



Gregg, S.H. (2022) 'Eccentric connections: toward a decolonial (digital) book history', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 34 (4), pp. 471-482.

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Reflections

Eccentric Connections: Toward a Decolonial (Digital) Book History

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Abstract

In my recent history of Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), the case study of Patrick Browne's *The Civil and Natural History of Jamaica* (1756, 1789) focuses on bibliography and technology to illuminate a story of remediation. The case study was silent, however, on how this book was imbricated in the system of Atlantic enslavement and colonialism. My Reflections essay attempts to redress this erasure by recognizing that the field of eighteenth-century studies is entangled within the legacies of global colonialism and by drawing on anti-racist and decolonial reading strategies. This essay intersects with postcolonial and decolonial approaches to digital humanities, book history, and the archives of the Caribbean and the Black Atlantic. It traces the routes across time and place of two book copies, connecting biography, provenance, archives, the violent histories of place and geography, the neocolonial conditions of digital publishing and technology, and the contexts of power and privilege of my own situation as a white scholar.

This story aims to raise some important questions about how we read the relationship between a book's record—or its bibliographical data, to be more precise—and its digital page images. These questions illuminate the cultural and technological contexts examined in my prehistory of ECCO.¹

Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: ... the making of *sources* ... the making of *archives* ... the making of *narratives* ... the making of *history* in the final instance.²

The historical erasure of colonialism and enslavement in histories of the Atlantic world is deeply entwined with how our material comes to us, the kinds of questions we ask, and the stories we make. This is as true for histories of books and digital archives. In *Old Books and Digital Publishing: Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, I included a case study of Patrick Browne's *The Civil and Natural History of Jamaica* (1756, 1789). My "story" was framed within bibliographical methodologies and technological contexts, but it was silent on how this book was imbricated in the system of Atlantic enslavement. I want to readdress this discomfiting disconnection between the questions I asked, the book's archival presence, and eighteenth-century transatlantic enslavement. In this reflection on my history of *The Civil and Natural History* I attempt to listen to

1 Stephen H. Gregg, *Old Books and Digital Publishing: Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 28, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108767415>.

2 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past (20th Anniversary Edition): Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 26.

the dynamics of place and history that are also the conditions of my scholarship. This readdressing intersects, then, with the postcolonial praxis and theorization of digital and print archives of the Caribbean and the Black Atlantic by (among others) Nicole Aljoe, Marisa J. Fuentes, Kim Gallon, Saidiya Hartman, Jessica Marie Johnson, and Roopika Risam. My essay is also indebted to the work by scholars such as Srinivas Aravamudan, Olivette Otele, Megan Peiser, Kerry Sinanan, and Eugenia Zuroski, who have explored the contemporary purpose of eighteenth-century studies and its entanglement with the legacies of global colonialism.

My story of a copy of Browne's book traced its remediation history from catalogue record to microfilm to digital image in order to reveal the prehistory of the Gale database Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO). Yet, even as my story of this book's journey sought to follow D.F. McKenzie's approach by considering a wide variety of factors acting on the digitization of old books, the geospatial and chronological limit of my analysis precluded other questions about its journey and the situatedness of my research. What assumptions was I making about the value of certain questions and contexts that elided other possible questions and contexts? How did the system of Atlantic slavery enable this book copy's material existence? How is my own access entangled with the colonial and neocolonial conditions of the archive (including library collecting and commercial digitization)?

Recent essays by Matt Cohen and Sydney Shep have powerfully rethought the relationships between transnationality, history, colonialism, Indigeneity, and the stories of books. Shep explores the methodologies of transnational, postcolonial, and global book studies to build a bibliographical methodology located at the convergence of the "complex, dynamic intercrossings between people (prosography), places (placeography), and objects (bibliography)": this "*event horizon*" enables a unique sensitivity to the agency and transnational movement of "frisky bibliographic objects."³ Cohen's essay reflects on the possibilities for "decolonial bibliography" and reminds bibliographers "to consider carefully how our work tells its stories. Storytelling about books and their production and circulation might begin to redress or repair both history

³ Sydney Shep, "Books in Global Perspectives," in *The Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Leslie Howsam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 66, 67.

and the relationships that have been built on hitherto absent or incorrect histories.”⁴ The essay argues for and exemplifies a bibliographical methodology “with different chronicities and evidentiary standards in mind,” showing how such a bibliographical sensibility can tell a different story, can be “generative, humane in its own right,” despite “(or perhaps as a function) of its colonial entanglements.”⁵ My own reflection will trace such entanglements, crossing between historical frames, locations, and different kinds of evidence to tell a different story about this book.

The Book

The title page of Browne’s *Civil and Natural History of Jamaica* claims it contains:

I. An accurate Description of that Island, its Situation and Soil; with, a brief Account of its former and present State, Government, Revenues, Produce, and Trade. II. A History of the natural Productions, including the various Sorts of native Fossils; perfect and imperfect Vegetables; Quadrupedes, Birds, Fishes, Reptiles and Insects; with their Properties and Uses in Mechanics, Diet, and Physic. III. An Account of the Nature of Climates in general, and their different Effects upon the human Body; with a Detail of the Diseases arising from this Source, particularly within the Tropics.⁶

Browne’s text belongs partly to the genre of British histories of the Caribbean, such as by those written by Hans Sloane and Edward Long, and partly to the explosion of natural histories that grew out of European encounters with peoples and lands across the globe. These writings depended on or proposed theories and taxonomies to account for differences in fauna, flora, and humans; such global ordering, or “epistemic mastery” was intertwined with European imperial expansion and colonial violence.⁷ Browne’s natural history is couched in a Georgic mode that insistently equated knowledge of

4 Matt Cohen, “Time and the Bibliographer: A Meditation on the Spirit of Book Studies,” *Textual Cultures* 13, no. 1 (2020): 181, 190, <https://doi.org/10.14434/textual.v13i1.30077>.

5 Cohen, 190, 202.

6 Patrick Browne, *The Civil and Natural History of Jamaica* (London: T. Osborne and J. Shipton, 1756), t.p. References are to this edition digitized by Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO) and accessed via Jisc Historical Texts. Italics in the original. The third part mentioned on the title page was never written (and the title page of the 1789 edition lists only two parts).

7 Theresa M. Kelley, *Clandestine Marriage: Botany and Romantic Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 1.

nature with improvement. The sheer variety and abundance of the natural products of the earth “*contribute to the ease and satisfaction of human society*” and call for a system to bring it all “*within a very narrow compass*” (xxxiii); he is notable for being the first English-speaking author to adopt in print the Linnaean classification system. Significantly, the book’s emphasis on natural history is set against the importance of Jamaica for the British imperial economy: “*the Emoluments of the whole nation, are deeply interested and augmented by the perpetual intercourse with this distant Island*” (v). Yet, other than to note in passing the costs and tax benefits of enslaved persons to the economy and a brief, superficial, description of their living and health (20, 22, 25), both the book’s civil history and its natural history serve to render invisible, to silence, the transatlantic system of enslavement that made the island central to the Britain empire.

These discourses, these linguistic codes, are inextricable from the material conditions of the book’s creation and production. Browne was a trained medical doctor and spent a substantial part of his working life in Jamaica.⁸ Jamaica’s slave economy provided work for him, which in turn financed the leisure time to study and write about the island’s minerals, plants, and animals. Both his professional life and his book were therefore dependent upon the British colonization of the Caribbean and the slave society it imposed on the island. Moreover, the illustration, printing, and publication of this work depended upon Browne’s own “*perpetual intercourse*” between Jamaica and Britain, which was enabled by the Atlantic network of protected shipping routes forged by trafficking and enslavement. The “*perverse geometry*” of the Atlantic Triangle was the material condition for the physical existence of the book copies that I was able to hold in my hand and view on the screen.⁹

One of the book copies I examined had belonged to Joseph Banks: the 1756 copy was part of his own library that was bequeathed to the British Museum.¹⁰ The survival of that copy is indebted to Banks’s centrality in the imperial metropole: his presidency of the

8 E.C. Nelson, “Browne, Patrick (c. 1720–1790), Physician and Botanist,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/3690>. See also Nelson, “Patrick Browne’s *The Civil and Natural History of Jamaica* (1756, 1789),” *Archives of Natural History* 24, no. 3 (1997): 326–36, <https://doi.org/10.3366/anh.1997.24.3.327>.

9 Elizabeth A. Bohls, *Slavery and the Politics of Place: Representing the Colonial Caribbean, 1770–1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 8.

10 ESTC [English Short Title Catalog] T089757, British Library, shelfmark 459.c.4.

Royal Society, his role on the board of trustees of the British Museum, and his connection with the government and the court meant that he had a high degree of influence on British imperial endeavours and on the printed records of those endeavours.¹¹ The recent British Library project to enable scholars to trace the provenance of material is a laudable aim to connect the histories of collections with the racial systems and colonial records of the British empire.¹² The record of Banks's copy of Browne came to us via the British Museum's "General Catalogue" published between 1881 and 1905. This was the initial seed of the Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) project begun in 1976, which, in turn, was the basis of the microfilming project by Research Publications, which was then digitized as ECCO.

The provenance of the 1789 issue was harder to trace, but doing so has produced other interesting resonances concerning its survival and accessibility. In this case, the source copy of the text digitized in ECCO is located in the Kenneth Spencer Library, University of Kansas (KU).¹³ I was unable to travel to see the copy, so I was indebted to the "women's bibliographic labor" (in Kate Ozment's phrase) of librarians Karen Cook and Elspeth Healey.¹⁴ But what enabled its journey from bookseller to owners to its presence in a library in Kansas and then into ECCO? Its presence in ECCO might have followed from the stature of the library's eighteenth-century holdings at the time of the microfilming operation. Henry Snyder, director of the US end of the ESTC project, taught at KU from 1963–79, so he might have been familiar with their collections. The presence of Browne's *History* in the Linnaeana collection at KU could have resulted from the acquisition of the collections of ornithologist Ralph Ellis in 1945 or of botanist and bibliophile Thomas Jefferson Fitzpatrick in 1953; KU's first rare book acquisitions in the 1880s foreshadow its current strengths in natural history and the eighteenth

11 Rudiger Joppien and Neil Chambers, "The Scholarly Library and Collections of Knowledge of Sir Joseph Banks," in *Libraries within the Library: The Origins of the British Library's Printed Collections*, ed. Giles Mandelbrote and Barry Taylor (London: British Library, 2009), 222–43, <https://bl.iro.bl.uk/work/sc/53239729-fccf-4e79-ba0c-bebb1f324c5e>.

12 Major Named Collections of Printed Books, British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/major-named-collections-of-printed-books-now-in-the-british-library>, accessed 26 November 2020.

13 ESTC T089758, University of Kansas Library, shelfmark Linnaeana G13.

14 Kate Ozment, "Rationale for Feminist Bibliography," *Textual Cultures* 13, no. 1 (2020): 167, <https://doi.org/10.14434/textual.v13i1.30076>.

century.¹⁵ The development of the library has a wider historical context. KU opened in Lawrence in 1866, though it had been in the planning stages since 1855.¹⁶ Lawrence was created as the capital of the new “free state” of Kansas by abolitionist settlers in 1854; the “free state” of Kansas was established, however, on the lands of dispossessed Indigenous peoples. KU occupies land expropriated from the Kaw, Osage, and Shawnee nations in the nineteenth century. Various KU departments have land acknowledgment statements on their webpages.¹⁷

My own digital book history might seem a long way—figuratively, historically, and geographically—from these histories that stretch across the Atlantic and across the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. But the eccentric routes by which these copies of Browne’s *Civil and Natural History of Jamaica* have come to me have a compelling force of connectivity. Strangely, or counter-intuitively perhaps, my reliance on this transatlantic digital connection brought home to me my reliance on various and historical networks of colonial power and privilege.

The Screen

Kevin Kelly, founder of *Wired* magazine, imagined a digital universe of immediate knowledge in 1994: “Pages from the books appear on the screen one after another without delay. To search Borges’s Library of all possible books, past, present, and future,

15 See Alexandra Mason, *A Guide to the Collections* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1987), 25–28, <https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/11782>; and James Helyar et al., *A Silver Anniversary: The First 25 Years of the Kenneth Spencer Research Library* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1994), 12, <https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/11765>.

16 *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History*, ed. Frank W. Blackmar (Chicago: Standard, 1912), 2:831–38, transcribed 2002 by Carolyn Ward, https://web.archive.org/web/20110628183347/http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/1912/u/university_of_kansas.html.

17 The Kenneth Spencer library also notes the way in which their collections of Indigenous materials are catalogued “typically reflect the perspectives of white institutions and European standards of information organization—not how indigenous peoples would describe themselves or their ways of knowing.”

https://guides.lib.ku.edu/braiding_sweetgrass/kenneth_spencer_research_library, accessed 8 October 2021.

one needs only to sit down (the modern solution) and click the mouse.”¹⁸ Matthew Kirschenbaum conceptualized such visions as “medial ideology,” and Nanna Thylstrup identified similar imaginaries that are characteristic of many mass digitization projects.¹⁹ Such dreams of books made instantaneously present in magical light powerfully obscure the material conditions of digitization and digital publishing.

When I was researching eighteenth-century books and their various remediated versions, my experience came close to many of these ideas. While a trackpad has replaced a mouse, I did sit down at a screen on which appeared the digital facsimile of Browne’s *Civil and Natural History*. My digital book history was supported by the work of librarians across the Atlantic, communication with whom was enabled by access to the global infrastructure of the internet, and included my privileged access to the paywalled online collection of texts, ECCO. Global disparities of internet provision and web access are well known, but expensive commercial digital products like Gale’s ECCO exacerbate this digital divide. Its high cost, the risk that this cost might limit the number of institutions that could afford it, and the question of the digital divide was highlighted as early as its launch in 2003 and in many subsequent debates.²⁰

Alongside questions of access, there is also a question concerning the production of digital collections like ECCO. The medial ideology of instantaneous access to knowledge and the abstraction that the word “digitization” implies obscures the labour required to build such products. Far more than merely running the films through a scanner, digitization also involves the processes of cleaning and cropping image files, encoding text and metadata in XML, and the various quality-control stages of production. Gale is headquartered in Farmington Hills, Michigan, but the digitization of

18 Kevin Kelly, *Out of Control : The New Biology of Machines, Social Systems, and the Economic World* (Reading, Mass.: Perseus Books, 1994), 263

<http://archive.org/details/outofcontrolnewb00kell> accessed 24 February 2022.

Jorge Luis Borges writes of a fictional universe comprising a vast library of all knowledge in the short story “La biblioteca de Babel” (The Library of Babel, 1941).

19 Matthew Kirschenbaum, *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 39; and Nanna Bonde Thylstrup, *The Politics of Mass Digitization* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018), 106–7. Gregg, “Screens, Microfilms, and Books: Dreams and Reality,” 13 September 2019, <https://shgregg.com/2019/09/13/screens-microfilms-and-books-dreams-and-reality/>.

20 Gregg, *Old Books and Digital Publishing*, 78–79.

ECCO was undertaken by HTC Global (also based in the US). Significantly, the work was undertaken by operatives in its India offices (HTC Global has offices in Chennai, Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Gurgaon). Natraj Kumar, in charge of the operation in India, estimated that around 500 people were involved in the two-year digitization, including over 350 production operatives, over 100 on quality control, and 75 in supporting service roles.²¹ Outsourcing is now an essential part of the global IT business where countries of the Global South have become the “scribes” of the corporations of the Global North.²² Tara McPherson, Lisa Nakamura, and Mattie Burkert point out that we need to connect the view from digital humanities scholarship to the infrastructures of racial and gendered labour beyond the platforms which enable that scholarship.²³ As McPherson puts it, such a connection

involves more than simply studying our screens and the images that dance across them, moving beyond the study of representations and the rhetorics of visibility. We might read representations seeking symptoms of information capital’s fault lines and successes, but we cannot read the logics of these systems and networks solely at the level of our screens. Capital is now fully organized under the sign of modularity. It operates via the algorithm and the database, via simulation and processing. Our screens are cover stories, disguising deeply divided forms of both machine and human labor. We focus exclusively on them increasingly to our peril.²⁴

My book did go beyond the screen to discuss the Anglocentric biases of ECCO and the wider debate about the whiteness of digital archives highlighted in work by Roopika Risam, Amy Earhart, Tim Hitchcock, Adeline Koh, and Martha Nell Smith.²⁵ However,

21 Natraj Kumar, email message to Julia de Mowbray, forwarded to Stephen H. Gregg, 1 November 2019. The addition of LoC subject headings 2007–2009 was also outsourced to HTC Global.

22 Shehzad Nadeem, “Indian Arrivistes and Cyber Coolies: Reflections on Global Outsourcing and the Middle Class,” *Sociology Compass* 9, no. 4 (2015): 290, <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12255>.

23 Tara McPherson, “Why Are the Digital Humanities So White? Or Thinking the Histories of Race and Computation,” in *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (2012), <https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/untitled-88c11800-9446-469b-a3be-3fdb36bfd1e/section/20df8acd-9ab9-4f35-8a5d-e91aa5f4a0ea#ch09>. Lisa Nakamura, “Indigenous Circuits: Navajo Women and the Racialization of Early Electronic Manufacture,” *American Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (2014): 919–41. http://muse.jhu.edu/content/crossref/journals/american_quarterly/v066/66.4.nakamura.html.

Mattie Burkert, “From Manual to Digital: Women’s Hands and the Work of Eighteenth-Century Studies,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 52 (forthcoming [2023]).

24 McPherson, <https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/untitled-88c11800-9446-469b-a3be-3fdb36bfd1e/section/20df8acd-9ab9-4f35-8a5d-e91aa5f4a0ea#ch09>.

25 Gregg, *Old Books and Digital Publishing*, 97–99.

it underplayed ECCO's place within the neocolonial division of labour in the global information business and what Alex Gil recently called the "uber whiteness" of the leadership of "knowledge cartels" such as EBSCO and ProQuest, and which is equally visible in the make-up of Gale's own executive leadership.²⁶

Eccentric Connections, Situated Listening

But what of the situatedness of the bibliographer holding the book and viewing the screen? How am I entangled with the routes of this book? The other conditions of my access, whether digital or physical, are clearly associated with my own set of privileges of class, gender, and race. I am a white middle-class man with a university education, employed on a full-time permanent contract at a university, with access to an expensive database and within travelling distance of a national archive. Moreover, the relationship between Browne and my own situation is not as distant as it might seem. The connection between Bath's built environment, slavery, and the wealth of its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century elite is well known to historians of this period, but it has taken some time for this connection to be publicly acknowledged by the city's heritage organizations.²⁷ There are also still traces of the industry that specialized in manufacturing brass goods for trade with Africa.²⁸ Less obvious is the high number of middle-class men and women in Bath who had invested in slavery, as evidenced by the records of claims and beneficiaries for slave compensation between 1814 and 1834.²⁹ Bath Spa University is built on land bought and "improved" by Joseph Langton in the

26 Alex Gil (@electroalex), "When we talk about who owns our digital scholarly record," Twitter, 27 August 2021, <https://twitter.com/elotroalex/status/1431306951036751875>. About Gale <https://www.gale.com/intl/about>, accessed 3 September 2021.

27 For example, Beckford and the Slave Trade (Beckford's Tower, Bath Preservation Trust), <https://beckfordstower.org.uk/a-statement-from-bath-preservation-trust/>, accessed 13 October 2021. The Holburne Family and Caribbean Plantations (The Holburne Museum), <https://www.holburne.org/the-holburne-family-and-caribbean-plantations/>, accessed 13 October 2021. Olivette Otele recently urged that we connect the legacies of slavery with modern attitudes to racism and diversity (Roundtable, *Bath 250 Conference*, Bath, UK, 8 October 2021).

28 Richard S. White, "Breaking Silences and Revealing the Disappeared: Walking-with Legacies of Slave-Ownership, Bath (UK)," *International Journal of Education through Art* 17, no. 1 (2021): 81–113.

29 See The Centre for the Study of the Legacies of Slave Ownership, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>, accessed 27 September 2021.

eighteenth century (designed by Capability Brown, then Humphry Repton), and although there is no evidence that the family ever owned slaves, their estate was built by the inheritance generated by his family's trading interests in Bristol.³⁰

Why bring this history of place to bear on an analysis of a book? My original silence was the symptom of a disconnection between different kinds of history: one came at the expense of the other. Eugenia Zuroski recently argued that if scholars of the eighteenth century are serious about decolonizing our field of study, then we need to “begin by acknowledging the field's legacy as a colonial construct designed to legitimate one set of cultural values and ideologies at the expense of others.”³¹ The urgency injected in discussions of eighteenth-century studies by scholars supporting #BIPOC18 and #Bigger6 call out for such acknowledgments and connections. Sal Nicolazzo, responding to this urgency, imagines a scholarship that is “attuned to its complicities with its objects of study.”³² I offer this slice of Bath history as a way of rubbing together contexts that have no immediately discernible connection, to create—in Srinivas Aravamudan's words—“eccentric readings” to make new and different connections between the local and the global in the hope they will illuminate a different way of telling this book's story.³³

Nevertheless, as a white man with what P. Gabrielle Foreman succinctly terms “consolidated institutional and societal power,” writing this essay is a problematic intervention since it risks reinstating the very privilege it is attempting to set aside, re-

30 Newton Park, Historic England, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000567>. Joseph's father was Joseph Langton, MP (ca. 1637–1720), whose father was John Langston, Bristol Merchant, brother to Thomas Langston Mayor of Bristol. See History of Parliament Online, <http://historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/langton-joseph-1637-1719>, accessed 25 October 2021. John and Thomas Langton had been wardens (Thomas also became Master) of Bristol's Society of Merchant Adventurers. John Latimer, *The History of the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol; with Some Account of the Anterior Merchants' Guilds* (Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith, 1903), 325–27, <http://archive.org/details/historyofsociety00latiuoft>.

31 Eugenia Zuroski, “This Ship We're in,” *The Rambling*, no. 9 (7 August 2020), <https://the-rambling.com/2020/08/07/issue9-zuroski/>.

32 Sal Nicolazzo, “Another 1987, or Whiteness and Eighteenth-Century Studies,” *ECF* 33, no. 2 (2021): 235, <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/776558>.

33 Srinivas Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency 1688–1804* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 330.

centering whiteness.³⁴ But the risk and the discomfort that arises from mobilising that privilege should not result in stasis and silence, which would in effect reinstate my original silence. Instead, I wanted to risk the attempt, feeling that this discomfort could be given voice. In a recent talk, Tanje Dreher proposed that we might “theorise how to give up power” and argued for a “generative” discomfort.³⁵ As Juliette Singh argues, “we cannot rely on masterful proscriptions about ethics and politics, nor can we abdicate our responsibility to act even when we fear complicity and risk failure.”³⁶ In opposition to the “epistemic mastery” evidenced in the natural histories of the eighteenth century, my scholarly discomfort might defuse such mastery of its subject by an eccentric set of connections between place and history and book. It is to run a risk but, in Singh’s words, “in recognizing, reading, and becoming vulnerable to failure—we participate in new emergences, new possibilities for nonmasterful relations.”³⁷ My own situation as a scholar demands a “politics of listening” which is clearly “located within specific contexts of power and privilege.”³⁸ Those contexts are entangled with the object of study and the routes by which it journeyed. It was the discomfort with that entangled complicity that—perversely perhaps—led me to listen more carefully to the story of colonial violence embedded in the existence of those book copies.

The story I have tentatively traced is one of convergence—an “*event horizon*,” to use Shep’s term—of the entangled routes across space and time that enable this book copy’s material existence in the present. These routes encompassed aspects of biography, the connections of provenance and archive, the violent histories of place and geography, and the neocolonial conditions of digital publishing and technology. It is necessarily

34 P. Gabrielle Foreman, “A Riff, A Call, and A Response: Reframing the Problem That Led to Our Being Tokens in Ethnic and Gender Studies; or, Where Are We Going Anyway and with Whom Will We Travel?,” *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 30, no. 2 (2013): 315, <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/527552>.

35 Tanje Dreher, keynote speech, online, Decolonisation and Discomfort event organized by the English Association, UK, 18 June 2021, <https://englishassociation.ac.uk/decolonisation-and-discomfort/>.

36 Juliette Singh, *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 174.

37 Singh, 174.

38 Tanja Dreher and Poppy de Souza, “Locating Listening,” in *Ethical Responsiveness and the Politics of Difference*, ed. Dreher and Anshuman Mondal (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 21, 22.

tentative: it is an unmasterful reflection that has depended upon an eccentric series of connections between me and these books.