

**GINA LURIA WALER**

**‘Women’s History: Galvanizing Marginality’**

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**For further information, please consult:**

**[walkerg@newschool.edu](mailto:walkerg@newschool.edu)**

**Consult also three associated essays in same volume, *Section II: Gender:*  
**Penelope J. Corfield,**  
***‘Enlightenment Gender, Womanhood, Manhood, Sexualities and Personhood:  
A Thematic Overview’* (pp. 89-105),**  
**also attached within this website as [Corfieldpdf55](#);**  
**Philip Carter,**  
***‘Masculinity: Towards Experience and Embodiment’* (pp. 123-38)**  
**see also <https://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/9276>;**  
**Julie Peakman,**  
***‘Understanding Eighteenth-Century Sexualities’* (pp. 139-54)**  
**see also [www.juliepeakman.co.uk](http://www.juliepeakman.co.uk).****

Patient scholars who toil in the often-unfurrowed fields of Women’s History frequently experience the « galvanizing marginality » that the feminist pioneer Catharine Stimpson described in 1978. This essay reflects upon the past lack of attention – exploring both the general conspectus and a range of specific cases – to argue that, in today’s cultural moment such marginality might soon be remedied, even erased. Suddenly, it seems, Female Content is Queen. Films like *Hidden Figures* (the American 2016 biopic), plus women in NASA Lego sets, novels,

plays, video games now abound, as do efforts to highlight the phenomenon of *Forgotten Women*. There are even Barbie Dolls called « Heroes ». And these toys are so named, the Mattel Corporation says, « to honor real women who have broken boundaries in their fields<sup>1</sup> ». Such developments hold out hope for raising girls' self-esteem and changing both the external and internalized obstacles to female fulfillment presented by historical misogyny<sup>2</sup>.

This is encouraging. But social change requires more than just commercial products. It demands recognition of how little we know about women, past or present. It also demands new knowledge-ordering systems. (This phrase follows Jason König's definition: « Knowledge-ordering systems structure our sense of the external world, and are, themselves, in fact, underpinned by deeply rooted ideological assumptions about what is to be valued most in human culture and in the natural world, and about how different parts of the universe of human knowledge interconnect with each other »<sup>3</sup>. Women need to become a fully inclusive story of the past from which they have too long been excluded. In that way, knowledge systems will be made whole.

Previously unknown or under-appreciated woman who have excelled « beyond their sex », often appear to emerge from the mists of time. Records relating to their deeds survive in ragged archives, conveying no obvious interpretative contexts. The lives of these unknown women were never part of the sanctioned cultures of teaching and learning, constructed by, for, and mainly about men. Therefore fresh approaches are required, not only to recover but also to preserve a lost past.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://news.mattel.com/news/barbie-r-honors-global-role-models-on-international-women-s-day>.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/03/08/how-low-self-esteem-is-killing-girls-academic-success-around-the-world/?hpid=hp\\_hp-top-table-main-self-esteem%3Ahow-low-self-esteem-is-killing-girls-academic-success-around-the-world%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm\\_term=.b718ed0b5cb9](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/03/08/how-low-self-esteem-is-killing-girls-academic-success-around-the-world/?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-self-esteem%3Ahow-low-self-esteem-is-killing-girls-academic-success-around-the-world%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm_term=.b718ed0b5cb9); <http://psycnet.apa.org/record/2017-6143001> ; <https://www.mother.ly/life/harvard-girl-leaders-gender-biases-are-we-hurting-our-daughters>; <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/11/read-like-a-girl-how-childrens-books-of-female-stories-are-booming>.

<sup>3</sup> The term is used following KÖNIG, J., « Re-Reading Pollux: Encyclopaedic Structure and Athletic Culture in *Onomasticon* Book 3 », *Classical Quarterly*, 66, 2016, p. 303.

Questions to ask include whether these forgotten *bas bleus* were associated with this or that man and his male circle? Was the new knowledge that they produced part of a clear lineage, perhaps reaching back to the ancient roots of Western civilization? Or were they originals, who cannot easily be explained? To confront such issues, scholars have the time-honored techniques of historical inquiry and, with them, new technologies. They bring encouragement, both for their capacities and for their (at least hitherto) lack of ideological and gendered biases, unlike the conventions and assumptions of the traditional Republic of Letters. The great challenge of feminist recovery is thus to incorporate women into the narrative of the human past, which is still dominated by masculinist assumptions. The work is time-consuming; and needs constant repetition. As Cheryl A. Wilson has remarked: « We are never truly “beyond” recovery in our scholarship or in our goals<sup>4</sup>. »

### *2.1 Inventing women's history*

Soon after the National Women's Studies Association was formed in 1976, Catharine R. Stimpson, Louise A. Tilly, Rayna Rapp, Mary Edwards, Ellen Morgan, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Rachel Maines reported on the status of Women's Studies. On their behalf, Stimpson enumerated the promise and problems of the enterprise. « Despite the marginality, » she wrote, « the galvanizing quality of women's studies—the energy and creativity—is vitally apparent to those of us who believe in them. We need no longer call for a feminist sociology, or for a feminist criticism, or for a women's history. Their beginnings

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<sup>4</sup> WILSON, Cheryl A. « “Something like mine”: Catherine Hutton, Jane Austen, and Feminist Recovery Work, *The Eighteenth Century*, 56.2, Summer 2015, p. 151-16.

are there. Ironically, even people in women's studies may not always appreciate the quantity and quality of work that has been done and that is being done<sup>5</sup>. »

Stimpson outlined the multiple initiatives that Women's Studies would necessarily entail, and stressed the centrality of a feminist vision of history, characterized by an « implicit sense of history as a process of change; as a series of phenomena in which beginnings may resemble and generate, but only resemble and generate, middles and ends. ... The belief in the plausibility of change underpins the efforts to bring about change. »

Forty years ago, Stimpson described the budding international reach of feminist inquiry. She concluded with a visionary prediction: « we believe that we are doing something fresh, and in the company of others. We have escaped both ennui and isolation, which, we are told, haunt the modern intellectual and scholar. This happy flight, as we fight against our marginality, is a source of our galvanizing strength<sup>6</sup>. »

My own contribution to feminist historical recovery sprang from my research into Mary Hays, a forgotten and provocative *femme philosophe* in the circle of radicals around Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. Hays was dubbed by Coleridge as « A Thing, ugly and petticoated<sup>7</sup> ». And she was the one « English Jacobin » woman for whom no portrait exists. But years of searching led to the publication in 2005 of *Mary Hays, 1759–1843: The Growth of A Woman's Mind*. The subtitle was drawn from William Wordsworth's oracular epic, *The Prelude: Or, the Growth of a Poet's Mind* (1850) in an effort to signal how complicated it was to recover and calibrate Hays's intellectual evolution<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> STIMPSON, Catharine R., The University of Michigan papers in women's studies: *Women's Studies: An Overview*, p. 14-26, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.acp0359.0003.001:03>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> COLERIDGE E. H. ed., *Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1895, Vol. 1, p. 323.

<sup>8</sup> WALKER Gina Luria, « I Sought & Made to Myself an Extraordinary Destiny, » *Women's Writing*, Special Issue on Female Biography, 25.2, 2018, p. 124-149; published online: 18 Oct 2017.

The quest further led to the discovery of countless other « forgotten » female authors. Their works have now been recovered in the first facsimile reprint series about women for Garland Publishing, entitled *The Feminist Controversy in England, 1788–1810*.<sup>9</sup> It incorporates 44 works, with fresh introductions, in 89 volumes, introducing a multitude of « new » female authors and their texts. This research into Mary Hays and her peers led me to question the structural forces that keep women out of history and that still endure.

## 2.2 Moving targets

Issues relating to « Enlightenment » and its future prospects for women have always been moving targets. A recent example of this dynamic of feminist historical recovery concerns *L'Éncyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert. The assumption had been that there were no women contributors to the *Éncyclopédie*. In September 2015, the Voltaire Foundation posted a report by Glenn Roe entitled, « Émilie du [sic] Châtelet, forgotten encyclopédiste? » Roe revealed the likelihood that the great *Éncyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert included entries based on work previously published by Du Châtelet, but without attribution. Advanced technology had enabled Roe to make this hypothesis. He « deployed a new computational method developed in the field of Digital Humanities that compares the entire text of the *Éncyclopédie* with a version of [Du Châtelet's] *Institutions de physique* (Paris, 1740) taken from the BnF's Gallica digital library<sup>10</sup>. »

Roe's findings led him to the hypothesis that « lost, perhaps, in the midst of these conversations for and against the metaphysical systems of Gottfried Leibniz and Christian Wolff is the active role that Madame Du Châtelet played in their

<sup>9</sup> LURIA Gina, ed., *The Feminist Controversy in England, 1788–1810*, New York, Garland, 1974, t.44.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.voltaire.ox.ac.uk/news/blog/emilie-du-chatelet-forgotten-encyclopediste>. Roe's research was later published as « A Sheep in Wolff's Clothing: Émilie du Châtelet and the *Encyclopédie* », *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 51, 2017, p. 179-196.

elaboration over the entirety of the *Éncyclopédie*<sup>11</sup>. » Her *Institutions de physique* was much more than a mere source. Instead, the clear and concise crystallizations of Wolff and Leibniz, which Diderot and d’Alembert sought to combat, often came directly from the *Institutions de physique* and only secondarily, if at all, from derivative works by other scholars such as Johann Heinrich Samuel Formey.

Roe intended the blog post « as a first step in this process of recalibration, and as a testament to the growing recognition of Madame Du Châtelet’s importance to both the encyclopedic enterprise and the intellectual history of the eighteenth century<sup>12</sup>. » She had helped to frame those big questions concerning the nature of knowledge, the limits of human intellect, and the workings of the universe that the *Éncyclopédie* itself tried to answer.

Roe concluded his thrilling discovery with the comment: « It is perhaps time then, given the above findings, to more fully acknowledge Du Châtelet’s important role as a posthumous and often unnamed contributor to the *Éncyclopédie*. If, however, some among us are still not quite ready to grant Émilie Du Châtelet full status as an encyclopédiste, then, as a matter of principle, we need to be sure that she is at least a part of the conversation<sup>13</sup>. »

But, yes and no. The recovery of a female thinker’s epistemological authority is very welcome. Roe’s breakthrough was overdue, and yet disheartening. His results augment what scholars Judith Zinsser and Isabelle Bour have long sought to demonstrate in their meticulous translations and commentary on Du Châtelet<sup>14</sup>, and in Zinsser’s biographical studies of Du Châtelet’s range and influence<sup>15</sup>. Why do scholars hesitate to grant Du Châtelet « full status as an encyclopédiste »? What is the principle required to ensure « that she is at least a

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> ROE « A Sheep in Wolff’s Clothing: Émilie Du Châtelet and the *Encyclopédie* », p. 193.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> DU CHÂTELET Emilie, *Selected Philosophical and Scientific Writings*, in ZINSSER J. P., transl. BOUR I. and ZINSSER, J. P., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> ZINSSER, Judith, *Emilie Du Châtelet: Daring Genius of the Enlightenment*, New York, Penguin, 2006.

part of the conversation »? Is it Honesty? Justice? Fair Play? Is the answer as simple as that there is no codified history of women as creators or participants in the making of encyclopedias? That « female encyclopaedism » is a category that Google and Wikipedia do not recognize? Or is even the most well-meaning male scholar at least partially blind to the patriarchy inscribed in knowing (and not-knowing) about women?

Every female thinker who contemplated the best way to produce Women's History shared, with others before her, what Michèle Le Doeuff has described as « women's conditional access to knowledge<sup>16</sup>. » Such thinkers perceived what needed to be done: Christine de Pizan in *The City of Ladies* (1405) conjures a citadel of women, which she and the Ladies Reason, Justice, and Rectitude are imagined as actually building with dirt, water, trowels, and bricks in their hands. De Pizan emphasizes the foundations of knowledge through lineages of named women participants. *The City of Ladies* was widely read. Brian Ansly (d. 1536) produced an English translation of the *Livre de la cité des dames* as *The Booke of the Cyte of Ladyes* in 1521. Nonetheless, « the prologue of this text, composed by printer Henry Pepwell, fails to acknowledge Christine as its original author<sup>17</sup> ». So de Pizan also passed out of historical memory. It was another example of the pattern for later scholars having to reinvent foundations and taxonomies and call forth individual women.

### 2.3 *Flows and ebbs*

The process of feminist recovery itself ebbs and flows. In the second half of the twentieth century it took on new life, promoted by Mary Ritter Beard (1876–1958). Her work elucidated the profound connections between the dynamic of

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<sup>16</sup> LE DOEUFF Michèle, *The Sex of Knowing*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2003, p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> DOWNES Stephanie, « Fashioning Christine de Pizan in Tudor Defences of Women ». *Parergon*, 23.1, 2006, p. 71-92.

unremembered women, the gendering of knowledge, and the male domination of encyclopedic knowers and knowing. Beard was one of the first female American historians (albeit without an advanced degree) whose major work, *The Rise of American Civilization* (2 vols., 1927), was produced in partnership with her husband, Charles Austin Beard (1874-1948). He was one of the most influential historians in the early twentieth century.

As Mary Beard researched in the archives and libraries, she became concerned about the omission of women from standard historical accounts. At the suggestion of Walter Yurst, Chief Editor of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, she convened a team with three other female scholars to produce « A Study of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in Relation to Its Treatment of Women<sup>18</sup>. » The editor assured Beard that improvements would be made in the next edition. In 1942, Beard and her colleagues delivered a 42-page report to the editor after 18 months of work. They made significant recommendations about existing articles, as well as suggestions for new ones. Thus they noted that the *Encyclopedia* treated abortion only as a moral question, while it is also highly relevant to population, political, health, medical, and social issues. Similarly, they noted that the article on education mainly addressed male training; and that there was no article entitled « Queen » and wondered why.

However, no changes were made in the *Encyclopedia's* next edition. Beard was bitterly disappointed and in 1947 she advised that women should no longer write for the *Britannica*<sup>19</sup>.

Beard was seventy when she published *Woman as a Force in History: A Study in Traditions and Realities* (1946). As a practicing historian, she had grown

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<sup>18</sup> LANE Ann J., ed., *Mary Ritter Beard: A Sourcebook*, New York, Feminist Press at City University of New York, 2001, p. 44-49 *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> GAYLE J. K. « The Mannishness of Our Encyclopedias », JAN. 4, 2013: « You may be aware that César A. Hidalgo's M.I.T. research of "the world's most influential people, born before 1950, using data from all language editions of Wikipedia" yields merely only just simply "all men. No women" ».



ever more frustrated by the absence of women in accounts of the past. She observed with irony and conviction: « It is hard to miss woman as a force if one keeps one's eyes open and seeks, in the scientific spirit, the truth about woman as revealed in a documentation as diverse as it is ponderous, if one is not afraid to know her, if one really wants to know her<sup>20</sup>. »

Yet Beard, too, passed out of active memory, like the many figures she sought to recover. At present, she is mostly unremembered, despite being a foremother of the vigorous fields of Women's History, Women's Studies, and Gender History<sup>21</sup>. However, over the past sixty years, things have changed – initially without much fanfare; but now with public awareness.

Beard would have been heartened by the emergence of Women's History in the 1970s. She might also have been concerned by the fissuring of these efforts as described by Penelope Corfield's astute account of the turbulent emergence and evolution from Women's History to Gender History<sup>22</sup>. It was imperative to develop a fully contextualized, and thus more accurate, understanding of lived history, predicated on the view that « the canon » (both of lives and studied texts) must be revised to include gender. Yet that broadening field unlocked its own set of challenges to be addressed, echoing the concerns raised by Mary Ritter Beard and her foremothers.

Details of attested evidence indicating how a woman's thought emerges from the idiosyncratic conditions of her life can make the difference between conjecture and certainty. The larger point is that if women remain studied through the prisms of male knowledge-ordering systems, old inaccuracies will remain

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.marxists.org/archive/beard/woman-force/index.htm>;  
<http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~sch00963>.

<sup>21</sup> LANE Ann J., *Making Women's History: The Essential Mary Ritter Beard*, New York, Feminist Press at CUNY, 1977; <http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/ww/beard.html>; COTT Nancy F., *A Woman Making History: Mary Ritter Beard Through Her Letters*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1991.

<sup>22</sup> CORFIELD Penelope J., « History and the Challenge of Gender History », *Rethinking History*, 1, 1997, p. 241-58.

perpetuated. And history will continue to ignore past female thinkers and actors, and their transformative responses to the obdurate presence of historical misogyny.

The great epistemological question is thus not theoretical but rather commonsensical: what has to be known with certainty in order to understand past women on their own terms? Once reliably known, how do women's contributions change the narrative of the past and women's place in it? Women's history told through the practice of « female biography », although ignored and still an uncomfortable analytical concept, is producing just the paradigm shift for which many have called.

#### **2.4 Female *biography as women's history***

Women have always lived lives which differ from those of their male contemporaries. The biographical approach continues to be viewed as mostly « male », on the model epitomized by Plutarch and other creators of public history. Like the gendering of history, the use of individual and collective biographies of earlier women continues to be divisive.

Why do « female biographies » matter? How do they reshape the historical understanding of individual women, the precise connection of their lives and works, of their Enlightenment activities and struggles? I confronted these questions when leading a collaborative of 200 scholars, writers, and editors to produce the Chawton House Library Edition of Mary Hays's neglected *magnum opus*, *Female Biography: Or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women of All Ages and Countries, Alphabetically Arranged*, in six volumes (1803)<sup>23</sup>. *Female Biography* was the first general history of women since de Pizan's *City of Ladies*: the first in English, and the first compendium of

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<sup>23</sup> *Female Biography: Or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of All Ages and Countries* (1803), in *Chawton House Library Series: Women's Memoirs*, ed. WALKER Gina Luria, *Memoirs of Women Writers Part 2, Part 3*, Pickering & Chatto, 2013, 2014, t. 6.

women by either male or female compilers since Thomas Heywood's *Generall Historie of Women* (1624, 1657) to include rebellious and impious figures.<sup>24</sup>

It was a compelling response to the « great forgetting » of women in traditional histories. Following Pierre Bayle's strategy in his *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697), and complementing its eighteenth-century Dissenting adaptation, the six volumes of the *Biographia Britannica* (1747-66)<sup>25</sup>, Mary Hays discovered, researched, and compiled accounts of some 302 women's lives—the largest number ever assembled. Her feat was prodigious, albeit flawed. It constituted the most comprehensive recovery of the female past to date<sup>26</sup>.

A bold autodidact, Hays contested the masculinist historical record directly. To produce her own, she used two earlier knowledge-ordering systems that coexist uneasily in *Female Biography*. The first was gleaned from learned dictionaries and encyclopedias from which female subjects and authors were mostly excluded. The second model came from the tradition of writings on « female worthies », with roots in classical works and Christian hagiography. Indeed, Philip Hicks argues that: « the discourse of “female worthies” was the prime vehicle for the dramatic growth of women's historical self-knowledge in Britain during the long eighteenth century<sup>27</sup>. »

While researching subjects for her encyclopedia, Hays identified « female biography » as a discrete empirical category of knowledge production. Like any Enlightenment thinker, she deduced that the material demanded a new genus that did not yet exist. Her « invention » of female biography tacitly addressed the

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<sup>24</sup> Another male contribution to this genre came from BALLARD George, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain, who have been Celebrated for their Writings or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts and Sciences*, Oxford, 1752; on which see too BIGOLD Melanie, « “Book-Making Out of the Remains of the Dead”: George Ballard's *Memoirs of Several Ladies* (1752) », *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 38, (Spring 2014), p. 28-4.

<sup>25</sup> Edited by OLDYS, William, with assistance for the last volume from unknown co-editors.

<sup>26</sup> See WALKER Gina Luria, in *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 29, September 2014; SPONGBERG Mary, WALKER Gina Luria and WHIPP Koren, « *Female Biography* and the Digital Turn », *Women's History Review*, p. 705-720, published online: 13 Jul 2016.

<sup>27</sup> HICKS Phillip, « Female Worthies and the Genres of Women's History », in DEW Benjamin and PRICE Fiona, *Historical Writing in Britain, 1688-1830: Visions of History*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 18-33.

reflexive need to insert the adjective « female » in front of a woman's « biography », because biography had long been gendered « male ».

*Female Biography* formed a template of alternative histories and approaches to knowledge, one in which Hays anticipated the late-twentieth-century impulse to reclaim a female intellectual tradition. « Female biography » as category, dictionary, concept and prophecy was intended to establish the assemblage of women Hays had wrested from the archives as a beginning, a placeholder, to secure women on the *human* map of history for posterity.

### 2.5 Female biography as « perfect history »

Hays connected together two strains of historical practice and Enlightenment intellectual history. Firstly, the empiricist « perfect history » of Frances Bacon; and secondly, the intellectual framework of eighteenth-century Rational Dissent, which stressed the role of accurate information in combating popular credulity and superstition. Together these approaches would forge Women's History out of stories about women's lives<sup>28i</sup>.

In *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), Bacon endorsed Aristotle's belief that the events of a certain place, at a specific time, could be accurately inscribed for posterity as « perfect history. » Bacon explained that « such being the workmanship of God... He doth hang the greatest weight upon the smallest wires, MAXIMA È MINIMIS SUSPENDENS ». Hence individual lives, « if they be well written, propounding to themselves a person to represent in whom actions both greater and smaller, public and private, have a commixture, must of necessity contain a more true, native, and lively representation » than the pomp and circumstance of official histories<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> DITCHFIELD G.M., personal email, 27 June 2016. See also HAAKONSSON K., ed., *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

<sup>29</sup> BACON Sir Francis, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. DEVEY Joseph, ed., New York, Collier, 1901, bk 2, ch 6.

Bacon assumed that meaningful « lives » would be mostly those of public men, without considering a broader gender perspective. From Bacon's time onwards, the project of feminist historical recovery demonstrates the difficulties of producing « perfect histories » of female actors. They have counted so little in the grand scheme of public recognition that, as researchers excavate new data about women, singly, in clusters, and in networks, it takes time to piece together alternative histories that complement, critique, and correct conventional ones. Such narratives remind the world that unearthed female intellectuals are not « new », but newly remembered. Therefore, a further challenge is how the work of recovery can make use of shards of information? How do we today collaborate with historical women and their early historians?

The data suggest one particular recurrent pattern: individual women struggled to learn, produced hybrid forms of knowledge, were trivialized, dismissed, or silenced, and, over time, forgotten. How can that state of affairs be rectified? This retrieval is done from archaeological rubble, official chronicles, the public and private accounts of men and women, from rigorous archival research and analysis, and, crucially, from collaborative initiatives in which scholars join together to link discrete information to find a bigger picture

That process has been necessarily and increasingly active on many fronts. Publishers have responded to the production of biographical texts and the appetite for them by focusing on particular historical periods and figures. The marvelous *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (2005), led by Barbara Taylor and Sarah Knott, was produced by 100 scholars from various disciplines and sub-disciplines, countries, languages, and perspectives to provide an enlightened forum for interrogating the great questions. They demonstrated that women and Enlightenment are a process, not one single « finding ».

Yet feminist recovery still battles against the threats of oblivion, neglect, and dismissal. For example, *Women's Writing, 1660–1830: Feminisms and Futures*, edited by Jennie Batchelor and Gillian Dow (2016)<sup>30</sup>, maps « the future of eighteenth-century women's writing and feminist literary history, in an academic culture that is not shy of declaring their obsolescence. »

With strenuous efforts, lives have been resuscitated through individual and collective biographies, intellectual histories, and new considerations of the effects of recovered texts and lives upon the practice of constructing the past itself. As Corfield has reported, every field of investigation has been involved, some with more alacrity, many with less. The unevenness of this evolutionary phase of recovery is leading enterprising researchers to push the disciplinary limits.

## *2.6 Onward*

For the first time in human experience, scholars are now poised to ignite a revolution in knowing about women. The project of feminist historical recovery has produced a critical mass of information about more past women than ever imagined. These figures left evidence of their lives that disappeared, was sometimes resurrected, and then was lost again (and again and again). Knowing is powerful, and women can become more powerful by galvanizing the new knowledge about real women's documented contributions to society; broadcasting the roles which women have always played in human endeavours; and insisting on a central place for women's voices in the world's cultural dialogues.

New narratives of female intellectual and creative evolution are now made possible by this scholarly renaissance. And, crucially, new technology will secure these figures for posterity. With feminist partners and a Scholars Council, plus

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<sup>30</sup> BATCHELOR Jennie and DOW Gillian, eds, *Women's Writing, 1660–1830: Feminisms and Futures*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Design colleagues, and students, I have initiated the « New Historia »<sup>31</sup>, which is dedicated to presenting authoritative, transdisciplinary female biographies that highlight women's ingenious creation of new knowledge-ordering systems. The project simultaneously broadcasts these stories on an interactive, immersive digital platform, using technologies that create new experiences. The outcome will stimulate further discoveries, reveal unimagined taxonomies; and promote another history, which will value the roles women have always played in human endeavours.

The venerable literary canon of male responses to texts by, about, and for men is something to honour, learn from, and preserve. At the same time, feminist scholarship is steadily providing evidence for a gendered remapping to include the multiple contributions of women.

Yet there are further pertinent questions: how can scholars do more than just add women into existing accounts and stir? How can they represent men and women in enlightened exchanges that can be documented? How can narratives about women both be acknowledged as part of History and be remembered as being excluded from History? And how to ensure that what is recovered is never again lost?

New data technologies help to visualize the unforeseen points of convergence between and among recovered figures, and to advance new hypotheses. As new figures are recovered and more information is assembled, we stumble upon the knowledge which women produced that has not yet been calibrated as part of the canonical narratives. Can historians and literary scholars together navigate beyond existing disciplinary routes that keep feminist scholarship and its subjects segregated, and traditional curricula resistant to incorporating

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<sup>31</sup> See <http://www.thenewhistoria.com/>.

them? Can the millennia-old war between the sexes be turned into constructive conversation?

If scholars and society at large can advance our unprecedented moment, it may be hoped that the incessant struggle by, for, and about women to secure their places in posterity will be realized. Instead of having to reinvent the (spinning) wheel once more, the multiple contributions of bustling women, busy as they always have been with their work of many kinds, will become accepted, and we can turn to the great human collaborations this will make possible. Girls and boys may practice « Enlightened sociability » by playing with an Èmilie Du Châtelet Lego Set, in company with her male and female associates. And the mien of a Mary Hays doll will matter less than what children are learning about the importance of her female encyclopedism. Once more ... onward.

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