

# Gendering Digital Literary History: What Counts for Digital Humanities

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In many cutting-edge critical discourses – e.g., globalization theory – the speed with which women can drop off the map takes my breath away. (Susan Friedman, in Cvetkovich *et al.*, 2010:242)

Ever since Anne Snitow's "A Gender Diary" was published in 1990, we have noticed that feminist activists confront numerous double-binds and paradoxes. In the forum discussing whether the term "woman" can be used "as a sponsoring category" from which the epigraph comes, Susan Friedman uncovers such a double-bind with which I'll grapple here. In order to be published in print, the forum concluded, a feminist critique cannot pose as a recovery project alone, but instead must address multiple discourses. That is, as to "what counts" (per the title of this chapter), one needs to count higher, adding to the numbers of minorities addressed and theoretical approaches deployed. However, the minute one adds other critical discourses to feminism, women tend to disappear from the discussion, rendering recovery projects even more necessary. To repeat Friedman's insight once again, women stop counting as significant so easily that "it takes [your] breath away" (Cvetkovich *et al.*, 2010:242).

Two principles inform my analysis of the problem of the disappearance of women writers from systems of valuation via paradoxical necessity. First, an approach that is beneficially required of any literary criticism is what N. Katherine Hayles named "media-specific analysis, ... a kind of criticism that pays attention to the material apparatus producing the literary work as a physical artifact":

Lulled into somnolence by five hundred years of print, literary studies have been slow to wake up to the importance of MSA. Literary criticism and theory are shot through with

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unrecognized assumptions specific to print. Only now, as the new medium of electronic textuality vibrantly asserts its presence, are these assumptions clearly coming into view. (Hayles, 2002:29–30)

My second principle is that, while new media make it possible for these “unrecognized assumptions” stemming from print culture to come into view, gender analysis makes them salient. That is, print culture has absorbed and materialized earlier forms of misogyny, putting it to its own uses, so that combining feminist with media-specific analysis can provide a powerful tool for analyzing our own “somnia” in order to wakefully invent digital forms.

After showing that women writers are being recovered and forgotten in cycles, both in print and potentially in digital media, I will investigate how print media obfuscated itself as a medium, pretending to transfer intentions from one mind to another, once and for all, by deploying the figure of woman as a scapegoat for the material, ephemeral, and historically imbricated. Next, I’ll examine two digital projects that are aimed at recovering women writers which do more than give us new content: they perform structural work, attempting to combat that paradoxical feminist necessity to produce a high count of women writers while simultaneously valuing them individually. Finally, I’ll argue for the thick contextualization of women writers even amidst the push to analyze big data, but will also add my hope that feminists make major interventions in data mining and topic modeling. Taken as a whole, this chapter demonstrates that feminist digital literary history needs to perform media as well as gender analysis, as called for by Susan Brown and colleagues (2006:320).

### Cycles of Forgetting

In 1989, Roger Lonsdale published his Oxford collection, *Eighteenth-Century Women’s Poetry*, introducing it by not only remarking how little was known among English professors about the topic, but also pointing to an earlier moment, the end of the eighteenth century, when there were so many publishing women poets that no one thought they would ever disappear from our literary purview:

Reviewing [one of over thirty collections] of verse [written by women in the 1790s], Ralph Griffiths ... felt able to [pronounce,] “it is no longer a question, whether woman *is* or *is not* inferior to man in natural ability, or less capable of excelling in mental accomplishments.” (*Monthly Review*, 1798, quoted in Lonsdale, 1989:xxi)

“In retrospect,” Lonsdale adds, “Griffith’s complacency ... must seem ludicrously unjustified. ... Anyone admitting to an interest in eighteenth-century women poets will soon learn to live with the politely sceptical question, ‘Were there any?’” (Lonsdale, 1989:xxi). Despite the fact that there were hundreds of them – the Cardiff Corvey Women Writers on the Web database lists 1065 works by women published between 1790 and 1835<sup>1</sup> – at some point in the evolution of literary history, these women writers ceased to count.

In 1998, Cathy Davidson made a claim very similar to the one made by Ralph Giffiths in 1798. Describing publications around 1985, she was confident enough to assert that the publishing of women writers had triumphed; they would not be forgotten again:

[Nina Baym and Jane Tomkins] worked to make visible a woman's tradition in American literature ... Series at Beacon Press, the Feminist Press, Oxford University Press (notably The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers), and Rutgers University Press – to name just a few – changed the canon of American literature. (Davidson, 1998:447–8)

Yet despite this celebration of a changed canon, performing data-mining techniques to count the writers in anthologies that have been published over the last decades reveals that women writers have not yet made significant inroads (Levy and Perry, 2015). And feminists were even after 1985 still engaged in recovering forgotten women writers, especially early modern women writers who had “published” in manuscript form, not print (Ezell, 1993). Writing in the 1990s, Kathryn Sutherland expressed hope for bringing women's work to light via digital media, based on her perception that print had failed to do so:

[I]f computers do not substitute for books, they may substitute for the absence of books; and this is what concerns me as a scholar working to rehabilitate women's writings. (Sutherland, 1993:53)

But many of the projects undertaken in the 1990s fell by the wayside, like Sutherland's own Project Electra, assimilated by the Oxford Text Archive with, as far as I can tell, its origins as a feminist project unmarked.

Many digital recovery projects of women's writing have, like *Project Electra*, never realized their ambitions: the *Perdita Project* has been commercialized – it is now sold by Adam Matthew Digital – and *Chawton House Novels Online*, including so many women writers, has been taken down since Pickering & Chatto began publishing it as a printed series. Some digital anthologies do exist and persist: the *Women Writers Online* project (<http://www.wwp.northeastern.edu/wwo>), discussed in more detail below; Mary Mark Ockerbloom's *Celebration of Women Writers* (<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/writers.html>), the *Victorian Women Writers Project* (<http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/vwwp/welcome.do>), recently revitalized thanks to the efforts of Michelle Dalmau; my own *Poetess Archive* (<http://www.poetessarchive.org>), its revitalization under way. But several have not been updated since sometime between 2000 and 2005: the *Emory Women Writers Project* (<http://womenwriters.library.emory.edu>), *British Romantic Women Writers at Davis* (<http://digital.lib.ucdavis.edu/projects/bwrp>), *Voices from the Gaps: Women Writers and Artists of Color* (<http://voices.cla.umn.edu>) was last updated in 2009 – these are not living projects. We have sites giving us diaries and letters by women writers,<sup>2</sup> and many individual women writers exist at <http://www.luminarium.org>, an anthology; we have a good Emily Dickinson site, despite the fact that her works themselves are put up on separate sites by Amherst and Harvard (<http://www.emilydickinson.org>); *Woolf Online* houses only one novel (<http://www.woolfonline.com>); an Elizabeth Barrett Browning site (<http://ebbarchive.org/index.php>) is as yet rather small in scope; and a site about the relatively unknown Baroness Elsa von

Freytag-Loringhoven (<http://digital.lib.umd.edu/transition?pid=umd:50580>) gives us many versions of her poems, but her oeuvre is quite small. With the exception of the *Willa Cather Archive* (<http://cather.unl.edu>) and a very promising *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts* site (<http://www.janeausten.ac.uk/index.html>), currently under way, we have nothing as yet on the scale of the Whitman, Blake, or Rossetti archives, or the sites for Shakespeare, Thomas Gray, Herman Melville, to name a few more – no sites, that is, which focus on bringing us a woman's entire oeuvre, through many editions and revisions, along with all her letters, diaries, and other writings.

Many do-it-yourself (DIY) 1990s-looking sites have disappeared, as evinced by all the dead links bedeviling a 2001 article by Georgianna Ziegler called “Women writers online: an annotated bibliography of web resources” (<http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/06-3/ziegbib.htm>) and the minority pages at Alan Liu's *Voice of the Shuttle* (<http://vos.ucsb.edu/browse.asp?id=2746>). Some persist without having been completed in any way, currently out of date: for Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Mary Leapor, Ann Yearsley, Anna Barbauld, Mary Hays, Jean Toomer, and Zora Neale Hurston. Amy Earhart talks about early hopes for opening the canon via the web and the gradual disappearance of those DIY projects as well as the sheer dwarfing of them in relation to the big well-funded projects that simply reiterated the masculinist canon:

While many early digitizers of texts believed in the web as a space in which the canon might be broken . . . , [w]ith limited exceptions, a majority of early projects reinforced canonical bias. (Earhart, 2012:312–13)

Thus, while scholars from 1798 to 1998 have declared that the absence of women writers is a condition that we can or have already overcome, this absence threatens to persist, in both print anthologies and the Web taken as a whole, as if it were one great anthology.

And recovery projects are not in great demand. In the forum quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, “Women as the sponsoring category,” Ann Cvetkovich, Susan Fraiman, Susan Stanford Friedman, and Miranda M. Yaggi seem to agree that, as Cvetkovich puts it, “projects that focus exclusively on women writers are limited if they presume that a history of women's writing is sufficient justification for the project” (Cvetkovich *et al.*, 2010:248). For, Yaggi adds:

while we could once justify grouping women writers together under the rubric “women's writing” by a sense of their shared oppression, such a justification no longer works. We need to seek other, more broadly based frameworks . . . (Cvetkovich *et al.*, 2010:236)

The category “woman” can't underwrite scholarship anymore. Dealing with women's oppression is not enough. Though working to bring the history of women's writing to the fore is important, it is only really justified if it is digital: Yaggi adds, “Even the word ‘recovery’ can elicit knee-jerk distaste or disinterest if not immediately qualified as ‘digital’ and disassociated from earlier [print] modes of recovery” (Cvetkovich *et al.*, 2010:248). Such “disassociation” involves, again, broadening one's interests to other “fields of inquiry such as the history of print culture, science and technology, or transatlantic studies” (Cvetkovich *et al.*, 2010:248). However, if there are, as I have

suggested, cycles of forgetting women writers, we disassociate from recovery at our peril. Moreover, two different speakers at this forum in two different contexts insist that it is only by expanding to include other fields that feminist work becomes “publishable” (Cvetkovich *et al.*, 2010:247,249). Why do they privilege producing a published book, so much so that they are encouraging feminists to forgo participating in the unpopular task of recovering women writers and to publish a printed book instead?

A printed book is a thing, enabling it to be a monument, but, when formed into a disciplinary monument, it is a decontextualized and decontextualizing thing. Print offers a soundless, supposedly bodiless, and allegedly eternal venue for articulation, and, as Pierre Bourdieu puts it, “eternal life is one of the most sought-after social privileges” of any class, intellectual or otherwise (1979:72). Transcendental ambitions, borne and bred by the book, I would argue, lead these thinkers away from recovery projects onto attempts at monumentalizing. But even though the participants in the forum want eternal life for feminism, the attempt to achieve eternal life via the printed book, is, I will now demonstrate, intrinsically inimical to women writers. (A century from now, will there be anthologies of twenty-first-century criticism that include as many women writers as men, some valued as major?) It is precisely the desire for transcendence as it is fed by the printed book, I will now show, that denigrates women writers, demotes them to the merely ephemeral and minor.

### Forgotten by Print

In the process of mediation, when one is writing and publishing a book, there is never a moment without concern for one’s own particular immortality in, via, and through the act of mediation. In a chapter of my 1999 book *Misogynous Economies*, I argued that the desire for immortality through print has motivated the systematic erasure of women’s literary history from anthologies and textbooks (Mandell, 1999:107–28). So, for example, during the time that disciplinary anthologies were coming into existence, creating with their tables of contents the monuments of literature strewn around the field of English Studies, Robert Southey published two different anthologies. One, the three-volume collection called *Specimens of the Later English Poets, with preliminary notices*, lists 213 authors, many women among them, in an index that doubles as his table of contents, listing the volume in which they appear and the date of their death. In a passage playing upon the meaning of the greek word *anthologia*, “a collection of flowers,”<sup>3</sup> Southey introduces his *Specimens* by explaining that he is simply collecting authors of various periods so that people can see what ordinary, or even bad, writing was like during older periods of time:

Many worthless versifiers are admitted among the English Poets, by ... charity towards the dead. ... There were other reasons for including here the reprobate, as well as the elect. My business was to collect specimens as for a *hortus siccus*; not to cull flowers as for an anthology. ... The taste of the publick [in previous generations] may better be estimated from indifferent Poets than from good ones; because the former write for their contemporaries, the latter for posterity. (Southey, 1807:iv–v)

This is not an anthology of living but a collection of dead flowers, specimens of what was once popular but is definitively not timeless literature. For that, one must go to Southey's 1831 collection of poets, *Select Works of the British Poets, from Chaucer to Jonson, with Biographical Sketches*, containing 21 male poets, whose genuine, enduring fame "has no present tense" because it extends now and forever. Ripped out of the womb of historical context, which is itself dead and withered, the great writers become part of a tradition, transcendent, immortal. The anthologizers Southey and also William Hazlitt constituted the discipline of English literature as transcendent traditions, and they accomplished this task by turning women writers into mere historical context, "the reprobate" in relation to the canon, never "the elect" (Southey, 1807:iv).

In a related argument, Julia Flanders points out another way that print culture embodies women writers in contrast to transcendentalizing men. Early modern women writers have not been edited in the way that men have, many only ever having been printed once, during their lifetimes. There simply are not printed editions that can be compared in an apparatus. In contrast, works by men have been published and republished. Consequently, the editing which canonical male authors typically undergo – editors listing "accidents" of local, contemporaneous publishing, and variants among various witnesses – transforms the material document into a timeless text containing the author's immortal intention, having sloughed off all contingent meanings. The historical context of each individual edition is cleared away, relegated to notes that elucidate meaning (Flanders, 1997:133–4). Again, women writers only appear in the materiality of the single print run. Because of the way that, in masculinist editing theory, "the text of the author" is conceived as "universalized and disembodied textuality," any "physical document" in which it was originally embodied is conceived as "corruption and debasement" and placed firmly "in the realm of the monstrous and the deviant"; it is seen as "an unchaste female body" that can be "chastise[d]" in order to produce a text reflecting pure, disembodied authorial intent (Flanders, 1997:129). Women's writing conveniently falls into the category of the monstrous and unchaste, the reprobate.

What Southey's anthologizing activity demonstrates is that saving male writers in disciplinary anthologies and authoritative editions is not enough by itself to establish their work as eternal: there must be concomitantly a production of collections containing works of merely historical interest and facsimile editions. Sexism is served by the media of mass-printed anthologies and anthological textbooks as well as "authoritative" editions – not the medium of print per se, but the medium in the forms that we have constructed it in order to ground the discipline of literary history. This sexism makes women writers, whose writings are coded as mere historical ephemera and purely physical, disappear habitually, regularly, and cyclically (Ezell, 1990; Woods, 1994; Mandell, 1999). In reviewing the *Brown Women Writers Project*, Susanne Woods asks, "how can we recover early women's writing in English once and for all?" (Woods, 1994:19).

Is it in fact the case that women's writings must come, in the end, not to count after publication, only ever recovered and re-recovered, whether digitally or in print? Do we have to keep re-finding it? This question is crucial to digital literary historians because answering it will suggest, I hope, how to make feminist digital recovery projects that actually achieve what they set out to do: recover women writers for literary history, if

not once and for all, then more permanently than has so far been accomplished. Can the creators of historical digital archives make women count, and, if so, how?

### Digital De-contextualization

A print book's ambition to exist as an eternal monument problematizes its capacity to recover women writers "once and for all," since women must be defined as ephemera in order to provide a necessary contrast and contain the threatened return of materiality. Does the same structure arise in digital media? Though not rock-solid in the matter of monuments, the "flickering signifiers" of digital media nonetheless live in an allegedly disembodied sphere (Hayles, 1999). Encoding digital editions in eXtensible Markup Language (XML), and particularly in the set of tags offered by the Text Encoding Initiative Consortium (<http://www.tei-c.org>), does entail a level of abstraction away from the physical and from presentation of text on the screen: this too, as Alan Liu has successfully argued, entails the ambition to achieve transcendence (2004), the very same ambition, I would argue, that prompted coding women's writing as of merely historical interest in print.

Additionally, the notion of gathering a "grand" archive of materials – on a digital scale – participates in a kind of "monumental logic," as Wernimont suggests (2013:5–6). Like Ellen Rooney, Wernimont condemns merely additive projects whereby the goal is to produce the highest number of women writers published online. Clearly she is right: discriminatory sexual difference informs ways of counting, given that male monuments are built by adding numbers of text to a single man's oeuvre, whereas the monumentality of feminist archives consists in increasing the number of authors, adding to women writers continuously and making it difficult for users to know how much attention to give to any individual writer. After all, too much information is as bad as too little if you cannot tell what counts as meaningful, or how to account for significance in a way that isn't about numbers. A recent critic has spoken of digital media (databases, Callahan offers) as providing "gardens of history" (Hatfield, 2006, quoted in Callahan, 2010:4), indicating that we may not have come very far from the anthological model: we can say about both databases and anthologies that we have a few great men in a database/anthology, each with many works, and many women in a database/print collection, each one with few works. Wernimont insists that digital projects of women writers must "facilitate access by helping users sort through an abundance of data and push against monumentalism in some way" (2013:6).

What way? How can we push against monumentalism? And if we push against it partly by recovering numbers of women writers, what place is left for a field of literature in which each woman writer can count? Flanders notices a paradox connected to the placing of women's writing: if we insist on its materiality and presence by putting forward a high number of women authors, thwarting transcendental ambitions by refusing to edit these writers in an authoritative, disembodied way, then we feed into the norm according to which women's writing is material and men's is not, but if we edit them according to the standards of authoritative editions, we perpetuate the set of standards according to which most women writers are denigrated as merely ephemeral, counting not as literature but as historically interesting (Flanders, 1997:137,140–1).

## Re-contextualizing

The problem of valuing women writers is as follows: for women writers to be counted, one must create for them the authoritative editions of writing that denigrate the material body, disregarding the specificity of gender, or worse, abjecting it, scapegoating it as if it were to blame for mortality, for materiality as such. Susan Belasco helpfully designates the apparatus of authoritative editions an “infrastructure,” demonstrating that, without such an infrastructure, women writers are not discussed by literary critics anywhere near as often as canonical male writers, despite the wealth of literary criticism that already exists for their works (Belasco, 2009:332). Changing our focus from “authoritative edition,” a print hangover, to “infrastructure” more broadly allows us to think of alternatives to an apparatus that necessitates a disembodied text or “the work,” as editorial theory designates it.<sup>4</sup> It also enables us to think digitally. Two feminist digital projects reconceive the infrastructure of women’s writing: (1) *Orlando: Women’s Writing in the British Isles from the Beginning to the Present* (<http://orlando.cambridge.org>), and (2) the *Women Writers Project*, formerly at Brown and currently at Northeastern University (<http://www.northeastern.edu/nulab/women-writers-project-2>).

The *Orlando* project effectively dismantles the canon and makes women count by virtue of its infrastructure, both socioeconomic and digital. Because it was generously funded, the *Orlando* project was able to hire many able researchers to deeply contextualize 1139 women writers. They are deeply contextualized via

two distinct types of documents. The first type consists of sometimes extensive biocritical articles on individual writers (primarily British women writers but also a selection of male and international women writers), which are deeply tagged for structure (e.g., paragraphs, document divisions), content (e.g., names, organizations), and interpretive material (e.g., political affiliations, sexual identity, occupation; authorship issues, intertextuality, landmark texts). The second type consists of briefer records of related material, of the historical landmarks, and minutiae that contextualize our view of literary history. (Grundy *et al.*, 2000:269)

In terms of chronology, women authors writing at the same time as Maria Abdy, for instance, would share all the contextual events that are listed when one generates a chronology for her (Figure 35.1).

Thus Abdy’s world is given a thick description, but that description applies to many others of her era as well as to all the women writers comprising her context. The intertextuality tag is arguably the most interesting tag in *Orlando*’s semantic markup: here women’s writing is connected to the writings of others, male and female, who are quoted, addressed, or to whom each writer alludes (Brown *et al.*, 2004). *Orlando* is not a collection of writings by women but rather an apparatus for women writers. The infrastructure of *Orlando*, I would suggest, is specifically designed to make a high number of women writers count.

The textbase of the *Women Writers Project* (WWP), called *Women Writers Online* (WWO), presents women’s writing: currently 150 texts, and it is averaging 15 new texts per year. In the WWO the materiality of the texts is preserved – the long s, for instance, as well as original spellings. But it does not merely offer facsimile editions.

Results: 1-50 of 9662 | ALL

- 1539-1843 During these centuries the proportion of the British population over the age of sixty did not exceed 9.7%. more ...
- 1622-1854 No more than 6% of households in Britain included members from three generations; more than 70% had only two generations represented. more ...
- December 1780-Spring 1803 Harriet Lee joined her sisters in running their school in Bath: Mesdames Lees, Ladies' Boarding School. more ...
- 1785-1814 Esther Tuke, a Quaker, ran a school for girls in Trinity Lane, York. more ...
- 1788-1867 During this period, more than 150,000 convicts were transported from Britain, mostly destined for Australia; at the practice's peak in the early 1830s, 5,000 convicts were transported every year. more ...
- 1789-98 *Essays in Physiognomy* (translated by Henry Hunter from Johann Kaspar Lavater), with engravings by Johann Heinrich Füssli (known in England as Henry Fuseli), set off crazes for physiognomy and silhouettes. more ...
- December 1789-August 1808 Elizabeth Moody wrote at least twenty-nine notices of books for the *Monthly Review*: a pioneering activity for a woman. more ...
- Primarily between 1790 and 1855 During the Highland Clearances a large proportion of the tenantry were evicted from small, struggling farms by their Highland estate landlords to be replaced by more profitable sheep, cattle, and deer. more ...
- During the 1790s Sarah Bache ran a school for girls in Islington. more ...
- mid 1792-1815 These were the active years of the informal evangelical Anglican group later called the Clapham Sect (then known as the Saints). more ...
- Between 6 September 1792 and May 1802 Eliza Fletcher bore six children; the youngest, Mary, was born on a visit to London. more ...
- 1794-1797 Priscilla Wakefield published with her name, through Darton and Harvey, *Mental Improvement; or, The Beauties and Wonders of Nature and Art, conveyed in a series of Instructive Conversations*. more ...
- 1794-1802 With engravings by N. Heidehoff, the *Gallery of Fashion* appeared monthly, featuring hand-coloured aquatints of current fashions. more ...
- 1796-1815 Throughout these war years the *Bibliothèque britannique*, published in Geneva, kept open cultural relations between France and England. more ...
- February 1796-September 1797 Mary Hays contributed often to Richard Phillips's new *Monthly Magazine*. During 1796 also, she began reviewing books for the *Analytical*, edited by Mary Wollstonecraft, signing herself "V.V." more ...
- 1 March 1796-June 1806 While Anna Letitia Barbauld's brother John was editor of the *Monthly Magazine*, she contributed to it at least fifteen poems and essays, perhaps many more. more ...
- October 1796-August 1797 Jane Austen drafted her third epistolary novel, "First Impressions" (which, from its title, was presumably an early version of what later became *Pride and Prejudice*). more ...
- 1797-8 Henrietta Battler (as 'Pat. Pindar') published another political verse satire in periodical form, *The Lemon*, an answer to John Giffard's highly loyalist *The Orange* (issued in three successive cantos over the same years). more ...
- 1797-1801 Lady Anne Barnard lived at the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa with her husband, who was Colonial Secretary there. more ...
- 25 February 1797 Maria Smith (later Maria Abdy) was born in London; she was an only child. more ...

Figure 35.1 Chronology of Maria Abdy from *Orlando*.

The texts are typed and so are analyzable via the visualization tools now available at WWO. They are also deeply encoded using a variant of the TEI specific to the WWO. This means that a great deal of care has been taken to present each text; in fact, the editors are paid for their work, and Oxford University Press occasionally publishes a volume to meet the demand of classes and researchers. In addition to the care with which each individual writer is treated, the WWP has been awarded several important grants. Grants typically de-privilege the work of archiving women writers because the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Office of Digital Humanities supports tool building but not archive building, innovation but not sustenance (Earhart, 2012:314). As Susan Brown and colleagues point out, "serving" or "delivering" women's writing (or indeed any kind of writing) in digital media is coded a feminine task, such service bordering on the servile (Brown *et al.*, 2008:37). It is by virtue of code development and tool building that the WWP has been funded by grants (Wernimont, 2013:15,18).

We now have these two exemplary projects, *Orlando* and *Women Writers Online*. So now what? "Is the mere presence," Wernimont asks, "– the fact of being there, of having women's work exist in digital archives – enough to address the continued marginalization of women's writing?" (2013:4). It is not enough: as every good digital humanist knows, "build it and they will come" is a dangerous philosophy. But *Orlando* in particular, with its interpretive tagset, does more than simply proffer digital biographies of women: it participates in "the politics of knowledge representation" (Brown *et al.*, 2006:323); it provides what Wernimont (2013:8) calls "a feminist response to

the elisions at the heart of sorting and editing”. In fact, Brown, Clements, and Grundy say, “we were trying to devise a tagset that would make visible what previous literary historical methods had made invisible or excluded”:

In contrast to the sorting out of women in older literary histories which excluded them, we were trying to sort women into the version of literary history we were constructing. (Brown *et al.*, 2006:321)

The intertextuality tag mentioned above provides just one example of rewriting women’s literary history such that women are not seen as forming a tradition, given each writer’s intertextual connections with men’s writing as much or more so than with other women (Brown *et al.*, 2004:197). Both *Orlando* and the *Women Writers Project* have been able to pay their contributors, and doing so has made it necessary for both archives to charge subscription fees. It is up to us now, as a community of scholars who care about the future shape of literature, to insist that our libraries subscribe, to pay the fees that make possible this new kind of infrastructure, crucial to recuperating literary history. In this respect, consumption is a form of production: we are co-designing the archive constituted by the Internet as consumers who insist upon the presence of these projects.

### Big Data Versus Encoded Data

I wish to conclude by discussing countlessness, a new type of monumentalism – digital, this time – which threatens once again to devalue women writers. Why?  $1139$  in *Orlando* +  $150$  in *WVO* =  $1289$ . When marshaled in huge numbers, women writers are not countless enough: in the absolute biggest datasets, the number of women is dwarfed in comparison to every man who ever wrote and becomes a small if not insignificant subset of the data stream. Margaret Ezell has successfully argued that twentieth-century anthologies erased early modern women writers by focusing on print culture. But the digital has similar problems, she suggests. “The electronic ‘archive’ model” of digital publishing – online editions which are successful “because of their size, scope, and ability to be all inclusive” – that publishing model threatens to erase a substantial portion of women’s literary history just as twentieth-century anthologies recovering women writers had done insofar as they privileged print. Early modern women writers, she has shown, published in manuscript, and sometimes wrote domestic volumes not meant for circulation at all. These manuscripts should not on that account be designated either non-literary or uninteresting:

Because of this easy transference of older critical terms and textual conceptualizations into a new editorial media, I would argue that editors of electronic projects ... need to be more aware of the significance of the materiality of texts, of the social conventions of handwritten culture as they may differ from print cultures, and the multiple ways in which these unique, single copy-texts are of interest and value to scholars. (Ezell, 2010:108)

For Ezell, refusing to “‘edit’ out the richness and complexity” of these manuscripts’ “way of communicating” is a means for “positive feminist interrogation of editorial principles” – again, essential to making women writers count in literary history by paying attention to medium.

However, we confront here another double-bind – this time between the monumentality of countlessness and careful editing. Neither careful editing nor even producing large numbers of women writers will avoid replicating the print invisibility of women as we transfer the archive of women’s writing and history to the Internet insofar as digital humanists focus their attention on algorithmically exploring big data. Bethany Nowviskie has noticed in comments on a blog posting by Miriam Posner (2012) about women encoders the small number of women who are involved in topic modeling, data mining, and highly mathematical, computational work in general. If feminists only create archives and do not then take the further step of doing cutting-edge research by learning how to use new tools for exploring them, we risk seeming only to *serve* in the ways that editorial work itself is feminized and denigrated as service in the field of literary studies. As we code innumerable documents in the archive of women’s history, coding them in ways that make them theoretically interesting, let us also perform cutting-edge digital research on these very sites, for then, in order to talk about significant results, the world will have to talk about Felicia Hemans instead of Herman Melville. Rich encoding of a high count of women’s texts is crucially important at our moment and can work to shape the literary history that is constituted by the Web. But so is trying out algorithms and innovative design on the resulting archives, no matter how relatively small.

There is a kind of misogyny accompanying the printed book that perpetuates this double-bind which insists that, to overcome sexism, feminists must count higher and lower at the same time. We continuously find ourselves caught in the paradoxical necessity to bring us many to make women significant, and yet focus on one or two lest significance is lost. The very same misogynist economy threatens us in the digital realm as well. Most recovery projects give us large numbers of women writers without caring about and enhancing the significance of each one, a problem confronted by *Orlando* and *Women Writers Online*, through thick contextualization and careful editing, respectively. But the digital adds a new threat to render women writers invisible: its valuation of countlessness. Big data threatens to eradicate the history of women writers altogether, given that women originally published in small print runs and via manuscript circulation. The answer is not to do nothing in despair: it is both/and. Just as the paradoxical need to bring us many women and yet focus on them all was a feat that has been accomplished by *Orlando* through mechanical means for individuation, we can confront the new double-bind as well. No matter how much or how many, data can be infinitely atomized and analyzed: we need to perform cutting-edge research on archives of women writers, even if those archives do not offer the countlessness of big data. Then, a scholar looking back from the year 3000, summarizing important research results, will notice that women’s history was exceedingly important to the world of the twenty-first century. “The most important theoretical and technical advances,” she will say, “were discovered in exploring women’s literary history.”

## NOTES

- 1 The CW3 database is freely searchable on the web: <https://www2.shu.ac.uk/corvey/CW3/>. Some of the works listed in this database are available via the Nebraska Corvey Novels Project: <http://english.unl.edu/corvey/html/Projects/CorveyNovels/CorveyNovelsIndex.htm>.
- 2 There are excellent sites for the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/montagu-letters.html>), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (<http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/ab-letters>), and George Eliot (<http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/georgeeliot>), as well as diaries for the Irish writers Dorothy Stopford Price (<http://dh.tcd.ie/pricediary>) and Mary Martin (<http://dh.tcd.ie/martindiary>).
- 3 “Collection of flowers” is the first definition of the term “anthology” in its list of meanings in Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary* of 1755.
- 4 Such a move resembles arguments against seeking authorial intent as an editing practice by Jerome McGann, D.E. MacKenzie, and others (Flanders, 1997:132).

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