
**Slide 1: Call to Order**

Good afternoon and thank you for coming. Today I will discuss a digital publishing partnership between OSU Libraries and Calyx Press, Inc. My name is Jane Nichols and I am a librarian at Oregon State University. Not able to join me are project collaborators Alicia Bublitz Director of Calyx Press and Korey Jackson, also from OSU. We three joined to respond to a Carnegie Mellon/National Endowment for the Humanities Open Books Grant to digitize 26 texts from authors published by Calyx Press an independent, feminist, small press. After digitization the eBooks will be made freely-accessible under a creative commons license. Today I’ll talk a little bit about the project, its status, things we’ve learned along the way, and current thoughts about how we believe it contributes to digital feminist futures and socially engaged humanities. But first, I must pause and call us to order. As with any Calyx meeting, we start with a reading of a poem published by the press. So if you’ll indulge me, Alicia suggested this one.

I Listen to Alice Walker on a Pocket Radio by Paulann Petersen, former Poet Laureate of Oregon

Sitting at my desk, I concentrate  
On a distant voice through static,  
The radio pressed to my ear,  
Antenna full-length.

I hear Alice Walker tell about  
Earthquakes,  
Her mama’s roots and seeds,  
Aunts who shed their weekday uniforms  
For Saturday’s perfume and furs,  
Turning (right before her girl-eyes)  
Into fragrant, velvety blossoms.

I press the small speaker closer  
To hear her voice  
Tell how we all require  
The wonder of transformations,

And a black, silver stemmed flower  
Unfolds at my ear.
Slide 2: Tradition as Cultural Heritage
Another tradition I wanted to share with you is that of the Green Suitcase. Our slide includes this image of a green suitcase that has been with Calyx for decades carrying their books and journals by the Press’ founders, directors, editors and volunteers, to conferences, readings and other venues to share and promote the press and its publications. It has survived many eventful travels, the ups and downs common to publishing as well as transformations in the publishing marketplace. The current staff continue to bring it with them to events to this day just I bring it here, today, though virtually.

Slide 3: 40 years
Calyx’s co-founders started the press to make women’s creative writing-poetry and prose-visible, heard, and published. Calyx joined many independent presses founded with the express mission of publishing literature and art created by and for women in the second half of the 20th C.
Transformations such as the broad availability of computers and the internet along with changes in publishing caused many independent presses to close or be merged into larger organizations. While some of the more widely known texts, such as This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (edited by Giora Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga first published 1981 Persephone Press, 2nd ed in 1983 by Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 3rd ed by Third Woman Press until 2008; 4th ed 2015 Suny Press Albany) have remained in print or are being reprinted now, many of the smaller works have been left without a platform. Thus, when the Grant opened we saw this as a way to partner to make Calyx’s literary works available. The grant was primarily focused on supporting publishers of scholarly monographs, typically from university presses, who wanted to digitize their back list and would agree to make their titles openly available as ebooks. Our project focused on the cultural heritage of twenty-some out-of-print Calyx press titles, a mix of poetry and prose, anthologies, novels and collections of poems spanning three decades.
We saw our project as a way for OSU Libraries to explore what the libraries’ scope of digital publishing services could be, a newer arena for academic libraries and this presented a way to do so that aligned with both our institution’s land grant mission and the libraries’ values of access, collaboration, diversity, innovation, and preservation. Calyx saw this as a way to preserve their titles, make them readily available in ebook formats, and to introduce these titles
and the press as a whole to new audiences while re-invigorating its long-standing readership. In essence, this is one way for the press to say, we’re still standing after 40 years of existence.

Slide 4: first participants include:

*Humming the Blues* by Cass Dalglish

*Raising the Tents* by Frances Payne Adler

*Storytelling in Cambodia* by Willa Schneberg

*Ginseng and Other Tales from Manila* by Marianne Villanueva

We chose these titles knowing that we would be able to reach the authors and they would be likely to agree to this project. It has been somewhat challenging to reach some of the authors, either because they are older and dealing with health issues, they may not respond to email and for others it means going through their estates. Unfortunately, this has slowed our progress. Buoyed by participating authors enthusiasm, encouragement, and support for the project, we continue to reach out to the remaining authors.

Slide 5: Because the project relies on the strengths of each partner, the library is contributing labor on managing the grant and the project overall. We take the lead on partnering with BiblioVault the organization doing the digitization and distribution; OSU will continue to cover the cost of paying BiblioVault to store the digitized files for some years going forward. We also plan to store copies of the files in our institutional repository as well. We plan to have files distributed where most users go: Amazon, Barnes & Noble.

Slides 6-8: The Books

In terms of the texts themselves, the only changes have been to the copyright page to reflect the grant support and the creative commons license; we collaborated on those revisions. Calyx is taking the lead on connecting with authors, which makes sense given their long-standing relationship. We are almost ready to feature the works on our respective web sites; BiblioVault is working on inserting the updated copyright pages into the epub files and once that is complete; we’ll be able to post them to both the Calyx’ and the Library web sites. I can say it’s been awfully fun to test read the files using iBooks on my computer. Here is what that looks like.
Slide 10: Valuing the labor of creative workers, and digital rights.

In addition to some of the challenges I’ve already mentioned in reaching authors and getting our workflow going, we have tussled with problematic questions of ownership.

One challenge we came up against was how to align ourselves with two sociopolitical platforms—open access and feminism—each with their own notions of women’s labor. Women’s rights movements have long condemned the fact that women’s labor was (and still is) largely invisible, socially, politically, and economically. As early as 1920—the year women won the right to vote in the U.S.—the movement was pressing for a “motherhood endowment,” a way of signaling and providing financial support for the politically “disappeared” work of raising a family and keeping a home. With this history in mind, we were uncomfortable asking women authors to offer their works for free, via open access.

While open access offers many benefits, it’s primary aim has not been on valuing labor. Open access, as a movement, is concerned with the ways that faculty work has been exploited by the academic publishing industry and some open access publishers have experimented with paying writers and peer reviewers. However, the larger problem of uncompensated labor within academic publishing—even in the service of access to knowledge—-is unresolved, and, is an ongoing dilemma.

So, when we began asking Calyx authors to allow their work to be “free to own and read”—we faced an uncomfortable reality that we could be echoing a history of exploitation where “free” can also mean “unacknowledged and unsupported.”

Ultimately, we decided to do what we could by including a stipend for each author in the grant budget itself as a way of acknowledging the continued value of their works even while making them freely available in the marketplace.

Slide 11 bell hooks to the rescue

As bell hooks so eloquently writes, “feminist writing that is inaccessible to the public is depoliticized and deradicalized.” Revolutionary feminism demands a revolution of access. Thus giving greater weight to our intention to provide long term access by storing copies in our repository.
Other projects we align with

Our project aligns with, and I believe is situated in, similar efforts. Florence Howe of The Feminist Press, in her 2014 article "Lost and Found–and What Happened Next: Some Reflections on the Search for Women Writers Begun by The Feminist Press in 1970" outlines why and how the press began and why it focused on resurfacing and re-printing books authored by women from around the world. Examples include *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman; *I love myself when I am laughing and then again when I am looking mean and indifferent* by Zora Neale Hurston. She closes by asking us, what do the terms lost and found come to mean; how does a work become lost? What is the process? Should we be concerned if an author begins to fade away? Before I depart from the feminist press, please do check them out they have what looks to be an amazing new slate of staff led by Jamia Wilson. Another effort to make feminist works re-visible is the digitization of the feminist, second-wave, UK magazine *Spare Rib* (1972-1993) by the British Library and JISC (a non-profit supporting digital technologies in research and education). Just as The Feminist Press’ aimed to reprint women authors and find new audiences, by digitizing feminist publications like these we see the potential to attract new and returning generations of readers.

Conclusion

In closing I want to try to weave together a few thoughts. We are not blinded by technolust; we realize this project is an experiment. In 2004 Simone Murray, rightly points our collective attention for the preservation of women’s writings, on intellectual property. “Reconceptualising books not as stand-alone entities, but as component products in the life of a larger content property, may offer feminist publishing its best chance of survival in a greatly expanded and increasingly converged media landscape” (Murray 2004, 216). Doing so is a contemporary example of Virginia Woolf’s assertion “that owning a printing press is the non-negotiable prerequisite for guaranteeing ‘intellectual liberty’; Murray concludes “control of the medium is proving secondary to control of the message itself” (218-9). Despite making their content openly available, Calyx authors retain control over their messages and their intellectual
property rights. Thus, they align with Robin Morgan’s 1970 declaration, “this book is an action” “through the act of publication itself” (Gilley 2012, 1). We believe that by making these works available through open access, and sharing our experience thus far, we align with our feminist foresisters who were “contributing to the movement through the very act of producing” these works (Forster 2016, 28) and thereby contributing to today’s digital feminist movement.
References


