Digital Archival Environments and Feminist Practice: A Review of Four Projects

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Introduction

In their introduction to the first of two 2019 special issues of *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* on the topic of Women and Archives, Laura Engel and Emily Ruth Rutter describe the archive "not only as a repository of artifacts and documents but also as a crucial epistemological concept for examining the relationship between power, knowledge, and identity, both past and present."[1] The articles, reviews, and interrogative essays that make up those special issues are just one sign of the extent to which feminist literary scholarship has embraced what is often described as the "archival turn" in the humanities and social sciences. Influenced by post-structural theories of history and materiality drawn from scholars like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Michel de Certeau, the archival turn marks a shift in thinking about archives as neutral repositories where documents are simply stored to a richer understanding of archives as complex sites where power and knowledge converge.[2] Archives are "official structure[s] of knowledge," so feminist researchers, including feminist literary scholars, have not hesitated to critique the role that archives play in constructing and maintaining patriarchal structures of knowledge and intelligibility.[3]

Insofar as archives exist as "official structure[s] of knowledge," they are political and epistemological projects. As feminist scholar of memory Marianne Hirsch points out, archives institutionalize knowledge in particular—and distinctly *political*—ways. The task for scholars is not (necessarily) to dismantle archives but rather to liberate them. Hirsch explains the challenge ahead:

> We need to question the very structure and conception of archives and the ways in which they institutionalize knowledge. We need to redefine what constitutes an event or a life worthy of being remembered and transmitted to the future, thus creating the opening for countermemories and for previously forgotten or ignored narratives, narratives that are potentially disruptive or subversive.[4]

Although some feminist activists explore radical and disruptive archival practices,[5] many researchers continue to create, use, and benefit from tra-

ditional archival collections. Even after the archival turn, archival collections remain valuable resources for feminist literary projects that center the recovery of lost voices, contribute to the recuperation of women's participation in literary movements, and set out to reimagine the past.

Increasingly, archives take digital form. As Jacqueline Wernimont points out in a 2013 article in *DHQ: Digital Humanities Quarterly*, digital archives are "the cornerstones of digital humanities and literary work."[6] Indeed, for many researchers, brick and mortar archives have been complemented—and in some cases entirely replaced—by the convenience of digital archives.[7] The range of digitized materials and online databases that have become available to contemporary researchers is dizzying to consider.[8] Unlike their physical counterparts, digital archival environments are unaffected by the limits of material space. It is, within the ever-expanding space of the online environment, imaginable that an online archive might contain every single item ever written by or about a single author.[9] When those materials are stored digitally and shared in open access archives, feminist researchers may encounter new possibilities for disrupting patriarchal structures of knowledge and intelligibility.

In our thinking about digital archives, we follow the lead of feminist cultural historian Michelle Moravec, who promotes the use of the term "digital archival environments."[10] Moravec arrived at this term after some reflection on the complex definitional debates about the term "archive" amongst professional archivists, and she uses it to "describe accessing online digitised surrogates of materials taken from archives" (p. 186). We use the term because it makes room for a wide range of materials. A digital archival environment is not an archive; it is *archival*, which is to say that it is shaped by archival logics and practices. It is also not a closed collection but an environment into which researchers and readers enter to answer existing questions and discover new ones. At their best, digital archival environments pique the curiosity of researchers and readers and help the past come alive in new and unanticipated ways. Writing about physical archives, Jennifer S. Tuttle highlights this dynamic nature: "For what is the archivist's task if not the 'gathering, staging, and storing of texts and objects' to allow for (rather than to foreclose) new historical narratives?"[11] For researchers committed to archival practices that interrogate the relationship between power, knowledge, and identity, the digital archival environment may play a key role in opening questions instead of giving answers.

For feminist literary scholars, digital technologies have played a vital role in efforts to expand access to women writers, enable research on marginalized figures, and further the longstanding effort to decenter a literary canon that has been stubbornly focused on white, western male literature. Digital archives and digital archival environments offer an alternative

to conventional archival practices and impact how we think about literary worlds of the past. They provide remote and open access to materials related to authors and the literary, political, social, and cultural environments in which they worked. Given the ubiquity of this kind of project, as well as the rich scholarly and activist discourses surrounding feminist archival practices, we reflect on the impact that digital archives and archiving has on feminist literary scholarship.

As a contribution to the larger conversation, we offer here a review of four representative digital archival environments, each one focused on a single English-language woman writer: Mina Loy: Navigating the Avant-Garde, The Gloria Naylor Archive, George Eliot Archive, and The Winnifred Eaton Archive.[12] Our strategy is to reflect on how these online archival environments exemplify or engage with feminist practices that we identify as foundational, as a way to address broad questions related to feminist literary scholarship in the digital age. We are interested in how feminist researchers, especially literary scholars, can engage with, develop, and build digital archival environments. Simply creating a digital archival environment that centers the work of a woman author is a strong first step, but the expansion of archives dedicated to women authors and feminist histories demands we go beyond recuperation to make further reflections on the work that these archives do and what is possible in the future. Ultimately, archives are more than just repositories of materials, they are also "sites of translation," which means that they are not accidental, haphazard collections.[13] All archives—and as we have learned by exploring digital archival environments, especially digital archives—tell stories about their contents. These materials are thoughtfully organized and explicitly curated; they take positions and position users. By building digital archival environments, archivists have the opportunity to engage in feminist practices and to invite and encourage their users to engage the archive with an ethic of care. Before turning to our reviews, we offer some observations on the principles that inform our evaluations. Our assessments are based on our own exploration of each site, which were guided by an interest in how digital archival environments reflect feminist principles through the following practices: situating the author in context, transparency, collaboration, acknowledging positionality, ethical stewardship, and accessibility.

The digital archival environments that we examine here contribute to feminist literary recovery and research by featuring a single woman writer through digital surrogates, or digital facsimiles, of her work that exists elsewhere in material form and by situating the author in a broader context with additional information about her writing, life, and general social, cultural, and political environment. We can examine early drafts of their works, correspondence, comments from editors, handwritten notes, private letters, published and unpublished writings, and scholarly articles about

their work that enrich our understanding of the author's writing and orientation to the world. Certainly, this deeper understanding is the promise of archival research for literary studies. Researchers have often turned to archives in order to learn more about how and why a text was produced. Among the most valuable developments to impact digital literary archives in the last thirty years are the methods and tools for searching, tagging, collating, and visualizing that provide increasingly rich and expansive interactive environments. Users are able to view timelines, chronologies, interactive maps, and personographies, all of which emphasize how literary figures interacted with their social milieux. One major benefit of the "infinitely expandable archival space" of digital environments is that users can consult virtually any text and often its contextualization.[14] We view the practice of contextualization as aligning with longstanding feminist critiques of authorship understood as an individual activity grounded in artistic genius.[15] An archive that situates an individual author in context balances preservation and recognition of a literary figure's impact with an appreciation for the broader social, political, and cultural environments that made their work possible. Moreover, by acknowledging that an author's literary productions occur in context, this practice aligns with feminist approaches that insist that knowledge is always partial, positioned, and situated.[16]

In addition to situating each literary figure in historical and political contexts, a feminist orientation to building a digital archival environment requires transparency about the underlying goals. Archives may often appear to users as neutral accumulations of artifacts, but of course they are actively curated collections. Archivists select items to include and exclude, and they create and provide access to collections for specific reasons. They might set out to increase the reputation of a literary figure, dislodge a hegemonic narrative about the history of literature, or secure a place for an author in a larger aesthetic movement. A digital archival environment might be constructed in order to counter the whiteness or maleness of dominant archives or to provide access to queer or nonbinary authors. In some cases, the creators of digital archival environments are focused less on the literary figure at its center and more on the capacity of digital resources to expand how scholars approach the literary past. In these cases, the goal might be experimentation with digital tools, training students, and/or encouraging users to consider how they might take up these tools to make their own contributions to archival environments. In any case, in reviewing websites, we particularly appreciated those that provided transparency about the goals of the project, which we view as a key feminist practice.

Centering the often immense amount of labor involved in creating a digital archival environment is another way to put transparency into practice. In exploring the sites we review here, we were pleased to find narra-

tives related to the goals of each project, but we were also on the lookout for descriptions of funding and acknowledgements of the labor of collaborators, research assistants, and digital resource centers that support the work of maintaining the project. In all cases, these projects are collaborative efforts involving contributions of researchers with diverse training and commitments, which is vital to accomplishing these enormous, intricate, and technically specialized projects; it is also a way to dislodge scholarly conventions that primarily value single-author scholarship.

The collaborative spirit that we identify in the sites does not stop at the named contributors—it often extends to a project's encounters with its users. Any contemporary archive is geared at users, but the digital environment grants them the agency to actively interact with, filter, cross-reference, structure, combine, and contribute to materials. Deploying digital search capability, visualization tools, games, and other technologies creates an immersive environment for a user and contributes to an experience that is shaped less by gatekeeping and more by a spirit of collaborative participation in the construction of knowledge about a literary figure. This user experience aligns with a feminist approach to knowledge as situated but also collaborative and shared.

Transparency and collaboration combine when digital archival environments provide users with details about the tools used to build the interactive environments, such as sharing open-access code through resources like GitHub or providing accessible tools, training, and encouragement to users who want to gain digital humanities competencies. Inclusion of instructions and open code sharing reflects a feminist do-it-yourself ethos that contributes to the broader project of dislodging hierarchies between experts and amateurs. An open and collaborative relationship with users can also be reflected in a project's policies, particularly those that invite peer review, incorporate user contributions, and outline procedures for revision and/or removal of sensitive materials.

As with all scholarship, the work of creating and maintaining digital archival environments is grounded in intellectual, political, and personal positionalities. In other words, each project team makes decisions about how it presents and frames archival materials in particular and positioned ways—none of this work is conducted from a phantasmatic view from nowhere.[17] The most engaging projects are those that incorporate manifestos or codes of conduct that make these positionalities explicit and transparent. We discuss these sorts of documents in the reviews below, but note here that the transparency around goals and positionality is closely aligned with feminist methodological imperatives that demand acknowledgment of a project's intentions, politics, and expressed voices and perspectives.

Digital archival environments additionally bear the responsibilities of stewardship, which is to say that when making available material about a

literary figure, including potentially sensitive materials (personal letters, for instance, or unpublished journal entries), project teams need to balance the benefits of open access with the risks of exposure and possibly exploitation of materials. As Moravec outlines in her article about digital archives, despite the unquestionable impact that digitizing and disseminating the contents of archives has had on increasing the reach of feminist history, there are many situations in which "members of marginalised groups may have concerns about digitising materials that involve their histories" (p. 187).[18] An archive ought to consider the woman writer not simply as an object of study but as a subject whose feelings, experiences, knowledge, and values must inform the project, especially when the author or her intimate circle is still living. These ethical imperatives ought to shape the kind of relationships that archivists have with authors of the past and the communities they built. There are also obligations on the part of archive users; Moravec raises "three questions researchers should consider before consulting materials in a digital archival environment. Have individuals whose work appears in these materials consented to this? Whose labour was used and how is it acknowledged? What absences must be attended to among an abundance of materials?" (p. 186).

The final principle guiding our review of the four representative projects is accessibility, a defining feature of any open digital archive. Any researcher, student, or curious fan with a computer and internet access can immerse themselves in the expansive resources available digitally, without travel, without a formal invitation, and without institutional authority. However, accessibility of design is also important. Sites should be easily navigable and clearly organized; they ought to conform to accessibility standards.[19] An archival environment does this well when the design is straightforward, intuitive, and easy-to-understand with clearly articulated instructions about how to use any tools. The digital interface matters, and it shapes how we encounter the materials included in the site. Design can be authoritative and closed, or it can invite exploration and open users to creative forms of engagement with site contents. Design informed by feminist logics makes room for messiness, contradiction, and multiplicity; it offers material not only to answer research questions but to open up the curiosity of users. Feminist design, we argue, invites users to inhabit the digital archival environment, recognize its goals, and understand their role as collaborators in knowledge production. The most compelling digital archival environments not only enable users to learn about literary figures and their social, political, and cultural environments but also encourage them to ask new questions about writers and ultimately to imagine new futures even as we orient ourselves to the past.

Mina Loy: Navigating the Avant-Garde

Mina Loy (1882-1966) was a white, British-born modernist writer, artist, and inventor who produced the majority of her body of work in the early twentieth century. The award-winning Mina Loy archive, characterized by the project team as an "open educational resource" rather than an archive, aims to provide "scholarly narratives and visualizations that contextualize and interpret [Loy's] writing, arts, and designs."[20] Distinct from the other archival environments we explore here, the Mina Loy site is an "*experiment in public humanities scholarship.*"[21] In their clear and accessible manifesto, the project team describes the aims of the project as not simply to "create a comprehensive digital archive or wiki" but instead "to provide a curated, multimedia, interactive platform for accessing and understanding Loy's writing, artwork, and career."[22] The project offers interpretation of Mina Loy in the context of the larger movements and history of which she was a part.[23]

The creators of the project argue that Loy's work was deeply impacted by her experience as a world traveler. The site emphasizes her relationship to her environment through the inclusion of maps that are superimposed with photographic images of Loy. It also offers a travel guide—or *Baedeker*— modeled on Loy's own innovative use of the travel guide form as a literary tool for "navigat[ing] real and imagined territory."[24] The creators emphasize Loy's engagement with the social, political, and artistic movements of her time, including feminism, Italian Futurism, New York Dadaism, and French Surrealism. The project contextualizes Loy's work within these movements to illuminate her engagement with the avant-garde; in the process, the project reveals the diversity of these movements. In creating the born-digital multimedia resources available on the site, the team self-reflexively models the tools and digital projects on the themes and contents of Loy's work, such as her "avant-garde migrations."[25] In this way, the project puts into practice its ethical commitment to Loy and the contexts of her work, putting aside the impulse simply to collect and reproduce it and instead providing a platform for understanding her writing, artwork, and career in context.

The site contains an extensive collection of material with multiple avenues for user participation, including primary texts by Loy, map resources describing her travels and their significance to her artistic life, the afterlife of her archival material, and a game built using Twine, which is an interactive tool for exploring non-linear online hypertexts. The site is organized into four main areas. "Read," written by the project team and its advisory board, situates readers in relation to Loy and her place in modernist culture. This scholarly section includes the project's manifesto, close readings of Loy's poems, and *Mina Loy Baedeker: Scholarly Book for Digital Travelers*, a

collection of essays detailing how to understand Loy's work in the context of her feminism, surrealism, and avant-garde theories. In this section, users can access five of Loy's poems, which are carefully represented alongside literary analyses. In a subsection of the *Mina Loy Baedeker* titled "En Dehors Garde," the creators offer a theory of the avant-garde that encourages recognition of "women, people of color, and queer or disabled artists."[26] *En dehors garde* is an orientation to writing and art-making that draws attention away from the figures at the center of avant-garde movements and toward those who found themselves at the edges and whose contributions were informed by their marginality. This section also links to the project blog, which contains up-to-date information about recent scholarly work on Loy and exhibitions of her work in the form of conferences, art shows, and awards.

In the "Interact" area of the site, researchers can explore user and student contributions, with over twenty scholarly projects or digital exhibitions about Loy or the avant-garde created by undergraduate and graduate students. This section is distinct from other sections in that it is not peer-reviewed. Projects include an exhibit about the evolution and artistry of Loy's signature, a collection of user-submitted postcards responding to the team's invitation to pay attention to those on the forgotten peripheries of the avant-garde movement, and the Twine game, which encourages users to explore and understand Loy's "Feminist Manifesto" (1914). Student projects are collected under the heading "New Frequencies," and they are explicitly offered as invitations "to interact with the work of Mina Loy and other avant-garde figures in new, experimental, and playful ways."[27] In this way, the creators of this archive encourage students to use digital tools and technologies to reorient scholarship on Loy and the avant-garde. Moreover, the inclusion of a range of projects expands the perspectives represented on the site to include fans and users, not just scholars.

The "Time Travel" section of the site offers rich engagement with Loy's biography and her avant-garde network, her archives and collections of her work, maps of her travels, and timelines charting eight significant eras in her life and career. The final section of the site, "About," provides conventional details about the site, the project, and its members and information about the process of peer-review undertaken when the project was developed. Users will also find helpful information about how to cite each page of the project or use its custom WordPress theme. This section reveals the extent to which the developers are eager for users not only to learn more about Loy but also to gain competency in digital tools. A "DH Toolbox," a collection of digital humanities resources, includes simple and straightforward directions, as well as easily navigable examples, for embarking on one's own project. Here, and throughout the site, the team emphasizes web

accessibility. They also emphasize the rich and unexpected benefits of taking a collaborative and collective approach to scholarship.

Included on the site is a compelling manifesto, "Mina Loy in a Digital Age," that is critical of the way digital humanities has encouraged distant reading and superficial machine reading of large collections. Against this, the manifesto highlights a commitment to exploring how tools made popular by digital humanities scholarship and enabled by the digitization of primary texts can be deployed for close readings that generate further curiosity about an author, her life, and her times. In addition to articulating this hope for the future of digital humanities, the manifesto also outlines an explicitly feminist approach to the design of the digital archival environment. Diversity and non-hierarchical approaches are highlighted here, as are collaboration and interaction with users. Additionally, transparency is part of their feminist approach to design: "The processes of *writing & revision & peer review* are made VISIBLE, *so that*: AUTHORSHIP becomes PUBLIC & COLLABORATIVE (rather than PRIVATE and INDIVIDUALISTIC)."[28]

Overall, the strength of this award-winning project is its rich and diverse engagement with Loy—it contains many voices, reflecting a multitude of questions about Loy, her writing, her art, and her contributions to the modernist avant-garde. While the site begins with Loy, it invites us to learn more broadly about the avant-garde movements and networks in which she participated, and it provides an example of how digital archival environments grounded in feminist scholarship have the capacity to disrupt or dislodge conventional literary histories. By centering marginalized figures and tracing the impact of their work on transnational avant-garde movements, the Loy archive challenges ideas about literary periodization and expands how we think about literary movements. Equally significant is the project's transparent approach to positioning itself within a context of digital humanities and feminist design. In particular, the beautiful and easily digestible project manifesto makes clear how the project is shaped by radical feminist reorientations to archives; it is written in an experimental fashion and accompanied by a thoughtful and theoretically engaged explanation for the decision to experiment in this way. The authors of the manifesto point out that they were inspired by Loy's rejection of rational and linear logics to "challeng[e] you to read outside the norms of scholarly writing."[29]

Ultimately, this project is an exemplary digital archival environment that models its practice of digital scholarship on the innovative avant-garde approach that Mina Loy took in her own projects. The project team is dedicated not only to expanding scholarship on Loy but also to transforming how researchers interact with archives.

Gloria Naylor (1950-2016) was a Black American woman writer best known for her acclaimed novels featuring the lives of Black women in the twentieth century. Her first novel, *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), which depicts the interconnected lives of Black women living in a New York City apartment building, was awarded the National Book Award for best novel in 1983. Her other novels include *Linden Hills* (1985), *Mama Day* (1988), *Bailey's Cafe* (1992), *The Men of Brewster Place* (1998), and *1996* (2006). She achieved early and ongoing acclaim for her novels and was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship in 1988. The Gloria Naylor Archive is an "interdisciplinary and multi-institutional collaboration" that aims to "facilitat[e] engagement with Gloria Naylor's life and works by making her collected papers widely accessible."[30] Its primary objective is to preserve and promote access to Naylor's work both through a physical archive that is currently held at Sacred Heart University in Connecticut and the online archival environment. It also aims more broadly to honor the political, intellectual, and aesthetic commitments Naylor had throughout her life and to put into practice the critiques that were central to her work. As such, a primary commitment of the project is to center Black lives. As a review in the Recovery Hub of American Women Writers notes, both the physical and digital components of the archive "[aid] in the continued critical study of Naylor whose work is integral to the emergence of Black women's writing between 1970 and 1995."[31]

One of the strengths of this archive is its transparency about its goals and the position that the creators take toward archiving more generally. The digital archival environment's home page includes a welcome to scholars, educators, students, and fans; a mission statement; and a bullet-point list of guiding commitments. The mission statement is explicit in its articulation of the broad goals that shape the work of the archive. It is a political project that views its contents not simply as a collection of records that teach users about Naylor and the "transnational networks of writers" who were, like her, actively working to "expos[e] the workings of racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism"; the project is also oriented toward the future.[32] Its key goal is to be a resource for contemporary activists and scholars who find inspiration in Naylor's work for their own projects on some of the most pressing issues of our day, including

> mass incarceration and police violence, migration and gentrification, religion and sexuality, racism and sexism in higher education, the enduring legacies of enslavement and colonization in North America, capitalism and globalization, as well as the power of Black joy, cultural traditions, and resistance.[33]

The mission statement ends with an acknowledgement of Naylor's critiques of archives: "We register Naylor's trenchant critiques of academic institu-

tions (including archives) that often marginalize, erase, and do violence to Black lives."[34] This recognition is immediately followed by a list of guiding commitments that reads not only as the practices of this archive but also as commitments that could be—and should be—applied to archives more generally if we wish to undo their violence. Most tellingly, this section describes archives using the language of accountability, collaboration, acknowledgement, and equitable community building.

Naylor's archive is the only one explored here that features a woman writer whose work is still in copyright and whose contemporaries are still living in many cases. As such, the archive takes seriously its ethical responsibility to protect both Naylor's estate and the relationships she maintained, many with Black women writers and activists who shared her political and intellectual commitments. The Naylor archive is not as immediately discoverable as other archives—much of the material requires a password and will not be found by plugging terms into internet-wide search tools. The creators of this archive have carefully weighed the benefits of open access against the responsibility to protect and care for the contents of the archive. Copyright regulations limit archivists' ability to make documents public, but more pressing for the Naylor archivists are questions of how to protect information that is sensitive. Those whose voices and words are found in the archive and are still alive may not be willing to have private letters searchable on a public site. The project team notes that they, like Naylor, are deeply aware of the "way that digital surveillance targeted people of colour."[35] The project team thus made the decision to password protect the resources and require visitors to agree to their terms of engagement. The archive is still freely available, as "anyone who asks for the password can have it, for any reason."[36] Password protecting the site both preserves the copyright interests of the Naylor estate and prevents the archival materials from being scraped by search engines or AI, thus preventing material that mentions individuals from turning up in Google searches for their names when they had no say in the circulation of those materials. In this way, the creators of this archive practice a thoughtful form of responsible stewardship over its contents. This approach negotiates a delicate distinction between ease of access and protection of records from disrespectful users.

Though access must be requested to explore the digital archival materials in the Omeka repository, users can freely peruse the resources on the WordPress site. The site contains a "Highlights" section, which includes important scholarly information contextualizing and analyzing the contents of the archive as well as ArcGIS StoryMap digital exhibits, YouTube and audio recordings of collection entries, and links to related archives. In the password protected portion of the site, users can access pdf facsimile reproductions of materials related to *The Women of Brewster Place*, *Linden*

Hills, and *Mama Day*, including handwritten drafts of each novel as well as notes and correspondence. In fall 2023, the project team anticipates the addition of digital records related to *The Men of Brewster Place* (1998), *Bailey's Cafe* (1992), *Children of the Night: The Best Short Stories by Black Writers, 1967 to Present* (1995), and various unpublished materials.

At this point, the password protected archive only searches the titles of the material, not the full-text of each item, but users will, in the near future, be able to browse materials according to type, subject, date, etc. The digital archival environment would benefit from full-text search capacity and TEI (text encoding initiative) transcription and encoding, as well as some reorganization of materials. For instance, the material in the "Highlights" section of the website includes valuable contextual information about Naylor's work, but this information is not reproduced alongside the facsimile reproductions in the password protected portion of the site. Having the scholarly work—such as Mary C. Foltz's articles "Insights from Naylor's Research for *Linden Hills*" and "Talking about Literary Representations of Black Lesbians"—easily linked to the archival materials would give further context about Black intellectual history.

The Naylor archival environment is an impressive resource for scholarship on this figure, and it is actively being expanded and revised by the project team. Among the most valuable aspects of the project is an ArcGIS digital exhibition entitled "Other Places," which brings Naylor's journal entries to life and recordings of lectures and discussions between contemporary scholars of Naylor. Reflecting Naylor's own commitment to nourishing Black community, the project is dedicated to Black feminist scholarship and to the larger project of archiving Black women writers. The site directs users to visit related archives and to recognize the interconnections between literary figures like Naylor, Nikki Giovanni, Toni Morrison, Ann Petry, Julia Alvarez, Cheryl Wall, and Maya Angelou.

The George Eliot Archive

Of the writers whose archives we feature in this review, the white British writer George Eliot (born Mary Ann Evans, 1819-1880), often considered one of the most highly acclaimed novelists in Western literature, is likely the best known. The George Eliot Archive reproduces a substantial amount of Eliot's body of work—some of which is unavailable anywhere else online—and information about her life and contemporaries in an extensive digital archival environment. The primary objective of the George Eliot Archive is to be a "barrier-free platform for scholars and general readers alike," and as such, the project team has provided fully searchable and freely downloadable digital facsimiles of Eliot's fiction, nonfiction, poetry, essays, and translation through its Omeka-platformed

site.[37] A notable feature of the project is its commitment to transparency through the open-access availability of its technical process on GitHub for others to use.

The site is divided into six main areas comprised of Eliot's published and unpublished writings, a gallery of all known images of the author produced during her life, early contemporaneous reviews of her work and biographies written by those who knew her, and interactive data. Included in the "Interactive Data" section are three born-digital projects that mine information from the rich archival sources collected in the project in order to produce data visualizations of Eliot's chronology, travels, and social networks. A personography, for instance, provides a visualization of Eliot's relationships with more than 125 of her contemporaries. The people in her social network are represented by circles of various sizes—larger for closer contacts, smaller for more distant contacts. Users can also search the network and read brief biographies of each figure included in the visualization. This network is a great use of available visualization tools, though it will have more appeal to Eliot experts or to Victorianists who might have a familiarity with major (and minor) literary figures of the time. The Eliot archive presumes that the visitors already know a fair amount about Eliot. Also included in the "Interactive Data" section is an exciting, innovative, and extremely useful experiment with AI generated text analysis. This site is an example of what can be accomplished when a digital archival environment is well funded and institutionally supported.

Unlike other sites we have explored, the Eliot archive does not offer a manifesto (Loy) or mission statement (Naylor), and it does not explicitly align itself with a feminist approach. The central stated long-term goals of the site are to "provide open access to all of Eliot's journals, notebooks, and correspondence" and to provide free access to everything Eliot has published, as well as to most of her unpublished work.[38] The emphasis here is on access, not interpretation. The "Contemporaries on Eliot" section, however, does collect interpretative scholarship published during her lifetime, including hundreds, perhaps thousands, of records such as reviews, newspaper articles, and scholarly writings. Though other lists of records provided on the site have been coded and made searchable, this section is simply an alphabetized list unaccompanied by any discussion of, for instance, trends, controversies, or main themes that emerge in Eliot's contemporaries' assessment of her work and life. But a final section of the site, titled "Current Criticism," links to the archive's sister sites: *The George Eliot Review Online*, with digital editions of the journal from 1970 onwards, and George Eliot Scholars, a platform for connecting scholars who research and discuss Eliot. On the George Eliot Scholars site, users can search contemporary criticism of Eliot's work by keywords, such as scholarly perspectives on Eliot's feminism (or lack thereof) and her engagement with issues

of class and race. Users can also browse full text scholarly works according to type: journal articles, book chapters, theses/dissertations, conference papers, and other contributions.

The George Eliot Archive makes a significant and important contribution to public humanities and literary scholarship through the sheer amount of free, publicly accessible information about Eliot's work and life. Its work collating and making accessible information about Eliot is impressive, and its value to Eliot scholars and to Victorianists cannot be understated. Whereas projects like the Loy and Naylor archives speak to audiences who are curious about communities, movements, political questions, or specific writerly positionalities, the focus of the Eliot archive is squarely on the author herself. Like the other three projects examined here, it treats its subject with care and respect and encourages continued scholarship. However, this project values neutrality and aims to "eliminate speculation and bias," which raises challenging questions for feminist critiques that insist that all scholarly practices are embedded in specific social, political, and historical position/alities.[39] Future iterations of the site might do well to consider the inclusion of a project manifesto or policies and to consider whether accessibility for non-specialists might be a useful goal to embrace.

The Winnifred Eaton Archive

The Winnifred Eaton Archive has to work a bit harder than the Eliot archive to reach out to users, who might have come to the site for a range of reasons. Winnifred Eaton Babcock Reeve (1875-1954) was a popular and prolific North American author of Asian descent, whose best-known works were signed "Onoto Watanna," a controversial Japanese persona she developed and assumed for more than two decades. Eaton received acclaim for her best-selling novel *Miss Nume of Japan* (1899), the first novel in North America published by an author of Asian descent, but she also wrote journal articles, plays, and screenplays. Supporting herself with her writing, Eaton's works were enormously popular, translated in several languages, reprinted, and produced on stage and screen. The Winnifred Eaton archive is a "research and teaching tool" that aims to collect and make available "all known publications, manuscripts, and films by Eaton in one location" in order to "provide a full survey of Eaton's work—its generic and stylistic range, its aesthetic experiment, as well as its often problematic politics."[40] The archive not only contributes to the recovery of a significant pioneering woman writer of Asian descent, it also takes a deeply nuanced approach to the organization and contextualization of her work. Each of Eaton's texts is situated within her extensive oeuvre, as well as alongside other contemporaneous writers and her larger social and historical milieu. In this way, the project successfully balances the goal of centering Eaton as

an important literary figure with the equally important goal of informing users about the events, policies, and ideologies (such as anti-Asian racism in North America) that were the conditions of Eaton's literary production.

Users of the digital archival environment encounter Eaton's work in a way that resists a simple chronological re-telling. Eaton's oeuvre is instead organized in the form of overlapping exhibits that correspond to different trends in her career: Early Experiments 1895-1902, Playing Japanese 1896-1922, New York Years 1901-1916, Alberta 1917-1954, and In Hollywood 1916-1935. These categories are one way that the creators of the archive have refused to disappear into the background; instead by offering this framing, they make themselves known, offer interpretation, and make arguments about Eaton's work, her life, and her times. Ultimately, one of the real highlights of this archive is the transparency and explicit positionality of the project team.

While the project is still under development, each exhibit item is reproduced in pdf form, and most documents are also transcribed with TEI markup. Of the items that are transcribed, several longer works also contain tables of contents with complete chapter headings, metadata (with credits given to transcribers, proofreaders, encoders, and authors of headnotes), ways to cite the information on the page, and a way to contact the project team. The items are also fully text searchable, along with thematic and bibliographic search examples. Users can, for instance, search for works according to the pseudonym Eaton used to write them. Users are thus given multiple ways of interacting with the material. The creators are able to make arguments about the author without closing down the curiosity of users, who are encouraged and enabled to explore the material in a range of ways.

Also notable in this site is the dedication to transparency around the work involved in its creation. A section called "Contributors" includes details about more than two dozen researchers involved in various ways with the creation, management, and development of the site. Each assistant's name and affiliation is included as are links to their specific contributions, which include conventionally invisible tasks like proofreading, transcribing, encoding text, and compiling bibliographic information, as well as the more visible work of authoring headnotes.

The Eaton archive also gives users important contextual information to fill in potential gaps in their knowledge. The project team understands that Eaton, while popular in her own time, has not remained a household name. The preambles to the digital exhibits contain scholarly information about the particular stage of Eaton's life and writing, and the headnotes include short summaries of stories, novels, or screenplays. In the biography section, a timeline also provides important information about Eaton's life and work in a clear and engaging format; as users scroll through a timeline, they see

brief entries describing major life events as well as evocative images from the wider archive. It lists the births and deaths of Eaton's thirteen siblings, as well as important historical information, such as the date of Canada's head tax on Chinese immigrants, and Eaton's interactions with important literary and historical figures like Helen R. Kellogg, Nellie McClung, and Mark Twain. The linked list of her collaborators is an extremely valuable resource that raises questions about how the research team might deploy digital humanities visualization technologies to explore the literary networks in which Eaton circulated. Though it does not use the familiar visualization or mapping technologies that are present in other similar archives, the Winnifred Eaton Archive notably contributes to the open-access development of digital humanities tools and technologies through open code sharing on GitHub. Its development of staticSearch, a client-side search engine for digital editions, rejecting outside and algorithmically biased search engines, is one such contribution.

Conclusions

> What happens when we scratch beneath the surface of the veneer of detached professionalism and start to think of record keepers and archivists [. . .] as caregivers?
>
> –Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor[41]

Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor describe "radical empathy in the archives" as an orientation infused by a feminist ethic of care (p. 23). It binds archive builders to "record creators, subjects, users and communities through a web of mutual responsibility" in pursuit of social justice objectives (p. 25). From our perspective, a vital aspect of a feminist archiving practice is the ethical imperative of empathy, which nurtures what we describe as responsible stewardship. As stewards rather than "detached professional[s]," members of archival project teams produce work grounded in a relationship of caregiving. Caregiving might, as it does in the case of the Naylor archive, involve protecting a literary figure and her personal and professional record from exploitation by and within technologies that are characterized by "racist digital surveillance."[42] Caregiving might, as it does in the case of the Eaton archive, counterbalance risk of exploitation with a robust and detailed archival environment that brings a virtually unknown figure into relief.[43] Caregiving in the case of the expansive Eliot archive takes the form of nurturing an entire field of Eliot scholarship through its intimate ties to other sites that maintain a community of Eliot scholars. Finally, the Loy archive expresses an ethic of caregiving both in its efforts to practice the aesthetic interruptions promoted by Loy and in the relationship it establishes with visitors and users of the site who are invited

to learn not only about Loy but also about how their own projects might be given digital life.

Though the researchers involved in building each of these digital archival environments have focused their attention on very different literary figures, they are at the same time engaged in a shared project of preserving, contextualizing, and making available a wide range of material related to the history of women's writing. Contemporary scholars may come to the projects with an acute awareness of the political and epistemological force of archives. These interactive, dynamic, archival environments confirm the continued value of archives and of the archival impulse, especially for literary figures whose work has not fit easily into the frameworks of mainstream aesthetics and literary scholarship. They suggest to us the foundational role of archives:

> However imperfectly, archives were established to preserve and make available material for generations to come. This longevity is why, despite issues of privacy, access, ethics, and the like, groups whose voices have been silenced or muted in Western archives have nevertheless sought to create repositories to share knowledge for their communities.[44]

The projects that we have explored are representative of a huge variety of digital archival environments that are committed to knowledge sharing. Some projects prioritize providing access to archival materials; others place emphasis on providing innovative frameworks through which to explore material; others model the ever-expanding possibilities of digital tools for reorienting literary scholarship. We end here with an eye to the future and with optimism for how digital humanities tools and technologies can continue to support feminist literary scholarship. One key opportunity that goes largely unexplored in the digital archival environments we review here is LOD, or linked open data. LOD can add an exciting and expansive networked dimension to digital archival environments. It allows users "to follow connections between texts, periodical reviews, cited works, biographical information, and other forms of context."[45] Although additional care and thought needs to be paid to projects that justifiably protect data from open access, like the Naylor archive, innovations in LOD promise to work against the siloing of knowledge and to enable researchers to explore the connections across and between texts, literary figures, and archival materials.

We see a lot of opportunities for researchers to enable connections outside their own distinct digital environments. And we are not alone in expressing an interest in connection. At the end of an essay about feminist archives of the future, Marianne Hirsch imagines a future in which archives are characterized by connection. We might imagine, she writes, the archive as

a list of holdings and as a web of connections circling within and across time and space. In such a network—we might call it a "network of complex ties"—we might stop and consider different knots and nodules, each a site for the production of feminist theory. These sites could link the past to the future in an archival web of open-ended possibility.[46]

Enabling links beyond a singular archival project is exciting, important, and messy work. Reimagined as a living space of encounter that raises questions rather than a closed static resource for answering questions, archives can become complex sites of expansive possibility.

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[1] Laura Engel and Emily Ruth Rutter, "Women and Archives," introduction to "Women and Archives" special issue, *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 40, No. 1 (2021), 12.

[2] There is a rich body of research on archives, archiving, and archival logics; a good starting point for understanding what is meant by the term "archival turn" is found in the work of historian Ann Laura Stoler, who describes it as a "move from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject"; see Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 44. See also Stoler, "The Pulse of the Archive," *Ab Imperio*, 3 (2007), 253. For perspectives from the field of archive studies, see Michelle Caswell, "'The Archive' is Not An Archives: Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies," *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture*, 16, No. 1 (2016). Other key works include Kate Eichorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013); Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge and Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002); Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); and Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

[3] Marianne Hirsch, "Feminist Archives of Possibility," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 29, No. 1 (2018), 174. See also Hirsch and Diana Taylor, "The Archive in Transit," *emisférica*, 9, Nos. 1-2 (2012), https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/emisferica-91/91-editorial-remarks.

[4] Hirsch, "Feminist Archives of Possibility," 174.

[5] DWAN: Digital Women's Archive North, an activist archivist group based in the United Kingdom, offers a radical vision of archives that are open to all. Despite the preservational requirements related to light and temperature, they call for archivists to "unlock drawers (give out free keys) dispose of gloves (beautiful dirt)"; see Jenna Ashton, "The Feminists are Cackling in the Archive: A Manifesto for Feminist Archiving (or Disruption)," *Feminist Review*, 115 (2017), 160. DWAN imagines archives that invite visitors to borrow items, write comments in the margins, leave the mark of their bodies in the archive, and against all convention, use pens in the archive.

[6] Jacqueline Wernimont, "Whence Feminism? Assessing Feminist Interventions in Digital Literary Archives," *DHQ: Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 7, No. 1 (2013), para 2, https://digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/7/1/000156/000156.html.

[7] Definitions of digital archives are notoriously slippery. For instance, in her article in the *Encyclopedia of Archival Science*, Kate Theimer points out that the term "digital archive" can be used for "collections of born-digital records, for websites that provide access to collections of digitized materials, for websites featuring different types of digitized information around one topic, and for web-based participatory collections"; see Theimer, "Digital Archives," in *Encyclopedia of Archival Science* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 158.

[8] Researchers interested in a range of digital humanities projects, including archival environments, may explore Reviews in Digital Humanities, https://

reviewsindh.pubpub.org; and the Recovery Hub for American Women Writers, https://recoveryhub.siue.edu.

[9] Digital reproduction and storage of archival materials are thus invaluable tools for researchers, but as Janine Solberg wisely reminds us, "it is important that we do not let digital plentitude cloud our recognition of what and who is still excluded—or what and who may be newly erased"; see Solberg, "Googling the Archive: Digital Tools and the Practice of History," *Advances in the History of Rhetoric*, 15 (2012), 27. In other words, Solberg reminds us that the limitless capacity for a digital archive to expand is a fantasy that needs to be balanced with careful reflection on the political and epistemological functions of archives (p. 66). See also Pamela van Haitsma, "Between Archival Absence and Information Abundance: Reconstructing Sallie Hollie's Abolitionist Rhetoric through Digital Surrogates and Metadata," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 106, No. 1 (2020), 25-47, especially 27-28.

[10] Michelle Moravec, "Feminist Research Practices and Digital Archives," *Australian Feminist Studies*, 32, No. 91-92 (2017), 186. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[11] Jennifer S. Tuttle, "Recollecting Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Archival Labor and Women's Literary Recovery," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 40, No. 2 (2021), 216.

[12] See Suzanne W. Churchill, Linda A. Kinnahan, and Susan Rosenbaum, eds., Mina Loy: Navigating the Avant-Garde, University of Georgia, 2020, accessed 18 September 2023, https://mina-loy.com; The Gloria Naylor Archive, Sacred Heart University and Lehigh University, accessed 18 September 2023, https://wordpress.lehigh.edu/naylorarchive; Beverley Park Rilett, ed., The George Eliot Archive, Auburn University, accessed 18 September 2023, https://www.georgeeliotarchive.org; and Mary Chapman and Jean Lee Cole, eds., The Winnifred Eaton Archive, v. 1.1, 13 March 2022, https://winnifredeatonarchive.org.

[13] Wernimont and Julia Flowers, "Feminism in the Age of Digital Archives: The Women Writers Project," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 29, No. 2 (2010), 427.

[14] Wernimont, "Whence Feminism?," para. 4. For an excellent example of how archival context enriches the understanding of an individual text, see Meredith Benjamin, "An Archive of Accounts: *This Bridge Called My Back* in Feminist Movement," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 40, No. 1 (2021), 45-68. Benjamin reflects on how "an engagement with [*This Bridge Called My Back*]'s archives allows us to consider it as a series of resonances and relationships that stretch back before its publication and forward, as it continues to circulate and be reimagined" (p. 48).

[15] See Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1985); and Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929).

[16] See Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies*, 14, No. 3 (1988), 575-99; and Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein, *Data Feminism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), especially chapter three, "On Rational, Scientific, Objective Viewpoints from Mythical, Imaginary, Impossible Standpoints."

[17] See Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 575-99.

[18] Moravec outlines concerns with how consent was conceptualized by the archivists who digitized the full contents of the feminist magazine *Spare Rib* (1972-

1993). See also Elizabeth Groeneveld, "Remediating Pornography: The *On Our Backs* Digitization Debate," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 32, No. 1 (2018), 73-83; P. Gabrielle Foreman, "Sankofa Imperatives: Black Women, Digital Methods, and the Archival Turn," *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 38, No. 2 (2023), 423-35; and Veronika Schuchter, "Toward a Feminist Archival Ethics of Accountability: Researching with the Aritha van Herk Fonds," *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en littérature canadienne*, 44, No. 2 (2020), 332-51.

[19] For more information and resources about web accessibility, see for instance WebAIM: Web Accessibility in Mind, https://webaim.org.

[20] "Cite this Project," Mina Loy: Navigating the Avant-Garde, accessed 25 September 2023, https://mina-loy.com/about-us/cite-this-project; and "White Paper," Mina Loy: Navigating the Avant-Garde, accessed 25 September 2023, https://mina-loy.com/white-paper.

[21] "About the Project," Mina Loy: Navigating the Avant-Garde, accessed 25 September 2023, https://mina-loy.com/about-us/project; emphasis added.

[22] "About the Project."

[23] The site will soon have a print companion, *Travels with Mina Loy*, forthcoming from Lever Press in 2024.

[24] Suzanne W. Churchill, Linda A. Kinnahan, and Susan Rosenbaum, *Mina Loy Baedeker: Scholarly Book for Digital Travelers*, Mina Loy: Navigating the Avant-Garde, accessed 25 September 2023, https://mina-loy.com/chapters. The title of the *Mina Loy Baedeker* is inspired by Loy's 1923 poetry collection *The Lunar Baedeker* and the best-selling nineteenth-century travel books produced by German publisher Verlag Karl Baedeker.

[25] "White Paper."

[26] Suzanne W. Churchill, Linda A. Kinnahan, and Susan Rosenbaum, "4. En Dehors Garde," in *Mina Loy Baedeker*, accessed 25 September 2023, https://mina-loy.com/chapters/avant-garde-theory-2/the-en-dehors-garde.

[27] "New Frequencies," Mina Loy: Navigating the Avant-Garde, accessed 25 September 2023, https://mina-loy.com/new-frequencies.

[28] "Manifesto: Mina Loy in a Digital Age," Mina Loy: Navigating the Avant-Garde, accessed 25 September 2023, https://mina-loy.com/manifesto.

[29] "Manifesto: Mina Loy in a Digital Age."

[30] "Welcome," The Gloria Naylor Archive, accessed 25 September 2023, https://wordpress.lehigh.edu/naylorarchive.

[31] Jina DuVernay and Seretha Williams, "Project Showcase: Gloria Naylor Archive," Recovery Hub for American Women Writers, accessed 29 September 2023, https://recoveryhub.siue.edu/2022/03/23/showcase-gloria-naylor-archive.

[32] "Our Mission Statement," The Gloria Naylor Archive, accessed 25 September 2023, https://wordpress.lehigh.edu/naylorarchive.

[33] "Our Mission Statement."

[34] "Our Mission Statement."

[35] Suzanne Edwards, personal communication with Michelle Meagher, 11 August 2023. Regarding the digital surveillance of people of color, Edwards recommends Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019); and Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

[36] Edwards, personal communication with Meagher, 11 August 2023.

[37] Roger Whitson, "George Eliot Archive," review of the George Eliot Archive, *Reviews in Digital Humanities*, 1, No. 2 (2020), accessed 29 September 2023, https://reviewsindh.pubpub.org/pub/george-eliot-archive.

[38] "George Eliot Archive," The George Eliot Archive, accessed 29 September 2023, https://www.georgeeliotarchive.org/

[39] "George Eliot Projects," The George Eliot Archive, accessed 29 September 2023, https://www.georgeeliotarchive.org/about.

[40] "The Winnifred Eaton Archive: Romancer, Journalist, Screenwriter," The Winnifred Eaton Archive, accessed 29 September 2023, https://winnifredeatonarchive.org; and "About," The Winnifred Eaton Archive, accessed 29 September 2023, https://winnifredeatonarchive.org/about.html

[41] Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives," *Archivaria*, 81 (2016), 25. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[42] Edwards, personal communication with Meagher. See also Benjamin, *Race After Technology*; and Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression*.

[43] A rudimentary search of WorldCat finds about 57 records with the subject "Winnifred Eaton," 527 records about Naylor, 440 records on Loy, and an impressive but unsurprising 13,272 records with Eliot as a subject heading.

[44] Emily C. Friedman, "Must Anonymous Be A Woman? Gender and Discoverability in the Archives," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 40, No. 2 (2021), 367.

[45] Sarah Connell, Julia Flanders, Nicole Infanta Keller, Elizabeth Polcha, and William Reed Quinn, "Learning from the Past: The Women Writers Project and Thirty Years of Humanities Text Encoding," *Magnificat: Cultura i Literatura Medievals* [Magnificat: Medieval literature and culture], 4 (2017), 4.

[46] Hirsch, "Feminist Archives of Possibility," 187.