximately 1450 to 1800, and present three short case studies demonstrating how this metadata can be ambiguous and why it requires such nuance.

DIAGNOSING THE PROBLEM

It has been a recent, and very welcome, trend in enumerative bibliography to address how databases obscure the work of women. In 2021, the Universal Short Title Catalogue (USTC) unveiled the development of a gender tagging system which allows the user to filter for “Female

¹⁵ Melissa Barton and Brenna Bychowski, “Modeling Black Literature: Behind the Screen with the Black Bibliography Project,” in *Ethnic Studies in Academic and Research Libraries*, ed. Raymond Pun, Melissa Cardenas-Dow, and Kenya S. Flash (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2021), 217–31.

¹⁶ This is a primary subject of the forthcoming volume *Gender and the Book Trades*, ed. Elise Watson and Jessica Farrell-Jobst (Leiden: Brill, 2024).

Author” and “Female Printer/Publisher” within the database.¹⁷ Based on this model, the USTC’s partner ProQuest, in their Early European Books and Early English Books Online databases, implemented a similar gender tagging system by including “Women in publishing” as a broad subject classification.¹⁸ There are practical issues with this methodology. Female authors and publishers were far more likely to obscure their identities, write under pseudonyms, or subsume their names under male ones in order to increase the likelihood that they would be published at all.¹⁹ In addition, the sole inclusion of the named printer, publisher, or bookseller in the imprint within the bibliographic metadata conceals the possibility that there were women working in most early modern print shops in some capacity. Finally, the strict binary of male and female in these records does not accurately represent the spectrum of gender expression present in authorship and publishing. Moreover, there are deeper interpretive problems. By separating out the 1% or so of books produced by named female authors or female printers, the default assumption becomes that the other 99% were produced exclusively by men. It silos this small number of “women worthies,” creating a binary that is not only problematic, but also factually untrue, as it ignores the familial and collective dimensions of early modern labor.²⁰ Though there is often one male name on the title page, books were produced by networks of laborers that included women.

A number of solutions have been pioneered already. The Women’s Print History Project addressed this issue by including categories for “female,” “male,” “unknown,” and a new one for “transgender,” which covered some forms of gender nonconformity.²¹ In 2020, the Short Title

¹⁷ Universal Short Title Catalogue, <https://www.ustc.ac.uk/>. I have worked on the project as a Research Assistant since 2021.

¹⁸ Early European Books, <https://www.proquest.com/eeb/>; Early English Books Online, <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/>.

¹⁹ Margaret J. M. Ezell, “‘By a Lady’: The Mask of the Feminine in Restoration, Early Eighteenth-Century Print Culture,” in *Faces of Anonymity: Anonymous and Pseudonymous Publication, 1600–2000*, ed. Robert J. Griffin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 63–79.

²⁰ For more on this term see Miriam Elizabeth Burstein, “Women Worthies,” in *Companion to Women’s Historical Writing*, ed. Mary Spongberg, Ann Curthoys, and Barbara Caine (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 592–96.

²¹ Sharren, Ozment, and Levy, “Gendering Digital Bibliography,” 903–4.

Catalogue Flanders (STCV) announced that they were updating their system to refer to printers' widows by their maiden names. Out of 173 authority files, they were able to identify 149 women through research and consulting specialists.²² The USTC is following suit, by aiming to include the given names of female printers when it is possible to find them.

While Robert Darnton's communication circuit remains the most influential model of the communal process of book production, it has more recently been complemented by the web model described by Helen Smith, comprised of the "interlinked economic, social, and corporeal relationships" that make a book.²³ With this in mind, perhaps the most accurate way of approaching these labels is by thinking of book production as a communal process from the start. Rather than viewing an early modern widow taking over her husband's printing business as an act of financial necessity, it is more inclusive and more accurate to acknowledge the likelihood that she must have had experience in the shop throughout its lifetime and to include her in this web from the beginning. Though bibliographic metadata is limited in its abilities, it need not be reduced to the master printer or publisher on the imprint.

What lies at the core of these issues is that in metadata as well as scholarship, librarians and bibliographers assume that printshops always passed from father to son. There has been little serious academic discussion of what the terms "widow" and "heir" could actually mean, as they are seen as outliers and exceptions. Widows identified themselves in a wide variety of forms. Sometimes they identified themselves by their late husbands, sometimes by "widow" and their husband's name, and sometimes by their own names. A huge number of different individuals could be heirs: sons, daughters, sons- or daughters-in-law, nieces or nephews, cousins, apprentices. The ambiguity and flexibility of this term, and its messy implications for bibliographic metadata, demonstrates why it was used so widely.

It is here that queer methodology has the potential to transform this metadata. Queer history is full of pioneering and transformative approaches to the concepts of family and dynasty.

²² These numbers were shared by Steven van Impe, STCV contributor and curator of old books and manuscripts at the Hendrik Conscience Heritage Library in Antwerp, Belgium, on X (formerly Twitter) on June 23, 2020, <https://x.com/RareBookLibAntw/status/1275503316873641984?s=20>

²³ Robert Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?" *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): 65–83; Helen Smith, *Grossly Material Things: Women and Book Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 10.

The concept of “chosen family,” or the “logical family” titling novelist Armistead Maupin’s queer memoir, presents a clear queer alternative to the inevitable progress of biological generation.²⁴ In the ball community, which dates back to the efforts of formerly enslaved Black queens in the 1890s, drag houses explicitly replicate familial structures, where the power dynamics are social rather than biological.²⁵ They are networks of relationships that pertain not only to ballroom performances and competitions but also often literal houses where drag families live together, with mothers, fathers and siblings in prescribed roles. Mothers and fathers, usually in Black and Latinx poor or working-class communities, play a symbolic but very real parental role, especially when it comes to navigating queer life and enabling access to gender-affirming care. The dynastic implications are social and symbolic but also literal, in their shared work. Without appropriating the fluid, discursive understandings of the labels used for family and dynasty in these communities, it is possible to take inspiration from them when it comes to describing families and dynasties from a different era. As Jack Halberstam wrote in 2011:

We tend to organize the chaotic process of historical change by anchoring it to an idea of generational shifts (from father to son). [...] De-linking the process of generation from the force of historical process is a queer kind of project: queer lives seek to uncouple change from the supposedly organic and immutable forms of family and inheritance; queer lives exploit some potential for a difference in form that lies dormant in queer collectivity not as an essential attribute of sexual otherness but as a possibility embedded in the break from heterosexual life narratives.²⁶

While Halberstam is writing in the context of media and politics (specifically, the politics of stupidity in the movie *Dude, Where’s My Car?*), this queering of family and dynasty has radical

²⁴ Armistead Maupin, *Logical Family: A Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017); see also Mathias Klitgård, “Family Time Gone Awry: Vogue Houses and Queer Repro-Generationality at the Intersection(s) of Race and Sexuality,” *Debate Feminista* 57 (2019), 124–33.

²⁵ Thaddeus Russell, “The Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality,” *American Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2008): 104–7; Marlon M. Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness: Theorizing the Gender System in Ballroom Culture,” *Feminist Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011): 367.

²⁶ Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 70.

potential in bibliography. Sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, and queer theorists may argue over the extent to which chosen families or alternative kinship simply replicate heteronormativity.²⁷ However, I suggest that bibliographers, catalogers, librarians, and other creators of metadata can participate in this queer uncoupling simply by acknowledging the messy reality of inheritance and self-identification in handpress books and structuring this within their structures of information.

Queer approaches to labor and family can also be instructive. The concept of the family firm has been well documented in business history, although there is no agreed-upon qualitative, quantitative, or historical definition of the term that encompasses all possible cases.²⁸ Family businesses have been both well-studied in terms of nineteenth- and twentieth-century industrial capitalism and in economic terms when it comes to the unique blend of mercantilism and nascent capitalism that characterized the early modern period. In particular, feminist perspectives on gendered labor have flourished since the 1980s, identifying how women's unpaid and often invisible labor was essential in maintaining the early modern economy.²⁹ While family businesses are unusually motivated by trust and kinship bonds, they are more likely to be threatened by interpersonal issues around leadership and succession.³⁰ Approaching this succession critically requires identifying how the concepts and language around it are deeply

²⁷ For example, Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

²⁸ Andrea Colli and Mary Rose, "Family Business," in *The Oxford Handbook of Business History*, ed. Geoffrey Jones and Jonathan Zeitlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 196.

²⁹ Early influential voices include Natalie Zemon Davis, Merry Wiesner-Hanks, and Martha Howell. For women's labor in the book trades specifically, see Susan Broomhall, *Women and the Book Trades in Sixteenth-Century France* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002); Paul G. Hoftijzer, "Women in the Early-Modern Dutch Book Trade," in *Writing the History of Women's Writing: Toward an International Approach*, ed. Suzan van Dijk et al. (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts, 2001), 211–22; Helen Smith, "*Grossly Material Things*": *Women and Book Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2012); Valerie Wayne, ed., *Women's Labour and the History of the Book in Early Modern England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

³⁰ Colli and Rose, "Family Business," 210.

masculine and heteronormative.³¹ Queering the family business, therefore, requires rethinking the language inherent in structures of labor, dynasty, and succession. In these early modern imprints, the language of dynasty entails two primary terms: “widow,” indicating the living wife of a deceased master printer, and “heir,” a more ambiguous catchall that could refer to widow, son, daughter, nephew, niece, or even apprentice of no blood relation. The case studies that follow demonstrate unusual uses of the terms “widow” and “heir”: the widows Delagarde, two widows collaborating on the same book; the Phalèse and Aaltsz families, two sets of daughters claiming the title “heir”; and the heirs of the widow of Cornelis Stichter, generations of a printing family combining the two terms in an intentionally disruptive way. In all of these cases, a queer approach to metadata can present a more accurate picture of the actors involved than traditional approach to inheritance and printing dynasties.

CASE STUDY I: THE WIDOWS DELAGARDE

In the seventeenth century, the town of Le Puy in the southwest of France had a printing industry dominated by the multigenerational Delagarde printing family.³² The same names appear with regularity in imprints over a period of approximately fifty years: Jérôme, André, Pierre, Guy-François, Antoine, and Jean-Baptiste. The first generation of printers was composed of André, Pierre, and Jérôme Delagarde. The second consisted of Jean-Baptiste (son of Pierre) and Guy-François (son of André) Delagarde. Between these six individuals, a huge number of collaborations took place: fathers, sons, nephews, uncles, and even sons-in-law worked together according to the imprints available in eighty-three extant editions. Two of the most frequent collaborators were Pierre and Guy-François, uncle and nephew who published at least twelve editions together. All of this is also traceable through the catalog of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, described in their authority files.³³

³¹ For a modern case study see the analytical framework used in Nicole C. Ferry, "It's a Family Business!: Leadership Texts as Technologies of Heteronormativity," *Leadership* 14, no. 6 (2017): 603–21.

³² Albert Labarre, *Répertoire bibliographique des livres imprimés en France au XVIIe siècle*, vol. 2: *Aurillac* [. . .] *Sarlat* (Baden-Baden: V. Koerner, 1980).

³³ “Des fiches de référence sur les auteurs, les œuvres et les thèmes,” Bibliothèque nationale de France, <https://data.bnf.fr/>.

However, there is another dimension to this dynasty that this data does not describe. From 1692 to 1694, all of the books published by the family contain the imprint “chez les Veuves Delagarde, marchands Libraires, proche le College” (at the home of the widows Delagarde, printer-booksellers, near the College). This identifies the widows Delagarde as the booksellers responsible for this enterprise (fig. 3). The imprint fails to answer an obvious question: whose widows were these? André Delagarde, who was originally from Viverols, was originally able to establish a foothold in the Le Puy printing business by marrying the niece of Philippe Guinand, a bookseller from Lyon. While the niece’s role was essential in the establishment of the business, we do not even know her name. She may have been one of these widows publishing independently.³⁴ Brothers André and Pierre were both deceased by 1688, before these books were printed, so these widows could have been their wives. Curiously, though, it is even more likely that one widow was the wife of Guy-François Delagarde, who died in 1689 or 1690. His widow, Marie Delolme, remained in the business and remarried another printer, Antoine Clet.³⁵ Therefore, it is equally if not more likely that these two widows were mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Here, the label of “widow” conveniently obscured their identities and relationship, allowing them to prioritize the family name above all else. Their assumption of this family identity in legal documents, particularly privileges, allowed them to inherit the family business.

These naming conventions also had ulterior motives. These women were not simply finishing the work of their husbands; based on the strength of their family name, they had obtained imprimaturs to publish ecclesiastical works for the city themselves. Evidence of these privileges is replicated in the paratexts of several of these works: in the 1692 *Instructions ecclesiastiques*, the “procureur du Roi” (crown prosecutor), Mr. Pinot, adds an approbation that allows the text “to be printed and brought to light by the Widows Delagarde, booksellers of the present city, with a prohibition on all others from printing, selling, or distributing it, under

³⁴ “André Delagarde,” accessed February 23, 2024, <https://data.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb125101761>.

³⁵ Albert Boudon-Lashermes, *Le Vieux Puy. Vieux Logis et Vieilles Familles* (Saint-Etienne: Theolier, 1911), 402.

penalty of 100 *livres d'amandes* [in local currency] and the confiscation of copies.”³⁶ In this way these women, marginalized due to their marital status and gender, were able to leverage their identities as widows and members of the family to secure these printing privileges. The identification of “widow” in the imprints and paratexts makes their relationship unclear, other than that they were married to members of the Delagarde family. This case demonstrates that these women must have been part of the family business since the beginning, or they would not have been able to take over the business in the way they did. It also shows clearly that, while “widows Delagarde” was a useful marketing strategy in the seventeenth century, library catalogs and metadata do not sufficiently describe this fascinating example. For example, in the printer field at the time of writing the USTC record for *Instructions ecclesiastiques* simply contains two identical entries of “Delagarde (widow of).”³⁷ A more thorough understanding of who these women were and more metadata regarding the nature of their relationship, like the data that exists for their husbands and sons, would make the lineage of this dynasty clear.

CASE STUDY II: THE DAUGHTER-HEIRS OF PIERRE PHALÈSE AND HERMAN AALTSZ

While the most popular use of “heir” in early modern imprints indicated the son of the master printer, this was not always the case. Some widow printers, such as Agnes Campbell, widow of Andrew Anderson in Edinburgh, used “heir” as a genderless marker to identify themselves.³⁸ In other cases, the term could refer to a daughter, multiple daughters, or a combination of sons and daughters. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many daughters of master printers

³⁶ “soit Imprimé & mis en Lumiere par les Veuves Delagarde, Marchandes Libraires de la present Ville, avec défenses à tous autres de l'imprimer, vendre, ni debiter, à peine de cens livres d'amande, & de confiscation des exemplaires”; *Instructions Ecclesiastiques* (Le Puy: les veuves Delagarde, 1692), sig. π4v, translation author's.

³⁷ USTC record for *Instructions ecclesiastiques, où l'on tache de faire connoitre l'essence, la dignité et la sainteté du clergé*, accessed February 23, 2024, <https://www.ustc.ac.uk/editions/6156919>.

³⁸ Alastair Mann, “Embroidery to Enterprise: The Role of Women in the Book Trade of Early Modern Scotland,” in *Women in Scotland, c. 1100–c. 1750*, ed. Elizabeth Ewan and Maureen M. Meikle (Edinburgh: Tuckwell Press, 1999), 136–51.

identified themselves in imprints this way, including daughters from the Roger family in Amsterdam, the Ballard family in Paris, and the Playford and Walsh families in London.³⁹ One of the more prominent sets of daughters inheriting the family business included Magdalena and Maria Phalèse, heirs of the Phalèse music-printing dynasty in seventeenth-century Antwerp. These sisters ran the business for forty-five years, producing 158 known editions.⁴⁰ While they usually identified themselves as “Haeredes Petri Phalesii” (the heirs of Pierre Phalèse) in their imprints, they joined the guild of St. Luke in Antwerp under the joint title “De dochters van Walesius, bockvercopers” (the daughters of Phalèse, book dealers).⁴¹ Exceptionally, Magdalena Phalèse printed a small number of editions under her own name, although with the modification of “Magdalena Phalesia & cohaeredes” (Magdalena Phalèse and co-heirs.)⁴² While printing under her own name, an extremely unusual act for a female printer in the seventeenth century, Magdalena contextualized herself within her family dynasty.

Daughters’ participation in the family business was also not necessarily predicated on the lack of a male heir. In eighteenth-century Amsterdam, sixteen editions were printed by “the heirs of Herman Aaltsz” (*erven* in Dutch editions or *haeredes* in Latin). The Aaltsz family was a middling printing and publishing family, Roman Catholic by faith and printing mostly Catholic works. Although this is not reflected in descriptive metadata, the archival work of Isabella van Eeghen and Lienke Leuven in the 1950s and 1960s revealed that the heirs of Herman Aaltsz’s business were his one son, Allard, and his three daughters, Geertruy, Maria, and Catharina. All three daughters had entered the religious life as Catholic lay sisters, called *geestelijke dochters* (spiritual daughters) in the Dutch Republic. Committed informally to a life of celibacy, they were

³⁹ Rudolph Rasch, “De dochters van Estienne Roger,” *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse boekgeschiedenis*, 12 (2005): 65.

⁴⁰ Maria Schildt, “The Music Printers Madeleine and Marie Phalèse in Antwerp, 1629–1675,” in *Early Printed Music and Material Culture in Central and Western Europe*, ed. Andrea Lindmayr-Brandl and Grantley McDonald (London: Routledge, 2021), 176–203.

⁴¹ Schildt, “Madeleine and Marie Phalèse,” 177.

⁴² Schildt, “Madeleine and Marie Phalèse,” 177. For example, Giovanni Rovetta, *Gemma musicalis diversis cantionibus sacris tribus, quatuor, et quinque vocibus* (Antwerp: Magdalena Phalesia & cohaeredes, 1649).

ideal heirs to continue running the business alongside their brother.⁴³ The output of their press was diverse, from a treatise on curing hemorrhoids to a series of elaborately illustrated Catholic missals.⁴⁴ In addition, there are five titles, printed between 1697 and 1707, that have Allard Aaltsz's name exclusively in the imprint, without the term "heir." Three of these overlap chronologically with the sixteen printed by the "heirs of Herman Aaltsz." Like the editions published by Magdalena Phalèse, there is no clear thematic link between the editions on which Aaltsz presented his name exclusively as opposed to the editions on which he is one of several heirs. However, unlike Phalèse, due to his gender he was able to present just his name without the additional required context. In the early modern period, the title of "heir" functioned as a vague descriptor in imprints, conveniently masking a diverse range of demographic realities.

CASE STUDY III: THE STICHTERS ALMANAC

The Short Title Catalogue Netherlands (STCN) demonstrates how significant this problem becomes in the eighteenth century. Cornelis Stichter was a Catholic publisher and bookseller in Amsterdam. He was married twice, once to Johanna Margreta Eggers in 1694, when he was twenty-four years old, and once to Agnes ter Hel in 1696, when he was twenty-six years old. He died only nine years later in 1705, at the age of thirty-five. He published a number of different almanacs during his career as a printer: according to the STCN, he has thirty-two publications to his name. This includes what came to be known as "Stichter's Almanac." His widow Agnes took over, and in the nine years before she died in 1714, she published fifty-six additional editions.

⁴³ Lienke Paulina Leuven, *De boekhandel te Amsterdam door katholieken gedreven tijdens de Republiek* (Epe: Hooiberg, 1951), 28, 60, 65; Isabella van Eeghen, *De Amsterdamse boekhandel 1680–1725*, vol. 3 (Amsterdam: Scheltema and Holkema, 1965), 13–14.

⁴⁴ Christianus Spenerus, *Epistola de novo haemorrhoidum coecarum remedio, muribus scl. marinis* (Amsterdam: H. Aaltsz, 1700); *Missae de sanctis archiepiscopatus Ultrajectensis, & episcopatum suffraganeorum* (Amsterdam: apud haeredes H. Aaltsz, 1735).

The title of the almanac went from *Stichters almanac* (Stichter's Almanac) to *Wed. Stichters almanac* (Widow Stichter's Almanac).⁴⁵

Her death did not mean the end of the publication. Another almanac appeared almost immediately with the title *D'erve[n] der wed. C. Stichters almanachi* (The Heirs of Widow Stichter's Almanac.) Between 1714 and 1800, more than one thousand editions (1,085 according to the STCN) were published with “d'ervgen[amen] wed[uwe] C. Stichter” (the heirs of the widow of Cornelis Stichter) in the imprint. Maintaining this kind of consistency in family branding was essential for almanacs, which needed to be printed and sold annually, and brought in enormous profit as a result.⁴⁶ In nearly every single edition, multiple generations of these heirs specify that they are not the heirs of Cornelis, but the heirs of the *widow* of Cornelis Stichter (fig. 4). This new almanac title would remain well into the nineteenth century, outlasting the Dutch Republic itself. The almanac went through new authors, publishers, locations, and revisions, but this deliberate disruption of patrilineal heteronormativity remained the first line of this popular almanac for almost a century.

At the time of writing, the STCN cross-categorizes these almanacs as being printed by “the heirs of Cornelis Stichter” and “the heirs of the widow of Cornelis Stichter,” separate from Cornelis and his widow, but without naming Agnes ter Hel as his widow. The University of Amsterdam catalog represents the publisher as “Stichter, Cornelis (II, erven wed.)”—a method of categorization that includes the 1,085 publications from the variety of heirs and the 56 from Agnes ter Hel under the umbrella of Cornelis II Stichter, thus increasing his publications from 32 to 1,173. There is no attempt to separate these elements or clarify what the implications of these terms might be.

As these catalogs indicate, across a period of 121 years, the metadata of this family business is tethered together by the name of its patriarch, a man who lived until he was 35 and produced only 2.7 percent of the family's overall output. Of course, in one sense, this is

⁴⁵ Data compiled from the STCN; “ECARTICO: Linking Cultural Industries in the Early Modern Low Countries, ca. 1475–ca. 1725,” <https://www.vondel.humanities.uva.nl/ecartico/>; and Leuven, *De boekhandel te Amsterdam*, 45, 68.

⁴⁶ For more on the value of almanacs as popular print see Jeroen Salman, *Populair drukwerk in de Gouden Eeuw: De almanak als lectuur en handelswaar* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1999).

represented in the metadata because this is how his widow and his heirs chose to represent themselves. This was intentional and strategic. However, in another sense, it is an inadequate label for such an expansive business, and in fact it actively obscures the dynamic publication strategies that gave this firm success for more than a century.

A WAY FORWARD

The Widows Delagarde, the Phalèse and Aalst families, and the Stichter's Almanac represent three cases from the handpress era where the roles involved in producing the work are less than clear-cut. Unfortunately, because of the lack of standardization of the terms "widow" and "heir," and the fact that these labels are universally indicated in the language in which the book is written, it is currently impossible to estimate how many cases there are. A comparative international search for "widow" also requires searching *vidua*, *veuve*, *witwe*, *weduwe*, *vedova*, *viuda*, and endless other linguistic variations. While many thousands of these cases surely exist, they are impossible to count, much less categorize. As a result, library catalogs, short-title catalogs, and national bibliographies use metadata that unintentionally oversimplifies or erases the diverse spread of individuals who are responsible for printing the book. This is due to existing metadata conventions that, above all, prioritize the name of one single master printer and his named male descendants.

By queering this dynastic metadata, acknowledging its ambiguity and messiness, a different and more accurate picture emerges. A queer metadata for this period should begin from a place of inclusion, seeing the family print shop not as a dynastic hierarchy but instead as a space of collaboration. With that in mind, it would be useful to expand the number of possible roles in regard to the text. Beyond printer, publisher and bookseller, these roles could include editor, binder, compiler, compositor, translator, even papermaker or book owner. The more provenance information we can include about the creation and use of a book, the fuller a picture of these communities we can access. Similarly, bibliographic metadata could organize labels such as "widow" and "heir" first by the label itself, regardless of language, and then the family name. The given names of widows could be preserved alongside their self-identification. This would allow researchers to engage with these topics on their own terms, rather than only in the context of their relationship to the master printer.

Of course, in an ideal situation the process of compiling bibliographic metadata would be simple enough that all librarians, archivists, and researchers would have the time and resources to research the individual name and gender of every publisher who produced works under the name “heir of” or “widow of.” While more collaboration with researchers regarding catalogs and metadata would be useful, this is, of course, an unrealistic goal. Open linked data and authority records, for example the services provided by the Virtual International Authority File (VIAF), could provide a controlled vocabulary for this data that would standardize one particular form of each name and concept, enhancing accessibility and discoverability regardless of format or language. Working with these tools would make this metadata transferable across catalogs and databases.

While these are results-oriented solutions, what is really necessary is a change in interpretive practice. As Drabinski notes, and Sargan implements in his work on transcology, the foundational work that needs to be done is rethinking systems of power in how data is represented, in particular how systems of language in traditional bibliography have excluded family systems from being included in studies of early modern printing.⁴⁷ Then, it will be possible to rebuild new systems that are accurate and inclusive.

Finally, metadata needs to be situated thoughtfully within the scaffolding of a research project. The labor and interpretive choices of the cataloger are scholarship, and they should be acknowledged as such by allowing them to describe these choices in a methodological section. Catalogs should be accompanied by some form of a description or user guide that describes how these issues are handled in the context of their particular dataset. By creating this structure, and by viewing the family printshop as a collaborative space, we can deconstruct the heteronormativity of the printing dynasty in the way we talk about books and make bibliography a queerer space.

Captions:

⁴⁷ Drabinski, “What Is Critical about Critical Librarianship?”; Sargan, “What Could a Trans Book History Look Like?”

Fig. 3 *Instructions ecclesiastiques* (Au Puy: les veuves Delagarde, 1694), title page. Image courtesy of the Bibliothèque jésuite des Fontaines, SJ A 340/471.

Fig. 4 *Almanach op 't Schrikk: Jaar ons Heeren Jesu Christi, 1768* (Amsterdam: d' erfgen[amen] wed[uwe] C. Stichter, 1768), title page. Image courtesy Collectie Stad Antwerpen, Erfgoedbibliotheek Hendrik Conscience, K 88729.