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### Women Writers Project (WWP) Team, eds. Women Writers: Intertextual Networks. Database

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**Women Writers Project (WWP) Team, eds.**

**Women Writers: Intertextual Networks. Database.**

Boston: Northeastern University, 2016–19. Accessed 17 January 2023.

[wwp.northeastern.edu/exist/restxq/intertextual-networks](http://wwp.northeastern.edu/exist/restxq/intertextual-networks).

Women Writers: Intertextual Networks is part of the larger Women Writers Project (WWP), a long-standing collaborative effort that includes the publication of texts by early women on the subscription-based website Women Writers Online ([wwp.northeastern.edu/wwo](http://wwp.northeastern.edu/wwo)). WWP has been studying women's writing from 1526 to 1850 for decades. This initiative centred on intertextuality is one of three open-access publications associated with Women Writers Online (WWO). Women Writers: Intertextual Networks is a rich tool that aids in the study of intertextuality in women's writing by gathering references to other texts and authors in the over 450 texts that are currently gathered in WWO. At present, the team has assembled an impressive dataset, including "11,787 quotations, 5,692 titles, 4,825 Biblical references, and 1,968 other bibliographic references, as well as 233 instances of more complex 'intertextual gestures'" ("About"). The database is still being expanded.

For each of these instances of intertextuality, the title, contributor, publication date and location, topic and genre, and type of intertextual gesture are identified. The categories into which the numerous "gestures" are grouped include quote, title, citation (or "prose description of the referenced work"), parody, adaptation (an "intentionally modified" quote), remix ("a combination of extracts, rearranged and adapted from the referenced work"), and advertisement (usually by the printer or publisher). The division into these seven categories is helpful for searching but also expands our notion of what intertextuality means by embracing all kinds of allusions and textual presences in the material books by women. For each of these, a link is provided to the text in WWO. Every work, author (of the allusion and of the text alluded to), and gesture is accompanied by a visual graph and a list of types, which, when you click on them, filter out the search. The database itself provides ample information for each intertextual instance, including the text of the gesture itself. In addition, the sidebar allows for the filtering of any search.

For those who prefer to browse, the website offers different ways of accessing the database in the form of four "explorer spaces." First, there is a bibliography of all the different texts and authors that are alluded to by women.

They are by default sorted by number of references, telling us that the Book of Psalms is most frequently alluded to (with 861 references at present), while a text like *The Duke of Guise* (1683) by Nathaniel Lee and John Dryden is only alluded to once in the corpus. I am not entirely sure why there are texts in the list with zero references—perhaps these are placeholders for future research. It is possible to order the bibliography by title and author name. Searching by genre for “Drama,” to give an example, results in 420 bibliographical items that have been alluded to in women’s texts, with *Hamlet* at the top with 68 references. A closer look at the results shows that these allusions are by 24 authors, some of whom allude to *Hamlet* numerous times.

The second option is to go to the “Authors in WWO” page, which provides an alphabetical list of women authors in WWO, with the number of works of the bibliography, number of works referenced by others in WWO, and the total number of their own intertextual gestures divided by categories. For example, Aphra Behn is the author of 27 works, of which 17 have been alluded to by other women; in her own writings, there are 160 intertextual gestures in 12 works published in WWO, of which title allusions are the most common (59), followed by quotes (43), advertisements (29), and citations (29). It is not surprising that advertisements are frequent in her work, given her status as a professional writer and the relatively commercial nature of her publications. What may come as a surprise is that many of her quotes and title allusions are to the Bible, mostly drawn from her preface to *A Discovery of New Worlds* (1688). Her dramatic works contain many gestures categorized as quotes for which sources are not identified but that are instead labelled “No external source,” “Proverb or saying,” and the somewhat confusing identifier “Unlikely to be published elsewhere,” which refers to “material unlikely to have been published before its appearance in the source text” such as in letters, speeches, and so on. Here, too, we see a laudable ambition on the part of the project team to expand what might be considered intertextuality beyond the usual concentration on printed text. But it also shows that the numbers alone are not enough—they require that we dig deeper and consider each of these intertextual gestures separately.

The third option is to search by intertextual gesture, with “quote” by far the most and “parody” the least common. This interface allows users to order gestures by referenced work, source text, gesture type, and text content. A closer look at the fascinating category of remixes, of which there are only 13, shows that Mary Davis used this technique three times in *The British Partizan* (1839)

for *Hamlet*, Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* (1839), and his "All That's Bright Must Fade" (1818). There are only three remix examples for the seventeenth century, one in Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682), which contains a Biblical instance, and two in Elizabeth Cary's *The History of the Most Unfortunate Prince King Edward II* (1680), both referring to Peter Heilin's *Cosmography in Four Bookes* (1652). Finally, as the fourth option, it is possible to browse "Topics and Genres," potentially a rich resource for study since the list offers not just traditional genres such as drama but also topics from agriculture (3 references) to slavery (116 references) to zoology (22 references).

To enlighten the user about the rich possibilities of this database, the website provides links to a small number of impressive visualizations, such as Intertextual References in the Almanacks of Mary Moody Emerson ([wwp.northeastern.edu/lab/emerson-networks/index.html](http://wwp.northeastern.edu/lab/emerson-networks/index.html)) and Intertextual Networks Bibliographic Visualizations ([wwp.northeastern.edu/lab/gallery/bibliography/index.html](http://wwp.northeastern.edu/lab/gallery/bibliography/index.html)). The latter contains visualizations of the entire database, showing, for instance, the relative size of intertextual citations by gender (male, female, unknown) of the author of the text alluded to and by genre. Blog posts on the Women Writers in Contexts website ([wwp.northeastern.edu/context](http://wwp.northeastern.edu/context)), also linked with WWO, showcase research using a database like this one while complicating how we might think of intertextuality. Amanda Henrich's "Allusions in the Age of the Digital" presents an exhibit that explores hitherto unnoticed intertextuality in the works of the Sidney family through computer analysis; Arnaud Zimmern's "Staging the Learned Lady" looks at hidden intertextuality in Margaret Cavendish and Jean Baptiste Molière; and Megan Herrold's "The 'Seeds' of Intertextuality in Seventeenth-Century Women's Writing" problematizes the categories of intertextual gestures in her exploration of a form of allusion that is "somewhere between an author's deliberate citation or appropriation of another text and the evidence in a text of what we call 'discourse' after Foucault."

In sum, this database, combined with other efforts at tracing intertextuality in relation to women, such as the RECIRC project ([recirc.universityofgalway.ie](http://recirc.universityofgalway.ie)) and UK Red the Reading Experience Database ([open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK](http://open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK)), will undoubtedly prove to be a rich resource for future research. If possible, I would love to see the option to limit source and cited texts by date so I could filter out works that fall outside of the centuries on which I am working. Because the database does not include page numbers or signatures for where the

intertextual instances occur, you need to search for the specific citations even if you click through to WWO. These are minor concerns, however. Overall, this is a helpful database that allows researchers to trace not only the types of texts and specific works women interacted with but also the topics they represented and debated. It provides evidence of the rich reading practices of early modern women and the textual networks they forged through their allusions, while enabling us to delve deeply into individual source texts and texts that are cited or present in other forms in women's books.

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