

Becoming Visible: Recipes in the Making

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An interdisciplinary project that encompasses digital humanities, collaborative research, and book history, the Early Modern Recipes Online Collective (EMROC) has found itself breaking methodological ground in several respects. Dedicated to a collaborative methodology, a largely female subject area, and the goals of open access, EMROC has many challenges and rewards. The collective offers its experiences and vision as a means of transforming future research endeavors in sustainable and exciting ways through cross-campus exchanges and Citizen Humanities initiatives.

EMROC began to render hundreds of early modern manuscript recipe books (1500-1800) accessible and full-text searchable. Our Steering Committee is international and interdisciplinary in its scope, comprised of literary scholars from across the United States (Rebecca Laroche, CU Colorado Springs; Jennifer Munroe, UNC Charlotte; Hillary Nunn, U of Akron; and Amy L. Tigner, UT Arlington) as well as historians from Europe (Lisa Smith U of Essex and Elaine Leong, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science). Using the Dromio transcription platform^[1] developed by the Folger Shakespeare Library, EMROC has generated transcriptions in upwards of twenty books, with seventeen now complete and to be housed in the Folger’s EMMO (Early Modern Manuscripts Online) database,^[2] but more importantly, we have facilitated the work of this transcription in an international community and, in so doing, increased general interest in making these rich and complex texts more visible and accessible.

Handwritten household recipe collections were one of the most widespread genres of women’s writing in early modern England, as historians and literary scholars have noted.^[3] Often compiled by families across generations and detailing how to make diverse medicines and foods and to conduct various tasks of housework, these texts are ideal sources for the study of quotidian life and for the exploration of the intellectual worlds of their creators. Hundreds of such books now survive in libraries and archives across the UK and North America, and a number of institutions have begun large scale digitization efforts, making many online reproductions available to experienced researchers.^[4] However, the handwritten nature of these texts renders them resistant to automated machine reading through optical character recognition, thus making them accessible only to those trained in paleography.^[5] Working in collaboration with the Folger Shakespeare Library, EMROC is creating a corpus of encoded, full-text searchable transcriptions with the potential for additional markup and tagging. The creation of this large corpus opens up new research possibilities via digital methods, as well as brings these fascinating sources to wider audiences.

Feminist and collaborative from its inception, EMROC supports new and established scholars as they take on the challenges inherent to transcribing, coding, vetting, and contextualizing recipe materials. For us, undergraduate and postgraduate classroom can (and should) become sites of inherently feminist pedagogy, spaces of knowledge creation and homes for academic

communities of practice. Collaboration with our students is central to our practice,^[6] and our approach moves away from a traditional model of an individual's publication and funding and insists that we learn from each other in a way that challenges elite models of knowledge creation. Our feminist pedagogy emphasizes the importance of flattened hierarchies, the role of personal experience and engagement, and the forging of links between the classroom and the external world.^[7]

To this end, EMROC generates its transcriptions through both crowdsourcing, especially amongst students in our classes, and an established membership of regular and experienced transcribers; in this respect, our project engages both our students and the public at large, calling on impulses associated with Citizen Humanities movements. Analysis of crowdsourcing tends to focus on the concept of 'engagement', but it has not really considered the relationship between teaching and public engagement.^[8] Such consideration is not straightforward. As a 2017 article on public engagement and pedagogy by Jennifer Sandlin and others has questioned: is pedagogy, as practiced and theorized in higher education, even applicable to interactions with the public?^[9] It has potential, particularly if we think of crowdsourcing in terms of Citizen Humanities. Citizen Humanities also allows inclusiveness, providing a much stronger framework for EMROC's work with classroom-sourcing, which otherwise does not really fit the model of crowdsourcing. Pedagogy as a method for working with citizen humanists is problematic if looking at it from a top-down approach to teaching, but drawing on the concept of Citizen Humanities allows us to reframe the relationship and to build on the traditions of volunteerism in heritage projects, goals of lifelong learning, and educated citizens.^[10] Our pedagogy, as it is centered around flattened hierarchies and collaborative community, can be a useful tool for developing effective communication and furthering engagement in Citizen Humanities.

There are three important facets to building a classroom-based research community: ensuring that students can see how their coursework fits within the wider discipline,^[11] promoting honesty about research failures (i.e. modelling research processes),^[12] and providing opportunities to communicate their research.^[13] These goals can be applied to Citizen Humanities, too; participants need to see where their efforts fit and have opportunities for sharing their own research. Modelling how the research process works is an important part of enabling participants to become researchers and can take many forms. In a module on recipes at the University of Saskatchewan (2012-3), before our adoption of the Folger's Dromio interface, Lisa Smith's students worked as the first set of non-professional transcribers to beta-test the Textual Communities crowdsourcing platform. Thirteen students transcribed over 100 folios of Johanna St. John's seventeenth-century manuscript recipe book over four months. This assignment entailed teaching the students not only transcription methods, but extensible mark-up language, as well as more basic skills such as using a wiki. Smith and her students regularly discussed the project – and the ongoing failures and successes – in class, and students frequently updated the wiki with useful bits of technical information as they problem-solved. As the transcription platform was in development, the students also gained insight into how researchers need to adapt when things inevitably go wrong. The goal should be to foster independent research and intellectual confidence.

Our model underscores a fundamental shift in teacher-student relationships; rather than placing either the instructor or students at the center, the classroom forms a community that works together. This form of teaching allows for the development of close working relationships. As University of Essex student Florence Hearn reported, "this module was a lot more intimate than any of my other third year modules ... it made us all feel a lot more

relaxed in conversation and debate within our seminar. Not only this, but every seminar really was a conjoined effort.”^[14] Crucially, our community extends beyond discrete campuses through our connected classrooms. For example, in 2017, the English classrooms of Maggie Simon at North Carolina State and Rebecca Laroche in Colorado Springs shared their experiences with transcribing the manuscript of *Mistress Corlyon* through an exchange of letters, expressing how “views of writing” and “views of English as a whole” were “widened,” as their sense of audience was expanding as well.^[15]

Beyond the classroom, we bring together individuals on different continents for annual transcribathons, where we concentrate on transcribing in full one book over twelve hours.^[16] At the November 2016 Transcribathon, for instance, we had over 130 participants from Australia, Canada, France, Germany, United Kingdom, and United States.^[17] Some groups met on campuses, while some transcribers joined from home. Our goal, which we accomplished, was to triple-key (the requisite for optimal vetting) Lady Grace Castleton’s book.^[18] Whether we are teaching in-class or interacting online with transcribathon participants, our goal is to foster conversations within and between groups. Twitter is at the heart of transcribathon events, linking international participants and various campus groups. More consistently, however, conversations are facilitated through blogs – a useful connective tissue for connected classrooms. By mid-January 2018, our EMROC blog (emroc.hypotheses.org) statistics revealed that nearly 2800 unique readers had visited in the first half of the month alone. We regularly publish student work about transcribathons and in-class activities and provide a public space in which students and teachers can share their experiences of and knowledge about the project with the community of recipe scholars, as well as future students. Students’ works matter beyond the walls of the classroom, extending to the wider digital and scholarly communities.

Our transcribathons, moreover, highlight in different ways the importance of collaboratively reading one book with many eyes, as well as the ways in which those many eyes can make for merry and light work.^[19] It is exciting to work in a group, especially when people start spotting interesting things, such as when Eileen Jakeway, a UNC Charlotte student who traveled to the Folger for the event, asked what the multiple crosses, circles and dots in the margin were. Such questions prompt spontaneous and intense conversations about what these kind of marks might denote – a conversation that drew on the research of Elaine Leong who was in the room – as well as how to encode such marks for future readers and scholarly inquiry. Participants regularly describe a growing awareness of the benefits of a shared intellectual life. As Arlington student, Vincent Sosko, in his description of the 2015 transcribathon, captured this sense of shared and international scholarly endeavor well: “To think that the work we did within our four walls was connected to a worldwide network on the same journey helps me to realize now just how the Transcribathon emulated the potential of scholarship.”^[20]

Once the recipes are transcribed, students and scholars are confronted with the content of the recipes and their mysteries of strange ingredients, odd cures, vague directions and hints regarding curious networks of people. We explore these “rabbit holes” presented by collections, often working collaboratively both in the physical and the virtual worlds to understand the historical context and meanings to discover knowledge in the books and about their authors/compilers. For example, in early modern women’s manuscript seminar at the University of Texas, Arlington, students transcribed the recipe, “To Cure a Cancer or any Sore, proceeding from a Sharp humour in the Blood,” (F207) from Ann Fanshawe’s book, *Wellcome MS 7113*.^[21] The cure consisted of the hard membrane that divides a walnut

ground up and dissolved in liquid. The recipe mentions that it has cured both a woman with a cancer in her breast and a boy with a scalded head. The students wondered how breast cancer and a scalded head were both called cancer. After the class members discussed this oddity and did some research, they discovered that “cancer” comes from the word “canker” and therefore had a much broader meaning in the seventeenth century. Also they discovered that the black walnut shell is still used in herbal medicine for healing sores. What at first seems slightly ridiculous turned out to be efficacious in light of the meaning of cancer in this context and the healing qualities of walnut shells. Also contained in the recipe is a testimonial to its effectiveness, including a French minister who swore that the powder had cured many in France. This recipe is but one example in the manuscript that shows how the author/compiler Ann Fanshawe took part in the circulation of knowledge throughout continental Europe and beyond. Studying the recipe allows the understanding not only of diseases and cures, but also how women took part in the dissemination of medical and culinary knowledge in the period.

EMROC labors to defuse hierarchical thinking, emphasizing the worth of bringing together people from diverse fields, and with vastly different skill sets, to work toward a larger goal. Though many crowd-sourced digital projects omit a public record of the names of people who participate in producing the work, EMROC is dedicated to giving credit to transcribers who work on the manuscripts by providing their names on our website.^[22] Further, we record all teachers, scholars, and funding agencies involved in the project,^[23] so that we are transparent in showing the many people and organizations involved in our collaboration in producing a searchable database of early modern recipes. The collaborations – between compilers and their neighbors, correspondents, and ancestors – that create these early modern recipe books provide useful models for twenty-first century scholars, but such collective methods do not fold easily into most institutional structures. In particular, because EMROC does not have a home office at a single university or library, our efforts unfold outside the institutional structures that surround most digital humanities efforts. While most recognize and praise the new vision our project brings, we often end up puzzling over such fundamental questions as who should sign a contract and how to establish clear lines of communication where matters of scholarship, finances, and technical specifications are concerned.

On the upside, for both teaching and doing public engagement, finding connections between projects (or classrooms) can make participants feel part of something bigger. It also makes their work behind the scenes more visible. In the first instance, the fact that transcribers are acknowledged on the website means that this work can be listed on a student’s CV or résumé as a scholarly contribution or skill set. In EMROC, our project encourages students’ recipe-related research interests as well; this is one advantage of doing Citizen Humanities within the classroom where instructors can offer direct supervision of projects. Students can explore the recipes at a deep level, whether preparing historical recipes in classroom or developing a contextual website for a manuscript in the classroom.^[24] Students might even take on leadership of their own initiatives, as with The Early Modern Paleography Society (EMPS) at the University of North Carolina Charlotte, which developed in response to the popularity of transcription in Jennifer Munroe’s classes. Students’ projects, whether websites or transcribathons (as with the EMPS annual event) are promoted by EMROC, shared with our students and the wider scholarly world. More generally, our students receive extensive research training and we are careful to follow the Student Collaborators’ Bill of Rights – which specifies that students should not be used for mere data entry or mechanical tasks.^[25] In the end, the role of Citizen Humanities in the classroom is to provide professional

opportunities and experience; the digital nature of the project allows student research to be visible in a way that would otherwise be concealed within a classroom's walls.

Throughout this discussion we have been drawing on examples of the directives undertaken by the members of the Steering Committee, but the work of the collective goes far beyond this concentrated labor. As we were writing this piece, members Rob Wakeman (Mount Saint Mary College) and Marissa Nicosia (Penn State Abington) have been completing their courses in dialogue around the Corlyon Manuscript; Margaret Boyle's about teaching recipes in her Bowdoin Spanish class has on our site;^[26] EMPS (UNCC) was planning its annual conference and transcribathon; Liza Blake (U of Toronto) was detailing a recipes unit in her class culminating in a transcribathon to be held on her campus; and transcribers and members were making new year's resolutions to transcribe pages in a big push to make the most of funding the Folger had received to vet and edit as many collections as possible in 2017–18. The work of the collective has gone far beyond what any individual, or even six individuals, could possibly do. And in providing the collective's example for other feminist collaborative digital projects, we hope that our work will continue in ways that we can barely imagine in this fruitful present.

1. EMROC, Folger Shakespeare Library, accessed January 24, 2018. <http://transcribe.folger.edu/> ↑
2. "EMMO. About the Project", Folger Shakespeare Library, accessed January 24, 2018. <https://emmo.folger.edu/> ↑
3. While space limitations prevent a full list of scholarly studies, recent books dedicated to the subject include Michelle DiMeo and Sara Pennell, *Reading and Writing Recipe Books, 1550–1800* (Manchester UP, 2013); Kristine Kowalchuk, *Preserving on Paper: Seventeenth-Century Englishwomen's Receipt Books* (University of Toronto, 2017); Elaine Leong (University of Chicago); and Wendy Wall, *Recipes for Thought: Knowledge and Taste in the Early Modern Kitchen* (UPenn, 2016). See also *The Recipes Project* (recipes.hypotheses.org) for a sense of the liveliness of current trends in recipes research. ↑
4. Libraries and archives with significant digitised collections of manuscript recipe books include the Wellcome Library and the National Library of Scotland in the UK and the Folger Shakespeare Library and National Library of Medicine in the US, among others. ↑
5. While efforts to render handwriting searchable through OCR are advancing, tools like Transkribus require customization that, at present, proves impractical at large scale. Similarly, the Early Modern OCR Project (EMOP) is working to make OCR a practical tool for texts once thought unscannable, but its efforts have concentrated only on printed works. See <https://transkribus.eu/Transkribus/> and <http://emop.tamu.edu> ↑
6. Angela Brew, "Teaching and Research: New Relationships and their Implications for Inquiry-Based Teaching and Learning in Higher Education", *Higher Education Research & Development* 22, 1 (2003): 3-18; Mick Healey, "Linking Research and Teaching to Student Benefit", *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 29, 2 (2005): 183–201; Jan Parker, "A New Scholarship of Classroom-based, Open Communal Inquiry", *Teaching and Learning Inquiry* 1, 1 (2013): 23–33. ↑
7. Carolyn Shrewsbury, 'What is Feminist Pedagogy?', *Women's Studies Quarterly* 15, ¾ (1987): 6–14; A. Mountz, et al. 'For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University', *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 14, 4 (2015): 1236–1259. ↑

8. Stuart Dunn and Mark Hedges, "Crowd-Sourcing Scoping Study: Engaging the Crowd with Humanities Research", 12 November 2012.
<http://crowds.cerch.kcl.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Crowdsourcing-connected-communities.pdf> ↑
9. Jennifer Sandlin, et al. 'Problematizing public engagement within public pedagogy research and practice', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 38, 6 (2017): 823–835. ↑
10. This concept comes from a workshop on 'Citizen Humanities Comes of Age' (September 2015): <https://connected-communities.org/index.php/news/citizen-humanities-comes-of-age-crowdsourcing-for-the-humanities-in-the-21st-century-event-summary/> ↑
11. Jane Robertson and Gillian Blackler, "Students' experiences of learning in a research environment", *Higher Education Research & Development*, 25, 3 (2006): 215-229; Barbara Zamorski, "Research-led Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: A Case", *Teaching in Higher Education*, 7, 4 (2002): 411–427. ↑
12. Carla Pfeffer and Christabel Rogalin, "Three Strategies for Teaching Research Methods: A Case Study", *Teaching Sociology* 40, 4 (2012): 368-376. ↑
13. Charles Anderson and Kate Day, et al. "Engaging with Historical Source Work: Practices, Pedagogy, Dialogue", *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 5, 3 (2006): 243-263; Parker, "A New Scholarship"; Rachel Spronken-Smith, Jason Brodeur, et al. "Completing the Research Cycle: A Framework for Promoting Dissemination of Undergraduate Research and Inquiry", *Teaching and Learning Inquiry* 1, 2 (2013): 105–118. ↑
14. Florence Hearn, "The Digital Recipe Project – A Finale!", May 12, 2017, accessed January 24, 2018. <https://drbp.hypotheses.org/609> ↑
15. Julien De Polo, University of Colorado Colorado Springs, "Letter to North Carolina Students," May 3, 2017. ↑
16. For more on transcribathons, see the Folger Shakespeare Library's explanation at <https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Transcribathon> ↑
17. Lisa Smith, "Announcing...our 2nd Annual Transcribathon", October 11, 2016, <https://emroc.hypotheses.org/1142>; Lisa Smith, "The Transcribathon in Summary", November 10, 2016, <https://emroc.hypotheses.org/1230> ↑
18. Lady Grace Saunderson, "The Lady Grace Castleton's booke of receipts," Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., V.a.600. ↑
19. Tim Causer and Melissa Terras, "Many hands make light work. Many hands together make merry work": Transcribe Bentham and crowdsourcing manuscript collections', in *Crowdsourcing our Cultural Heritage*, ed. Mia Ridge (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 57–88. ↑
20. Vincent Sosko, "Transcribathon: Recaptured, Reflected, and Envisioned", November 6, 2015, accessed January 24, 2018. <https://emroc.hypotheses.org/798> ↑
21. Lady Ann Fanshawe, "Recipe book of Lady Ann Fanshawe," Wellcome Library MS 7113. ↑
22. Early Modern Recipes Online Collective, "Trancrivers", accessed January 24, 2018. <http://emroc.hypotheses.org/about/transcrivers> ↑
23. Early Modern Recipes Online Collective, "About", accessed January 24, 2018. <http://emroc.hypotheses.org/about> ↑
24. Alex Boon, "What is the Baker Project?", accessed January 24, 2018. <https://sites.google.com/prod/view/uobakerproject/> ↑

25. Haley Di Pressi et al., “A Student Collaborators’ Bill of Rights,” June 8, 2015, accessed January 24, 2018. <http://www.cdh.ucla.edu/news-events/a-student-collaborators-bill-of-rights/> ↑
26. Margaret Boyle, “Teaching Transcription and Recipes at a Liberal Arts College,” December 20, 2017, accessed January 24, 2018. <http://emroc.hypotheses.org/1521> ↑