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TYPE:	Article CC:CCG
JOURNAL TITLE:	Resources for American literary study
USER JOURNAL TITLE:	Resources for American Literary Study
ARTICLE TITLE:	Re-mediating The Female American : Collaboration and Situated Knowledges in the Digital Humanities Classroom
ARTICLE AUTHOR:	Burkert, Mattie ; Combs, Rachel ; Gekiere, Kathlee
VOLUME:	45
ISSUE:	1
MONTH:	
YEAR:	2024
PAGES:	31 - 63
ISSN:	0048-7384
OCLC #:	

Processed by RapidX: 8/2/2024 9:01:01 AM

Re-mediating *The Female American*: Collaboration and Situated Knowledges in the Digital Humanities Classroom

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ABSTRACT | *The Female American*, published pseudonymously in 1767, has drawn scholarly attention in recent decades as a novel that raises questions about anonymity, gender, authorship, Indigeneity, settler colonialism, and the American literary canon. Yet access to the text has remained limited, dependent on subscription databases and print scholarly editions. In 2022, as part of a graduate seminar on eighteenth-century literature, science, and colonialism, we produced the first open-access digital edition of volume 1; a subset of the class also recorded a public domain audiobook of the full novel. This article presents an account of our process and the connections drawn between these projects and course content, with attention to conversations and tensions that arose as we drafted a land acknowledgment for the edition. Moving beyond the "how we built this" genre common in digital humanities, this article offers a critical reflection on the ways our individual interests, identities, commitments, and institutional embeddedness shaped the knowledge we could cocreate. Our aim is to demonstrate that the benefits of digital pedagogy extend far beyond technical skill-building—especially in graduate education, where digital projects provide an opportunity for emerging scholars to reflect critically on material and social entanglements that conventional humanities workflows often obscure.

KEYWORDS | digital humanities, graduate education, land acknowledgment, collaboration, *The Female American*

RESOURCES FOR AMERICAN LITERARY STUDY | VOL. 45 | NO. 1 | 2023

https://doi.org/10.5325/resoamerlitestud.45.1.0031

Originally published in 1767 under the pseudonym "Unca Eliza Winkfield," *The Female American* is a novel that responds to and capitalizes on the popularity of Daniel Defoe's (1660?–1731) *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Like other so-called "Robinsonades," *The Female American* rewrites Defoe's colonialist fantasy of shipwreck and survivalism—in this case, as the first-person account of a British woman of white and Indigenous North American parentage who finds herself deserted on an island in the Caribbean after being set adrift by mutineers.[1] Set in the early seventeenth century, the book presents itself as a predecessor rather than a successor to *Robinson Crusoe*. After its initial London printing, *The Female American* appeared in at least two American editions in 1800 and 1814 before fading into relative obscurity for nearly two centuries. Recent decades have witnessed a renewed and steadily growing interest in the novel for the light it sheds on issues of anonymous and gendered authorship, adaptation and originality, race and Indigeneity, settler colonialism, American identity, and the literary canon.[2] This expanding body of scholarly discourse has coalesced around a narrative of loss and recovery: *The Female American* is said to have all but disappeared after 1814, only to be recovered by feminist critics during the canon wars of the 1990s. Indeed, *Women's Studies* published a special issue in 2016 marking two decades of what the editors describe as "serious scholarship" on the novel (Collins-Frohlich and MacNeil, "Introduction").

A handful of scholars heroically resuscitating a long-lost text makes for an appealing narrative, but this framing overlooks the decades of work and collaboration that enabled the text's survival over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Simply put, *The Female American*, despite its recent renaissance, was never truly lost. These well-intentioned attempts to celebrate feminist knowledge work inadvertently obscure the collaborative labor of archivists, microfilm photographers, catalogers, and data entry workers—many of them women—who ensured the ongoing availability of the book for "rediscovery" by producing the facsimile images on which the vast majority of today's scholars depend for access to the text. In this essay, we trace the text's material history as a condition of possibility for our own work in creating an open-access digital edition of volume 1 of *The Female American*, a project we undertook together as students in and instructor of a graduate seminar in 2022. The collaborative edition we produced as a class further inspired individual and small-group final projects, including a public domain audiobook.

As we began formulating this experience and the resulting insights as an essay for publication, we initially gravitated to a formula that has become a staple of digital humanities discourse: the "How We Built This" genre, in which a project team relates the steps they took, the technologies they used, the critical decisions they made, and the lessons they learned along the way to making a work of digital scholarship.[3] Within this narrative framing, we could position ourselves as the heirs of our feminist foremothers: just as they had rescued this strange and fascinating novel from obscurity a few decades ago, we had brought it out from behind the paywalls of subscription databases, transforming it into an Open Educational Resource for students to read and listen to in their classes.

In the account that follows, however, we try to resist the pull of this genre and its implied narrative of heroic individualism and innovation. Instead, we emphasize the inherently collaborative nature of our own work and the situatedness of such work within extractive logics and systems that condition scholarly production. Furthermore, we argue that collaborative, public-facing digital humanities (DH) work has a unique and under-recognized role to play in graduate education, even for those students with no academic or professional interest in technology. Because it pushes one to think critically about one's own interests and how those relate to the interests and needs of one's collaborators and audiences, this kind of project throws into relief the productive tension between individual and collective labor that characterizes all scholarship but that is commonly disavowed or mystified within conventional humanities workflows. Accordingly, the structure of this essay poses an intentional challenge to individualistic models of scholarship, a challenge reflected in its movement between a collective voice and sections presented from individual points of view, displayed below in italics. We have adapted this formal structure from other models of collaborative writing by instructor-student teams that have influenced and inspired us.[4] Similarly, we hope that our essay will prove useful for college instructors who are interested in collaborative digital projects.

In the first section, we offer a narrative account of our digital project development process. As we discuss below, it was an in-class exercise based on Eugenia Zuroski's "'Where Do You Know From?': An Exercise in Placing Ourselves Together in the Classroom" that first allowed us to reflect not only on the interests and commitments we each brought to the collaborative project but also on how our institutional embeddedness shaped the

knowledge we could cocreate. In the next section, we detail our in-class attempts to enact these insights in the form of a land acknowledgment that engaged both with individual relationships to place and with the way digital projects extend the network of places with which one is entangled. Crafting a land acknowledgment was not an easy process; it was far more time- and labor-intensive—and far more contentious—than we had anticipated. Despite this difficulty, our class agreed that a land acknowledgment was vital to our DH project because of the explicit themes of settler colonialism in *The Female American*, a decision that was informed by other primary and critical texts that we studied together throughout the term and was reinforced by our ongoing discussions of the ways in which digital structures and norms continue to perpetuate colonialist practices—for example, through the continued extraction of minerals, resources, and dispossessed labor to produce and power digital devices. Our personal recollections of the process of crafting a land acknowledgment reflect on the vulnerability, introspection, and recursive conversations that this part of the project required. We also reproduce in full the land acknowledgment that our class ultimately created. We provide this not as a model but as an example of how collaborative digital projects can promote collective reflection on and reckoning with not only intellectual and social but also material and institutional inheritances of colonialism that continue to structure knowledge work. Finally, building on these themes of place and relationality, the third section considers where our edition "knows from." We trace the publication history of *The Female American*, with a focus on the invisible labor that has been involved in maintaining access to this text over time. Our audiobook, we conclude, even more than our edition, continues the work of expanding access to the text even as it inherits ongoing problems of authorial attribution, labor, and acknowledgment.

I.

The course that brought us together was English 645: 18th-Century Literature, which meets a historical distribution requirement for our department's graduate program. The class enrolled a dozen students, most pursuing an MA or PhD in English, with a few doctoral students from History and Environmental Studies. The topic, "Science, Colonialism, and

Empire," invited students to examine the intimate relationship between scientific inquiry and European colonial expansion during this period, as well as the role of literature in fostering and resisting the violent ideologies at the heart of colonial science. Our primary sources included canonical texts such as *Robinson Crusoe* and Jonathan Swift's (1667–1745) *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World* (1726) as well as items of more recent scholarly interest: Margaret Cavendish's (1623?–73) *Description of a New World, Called the Blazing-World* (1666), Aphra Behn's (1640?–89) *Emperor of the Moon* (1687), Olaudah Equiano's (c. 1745–97) *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself* (1789), Charlotte Smith's (1749–1806) *Beachy Head* (1807), and, of course, *The Female American*. The reading list also incorporated contemporary meditations on the relationship between the long eighteenth century (1660–1800) and the present, including selections from Nikole Hannah-Jones's "1619 Project," Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*, and M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*. The syllabus thus leveraged and interrogated the connections between past and present, making the case for the relevance and vitality of centuries-old materials. The class digital edition project was likewise an opportunity to reactivate a historic text in the present, re-mediating it for twenty-first century readers and critically reframing its content through a contemporary lens.

The selection of *The Female American* for this project arose as part of Burkert's preparation for the course, during which time they were able to locate open editions of nearly all our other primary source readings. For example, students could access *The Blazing World* through *Digital Cavendish* and *Emperor of the Moon* through *A Celebration of Women Writers*. To read *The Female American*, however, students needed to purchase the second Broadview edition of the novel (2014), edited by Michelle Burnham and James Freitas. This is an affordable and high-quality edition that includes supplementary materials, critical paratexts, and bibliographic notes. Still, a text's survival outside of academe depends today on its availability in open-access, digital formats that ensure its indexability by search algorithms, its availability to computational analysis within large text corpora, and even its inclusion in the training datasets of large language models such as OpenAI's GPT-4—sociotechnical artifacts that increasingly define the contours of public culture. Producing a digital edition of the novel would

therefore serve multiple purposes and meet the needs of different audiences than the leading print edition.

Our edition was designed from the start for publication as part of *Literature in Context* (LiC), an "Open Anthology" of public domain texts commonly taught in high school and college. LiC provides its users with free, classroom-ready versions of seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and early nineteenth-century texts edited by scholars and their students that are available to download in a variety of print- and e-book reader–friendly formats and as part of custom course packs. One of the goals of LiC is to route literature students away from the bustling market for cheap, print-on-demand titles reproduced from public domain texts; another is to provide a scaffolded workflow for instructors who wish to cocreate and publish digital editions with their students. The workflow for our project derived directly from LiC's documentation and from advice offered generously by project director Tonya Howe.[5]

We started by producing a hand-corrected transcription of the first edition, using facsimiles from the subscription database *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (ECCO). *The Female American* is not part of the subset of ECCO holdings that have been professionally typed and published in open-access plain text formats under the banner of the Text Creation Partnership.[6] Instead, its contents are discoverable in the ECCO search ecosystem as a result of optical character recognition (OCR), an automated process for extracting machine-readable text from images containing arrangements of pixels only a human would recognize as text. OCR algorithms have been trained largely on modern typefaces and are notoriously inaccurate for early printed texts, which include catchwords, the medial "s," and other anachronistic typographic features. To correct and standardize the automatically extracted text of *The Female American*, we used a collaborative editing environment called TypeWright, which was developed by the Center of Digital Humanities Research (CoDHR) at Texas A&M University.[7]

Each student in the class was responsible for just a handful of pages, amounting to two or three hours of work. Through carefully scaffolded in-class exercises and low-stakes follow-up assignments, students deepened their familiarity with the primary text and gained foundational knowledge about the materiality and the editorial conventions of early modern printed

texts. Furthermore, they performed a public service with immediate and concrete value for other scholars: the corrections were sent back to ECCO to improve the plain text display and search discoverability of *The Female American*. As Laura Mandell, Elizabeth Grumbach, and Danielle Spratt have argued, this kind of editorial work can be rewarding for students concerned to see their study of the humanities as valuable and legible outside the academy. Projects that involve transcription, editing, correction, or encoding of digitized documents can be framed as a kind of service learning or publicly engaged scholarship that is unique to those fields that train students to engage with, not just the content, but also the materiality of historical texts and artifacts.

Once our corrections were complete and approved by the TypeWright team at Texas A&M University, we received a copy of the finished text file along with permission to use it for our own research or as the basis for a digital edition.[8] The next step was to encode the text's structural features—page numbers, chapter divisions, paragraph breaks, and so forth—to ensure that it would display correctly on the *Literature in Context* website. Both TypeWright and LiC editions are encoded in TEI-XML, a widely accepted and flexible standard for structural, editorial, and descriptive markup of digitized primary texts.[9] Burkert invited volunteers willing to learn the encoding methods, and those students interested in developing their technical skills signed on to augment the basic markup of our TypeWright text by customizing it to conform with the LiC schema.

Other students were more interested in generating content for the editorial apparatus. While those elements would eventually need to be encoded using TEI tags, Burkert scaffolded the work using an annotation tool called Hypothes.is, which is available as a plugin for many learning management systems and as a free browser extension. Students worked in small groups over a two-week period to compose notes indexed to specific locations in the text, including glosses of archaic or difficult words and phrases, explanations of obscure references and allusions, contextual and discursive notes, and identifiers for real people and locations referenced in the text. LiC requires that the latter be keyed to the Library of Congress Name Authority File and the Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names to promote the connectivity and discoverability of these editions and to enable internal links between texts within the anthology.

Burkert: *I had envisioned that the TEI group would be responsible for encoding the other groups' completed annotations to display as pop-ups when users click a hyperlinked word or phrase. In the end, however, the sheer scale of this task became daunting for students who were preparing to write seminar papers and beginning to conceptualize individual and small-group final projects for this and other classes. Ultimately, I undertook this task myself, as well as the work of anchoring the facsimile page images to the corresponding sections of the transcription. I did so over a short and intensive period, as I was concerned to get the finished files to the LiC team and go through what I knew would be a multistep validation and integration process in time for students to see the results of their work before the end of the term.*

This experience illustrates a problem that is familiar for me and, I suspect, for many other instructors teaching digital humanities projects: any last-minute crunch (rightly and necessarily) falls to the instructor and to any embedded librarians, technologists, or community partners, especially if the final implementation involves skilled technical work. This might be considered another dimension of what Diane K. Jakacki and Brian Croxall have called "the invisible labor of DH pedagogy," and it is important to recognize as a significant factor in deciding whether to undertake such a project with students.[10] *At the same time, partially disentangling the encoding work from the content creation allows students who have little interest in or experience with digital technology to contribute meaningful domain knowledge to a project with far-reaching impact, offering a gateway to public digital humanities with a less steep learning curve. Building on lessons learned about scope and timeline, I iterated on the Hypothes.is/TEI workflow in a subsequent advanced undergraduate class. Students continued adding annotations to the text, capitalizing on the unique capacity of digital editions to remain living works-in-progress beyond the limits of a single course or term.*

II.

Our digital edition is a collaboration balanced between two goals in tension: valuing individual contributions and creating a cohesive product. The process of creating pop-up annotations, in particular, prompted reflection on our potential audiences and the needs, expectations, and resources they would bring to their engagement with the text. Mary McAleer Balkun and Diana Hope Polley helpfully summarize the kinds of questions that guided our sense of what an audience-aware, interactive text might look like: "What do those readers need to know? How much information is too much? How can the information best be conveyed?" (40). Determining an audience's needs turned out to be a surprisingly difficult task as many of the annotators had no previous experience with textual commentary. As first-time producers of interactive texts, the individuals in our class primarily contributed annotations in line with their own research interests and intellectual investments—a freedom Burkert was committed to supporting, given the pedagogical aims of the project. The resulting paratext was overwhelmingly concerned with such topics as the history of science, colonialism, food studies, and theological references. While *The Female American* does contain abundant references in these areas, more recent contributors have begun to attend to contexts of greater interest to undergraduates, such as the text's allusions to *Robinson Crusoe* and its links to the writings of Mohegan Minister Samson Occom (1723–92).[11]

Our annotations also demonstrate the way we see the digital text as a living document, intended to be updated by future collaborators for an ever-changing audience. Ideally, we envision the ongoing collaborative efforts of this project to lead to a body of annotations in constant flux, attending to the needs of a mutable readership. Collaborators in Burkert's subsequent classes have continued the project that began in our graduate seminar by reviewing and adding to volume 1; future students may go on to edit and annotate volume 2. In this way, our project is not limited to the first iteration of contributions from individuals in one seminar; rather, we see this project as the beginning of an assemblage of contributions from several voices, present and future. Accordingly, we made the choice as a class to attribute all annotations to a single collective entity, "UOStudStaff," short for "Students and Staff at the University of Oregon." Individuals' roles are

spelled out in greater detail in the "Editorial Statement," but we wished to avoid making the contributions of the annotators more visible than those of the students gathering identifiers for named people and places or encoding the text's structural features in TEI.

The collaborative nature of our project necessitated an ongoing conversation about our individual identities. As we edited and annotated, we considered how this project would reflect our communal knowledge, our individual biases, and our developing awareness of the relationships between narratives of technological progress, racial capitalism, land theft, and environmental devastation through our readings and discussions. As Sharon Block writes,

> Digital humanities' emphases on power dynamics and methodological self-reflection are particularly useful in the context of rethinking traditional imperial and nation-state histories. . . . Through such digitally enabled transformations, students do not just receive and digest information about a historical time and place, they interrogate the ways that scholarly production re-colonizes and re-inscribes global hierarchies. (373)

We recognized a responsibility to resist, rather than to reinscribe, the power dynamics of colonization that this project and course sought to confront. The necessity of collaboration produces a tension between one's values and commitments as a scholar and one's role in a community of practice.

As Ryan Cordell has argued, DH projects are valuable in graduate education, not just as avenues for technical training and professionalization, but also because they teach collaborative modes of work that are essential in many careers and contexts but that still run counter to norms of humanities scholarship:

> Most graduate students . . . are not learning one important outcome of cross-field collaboration we discuss less often as an explicit goal: how to articulate your goals and vision for a project to partners who bring distinct goals and visions, and identify the intersections. DH has been an exception here. Perhaps more than the technical skills DH students learn, they are more likely to learn how to translate their intellectual work and see its value in contexts beyond their own minds.

Cordell notes that collaboration trains us to think more deeply about how our ideas and values intersect with and diverge from those of our collaborators. We agree with this insight, and we add that another form of deep intellectual work enabled by DH's collaborative modes is a probing of one's interdependence with other authors and the situatedness of one's own knowledges.

Burkert: *In planning the course, I grounded my thinking in standpoint theory, a foundational concept in feminist studies of science and technology. Beginning with Donna Haraway's work on "situated knowledges," I centered the course design on questions of epistemology and identity that I hoped would help students think critically and with nuance about historical texts, both as artifacts of their own moment and as actors in ours. I thought, too, that it would allow students space to use these texts as a springboard to metacognitive reflection on questions that are central to understanding one's own role and values as a scholar in an institutional context: how knowledge is created or extracted, how it is authorized and validated, how it circulates, how it is monetized and commodified, how it shapes and is shaped by systems of power. I have found that digital projects can be a powerful site for this kind of exploration because they run counter to the traditional workflows of humanities research and therefore throw into relief all the assumptions, agreements, and apparatuses that smooth the way for "default" modes of humanities knowledge production such as seminar papers and monographs. To create a digital humanities project is to contend with image rights, site hosting arrangements, proprietary software licenses, database subscription agreements, and other instruments that enable and constrain scholarship, often invisibly. It is to see how the sausage gets made. Viewed this way, the digital edition project became less a training ground for early modern literary scholars or for burgeoning digital humanists (although it was that for a few) than a site for hands-on investigation of how power shapes knowledge creation today, as well as how the matrix of knowledge and power within which we operate is grounded*

> *in histories and practices to which we have access through the archives of colonial science. The digital project became a kind of laboratory for testing the value of the strategic presentism manifested by the syllabus.*[12] *It pushed us to ask: How might understanding the history of science and technology and our entanglements with that history make us more skilled critics and ethical users of new technologies in the present?*

Donna Haraway's concept of situated knowledge helped us recognize the mediated and contingent positions we each hold in the world—and the ways these conditions translate to our academic work. We began our discussions about our own situated knowledges on the first day of the seminar with Haraway's influential critique of "the God trick" in scientific discourse: the illusion of objectivity available to those whose identity is perceived as "neutral," while knowledges grounded in identities and experiences outside a narrow, privileged band are deemed "partial," "interested," or "subjective." Then, we triangulated Haraway's work with Eugenia Zuroski's essay, "'Where Do You Know From?': An Exercise in Placing Ourselves Together in the Classroom." Building on the work of Katherine McKittrick and Minelle Mahtani, Zuroski calls on graduate faculty to foreground questions of epistemology as a central part of feminist and anti-racist teaching praxis.[13] By answering this question, we identified *all* of our perspectives as partial. As a conversation starter, "where do you know from?" reframes the ubiquitous first-day icebreaker "where are you from?"—a charged question about identity and origins. The question invites students to challenge the convention of "separating who we *are* from the question of what we know." Zuroski argues, "Academic intellectual authority—what we think it looks, sounds, and feels like; where we think it comes from—is precisely the problem, the structure that perpetuates imperialism in our spaces of learning and intellectual engagement." Zuroski—a scholar who self-identifies as mixed-race—reflects on the shift in perspective this reframing entails:

> As someone who has been asked where I 'am from' more times than I could possibly count, I know from experience how inadequate that framework is for situating me as a participant in intellectual communities. The question of how I would trace the genealogy of my

knowledge and my intellectual commitments strikes me as a more effective way of placing myself in the room, in the group, and in the conversation.

Asking students to account for their influences, discourse communities, and motivations in this way, then, explicitly values the multiple, situated knowledges they bring to bear on their academic work. We were invited to pause at this question and to locate something about our being in the world that transcends how we wish to be seen in an academic context—the underlying knowledges that, in turn, shape our academic engagement.

Olivar: *No student expects their epistemology to be challenged on "syllabus day," the first meeting of a class that will set the conversational tone for the rest of the term. Personal introductions in a typical graduate-level literature seminar usually limit each person's responses to a list of categories: name and gender pronouns, research interests and department, year in degree program. And yet, on the first day of our seminar on eighteenth-century literature, our instructor departed from this convention by asking us to respond to Dr. Zuroski's question: Where do you know from?*

For me, the question concerning my identity, discourse communities, and related intellectual commitments required reflection on matters that preceded my own personal choices. I was hesitant to give my response to a room full of unfamiliar individuals from various intellectual backgrounds. For one thing, the question felt unanswerable—how could anybody truly name the multiplicity of influences that structure their knowing? I approached answering the question by thinking about the communities in which I have existed, especially those of my youth. I started with my emplacement, the foundations for which I had no say—where I was born, my cultural heritage, the spiritual practices of my family—before I gave thought to the university context that shaped my knowledge as an adult. In other words, I started with where I am literally from before I could trace my intellectual genealogy. I wrestled with the sense that anything I said was

an act of oversharing. I did not want to be exposed as a first-generation college graduate from a Mexican Catholic and white evangelical family.

The question felt more like a threat than an invitation. Divulging my answers without a sense of community belonging posed a risk of alienation. In other words, the question demanded that I reject a myth of academic distance while it invited into the classroom an ethos against pretending to be disinterested observers of phenomena. We were not just brains without personal histories; and we acknowledged, together, that our histories, combined with our research interests, informed the scholarship we produced. The question produced in me a sense of vulnerability in having to peel back my attempts at a professional, academic persona and reveal the concealed aspects of my identity I reserve for more familiar peers.

Starting with a vulnerability-producing question invited in a spirit of awareness toward the social foundations that inevitably shape our scholarship. For this reason, we were able to bring to the class our unique areas of knowledge and apply them to our contributions on our digital project. I was responsible for the biblical annotations, including the transcription of and notes on the novel's Greek sentences. The exercise in identifying our situated knowledge gave me confidence to believe that my ability to sniff out biblical and theological references—even when they are not the most obvious—was worthy of an academic project. My sensitivity to catch biblical allusions is like that of a freshman who hears naughty puns where, sometimes, there are none intended. I was initially hesitant to admit this because the ability sounds so old-fashioned; however, in recent years, I became aware that my peers do not usually have the religious context needed to sense the significance of a word or turn of phrase that nudges to a Christian reference. Such "old-fashioned" knowledge, it turns out, significantly illuminates an eighteenth-century text such as The Female American. *I wanted future readers to share in the delight*

of catching a point of theological nuance and attempted to reflect this intention in my annotations. I will admit now that I was overzealous, straying at times from explanation and leaning too far into interpretation. Even though I anticipate that many of my annotations will be condensed or removed by future collaborators, I learned valuable lessons regarding the process of generating contextual annotations. The greatest lesson I learned, however, is that the theological foundation of "where I know from" gives me a rich source of knowledge that both confirms my intellectual stakes and offers productive contributions to an academic context.

III.

Starting the course with the question "Where do you know from?" we extended our discussions about acknowledging intellectual debts and positionality in conversation with another essay by Zuroski, "Academic Land Acknowledgment for Settler Scholars." We were further inspired by the "virtual land acknowledgment" for the electronic performance piece *Antidote* (2021), which recognizes the obfuscated material entanglements of supposedly virtual spaces (Hemmings et al.). Our early discussion of land acknowledgments and land-back initiatives with guest lecturer and activist-artist Amber Starks (Muskogee/Creek) prompted us to think about the ethics of our digital edition in relation to our university and the land it occupies, as well as the lands mentioned in the text of *The Female American*. These reflections were framed by but ultimately exceeded the intentional design of the class. We explored the relationships different students had to each of these lands as Indigenous people, guests, and settlers. We also discussed the ongoing colonialism of digital structures and practices, including the use of Name Authority Files that reproduce settler taxonomies of place and the ecological impacts of server farms and rare earth mineral extraction. We reckoned with these issues through a term-length interrogation of the genre of the land acknowledgment and its adaptability to collaborative digital projects, given the multiplicity of actors and the various physical and virtual sites involved in such projects. Grappling with this vast array of stakeholders and sustaining lands, we found ourselves staring at a blank document week after week.

Individual thought on land acknowledgments requires personal stakes and vulnerability, but the creation of a group land acknowledgment requires curation and consensus. This small but vital part of the DH project exemplified the larger tension we were experiencing between our individual goals and contributions and the need for a cohesive collective vision.

Combs: *In "Academic Land Acknowledgment for Settler Scholars," Zuroski asks settler scholars to consider several key questions: "Where am I right now, and with whom? How have we come to be here, and for what purpose?" Zuroski's work acted as an influential entry point for me to the ethics and practices around settler land acknowledgment as well as the larger issues around colonization that our class examined. As we note above, our class made several attempts during the term to craft a land acknowledgment. While we agreed that an acknowledgment was a necessary part of our philosophy of attribution for all involved in the project, the practice itself presented a challenge. Zuroski writes that, for settlers, "[f]eeling ill at ease is central to the work," and I can certainly admit to feeling uneasy as silence settled over our classroom ("Academic Land Acknowledgment"). I had not heard of land acknowledgments before entering graduate school, and I was uncertain of where to begin.*

Reading Zuroski emphasized the significance of personally investing in an acknowledgment and not simply repeating verbatim the template acknowledgments often produced by universities. The multiplicity of relations present in our class required us to work both separately and collaboratively to craft something that felt authentic and comprehensive. To try to answer Zuroski's questions, I currently occupy the traditional homelands of the Kalapuya peoples, and during Burkert's class, I shared that space with other uninvited settler students as well as those who identify as Black and Indigenous kin. I have access to the institution and its resources as a PhD student, a position of privilege that has allowed me to pursue my educational goals. I am also a first-generation college student who grew up in a

conservative household, and so I return to Zuroski's arguments (and our class discussions) frequently to remind myself to accept discomfort as a necessary part of my academic and personal growth.

Cain: *I received my BA in English from Southern Oregon University in 2006. At that time, and in that place, it still felt very much like we were doing the work of recovering women's contributions to literature, albeit white, middle-class women's contributions. In 2022, I recognized topics of Indigeneity and colonization as gaps in my education. The first time I encountered a land acknowledgment was in my first graduate seminar in 2020. It is uncomfortable to admit that, at the time, it felt revolutionary. It felt like a way of "doing justice," a practical and concrete exercise amidst so much high theory, out of which I longed for someone to just give me something I could do to make the injustice around me better. It is uncomfortable to admit that as well, and it probably tells a reader all they need to know about the subject position which I inhabit. So, while the idea that land acknowledgments are not a substitute for actually giving land back felt true and right, it was a concept, for me, that washed away the comforting concreteness of acknowledging my presence on someone else's land and going on about my day. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang write in "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," "We wonder whether another settler move to innocence is to focus on decolonizing the mind, or the cultivation of critical consciousness, as if it were the sole activity of decolonization; to allow conscientization to stand in for the more uncomfortable task of relinquishing stolen land" (19).*[14] *And here is where I feel compelled to color in the details of my subject position. I am the first person in my family to go to college. I am also the first person in my family to buy a home. And I am not giving it back. It is a credit to Burkert and to my amazingly warm and kind fellow graduate students that I felt comfortable enough to say this during one of many class discussions about land acknowledgments. Because, if I am to acknowledge that I*

> *agree that the land should be given back, and also that I am not giving my land back, is not any contribution on my part to craft a land acknowledgment disingenuous, at best, or at worst, furthering the violence of colonization?*

The following is the land acknowledgment that we ultimately published in our "Editorial Statements," which is accessible through a tab in the header section of our edition:

> As editors, we occupy different positions with respect to the ongoing processes of colonialism and settler colonialism in which *The Female American* participates. Dr. Zoe Todd (Métis nation) writes that non-Indigenous folks tend to appreciate Indigenous scholarship but "balk at addressing specific Indigenous societies whose homeland they occupy" (@ZoeSTodd).[15] While land acknowledgments will not rectify the historical or contemporary violence affecting Indigenous communities, this statement attempts to acknowledge some of the specific Indigenous societies and homelands with which we and this edition are entangled.
>
> We, the editors, identify individually as both uninvited settlers on Indigenous land and as Black and Indigenous kin—that is, people related to or in relation with Indigenous communities. As Indigenous and Black kin, we acknowledge our feelings of conflict in publishing a text that reproduces harmful representations of Indigeneity, minimizes the presence of Indigenous people, and potentially furthers a reading of colonialism that undermines the violence of its reality against Black and Indigenous bodies. As settlers, we recognize that ideas of Indigeneity represented in *The Female American* reproduce stereotypes, inaccuracies, and literary violence. We acknowledge that the land we currently occupy is the homeland of the Kalapuya people, and that we are individually indebted to myriad other Indigenous lands and peoples.[16] We recognize that we produced this edition using resources and knowledges available to us through our affiliation with the University of Oregon, an institution complicit in the ongoing settler-colonial project.[17] We acknowledge our responsibility to support equity movements like Water for Warm Springs until this land is returned to its rightful inhabitants.[18]

The Female American begins with the history of the seventeenth-century English arrival in Tsenacomoco, the homeland of the Powhatan Chiefdom. This settlement, which was called Jamestown, is today a cultural heritage site in the greater Williamsburg, Virginia, area. Many Indigenous peoples hold ancestral and present-day relationships to this land, including the Cheroenhaka (Nottoway), Chickahominy, Eastern Chickahominy, Mattaponi, Monacan, Nansemond, Nottoway, Pamunkey, Patawomeck, Upper Mattaponi, and Rappahannock. Indeed, this edition is hosted at the University of Virginia, using servers sited on and powered by plants operated on Monacan lands. At the time of this writing, the Monacan Indian Nation is fighting to save their historical capital Rassawek from further incursion from the state of Virginia, which plans to build a water pumping station over it. Readers can learn more about the effort to Save Rassawek and to join in the effort to stop it at the Monacan Nation website.[19]

We recognize the technological infrastructure that has allowed us to create this digital edition, including the extraction of rare earth minerals and human labor to produce electronic devices and the use of fossil fuels to power those devices. We encourage readers to account for the material conditions of their access to this edition as a site of entanglement with and indebtedness to Indigenous communities whose stewardship of the land stretches back to times immemorial and persists to this day.

IV.

To write an editorial acknowledgment statement is essentially to ask: Where does our *edition* know from? To whom do we owe thanks for inspiring and enabling our shared work? What intellectual genealogies and material histories shape our efforts, and how? In researching and writing this essay, we began to unpack one of these inherited legacies: our received notion of *The Female American* as a "lost" work that was "recovered" in the 1990s and early 2000s. In fact, this framework of loss and rediscovery is present in the framing of the novel itself. An advertisement that appears between the title page and the first chapter offers a tantalizing bit of non-information about the text's provenance:

> THE following extraordinary History will prove either acceptable or not to the reader; in either case, it ought to be a matter of indifference to him from what quarter, or by what means, he receives it. But if curiosity demands a satisfaction of this kind, all that he can receive is only this, that I found it among the papers of my late father.
>
> Upon a perusal of it, I found it both pleasing and instructive, not unworthy of the most sensible reader; highly fit to be perused by the youth of both sexes, as a rational, moral entertainment; and, as such, I doubt not, but that it will descend to late posterity, when, most of its contemporaries, founded only in fiction, will have been long forgotten.
>
> The EDITOR.

While conventional, this editorial note sets forth the basic premises that continue to condition our reception of the text: After a period of obscurity, the text has been recovered, but the gap of time renders the full history of its origin and transmission irrecoverable. We believe, on some level, that the textual artifact should speak for itself regardless of its origin; "it ought to be a matter of indifference" how we came to encounter the text. Despite our sense that we "ought" not to care, our "curiosity demands a satisfaction" as to the text's authorship; despite our best efforts, we find it difficult to bracket the question of the text's origin. Finally, the fact of the text's survival gives evidence of its quality and/or veracity and therefore, in circular fashion, proves that it merited recovery in the first place. In short, this preface both disciplines and titillates, provoking desire for knowledge of the text's origins by insisting that we suppress that desire. It furthermore engineers a transference of that frustrated desire from the unknowable author onto a new origin story with more clearly discernible agents: the parties responsible for recovering and recirculating the text.

Yet these narratives position recovery as a singular instance of heroic individual effort, rather than as an ongoing collaborative and accretive process. As Rochelle Raineri Zuck has recently shown, the critical preoccupation with who wrote *The Female American* has effectively eclipsed inquiry into its publication history—a history that belies the notion of this book as a little-read, obscure work that largely escaped notice before the late twentieth century. Zuck systematically reviews advertisements and catalogs for circulating

libraries of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, demonstrating that "*The Female American* circulated much more widely and for a longer period of time than has been commonly understood" ("Who?" 662). Furthermore, the novel's clear association with circulating libraries—private businesses that rented books for profit—strongly suggests that it was written expressly for this market at the behest of publishers John and Francis Noble, and that readers would have understood it in this context rather than viewing it as the original work of an Indigenous woman (663).

Zuck's careful bibliographic work makes it clear that readers could have received *The Female American* as the product, not of a single author, but rather of a system more akin to Motown's hit factories or today's digital content farms. Like new media technologies, circulating libraries prompted moral panic over the ways they expanded access to cultural materials and over their tendency to flaunt the market-driven, collaborative nature of all creative work—a reality that is at least partially repressed when an identifiable, proprietary author is named. As a text circulated predominantly through libraries, *The Female American* would have been read mainly by non-elite readers for whom a library membership was more accessible than purchasing new books on a regular basis.

Its connection with the circulating libraries also helps to explain why relatively few copies of the book survive and, therefore, why it had become a relatively inaccessible text by the twentieth century. The book's "recovery" by feminists of the 1990s and early 2000s, combined with its availability to more scholars through databases such as *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, was intuitively perceived by many critics as a moment of rediscovery. Yet, as Paul Fyfe points out, "our justifiable enthusiasm for linking past and present has effectively erased the interval between—the twentieth-century transmission histories that established the parameters for scholarly resources in digital forms. New media is always in the process of constituting itself as new, erasing the legacies of its entanglements and the continuous work of its propagation" (546).[20] Fyfe's work draws attention to the significant role that midcentury microfilming initiatives played in laying the groundwork for the subsequent database publishing boom. The tendency to forget about these microfilm efforts further obscures the collaborative archival, scholarly, and technical labor of the people (most of them women) who scanned and cataloged these items.[21]

The Female American appears to have been microfilmed by the late 1960s. Reprint editions appeared in 1970 and 1974 as part of two reprint series from Gregg and Garland. Both of these reprints are based on scans of the first edition (London, 1767) (Suarez). The 1814 American edition of the book (published in Vergennes, Vermont) was photographed in 1975 and included in the "History of Women" microfilm collection (1983), which is now part of the "Women and Transatlantic Networks" hub of Gale's *Nineteenth-Century Collections Online*. At the turn of the twenty-first century, discussions of *The Female American* featured in Roxann Wheeler's landmark monograph *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* and in Betty Joseph's article in the pages of flagship journal *Criticism*, signaling the growing scholarly interest in the text.[22] Michele Burnham's Broadview critical edition (2001) further expanded access to the text, as did the text's release as part of *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*, contributing to a still larger increase in published scholarship on the novel in the ensuing two decades.

Ultimately, Zuck reframes the question "Who wrote *The Female American*?" by orienting us toward the collaborative processes and publishing structures that produced *The Female American* instead of by proposing a specific author. Yet even Zuck identifies a heroic solo agent in this history, describing *The Female American* as having been "recovered by Michelle Burnham in 2001" (661). We seek to resist this urge, deliberately acknowledging our *Literature in Context* edition as collaborative in the broadest sense: not only coedited in community with one another but also dependent on untold other agents of textual production, commentary, and remediation, past and present. Like the Noble Brothers' circulating library and associated publishing arm, our digital edition leverages collaborative modes of textual production to quickly create something and make it available to readers who may not otherwise be able to buy their own copy. In addition to the digital edition, our course brought *The Female American* into a new material space: an online audiobook.

Gekiere: *As one of the students who developed the audiobook, I believe that the structure of the course, focusing on a public-facing and actionable project, inspired the audiobook as a natural, yet unanticipated, offshoot of the main project. In addition to developing collaborative skills and digital*

capabilities, well-integrated digital projects not only prepare students to recognize opportunities for similar projects as they arise but also give them the confidence and space to act on such opportunities. While reading other texts early in the course, I frequently used audiobooks as a supplement to traditional reading. Listening to Robinson Crusoe *one evening instead of visually reading it brought me several insights, both about the specific sections of the text (which I interpreted and analyzed differently through the different material engagement with the text) and with the concept of audiobooks as a resource for classroom use.*

However, as I found the next week, The Female American *was not available for listening through either screen reader (which would require the very digital text we were in the process of producing) or audiobook forms. Already thinking in the mode of public digital humanities projects, I brought the idea of creating an audiobook version of* The Female American *to our class. Other students quickly joined the project to create a freely accessible LibriVox audiobook version of* The Female American, Volumes 1 and 2, *alongside the annotated digital edition. This audiobook sought to further expand access to the text, this time not only abstracting it from the physical page but also freeing it from the impersonal and mechanical screen readers that are commonly available for digital texts, ultimately expanding access for more people to engage with the text and echoing the advocacy of work in disabilities studies (Dali and Brochu; Lundh).*

The process of recording, editing, and digitally publishing an audiobook was an engaging experience that required the development of several technical and artistic skills. Beyond technical skill development, the creation of the audiobook demanded an investigation into the nature of a text, and, in particular, the nature of a text for academic study, as it was both expanded and constrained by the material conditions of its new format. While our general goal was to increase access to The Female American *for student purposes, the audiobook challenged us to consider wider audiences, with*

different goals and expectations. Paratextual elements such as footnotes and other annotations are notoriously challenging to integrate into audiobook format and did not serve the goals of a public domain audiobook edition (Bacaller 36, 38); therefore, the book was presented in only its own words.

In addition, the audiobook project introduced new stakeholders and actors into the creation of the edition, ultimately resulting in more invisible labor. While Nikki Cain, as the voice of Unca Eliza Winkfield, Kathleen Gekiere, as the LibriVox audiobook coordinator, and the experienced LibriVox volunteers J.M. Smallheer and Larry Wilson, who provided valuable guidance and advice, are listed as contributors on LibriVox, other valuable team members are, without acknowledgment, made invisible. Yet the audiobook could not exist without this invisible labor. Recording itself was dependent upon Kimberly Olivar, who developed an intricate understanding of the spaces, equipment, and conditions of access available within the university. Thwarted by infrequent training opportunities and limited availability of university sound booth resources, Olivar built a sound booth out of books, personally sourced a microphone, and has since documented the experience for people working to fund additional resources and spaces for students. Additionally, she researched audio-engineering techniques to improve low-quality recordings and wrote the post-production guide to maintain consistency across several audio tracks. Using this guide, Josiah Basaldua listened to our raw recordings and edited the tracks into a high-quality audiobook. Without Basaldua's arduous editorial work, our audiobook would be full of buzzes, coughs, interruptions of laughter, and long pauses. In acknowledging all the labor that accompanied this project, I seek to further bring our critique of single authorhood into practice.

Like the audiobook, our *Literature in Context* edition of *The Female American* came into existence through collaboration and multiple authorhood scaffolded by invisible labor throughout its history, from the initial

publication of *The Female American* to our work today. Within our classroom, multiple forms of invisible labor emerged, including that of other students and guest lecturers whose thinking and writing were central to our own evolving understandings of these issues. They are all our collaborators.

Invisibility, however, ultimately depends upon viewpoint. As we engaged with texts that participated in establishing the legacy of settler colonialism and dispossession, we consciously acknowledged the collaborative nature of our learning and fought the dispossession of ideas through a collective memory project. In addition to *The Female American* digital edition, we produced another collaborative digital project: a course blog containing both reading responses intended to spark in-class discussion and detailed reports of the resulting conversations.[23] This blog was a key source for us in writing this article in ways that are not fully expressed by our citations and footnotes. We deliberately name the work here as a form of archival work and memory work, both forms of labor that are historically feminized, devalued, and rendered invisible. The frustrated pursuit of a complete accounting of our debts echoes the struggles recounted above to formulate an adequate land acknowledgment for our project. Collaboration proliferates relations and, with them, a unique richness of thought. Approached with intention, digital projects are uniquely suited to benefit from this richness while acknowledging the complexities of collaborative labor.

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NOTES

1. For more on Robinsonades, see the digital collection *Baldwin Library: Robinson Crusoe and the Robinsonades*.

2. See Bowen, McMurran, Reilly, Stevens, and Vaccaro. Following the release of the second Broadview edition in 2014 (edited by Burnham and Freitas), scholarly interest has continued to grow; see, for example, Abbé, Barnett-Woods, Chloe Wigston Smith, and Zuck; chapters by MacNeil and Zuck in editors Balkun and Imbarrato's collection *Women's Narratives of the Early Americas* (2016); and articles by Barnett-Woods, Beebe, Conway, Kvande, O'Malley, Simon, and Weise in editors Collins-Frohlich and MacNeil's special issue of *Women's Studies* (2016).

3. In looking for resources to inform our own practices in this project, we turned to Balkun and Polley's "Going Digital," which details the creation of another digital critical edition in collaboration with students. For further examples of work performing this vital service, see Battershill and Ross's *Using Digital Humanities in the Classroom* and Davis et al.'s *Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities*, a collection that is part of the *MLA Humanities Commons*.

4. In crafting this fluctuation between collective and individual voices, we draw from examples of collaborative scholarly writing by Franze et al., Gee and Wood, and Draxler and Spratt.

5. We wish to extend our gratitude to Tonya Howe and to the *Literature in Context* team for their continued support of this project and their work to maintain and sustain the edition.

6. On the offshore outsourcing of this labor, see Burkert, Fyfe, Mak, and Gregg.

7. TypeWright (18thconnect.org/typewright/) is hosted by 18thConnect, an aggregator of digital scholarly resources directed at Auburn University.

8. These permissions were granted according to contracts between the TypeWright team and Gale, the publisher of ECCO.

9. "The Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) is a consortium which collectively develops and maintains a standard for the representation of texts in digital form. Its chief deliverable is a set of Guidelines which specify encoding methods for machine-readable texts, chiefly in the humanities, social sciences and linguistics. Since 1994, the TEI Guidelines have been widely used by libraries, museums, publishers, and individual scholars to present texts for online research, teaching, and preservation" (TEI Consortium, tei-c.org).

10. The risk of unexpected workload may be particularly high for contingent or untenured faculty who are professionally incentivized to innovate in their classrooms and who are especially vulnerable to negative evaluations from students who have a frustrating or dissatisfying experience with a digital project.

11. On links between Winkfield and Occom, see Stevens ("Reading" and *The Poor Indians*), Bannet (ch. 7 of *Transatlantic Stories*), and Vaccaro. On the digitization and repatriation of Occom's papers, see Schweitzer and Henry.

12. On strategic presentism, see Coombs and Coriale.

13. On the question of "where we know from," see McKittrick 108.

14. For a more recent commentary on this influential work, see Garba and Sorentino.

15. In the published editorial statement online, this sentence contains a link to the quoted tweet, which has since been deleted and is discoverable through *The Internet Archive*.

16. This sentence contains links to "Indigenous UO," "Honoring Native People and Lands," and *Native Land*.

17. This sentence contains a link to Rambo, "University of Oregon Ignored Calls."

18. This sentence contains links to the *LANDBACK* "Manifesto" and Bakall, "The Chúush Fund: Water for Warm Springs."

19. This sentence contains links to the "Save Rassawek" campaign and the Monacan Indian Nation's website.

20. For further considerations of the invisibly layered reality of digitization, see Mak and Chun.

21. For more on feminist labor, recovery, and practice in archival and scholarly work, see Ozment and Wilson et al.

22. Wheeler cites the 1767 London edition, while Joseph cites the 1814 Vergennes, Vermont, edition.

23. The design of these assignments was inspired by the graduate pedagogy of Michael Witmore, who was one of Burkert's teachers during their doctoral training.

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