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Frontiers Forged and Colonized: Feminist Storytelling in Digital Narrative

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Abstract

Truly impactful innovations are developed by outsiders out of a sense of need; those that rise to mainstream recognition and acceptance, however, are colonized by dominant hegemonies. This paper traces cycles of innovation and colonization in literature, publishing, and computing as ancestral domains to electronic literature, which has been subject to the same gendered and othered frontier-colonization cycles that dominated its forebears. Elit was a new frontier for writing and publishing, a strong site of marginalized creativity, until it was codified and colonized into publishing and academia by the dominant class: women could create, but men had the actual and cultural capital to create and develop the structures to platform their work into the dominant discourse. This paper analyzes how feminist and marginalized digital writers resist colonization of their innovations and erasure of their innovations by hacking platforms, subverting narrative conventions, and amplifying hidden voices. The paper examines elements of innovation-colonization cycles in elit and adjacent practices (indie games, fanfic), showcases Lillian-Yvonne Bertram's algorithmically-generated epoetry as a site of subversion, and presents fanfic community Archive of Our own as a preliminary model of value-sensitive and inclusive community design. It argues for the development of feminist-first platforms—digital spaces that actively resist the structural colonization of marginalized storytelling.

Keywords: women's art; electronic literature; women's writing; literature; computing; publishing; innovation; marginalized voices

1. Introduction

The evolution of electronic literature (elit) and interactive narratives mirrors the broader history of computing: frontiers forged by women and marginalized creators are frequently colonized by dominant hegemonies as fields mature. As Coverley/Luesebrink (2017, p. 5) and Mencía (2017a, p. xiii) observe, women led the early field of electronic literature, using digital spaces to escape the constraints of male-dominated literary traditions. However, as the medium gained legitimacy, male voices increasingly dominated both the academic and commercial spheres. Gloria Anzaldúa tells us "the dominant culture consumes, swallows whole the ethnic artist, sucks out her/his vitality, and then spits out the hollow husk along with its labels" (G. Anzaldúa 2009a, p. 182). This pattern reflects a recurring cycle across Western culture more broadly and creative and academic disciplines more specifically: innovation begins at the margins, shaped by necessity and constraint, only to be later appropriated, commercialized, and reframed by dominant groups (Berger 2008; Hicks 2017; Pratt 1981; Warhol and Lanser 2015b).

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This paper examines case studies of digital narrative platforms and storytelling spaces that illustrate this process. It traces the trajectory of hypertext literature, from early feminist pioneers like Judy Malloy and Deena Larsen to the academic codification of hypertext theory through institutions seeking to mimic the royalty publishing industry's exclusionary gatekeeping, and later to the rise in tools and platforms innovated out of need from those shut out of the burgeoning games sphere. Similarly, fan fiction platforms, originally an organic and largely female-driven storytelling space, have been increasingly commercialized through platforms like Wattpad and Kindle Worlds, often stripping the participatory and community-driven ethos that characterized its origins. The paper also explores the monetization of personal storytelling, where early feminist blogging communities gave rise to an influencer economy that exploits and commodifies women's digital authorship (Mencía 2017a).

Furthermore, the discussion incorporates insights from Lillian Yvonne Bertram's work on AI-generated literature (*Travesty Generator*) (Bertram 2019), analyzing how algorithmic bias (Noble 2018) reinforces the marginalization of feminist and racialized narratives in computational poetics (Booten and Bertram 2022; Whalen 2023). Bertram's critique underscores how AI models, trained on existing data structures, amplify preexisting exclusions rather than innovating new narrative possibilities. This aligns with Berger's (2008, p. 195) observation that mainstream culture frequently co-opts marginalized innovations, rebranding them to maintain dominant cultural paradigms rather than transforming them.

1.1. A Note on Positioning, Terms, and Labels

I write this paper from the perspective of a cis-gender, educated, upper middle class white woman who is also queer, disabled, and a migrant (though of a privileged origin even in my adopted country). My first language is English, and my culture and education rooted in Anglo-American imperialism. The discussion herein is thus necessarily limited in scope to institutions, experiences, practices, and systems in place in Western culture and primarily English-language writing and discourse. I have attempted to provide other perspectives where mine are limited, though I acknowledge that to be entirely thorough and inclusive is not a task to be completed, but rather a process to be engaged in. I am more aware and inclusive than I was yesterday, and less than I hope to be tomorrow.

Our use of terminology is ever evolving, and thus can never be satisfactory from one moment to another; as noted, progress is a process. For the moment in time and discourse this paper represents, I engage in "feminism" as an inclusive concept representing the struggle for equality for all, regardless of gender, sexuality, race, religion, origin, dis/ability, or class, and the dismantling of societal structures that privilege a historical hegemony. "Femme" and feminism in this paper thus encompasses creators, theorists, and works that seek the same, regardless of any one individual's personal identity. By extension, "feminist storytelling" is any that resists the dominant hegemony in authorship, identity, content, form, or platform, again regardless of individual identity. For some, engaging in this work is unavoidable: queer and trans women of color, for instance, resist the hegemony simply through the act of creating and writing, as the dominant Western culture would exclude them entirely (cf. Ahmed 2023; hooks 2014; G. Anzaldúa 2009b; Stryker 2023). Others, such as cis-het white men who may nonetheless recognize the harm caused by patriarchal culture, have to stretch further to engage in this work, as they are positioned closer to the hegemony than to the borders that exclude marginalized people. Nonetheless, as bell hooks tells us, "feminism is for everybody" (hooks 2014).

From this positioning, I use the term "women" to be inclusive of all who identify as women, including trans-women. I also use the terms "marginalized" and those on the "margins", "outsiders", and "othered"; I dislike these terms as they are defining the

Global Majority by *what we are not*, and by *what has been done to us* by an exclusionary and often violent hegemony. The word "hegemony" does not carry a satisfactory antonym: I refuse to saddle the powerful voices of those who have been historically oppressed, othered, and silenced with monikers such as "subjugated", "dominated", or "weak". For the purposes of what is a complicated and nuanced discussion, "Global Majority" lumps the various communities and identities so important in this space into a homogenized group, promoting erasure and the continued centralization of *white women* in discourses about feminism and otherness. At this time I lean toward terms that reclaim the power of the other: "monstrous", "queer", "femme", and other labels communities have taken back in order to refuse the framing of the dominant hegemony. I am seeking more positive, inclusive, yet non-homogenizing nor confusing terms in my work, and I am happy to be educated as I have not yet found any to be wholly satisfactory. As Gloria Anzaldúa notes, "Until we live in a society where all people are more or less equal and no labels are necessary, we need them to resist the pressure to assimilate" (G. Anzaldúa 2009a, p. 182).

In this vein, it is difficult to completely eradicate the use of the word "men" to equate to the dominant hegemony of institutions and structures of Western culture (and those suffering from current or historical Western colonization either in rule or in enculturization). Wherever possible, I have attempted to differentiate the broad "dominant hegemony" from individual men who may inadvertently and unintentionally participate from within and benefit from it. If my language becomes impassioned on the topic, well, that's because it is: I do not hold to the imperialist approach that knowledge is objective and should be divorced from subjective experiences and emotions. Rather, I embrace a more indigenous and feminist—again—perspective that knowing can be scientific and analytical, yes, but also personal, experiential, emotional, and situated (Haraway 1988): "A form of spiritual inquiry, *conocimiento* is reached via creative acts—writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism—both mental and somatic" (G. E. Anzaldúa 2002, p. 542).

1.2. Dismantling Hegemonic Structures in Elit

The following discussion analyzes how feminist and marginalized creators resist the cycles of innovation and hegemonic colonization by hacking existing platforms, subverting narrative conventions, and amplifying hidden voices. It argues for the development of feminist-first platforms—digital spaces that actively resist the structural colonization of marginalized storytelling. To do so, to dismantle the hegemonic structures that continue to entrap us in patriarchal prisons, we must first understand how they were constructed, by whom and for whom. I examine the innovation cycles that intersected to create environments conducive to digital narrative creativity, in literature, computing, art (and to a certain extent, academia), as institutions constructed by patriarchal culture subsume subversions and resistance rather than reforming to accommodate them. I present examples of innovation in feminist storytelling: early hypertext pioneers, online storytelling communities, indie game designers carving space for their identities, and fanfiction practitioners, tracing their work as it emerges and then suffers devaluation, derecognition, and capitalist exploitation.

This history reveals our feminist storytelling as trapped on a wheel of fortune—a wheel on a cart constructed and still driven by the dominant hegemony. Marginalized voices may rise and fall on the wheel, plucked from the apex when convenient for the patriarchal institutions and ground into mud otherwise, but we cannot ascend to the driver's seat, much less free ourselves of the cart entirely, unless we first break the wheel. Toward that end, I look at examples of "killjoy hammers" (Ahmed 2023) of feminist subversion banging on that wheel. Lillian-Yvonne Bertram's epoetry exposes gendered and racial bias

inherent in both algorithms and in eliterary practices creating "from constraint", a singular and powerful artistic model of using what the patriarchy provides as tools to weaken its structures. The platforming and amplification of queer and trans voices in indie games through open access and open source tools and infrastructures is another mallet resisting the toxic masculinity of gaming and computing spaces. Finally, the deliberate construction of the online fanfiction community Archive of Our Own (AO3) provides a model—albeit imperfect, particularly with regard to racial inclusion—of inclusive, co-created infrastructural design that serves as a potential starting point for re-framing structures in the elit community and beyond.

2. Background: Innovation Cycles

Innovation cycles are oft-studied in engineering, technology, and art, including experimentation and popularization of digital fiction (Skains 2022a, pp. 19–38). Bourdieu (1983) would have it that we often innovate out of wealth and leisure: with the extra time and resources for creativity afforded by wealth, we play and experiment and develop new ways to interact with our world and one another. The other side of that argument is to point toward innovation as *necessity*: we create to fill a gap, a need. Our tribe has grown too large to subsist on hunting and gathering, so we invent the tractor and genetically modify corn (to grotesquely condense and simplify thousands of years of agricultural development). In reality, truly impactful (or "disruptive") innovations are developed on the margins, by outsiders (Berger 2008; Russ [1983] 2018), to bridge a gap *precisely* created by their *lack* of wealth and/or privilege; creativity and ingenuity are the voices of the marginalized and the oppressed, announcing themselves at the door that protects hegemonic culture (Ahmed 2023; G. Anzaldúa 2009b; Lorde 1979; hooks 2014; Seller 2024; Stryker 2023). We see the pattern of innovation emerging from Bourdieu's dominant class because they have the capability and capacity to bring the "new" into the mainstream: they have the privilege to legitimize and/or capitalize on innovation, and subsequently are also blessed with the recognition. This is the cycle of innovation and colonization that we see in fields relevant to electronic literature: literature, publishing, and computing.[1]

Literature, particularly as lionized, canonized, and theorized in Western cultures and linguistic traditions (as well as those impacted by imperialist impositions) is a method of concretizing culture, rising in the wake of the industrial revolution, growing literacy, and the decline in the role of the church in society (Eagleton 2008). Its role—the entire purpose of a "canon", chosen by the dominant class—is to maintain the status quo of the dominant class, to engender investment in *the way things are*: a "white hegemonic and heteronormative power" (Bertram 2015, np). While the evolution of storytelling can be heavily linked to women's activities and marginalized communities, from gossiping in spinning groups to dialogism in novels (Murray [1997] 2016, loc. 2002; Thomas 2012) to indie games (Kopas 2014; Seller 2024; Ruberg 2022), women's literature (and to a much greater degree that of women of color) has been undervalued as silly, for children, trash, and derivative (Russ [1983] 2018; Cixous 1976; Rossiter 1993; Nochlin 1971); it has been sidelined ("ghettoized", as bell hooks would have it) as "women's fiction" or "identity fiction" (G. Anzaldúa 2009b; hooks 2014; Warhol and Lanser 2015a; Coykendall 2015); and genres where women tend to dominate have been themselves sectioned off as lesser-than (romance, young adult, children's literature). Historically, when women's work *was* recognized as worthy of a place in mainstream culture, it was often because it presented as male-authored, from George Eliot to James Tiptree, Jr. to today's biggest selling authors using only their initials (a la "E.L." or "J.K."). The default for "good literature" has largely been defined by a "prevailing masculinity" and an inherent whiteness (Russ [1983] 2018, p. 52), from the study of narrative (which as a field has failed to account for gender

and intersecting identities (Bertram 2015; Lanser 1986; Warhol and Lanser 2015b) to the commodification of literature in the publishing industry.

Editing and publishing (and indeed, writing and reading books) is often touted as an exception to the domination of entire fields and industries being dominated by white, cis-het men of Western European descent. Statistically, women read more than men (Summers 2013), make up the majority of postgraduates in creative writing programs (Cima 2017), and constitute roughly 80% of the English-language publishing industry (though only 60% of its executives) (Feijao 2018; see Supplementary File S1). Yet male authors dominate reviews (70–80% of major publication channels) (Cima 2017), prizes (~60%) (Griffith 2015), earnings (a 15% gap) (Feijao 2018; see Supplementary File S1), bestsellers (Cima 2017), and entire publishing catalogues (~70%) (Cima 2017).[2] Kate Summers' study (Summers 2013) reveals that this hegemonic dominance is more than just men favoring men; even in fiction publishing, with its much higher proportion of women participating across most spheres, men dominate in terms of recognition (pay, prizes, exposure) because all participants have a cultural tendency to *prefer* books written by and about cis-het white men. We are taught that their texts are better, since they make up the majority of the literary and educational canon, and we experience far more texts about and by men across all media spheres, because they are the ones who create our films, games, and television shows (these industries have a much more prominent representation gap both on- and behind-screen). To be white, cis-gendered, heteronormative, and male is to be the default across Western culture to such an extent that even those who do not share all these characteristics unconsciously process it as a "base" for storytelling, as Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie notes: "I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading: All my characters were white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow. . ." (Adichie 2009, at 00:31). Thus, to simply write an authentic self that is in any way not part of the dominant class is to innovate, experiment, and create against constraint (cf. Skains 2022a, p. 123); it is "to plant something, a possibility, a new growth of some kind, to mark the site of violence, to tell us what happened here. The site of violence is the site of protesting it, of saying *no* to it" (Ahmed 2023, p. 213, emphasis original).

As an industry, computing seems to have little in common with the rather conservative and risk-averse publishing world: it is known for innovating, pushing boundaries, constantly evolving, with frequent bubbles and turnover. Computing and storytelling, however, have a rather fascinating shared, feminine ancestry in textiles: as noted above, spinning circles provided fertile grounds for sharing stories; as an industry, weaving's automation through the use of loom cards was the direct inspiration for punch cards as a method of programming computers. In the early days of computing (a technology primarily developed in Britain and the US), it was largely considered "women's work": women were human calculators for ballistics projections in World War II and the first programmers, as such activities were seen as "clerical" and thus feminized (Abbate 2012; Hicks 2017; Light 1999). Ada Lovelace is considered the first programmer, Betty Holberton created the first applications, Grace Hopper created the first compiler (Abbate 2012; Gürer 2002). But as the war ended and men returned to the workforce, and computing grew as a primarily business-related industry instead of a war service, women (and what few people of color or LGBTQIA+ identity may have been in the industry) were deliberately, systematically forced out to such an extent that computing remains the industry with the worst gender and race disparities of any professional sphere (Abbate 2012; Hicks 2017; Margolis and Fisher 2002; Trinkenreich et al. 2022; Rankin et al. 2021; Young et al. 2023). There is perhaps no better sphere to demonstrate the cycle of innovation, colonization, domination, and exclusion of women's work to the benefit of the dominant class of white, cis-het men than computing.

This is the historical foundation of the tools and traditions giving rise to electronic literature. In Western culture, it is possible to say that (mostly white) women fill a liminal niche

between the dominant class (whiteness) and the margins (being female). The former grants limited access to channels of power where they can exist, express ideas, and innovate: note that Ada Lovelace was upper class, wealthy enough to have Bourdieu's leisure capacity for innovation, with access to education and social circles where she could pursue her interests in mathematics and systems. As a woman, however, she was barred from formal education, her accomplishments downplayed. For Lovelace, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and other "privileged" outsiders of the era, walking that liminal line meant they had at least *some* level of access to mainstream culture, while their status as outsiders sparked innovation from necessity. White, relatively wealthy, cis-gendered, and "passing" as not-queer women are the prominent examples in the history of literature and computing not because they were the only ones participating, but because their modicum of cultural and economic privilege kept them from being entirely "blanked", as Sara Ahmed defines it; where queerness, transness, disability, race, and class could not be masked they were "not recorded as there" (Ahmed 2023, p. 65). As social progress exposes more doors to more people (civil rights movements, anti-apartheid, feminism, LGBTQIA+ rights, disability adjustments), a greater diversity of voices approaches this liminal space where their innovations have a shorter, clearer path to mainstream culture—but also to appropriation and colonization of those innovations by the dominant class. Folk music becomes jazz, migrant vernacular becomes slang, traditional hairstyles and clothing become trendy fashion, stripped of their cultural origins and mined for innovation points (and, often, profit) by a hegemony that demeaned such creativity when it was solely practiced by those self-same outsiders (Arya 2021; Young 2010). The cycle repeats itself across all relevant cultural spaces, including digital creativity and electronic literature.

3. Innovation & Colonization in Digital Creativity

Some discourse would have it that electronic literature ("elit") is a space where the role of women has been more prominent than in other cultural spheres. N. Katherine Hayles makes a start on this argument, but almost immediately reverses it: "Electronic literature is an exception to this generalization, for women have been active since its beginnings in the late 1980's [*sic*] up to today, although the importance of their contributions remains under-recognized and, importantly, under-theorized" (Hayles 2017, p. xi). It is worth noting that the late 1980s is not truly the beginnings of elit, as Mabel Addis and William McKay had created civilization simulator *The Sumerian Game* in 1964 (Addis and McKay 1964), and an entire generation of interactive fiction (or text adventure games) had risen and fallen (with contributions from only a few "exceptional women" (Skains 2022a, pp. 87–97; cf. Russ [1983] 2018; Rossiter 1993; Nochlin 1971; Sheriff 1996)) by that time. Hayles's discourse (and most of that in the same volume, #*WomenTechLit* (Mencía 2017b)) focuses on elit as practiced in arts-, academic-, and/or non-commercial spheres; much of which might have been referred to as experimental or avant garde, that which is analyzed, venerated, cited, and archived through the community and activities centered in the Electronic Literature Organization as the key professional and artistic association for elit worldwide. For this discussion, I focus on that institutionalized segment of elit as an example of structures that do not intend to marginalize anyone, yet whose inadvertent foundations in patriarchal structures nonetheless do so. It is worth noting, too, that the perceived equality in elit applies, by and large, to white women, as the extremes of exclusion for people of color in the overlap of literature, computing, and academia in Western culture were and remain excessively high barriers to entry (Ikeda 2021). What we actually see in the emergence and recognized practice of elit in arts and academia as recorded in ELO and associated activities and archives, and certainly in popular or mainstream culture (e.g., indie games), is the same cycle of innovation and colonization, albeit on the scale of elit as a more niche community.

3.1. Women's Online Creativity

In a predictable trend, the common perception of the average computer user is of a white, cis-het male, particularly in the early days of personal computing and then the internet. Given the systematic exclusion of anyone outside this dominance class, that is not terribly surprising, though it elides the significant cultural, artistic, and technological contributions of "women's work". Conducted largely in the margins, women's work online parallels women's work offline: emotional labor, generally invisible until it is leveraged for gain by male developers. Similarly, the work of global majority cultural groups takes place in their communities, often with only the tools at hand created by the dominant class, but is largely ignored unless it can also be leveraged; see Black Twitter's role as a tool of community activism as an example (Lee 2017; Sharma 2013). Outsider communities provide a great deal of the work, or content, that makes the internet proliferate; a key example here is the development of women's online content from personal sharing and community building to today's pervasive influencer culture.

Feminist storytelling is often characterized by its sharing of secret lives, voices, and dialogues, such as the epistolary novel (Pratt 1981; Showalter 2009). With the internet and Web 2.0 came a new form of sharing: blogging, which would become microblogging on various social media platforms. The early days of LiveJournaling provided not only an open, connected channel to generate and share emotional energy; they also established a culture of documenting and publishing intimate aspects of their lives (Berryman and Kavka 2018, p. 88). Ashleigh Logan-McFarlane argues this "display" is "in pursuit of some measure of celebrity" (Logan-McFarlane 2023, p. 122); certainly that is the case with many influencer-type socials today, but that is an oversimplification of the drive for people who have been undervalued, overlooked, and ignored to have their voice heard, even if it is only by a select few in a wider community. Or rather, to express the rage of the marginalized (Cixous 1976; Bassett et al. 2020; Stryker 2023), which Hélène Cixous frames as a drive for *écriture féminine*, a subversion of dominant, masculine language and literature. Nonetheless, such contributions have been colonized and commodified for the benefit of male developers (the mainstream social media platforms are all owned by cis-het white males, save TikTok's founder who is Chinese) and brand advertisers, which continue to invest ever more heavily in influencer content (Berryman and Kavka 2018; Logan-McFarlane 2023; Arcy 2016). The platforms have never been neutral; they have always existed to benefit their creators, but the churn and pressure of influencer culture has scraped away any façade of "community" within them.

3.2. Electronic Literature

Elit as we understand it within its community (in this discussion signified by the ELO as a representative cultural structure) has never quite unlocked the door to mainstream culture in the same way as social sharing and influencer culture has, though some iterations of it have certainly come a-knocking. If we take Hayles's starting point for elit, the late 1980s, then her depiction of it as a space welcoming to women is, at first glance, fairly accurate. Certainly it is during that time that women (and, notably, queer and trans) creators found cyber-room of their own to experiment and innovate with emerging technology, despite (or perhaps *because of*) their undervalued contributions in literature and publishing, and their systematic expulsion from computing. "Women were among the first of the artists and photographers, video artists and filmmakers to pick up on the potential of the digital arts" (Plant 1998, p. 195). Elit exemplars are Judy Malloy, Shelley Jackson, and Deena Larsen, upon whose heels quickly followed M.D. Coverley, J. Yellowlees Douglas, Christy Sheffield Sanford, Caitlin Fisher, Stephanie Strickland, María Mencía, Sue Thomas, Dene Grigar, Carolyn Guertin, and *hundreds* of other writers, artists, designers, and coders (Cov-

erley/Luesebrink 2017; Mencía 2017a). Of course, there is further potential for Ahmed's "blanking" here: for every name recorded in journals and conference notes, there must be dozens if not hundreds of artists innovating and creating with these burgeoning technologies, forgotten to our archives because they were not close enough to branches of play and storytelling (elit, games, postmodern literature, academia, publishing, etc.) to become notes on the margins of hegemonic history.

Nonetheless, these elit pioneers point to elit as a new frontier for writing and publishing. Marjorie Luesebrink (also known as. M.D. Coverley) compares the scope of elit at the time with the print literature canon and its barriers to entry, noting that "women were free to invent as they chose" (Coverley/Luesebrink 2017, p. 4), and that the affordances of the digital made space for the experimentation she had always been interested in: spatial-based storyworlds, polyvocality, and multimodality. Judy Malloy's database novel *Uncle Roger* (Malloy 1986), the first online hyperfiction (pre-internet hyperfictions were traded on floppy disks) (Coverley/Luesebrink 2017, p. 6) and the first (American) commercial work of elit (Grigar 2017, p. 361), emerged from her similar desires to push back against the male-dominated publishing sphere and to express her voice in a medium that provided meaningful play with the form and structure of narrative (Malloy 2017). Deena Larsen's *Marble Springs* (Larsen 1993) took the then-ubiquitous Apple HyperCard software to new elit heights, and sparked decades of her community-building collaborations with other artists on the margins. Caitlin Fisher's unapologetically queer *These Waves of Girls* (Fisher 2001) won the inaugural Electronic Literature Award for fiction (Electronic Literature Organization 2001).

Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (Jackson 1995) belongs among this list of notable early works, incorporating feminist, queer, and trans metaphors of textiles (quilting, patchwork), collage, and a discursive matrix of embodied materiality (Odin 2003, p. 454; cf. Stryker 2023). It also, along with Deena Larsen's remediated *Marble Springs*, marks the point at which women's innovations in elit became plunder for the benefit of the dominant class. Enter the publisher of "serious hypertext", a software platform specifically designed for the creation of hypertexts, and a commercial platform for hypertext distribution. It is no surprise that the early innovators embraced the software: Malloy carved out *Uncle Roger* on database software; Larsen created *Marble Springs* on a souped-up presentation program; even Caitlin Fisher's later multimedia *Waves* was created on Adobe Flash, a proprietary platform not intended for elit and wiped out by tech-bro territorialism (Fox 2021). Yet the new elit publishing paradigm perpetuated the exclusivity of the dominant class: the founders were men, the model that of the patriarchal capitalist-dominant royalty publishing industry and copyright standard, the intent was to shape a new canon (a patriarchal, imperialist inclination), and the new creation platform was proprietary (and costly). To this day, this platform maintains a hold on every title it gained publishing rights to, meaning its authors cannot remediate their works into more accessible and sustainable forms (as Malloy has done with her works, or the NEXT with its collection of Flash works).

In parallel, the Electronic Literature Organization was formed in 1999 (Electronic Literature Organization 2022), again by an all-male team. Intention, or lack thereof, to deliberately exclude diverse voices in these institutions is irrelevant. Like the men who codified experimental literature in their French club dedicated to "writing under constraint"[3], and those who created the first text adventure games, they were simply doing that which interested them, same as the women pioneering hyperfiction. Both these groups benefited from a level of privilege: most of the women from whiteness, and the men from their default position in the dominant class. The notion of privilege is a complex one, tied far more to cultural systems and institutions, and *who* created them *for whom*. It is no stretch to note that current cultural institutions from publishing to computing to academia are patriarchal

systems, designed and built by wealthy cis-het men of European descent, historically with little intent to include anyone else. The systems are round holes for round pegs; women, trans folks, people of color, migrants, queer people, and those with disabilities come in different shapes, none of them easily sliding into the round holes of these institutions and their processes. Whereas the (relatively privileged white) women, rounder pegs than most other intersectional groups, could *create* in this new frontier,[4] the men could create *and develop the structures to platform their work into the dominant discourse* (albeit largely in niche academic and avant garde circles). "The structure that makes it harder for some to get in or get through is the same structure that eases the passage and progression of others" (Ahmed 2023, p. 168). As has become ever clearer to us in arts and academia, as women's careers still lag behind men's (victim-blamed on time out for maternity leave, lack of confidence, invisible work, inclination toward lower-paid—ahem, *feminized*—roles, etc., ad nauseum), those of the dominant class remain top of the heap in terms of access, mental space to work and create, and to promote their own class of work (whether deliberately or through unconscious bias toward those most like them). In an insidious turn, we have also come to realize that it is not only those of the dominant class who have such bias: the rest of us share it because it is the default for our Western culture (of origin or of colonization), and so we (unconsciously) see tokenism, undervaluation, and lack of recognition as the norm. We perpetuate it in trying to unlock those doors to privilege, through the politics of citation and needing to be accepted in the dominant discourse: citing "foundational" theory and "firsts" in the field, both of which will lean toward white and male, given historical privilege and increased likelihood of recognition and acceptance for white male-coded academics and creators.[5]

In 2021, discussions in Dene Grigar's symposium on women in elit exposed some trends in the elit community that sparked feminine rage (Skains 2021). Though a queer woman had won the ELO prize in 2001, no solo or first-author woman or non-binary gender person had ever won the subsequent Robert Coover Award to that date; only 30% of Coover winners had been women (all as co-authors). No woman or non-binary gender person had ever been awarded the N. Katherine Hayles Award for Criticism of Electronic Literature; the award's Honorable Mentions were 50% women, but only two were solo authors. Only two women were mentioned on the Wikipedia page for Electronic Literature. A year later a panel at the 2022 ELO Conference (Skains 2022b), updated the information: both awards in 2021 had been awarded to people identifying as women; the Wikipedia page was up to nine *citations* (of 27) by women, though only Hayles was named in the article itself.[6] One example of the politics of citation was also quite stark: using Google Scholar, I found that Judy Malloy's 1986 *Uncle Roger* delivered 367 results; Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* 2830; while the supposed "first" hypertext (by one of the co-creators of the proprietary hypertext software), dated 1987, garnered 55,200. A work that is largely inaccessible because of its gate-keeping origins (under copyright, in obsolete formats, and with a price tag) has 15,000% more citations than one that has been continuously and freely available since its release, due to the former's signalled acceptance into mainstream by its cultural trappings, all of which are generated, perpetuated, and reaped by the dominant class.

Within any community such as that of elit, of course there are pockets of resistance and difference even as the cycles of innovation and colonization churn, though they do not often carry clear hashtags and picket signs as to their subversion. The next two sections examine examples of such pockets that have impacted the elit commmunity: indie games and the discursive algorithmic work of Lillian-Yvonne Bertram.

3.3. Indie Games

The marginalization of games in the elit community is part of its discourse, memorialized in the "ludo-narratological debate": the notion that a distinction could be made between works that were about play and works that were about language, and that the latter were more relevant to a community that had budded off a literary core. The baked-in desire for literature to be elevated above anything aimed at mainstream distribution (such as commercial games) led many elit artists and academics to ignore commercial games, only accepting their forms if and when they occupied experimental or avant garde niches; for example, Infocom's commercial text adventure games were not elit, but those created in the subsequent interactive fiction community were. Indie games show a distinct parallel to the interactive fiction sub-culture, however, in that they are largely the product of exclusion from mainstream game development. Infocom's games ceased because the company failed and was sold off (and the games industry shifted its focus to graphics); heavily invested text-adventure fans created software and sharing systems to revive the commercially-excluded form (Skains 2022a, pp. 87–96; Briceno et al. 2000). Indie games, on the other hand, arise from *cultural* exclusion from the games industry, that direct descendent of a computing era that ruthlessly booted participants who were not white cis-het males. From the late 2000s onward, developers shut out of mainstream companies and discourse split off to produce alternative games with more depth, emotion, character, and, yes, narrative than many triple-A games (Kagen 2017; Sweeney 2015—see Supplementary File S2; Grabarczyk 2016; Reed et al. 2020). This ushered in an era of "walking simulators", an initially derisive term calling them out for not being "real" games, then reframed and adopted as a generic indicator by the indie game community, particularly trans and queer creators (Salter and Moulthrop 2021; Kopas 2014; Bohunicky and Milligan 2019; Anthropy 2012).

Alongside walking simulators, another channel emerged for indie developers: Twine (Klimas 2009-). In a fascinating reversal of the innovation-colonization cycle's typical players, Twine's innovator is (by all indications) of the dominant class, and created his platform (as many have) because those available at the time were unsatisfactory; by his own admission, however, it came close to failing before a frustrated games developer fighting from the margins took it up as a banner for creativity (Klimas 2019; Anthropy 2012; Ellison 2013). Astrid Ensslin and I characterize Twine's effects in elit: "Anna Anthropy and Porpentine's adoption and promotion of Twine have affected the hypertext genre in two spheres: first, as a platform for marginalized voices in the gaming industry, and second as a democratization of hypertext as a literary form" (Ensslin and Skains 2017, p. 300). The Twine community that emerged after 2012 was primarily feminist, queer, and trans, but also widely inclusive to all voices, drawn to the kinds of "personal" games conveying lived experiences of such intimacy as mental illness (Quinn 2013), body trauma (Porpentine and Neotenomie 2014), and queerness (Anthropy 2013). The "fringe mainstream's" adoption of the platform (Ensslin and Skains 2017, p. 299) brought sufficient awareness and attention to revive Twine and catapult it to its own accepted genre of indie games.

A key element of Twine's persistence (and that of the parser programs created at Infocom's wake) is its openness: unlike proprietary platforms like HyperCard and Adobe Flash, Twine and other community-driven programs are free and open-source. The only barrier to entry to creating with them is possession of a working computer and internet access. The underlying foundation is in common web technologies (HTML, CSS, JavaScript) that persist across operating systems and browsers. Community contributions mean that mods and add-ons can be shared, and if the original creator ceases to support it, the community can take it up entirely. On the limiting side, the platform is English-based and does not adapt sufficiently to the size of mobile phone screens to permit creation of Twine games on that lowest level of digital accessibility that is most commonly available

around the world (80% of people worldwide have a mobile phone; only around 50% of households have a computer. These rates are higher in wealthier regions, and lower in developing regions) (Kinton 2024; ITU 2024). So while true democratization remains a lofty goal, Twine nonetheless provides a step toward digital literacy and better access to a games development community (albeit one that is fringe) than the jealously held vaults of mainstream tech and games. As for the elit community, while proponents of Twine were once termed (derivatively) "hobbyists" and (optimistically) "punks" (Ensslin and Skains 2017, p. 302; Kirschenbaum 2017), the platform, its community, and its outputs now seem to be largely accepted as an elit genre thanks not only to the exposure from those hobbyists and punks, but also to the embrace of dominant class members as exemplified in Anastasia Salter and Stuart Moulthrop's collaboration on Twine (Salter and Moulthrop 2021).

3.4. Elit Reversion

On a smaller scale than the Twine revolution (but no less important or impactful), are works by individual creators who use exclusionary technologies to push back against the hegemonic culture, such as those by Lillian-Yvonne Bertram. Like pioneers Malloy and Larsen, Bertram finds room in this new frontier of digital technologies to challenge "literary practices that have historically excluded women and minorities" (Bertram in Whalen 2023, np). They describe a typical gendered experience of computers as a child: a computer-obsessed brother, while they were into writing (Booten and Bertram 2022, p. 263). As a reader, however, they were also excluded, "unimagined" as a Black woman (Whalen 2023; Booten and Bertram 2022). A Master's of Fine Arts at technology-inclined Carnegie Mellon University exposed them to some elit and influenced their experimental poetry, and makerspace play with a Raspberry Pi brought them all the way into the digital (Booten and Bertram 2022).

Zach Whalen's 2023 article (Whalen 2023) delicately unpacks the layered intricacy of Bertram's poetry in *Travesty Generator* (Bertram 2019), acknowledging his position as a commentator from the dominant class and aiming to use it to bring attention to the works. I offer the same sentiment here, though focusing on the elit cultural cycle Bertram subverts in their conception and creation of *Travesty Generator*. As described in these articles and interviews, Bertram takes concepts, programs, codes, and algorithms originating from the deeply exclusionary computing culture and creators in the dominant class and uses them—twists and turns and subverts them—to *un*-unimagine themself and their community *with* and *through* those selfsame technologies. This reflects a practice of culture jamming (Harold 2004), like the dissonant fabulations calling attention to bias and exclusion in and through digital commerce and branding spaces (Skains 2018), made all the more powerful for using the tools and words of a system engineered by racism and misogyny to lift its hood and reveal its inner workings (Weiss 2025). Whalen variously categorizes the materials Bertram utilizes—algorithmically generated epoetry from white male-coded authors playing with constraint as a writerly practice—as esoteric, conceptual, hypothetical, concerned with technical process and semiotics, but not necessarily with cultural discourse. Bertram's subversion of these materials, however, lifts them into a cultural sphere far more meaningful than artistic play: political reality, ideologically specific, *real*, "challenging us instead to bear witness to the trauma it symbolizes". More than discourse or play, Bertram's use of not only "ANY MEANS NECESSARY", but *specifically* the means by which they have themself been excluded and marginalized, is a righteous reversion of these technological and artistic tools "TO REFUSE ERASURE BY THE ALGORITHM", a reclamation of a digital poetic frontier colonized by voices already privileged by patriarchal literary, computing, and publishing institutional structures.

In doing so, Lillian-Yvonne Bertram's work is an intersectional model of feminist storytelling in electronic literature. *Travesty Generator* exemplifies a work of "immanence" constructed from one of "transcendence" (Ahmed 2023, pp. 189–90), taking tools and algorithmically-generated work participating in and accepted by the culturally dominant class (a false universal of transcendence) and recombining its very text into a situated, subjective, emotional *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa's "spiritual knowing") of violently oppressed Black Americans. Bertram shows us that artistic play for the sole sake of play is interesting yet shallow, an exercise in innovation but not achieving an affective awareness of the origins of those words, those tools. Algorithms are created in white-male-centric patriarchy; so is racial violence. The juxtaposition of George Floyd's last words within the technological codas and knowledge structures that continue to shape Western society are a powerful statement on the institutions that we are struggling so desperately to break free of, an attempt to dismantle the master's house with the master's tools (Lorde 1979). Bertram's work tells us to do more, push further, that what is worth recognition and discourse and preservation is not the novelty of Bourdieausian innovation from positions of relative wealth and privilege, but the innovation collaged together in the margins to convey spiritual knowledge, *conocimiento*.

Bertram's work, of course, is that of an individual, and represents only a tiny proportion of electronic literature that is examined by the academic elit community, much less the wider community of elit practice both within and without mainstream participation. Elit has not remotely approached a community of inclusivity sufficient to overcome its shared ancestry in literature, publishing, and computing, inheriting *additive* systemic inequalities of these traditions: if it is difficult to gain access, attention, and acceptance in any of these domains, it is triply difficult to break into one that necessarily integrates them all. Passive models of inclusivity are insufficient to fully unlock and break down barriers so deeply anchored in its foundations; instead, we might look to other communities for inspiration.

4. Modeling Inclusivity

Those who create, enjoy, and study elit—the elit community, partially codified in the Electronic Literature Organization—strive toward inclusivity, acknowledging that it is a process rather than a goal that can be definitively accomplished. Like many communities, we can point to improvements in recent years, though often as reactionary measures when the banging and shouting from the margins finally break through: the "field-defining" Electronic Literature Collections have adjusted their criteria so that the Western conceptions of technological innovation and literariness have less influence to exclude works from other cultures, classes, languages, and technological access. Organizational structures have been altered to be more responsive to community members (such as open nominations to the ELO Board of Directors). Protective codes of conduct have been published to positively shape the diverse participation in community events. Academic publications have engendered discourse about our inequalities. These are all positive steps, but none of it is nearly enough. As we head into a new era of technology—and thus society—shaped and dominated by the algorithmic bias of its hegemonic class (Noble 2018) (the large-language models colloquially termed "gen-AI") (Padmaja et al. 2025; Shetty et al. 2024; Risi et al. 2025), the question rises: how to be proactive about "escaping, or even destroying the structures that entrap" us (Bassett et al. 2020, p. 74)?

The following discussion is an opener, an examination of one community that found itself caught in a cycle of innovation, devaluation, colonization, and exploitation, and deliberately stepped outside the available structures to engineer a(n imperfect) space of their own: the fan fiction community.

4.1. A Femme-Driven Culture

Fan fiction, or "archontic" narrative (Derecho 2006, p. 68; cf. Skains 2022a, p. 170) is an inherently feminized, queer practice, the "literature of the subordinate" as women, LGBTQIA+, and people of color push back against that default of white cis-het male perspective and representation in media properties (Derecho 2006, p. 71; Flegel and Roth 2016, p. 255; Bacon-Smith 1992, p. 5; Heeg 2022, p. 223; Coker and Benefiel 2016, p. 20). It is an extension into print culture of the oral practices of communal storytelling and gossip: dialectic, polyvocal, and open-ended (Kristeva 1980). As such, it is also an inherently *resistant* practice as these writers actualize narrative potentialities left unimagined by the dominant class that shapes the vast majority of mainstream storytelling. It is progress through popular culture, taking what is available and making *more* from it (Fiske [1989] 2011), an ethical practice that does not value dominance or hierarchy (Derecho 2006, p. 77) that, even while minimized as feminine-coded activity (Fathallah 2017), gives marginalized writers a community of practice to develop skills and confidence to participate in—and push back against—a publishing industry that still favors male-coded work (Flegel and Roth 2016, p. 260).

As a practice in English literature, fan fiction traces back at least four hundred years (Derecho 2006, p. 68; Edwards 2018, p. 52), though the community explosively expanded with the networked social and publishing capabilities of the internet. Prior to digital media, it primarily functioned as small, independent presses, or "amateur press associations" (APAs) producing and distributing zines for cost (Pugh 2005, p. 116; Hellekson 2014, p. 189). Wary of persecution for their artistic engagement with works still under copyright, the community has developed a strong culture against remuneration, flying under the radar in gift economies to stay within the boundaries of ethical, transformative work as defined in copyright law. In the act of transforming existing media texts into fan fiction, however, new and different works are created (Coker and Benefiel 2016, p. 25); the irony is that copyright law is yet to be fixed around online fanfic activities, particularly noncommercial fanfic, so most is fairly safe from any litigation beyond a cease-and-desist letter (Schwabach 2016; Lipton 2014). The paradox, and Flegel & Roth term it, is that the community is largely women policing other women from viewing their work as remunerative or *professional*, while still providing encouragement and feedback for improvement in a semi-professional practice atmosphere (Flegel and Roth 2016, p. 265): online fan fiction practice as we understand it today is a *writerly* community.

4.2. Male Colonization

Perhaps because the fan fiction community is so demonstrably feminine (Lauren Rouse and Mel Stanfill's survey puts it at roughly 65% cis-women, 24% broadly non-binary, 4% trans-men, and 6% cis-men (Rouse and Stanfill 2025, p. 11)) and the tech industry so demonstrably male, colonization in this example is extraordinarily visible. First, while zines, APAs, and online fanfic communities are the primary perception when we speak of "fan fiction", these are not the only examples in practice. In television, for example, aspiring writers compose sample scripts to submit, their own vision of an episode for the show whose writers' room they want to occupy. This is a professional practice, with no connotations of copyright infringements or derivative work. Not only is the online fanfic community feminine, its work is *feminized*, and thus devalued, same as other practices and fields dominated by marginalized voices; in spheres such as screenwriting, where men dominate, the practice is professionalized and valued.

Men have colonized fan fiction practices and communities in more direct ways as well. "FanLib" was an attempt to commercialize fanfic by two men in 2007, hosting contests where a winning work could be included in the originating media property's

canon—very little reward, with the contributors carrying all the risk in terms of copyright (Heeg 2022; De Kosnik 2009; Fiesler et al. 2016). It failed, as did Amazon's attempt to monetize fanfic through licensing agreements in Kindle Worlds (Coker and Benefiel 2016; Parish 2015; Hellekson 2015); both neglected to understand that fanfic is a community-based practice with specific cultural conventions and motivations, without which few are willing to participate. *The Amanda Project* from Fourth Story Media and HarperCollins was similarly top-down in that it provided a (mediocre) "canonical" story that it encouraged an online community to contribute to (for little reward other than to see their work in subsequent volumes, which never really materialized). The top-down approach here similarly failed, in that the community was not organic, self-sustaining, and self-policing, and its members found no reward for their participation, neither in social esteem nor creative credit (Martens 2016).

Wattpad, on the other hand, is a successful colonization of fan fiction practices because it has focused on community rather than content control. It is akin to a social media platform, in that users can post and share their writing in the community freely, with nothing to distinguish between original work, fan fiction, established authors or newbies (Ramdarshan Bold 2016, p. 8). Launched by two Canadian men in 2006, the app attracted millions in investment funds, garnered millions of users, was spotlighted for users who launched from fanfic practice on the platform to royalty publishing bestseller-dom, expanded into paid production and sister apps, and was sold in 2021 for US$600 m (CBC 2021). A few users benefitted from their activities on the app, and like other fanfic and writing communities, the members experience a social community around shared interests, but no one reaped rewards in the millions the way its founders did. Only outside Western culture, legal frameworks, and copyright traditions does an example of a fanfic community commercializing in a way that offers some level of professional equity to writers emerge: Japanese dōjinshi, which are fan-created and -published comics sold at conventions (both in Japan and internationally) (De Kosnik 2009, p. 120).

4.3. Inclusive Community Platform

The model of inclusive, sustainable community presented here is one that arose as a direct response to patriarchal capitalist colonization in the fanfic community: Archive of Our Own (AO3), which was born in the backlash against top-down community control and attempts to monetize their work (Flegel and Roth 2016; Heeg 2022; Fiesler et al. 2016; Edwards 2021). Sid Heeg notes that "fans have felt time and time again as if they were being exploited for their work by a group of men" (Heeg 2022, p. 229). A call went out from those who would found AO3, for others in the community with the skills needed to create their own platform—a room of their own—to publish, share, host, and archive the fanfiction works they valued, with responsibility and agency lying with the community members rather than any top-down corporation or profit-motivated outsider. A committee formed, a nonprofit organization was founded, and a website collectively produced, "designed and coded primarily by women to meet the needs of the online fandom community" (Fiesler et al. 2016, p. 2574). It has *mostly* succeeded in that goal, though discourse within the community as well as recent research on identity and participation has shown that there is still progress to be made in racial inclusivity (Rouse and Stanfill 2025)

Casey Fiesler et al. make a case study of the site as an example of *value*-sensitive design: "a theoretically grounded approach to the design of technology that accounts for human values in a principled and comprehensive manner throughout the design process" (Fiesler et al. 2016, p. 2575), committed to feminist values, agency, inclusivity, diversity, and empowerment. At last check, the site was home to nearly 75k fandoms, 9.4 m users, with over 16 m individual works posted (AO3 2025); its most recent membership drive

garnered US$289k from 7339 donors. The governing nonprofit organization (Organization for Transformative Works, OTW) is open and transparent, its financial statements, board minutes and calendar, filing and governing documents posted publicly online (OTW 2024); its values and mission community-driven and inclusive, its goals and strategy giving clear direction for its projects (OTW n.d.-d); and its projects neatly defined to support its community in legal, legitimization, and preservation and archival capacities (OTW n.d.-c). It has a Board of Directors and volunteer committees with defined remits and easily searchable opportunities for members to get involved, with lines of communication explicitly described (OTW n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

None of these qualities is unique to AO3/OTW, apart from perhaps the inclusive and dynamic design of the site itself (Fiesler et al. 2016, p. 2574). Plenty of nonprofit organizations have clear and transparent infrastructures, values, goals, strategies, and ways of working, though such signposts are not always indicative of true inclusivity, as it is easy enough for institutions to bear a façade of diversity and openness while still suffering systemic inequality issues, "to cover violence, enabling people to claim an oppositional stance without changing how they act, or even as justifications of how they act" (Ahmed 2023, p. 242). No collection of humans is entirely immune to this; despite AO3's model of inclusive co-design, the community still "has a problem with racism" (Rouse and Stanfill 2025, p. 13). AO3 does have a strong co-creation advantage in having such a large quantity of users: with 9.4 m users, even if only a small fraction donate or volunteer, it is still a sizeable number. Further, OTW and AO3 launched from heightened emotion and a clarifying sense of community in the wake of LiveJournal's (and similar sites') sudden restrictions of normal fannish activities; *passion* drove the founders and the hundreds of volunteers, a desire to carve out their own space when they felt exploited, excluded, denigrated, and devalued. Their activities are not for personal gain or renown outside the community (in fact, many committee chairs and board members are only known under their usernames), but for the shared love of the activities and the community.

5. Conclusions

Innovations arise from need: from needing to be heard, to share inner experiences, to contribute to shared lore and knowledge, to forging space where none has been granted. Women, people of color, queer creators, trans creators, those with disabilities, and everyone who sits outside the dominant class of cis-het white male Euro-centrism have a history of making art and discourse from the meager leavings dumped outside mainstream acceptance: gossip, dialects and dialectics, letters and polyvocality, multimodality and multiple identities. To write, to create from the position of the outsider is by its very nature creating under constraint, with the deeper connotation of amplifying and connecting a previously unheard voice. The history of innovation, however, like many histories, is often written by its conquerors. Those who are able to not only recognize the new, the fresh, but also positioned *to be recognized* for it. To be rewarded for it. To participate in and benefit from a mainstream society that both consciously and unconsciously values men and their contributions while placing feminized work on the lowest tier.

Reconstruction of our institutional structures, from the deeply embedded foundations in patriarchal capitalist society to our own individual perspectives and biases, is necessary if we seek to improve and enrich our culture with true inclusivity and equality. More contemporary feminism stresses the benefits of greater inclusivity to *all*, including the centered class of cis-het white males; the toxic masculinity of patriarchal culture entraps and limits men as surely as it excludes and others women, LGBTQIA+, people of color, those with disabilities, and all marginalized voices. The goal of the elit community (both as institutionalized and as more widely practiced) is to be inclusive, to "*widen* the range

of texts and stories published and read, *widen* our scripts for living, for who we are, and who we can be" (Ahmed 2023, p. 256). To do this, we must alter ourselves, our values, our practices, the very heart of who we are and how we define our activities. It has proven insufficient to simply labor on hoping to overcome the patriarchal foundations of our historical traditions in literature, computing, and academia, and the privileged structures of our community origins. The wheel is still grinding our global majority into the grit. That is the purpose of this paper, this discussion, which I refuse to tone down or to apologize for: to introduce ways forward that are more than speculative hope, but that are founded in positive examples and design justice (Costanza-Chock 2020), that acknowledge the struggle to achieve equality and justice is exactly the point.

As a descendent from the joint ancestry of the study of literature, the royalty publishing industry, the computing industry, and, indeed, academia, electronic literature has been subject to the same gendered frontier-colonization cycles that have dominated its forebears. How far have we come from Virgina Woolf's declaration that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Woolf 1929, p. 6), her recognition that the publishing world would make no room for her, that Orlando had more power as a man yet more passion as a woman? Perhaps not as far as we would hope, though conscious effort at value-sensitive and inclusive design of community, community spaces, and community practices can certainly move us much farther along than the blinkered assumption of equality in opportunity, recognition, and respect.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/h15020033/s1, Supplementary File S1: Archived version of Feijao (2018), *Women in Publishing: Addressing the Glass Ceiling*, originally accessed 13 September 2021. Supplementary File S2: Archived version of Sweeney (2015), *Indie Implosion: Walking Simulators*, originally accessed 8 October 2021.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

ELO	Electronic Literature Organization
APA	Amateur Press Association
AO3	Archive of Our Own
OTW	Organization of Transformational Works

Notes

1 Academia as well.

2 While these sources are becoming somewhat dated now, no significant changes have been noted in the mainstream fiction publishing industry since; indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic and current economic climate have worsened workplace statistics concerning women and workers of color (OECD 2022; Kantamneni 2020; International Labour Organization 2025).

3 Um, okay, yeah, those guys totally deliberately had a "no girls allowed" policy for *decades*.

4 Worth noting that technology gaps, language gaps, colonialism gaps, and many more barriers to entry existed for the Global Majority (Skains 2022a, pp. 39–60).

5 I openly acknowledge that politics of citation is certainly at play in this paper.

6 Deena Larson took this as a challenge, and established a project to expand the representation of elit on Wikipedia as a whole, with a focus on inclusivity: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Electronic_literature (accessed on 10 October 2025).

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