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1780-1840: A Bio-Bibliographical Database*

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Abstract

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Keywords

digital humanities, women writers, archives, collections, database, travel writing, native american, biography, dime novel, genre fiction

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Review of *The Bluestocking Archive, Emory Women Writers Resource Project, and Women's Travel Writing, 1780-1840: A Bio-Bibliographical Database*

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Increasingly universities are participating in digital humanities resource projects on women writers through the role of sponsors or web hosts. With reliable server space and devoted maintenance, institutionally based projects provide opportunities for scholars and collaborative partnerships to invest their skills in the digital representation and preservation of works by women in history. These projects also serve to connect work on women writers—contributing to the growing digital community that gives voice to historical women in the arts. *Bluestocking Archive*, the *Emory Women Writers Resource Project*, and *Women's Travel Writing, 1780-1840: A Bio-Bibliographical Database* share three significant characteristics: they are institutionally supported, are open-access, and represent cross-genre collections of writing by women.

Bluestocking Archive. Project Manager: Elizabeth Fay, University of Massachusetts Boston.
http://www.faculty.umb.edu/elizabeth_fay/archive2.html.

The *Bluestocking Archive* at the University of Massachusetts Boston is a linked bibliography of sources—both primary and secondary, on the eighteenth-century group of progressive women in the arts and their influence on Romanticism. An admirable pedagogical resource, the bibliography categorizes authors and their works by circle (e.g. Original Bluestocking Circle, the Della Cruscans), or subject (e.g. The Slavery Debate). It features poetry, essays, drama, memoirs, novels, and other prose fiction pieces. Some of the listed eighteenth-century texts are linked to open-access digital surrogates or digital editions, and as the contents of freely available texts in digital libraries like HathiTrust, Internet Archive, and Google Books grow, I expect *Bluestocking Archive's* linked sources will as well.

The *Bluestocking Archive* markedly parallels the Bluestocking Circle itself, by creating a linked community of digital projects committed to work on the period. It performs on a smaller scale the same function as other digital humanities hubs like [NINES](#), or *18th Connect*. Brycchan Carey's page on black British writers, the *British Women Romantic Poets Project*, *British Women Playwrights Around 1800*, the *Literary Encyclopedia*, and *Representative Poetry Online* congregate in the *Bluestocking Archive*, drawing attention to the diverse chorus of voices whose work contributed to the Bluestocking Circle and their legacy.

Unfortunately, the archive is riddled with broken links, and connections to dead projects. Dead digital projects are a growing problem for digital humanities initiatives; especially those like *Bluestocking Archive* that endeavors to build a community in addition to a repository. The *Bluestocking Archive*, however, welcomes comments, and openly calls for suggestions. Its future will depend greatly on its ability to get others to contribute to and use it, thereby requiring its maintenance. *Bluestocking Archive* has the foundations of an active home for a continuing, up-to-date bibliography, especially if an open collaborative editing platform can be incorporated in coming updates.

Emory Women Writers Resource Project. Project Manager: Sheila Cavanagh, Emory University. 2006. <http://womenwriters.library.emory.edu>.

The *Emory Women Writers Resource Project* (EWWRP) is actually several smaller projects aimed at creating digital critical editions, digitizing, and disseminating British and American writing by and about women. *EWWRP* has combined these projects to create a diverse searchable database that makes available the texts of rare works from Emory's Robert W. Woodruff Library. Texts are marked up in XML using Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) standards. *EWWRP* features several rare texts for which there is no current edition—for example Aphra Behn's *The Adventure of the Black Lady, a Novel* (1697), a work that desperately needs more scholarly attention. Rare books digitization projects like *EWWRP* serve the indispensable role of supplementing catalogs and finding aides for institutional collections, and not only encourage work on those collections through digital access, but also bring researchers to collections in person by stressing the bibliographical elements unique to their archive.

EWWRP's strength is the 140 items catalogued in the "Genre Fiction" section, a National Endowment for the Humanities funded (2002) project expansion that makes available for the first time nineteenth- and twentieth-century dime novels by women writers. The divided project sections are invaluable to pedagogical use, making the accessible texts easy for student access. The *EWWRP* started initially as a learning tool, offering students the opportunity to create editions of texts, and now serves as a fantastic example and resource for anyone incorporating digital scholarly editing into their courses. *EWWRP* has graciously provided examples of student editions on the project's site (under the "Essays" section). Though smaller collections, *EWWRP* also features sections on Women's Advocacy literature, Native American documents by and about women, WWI poetry, Early Modern, Eighteenth-Century, and Twentieth-Century literatures.

While its interface is at times challenging to navigate, and its search parameters are extremely limited (results sorted by popularity and showing only twenty at a time), the project recognizes the growing use scholars make of digital bibliographies and indexes to locate material texts. *EWWRP* provides an information page for each text that outlines how it was digitized and encoded for the project. These information pages are also valuable in citing the work of research fellows, graduate students and staff that contribute to building *EWWRP*, reminding users that digital humanities projects are collaborative efforts, and justly recognizing that labor.

The *EWWRP* is ripe for collaboration—libraries and archives whose collections fit within the *EWWRP* areas of focus would benefit from the project's existing structure, and its team's experience in growing linked single-location archive web collections. The hope that the *EWWRP* will grow through partnerships that will add to its archives will continue to make it a rich and relevant resource.

Women's Travel Writing, 1780-1840: A Bio-Bibliographical Database. Project Manager: Benjamin Colbert, University of Wolverhampton. 2014. <http://www4.wlv.ac.uk/btw/>.

The *Women's Travel Writing, 1780-1840: A Bio-Bibliographical Database* brings together texts by women that contributed to the popular growing genre of travel writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Dr. Benjamin Corbet, whose work is committed to growing scholarship on

the field of women's travel writing in Britain and Ireland during the period, established the new (begun in 2014) project at the University of Wolverhampton's Centre for Transnational and Transcultural Research. The Leverhume Trust and British Academy supported project houses an impressive 5,000 entries, and notably includes works from a variety of textual forms: narratives, guidebooks, illustrated collections, though has yet to incorporate less-literary sources such as periodicals, dictionaries, or memoirs. *Women's Travel Writing's* database structure and format will be familiar to users of Peter Garside's *British Fiction Database 1800-1829*, a Cardiff University project that has done well to set standard material elements to be included in bibliographical databases (e.g. library source for first edition, text format), many of which originate from Garside and James Raven's print bibliography, *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*. Anthony Mandal, database and web designer for both the *British Fiction Database* and *Women's Travel Writing Database* has carefully constructed forward-looking search parameters and tags that are malleable to the various research needs of its scholarly users.

The *Women's Travel Writing Database's* scope highlights the hand of women writers contributing to the genre of travel writing, as authors and as editors, and offers biographical information on these writers where available. These short biographical entries in an open-access database provide an invaluable supplement to other British biographical resources like the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, and *The Orlando Project*, which are necessarily behind pay walls. In fact, several of the authors featured in the database do not have an entry in either of the aforementioned biographical resources.

Women's Travel Writing Database also includes works translated into English (mostly European), stressing the important role what women writers played as translators of works in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Each bibliographical entry links to open-access full text of the work at hand if available, lists English Short Title Catalog number (where available), provides notes on the work's paratextual material, and cites contemporary book reviews. Linked connections to the *British Fiction Database* would, in the future, highlight the role of travel writing in the history of the novel, and help expand research on women writers who put their pens to more than one genre. *Women's Travel Writing Database* provides scholars with a valuable open-access bibliography, a digital tool becoming increasingly necessary for work on women writers, especially in the fields of textual criticism, bibliography, and biography.