

Teaching women writers with NEWW Virtual Research Environment

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1. Introduction

The underrepresentation of women in cultural historiography has challenged a number of feminist responses in the form of supplementary female canons since the 1970s. The DARIAH Working Group *Women Writers in History* (<https://www.dariah.eu/activities/working-groups/women-writers-in-history/>) takes this task a step further, and investigates historical sources until 1930 to find out whether female authors were read in the past. The objective of the DARIAH Working Group WWIH is: to carry out research about female authorship in history, the international reception of women's writing and the connections between women authors. Evidence of readership, translations and commentary is contained in the digital repository NEWW VRE (Virtual Research Environment) <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/womenwriters>, which serves as a collaborative research tool for the above mentioned working group.

This tool aims to facilitate research about women's authorship in Europe from the Middle ages until the early 20th century. Data are entered when any proof of reception (comments in press, private letters, translations, adaptations etc.) is found: in other words, when it becomes clear that a woman writer and/or her works were received and read. Although the main focus lies on European women authors, the NEWW VRE also includes information on works and reception created in European colonies, Canada and the United States, due to the mutual cultural exchanges between these regions and Europe. NEWW VRE provides information which is not always easy to find elsewhere; in particular it is presented in a structured way and within a meaningful context. The larger part of the information is open for consultation by everybody: data about women authors, their works and the reception of these works are accessible without a password. The systematic scrutiny of reception data from large-scale sources (library and booksellers' catalogues, the periodical press) forms the basis for the study of women's participation in this process. This includes hyperlinks to online biographies, texts and testimonies of reception (for instance, in the periodical press).

The present version of the NEWW VRE was (and is being) developed by the IT department of the Huygens Institute for the History of the Netherlands thanks to the European HERA project *Travelling Texts 1790-1914* (2013-2016) <http://travellingtexts.huygens.knaw.nl/>. The HERA project had been prepared by a series of earlier digitizing projects (NWO, SURF), projects in international networking (NWO, COST), and in IT development (CLARIN-NL). Within the COST-collaboration (Action IS0901 *Women Writers in History*) several of the participants succeeded also in having connected projects funded at the national level.

It is the ultimate goal of the NEWW VRE to contribute to the inclusion of women in European literary historiography in order to do justice to the roles they played in their own time: to understand that they actually had “something to say” – which was recognized by contemporary readers.

2. About the project Teaching Women Writers: exploring the possibilities of VRE Women Writers

Teaching covers a wide range of activities, from using outcomes of the research to contributing to it. We believe that indeed the students could be given a more important role than the rather passive one they are allowed to have now. Besides, given the important number (over 6000) of European women authors before the early 20th c. discovered up to now and accumulated in our NEWW VRE, we have to enlarge the group of active collaborators. And most importantly, it now seems possible to have the collaboration of students – in the classroom or as trainees – and also seniors as “citizen scientists”. They can much more than before, participate in scholarly enterprises like ours, considering that so much of textual material (including those by and about women authors; including also the periodical press) is now available online.

In this way, the research tool NEWW VRE can also become important within the process of teaching women’s presence in the literary field – at different levels: MA students can study individual cases (within the large context provided by NEWW); Bachelor students can become familiar with women’s too little-known contribution to literature, and even grammar school students can find information and access the writings.

A number of the WWIH-members are interested in exploring the usability of the tool to enhance, more generally, students’ digital competences.

The discussions and training sessions held at the international conference and workshop *Teaching Women Writers – exploring “NEWW Virtual Research Environment” possibilities* (Ljubljana, 16-18 November 2017) have been continued by individual work in the VRE at home, with checking and support given by a qualified assistant hired especially for this and funded by DARIAH. Such training and support has contributed to easiness of data entry, to the quality of data, and to further development of the online tool.

3. References

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