

Mary Lamb demonstrates the extent to which reading and writing were gendered acts in 16th- and early 17th-century England.

Renaissance gender ideology did not prevent women from writing altogether, but by sexualizing the act of writing it rendered the task of authorship more dangerous for women than for men. Lamb traces the effect of this gendered ideology of authors within the Sidney family—a famous Renaissance line that included the countess of Pembroke and Mary Wroth, two notable women authors of the time, as well as the famous Sir Philip Sidney.

Unlike other works which analyze gender only in terms of women's writing, Mary Lamb explores gender as a determining force in the works of both men and women of the Sidney circle.