

# Editors' Introduction to the First Issue of *Scholarly Editing: The Annual of the Association for Documentary Editing*

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We are honored to present the inaugural issue of *Scholarly Editing: The Annual of the Association for Documentary Editing*. As many readers know, this journal has had a long life as a print publication—*Documentary Editing*—but has now been remade as an open-access, digital vehicle for publishing not only essays about the theory and practice of editing but also short scholarly editions themselves. The journal will be among the first—if not *the* first—to offer a platform for textual editors to publish peer-reviewed short editions. Our concept for the remaking of the journal, and particularly for the publication of short editions, emerged from a desire to somehow respond to obstacles we see emerging for digital scholarly editing, and to provide an incentive to would-be editors in the form of technological support, peer review, and publication. We would like to offer some background on why we came to remake this journal, and how we see *Scholarly Editing: The Annual of the Association for Documentary Editing* as providing an important venue both for editors looking for appropriate publication opportunities and for any reader interested in the documents comprising the record of cultural history.

We first, however, want to publicly thank the Association for Documentary Editing, which sponsors this journal. The ADE has long supported the editorial work of a varied group of scholars, and in embracing the reinvention of this journal, they are taking a substantial risk. For over thirty years, the ADE has successfully published *Documentary Editing* as a print journal, and, of course, the organization could have persisted with that model. True to its mission to support the work of scholarly editors, though, the organization embraced a new model that

would allow for both continued publication of essays about the theory and practice of editing and, importantly, editions themselves. By sponsoring *Scholarly Editing*, the ADE is dedicating itself to a new publication model that will hopefully expand the opportunities for scholars undertaking editorial work. It takes a committed and courageous organization to embrace a reinvention of its well-established publication, and we wish to thank the membership and leadership of the ADE for its gracious support throughout the development of this debut issue.

We undertook to transform this publication because we saw it as a significant opportunity to contribute to the fields of both editing and digital humanities. Over the last fifteen years or so, scholarly editing has increasingly turned to digital environments for their flexibility and potential. Space and financial constraints historically have forced print editors to make choices about which texts should be considered authoritative, sometimes requiring them to choose one version of a complex work to represent in the edition, or to collapse complicated documentary histories into an apparatus often so impenetrably condensed that such editions have been accused of placing texts behind "barbed wire." Digital editions radically ease these concerns, theoretically allowing editors to include any number of drafts and competing print variations, and allowing for creative and dynamic interfaces that can help readers immediately comprehend the complexity of the text, rather than choking it up with an intimidating print apparatus. The digital environment also allows for facsimiles of documents to be used in ways that are unimaginable in print, sometimes illuminatingly knitted to transcriptions and commentary, and sometimes offering a degree of detail that would be prohibitively expensive in print volumes. Digital editing also allows editors to reconceive the very basis of editions, collecting, studying, and recombining works around different axes than what can conform to the strictures of the codex edition. Digital editors find that the ongoing nature of their projects allow them to add texts and commentary and correct mistakes in ways that their print forbears would have envied. Best of all, while an impressive, multi-volume print edition may cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars—often meaning that only research libraries or true devotees can buy it, or that lay readers are limited to the narrower offerings of a derived reader's edition—some of the largest digital editions are available free online, readable by anyone with a computer and internet connection.

For these reasons, literary scholars, historians, librarians, musicologists, paleographers, philosophers, and many other scholars around the world have taken up digital editing as the most promising means of representing and disseminating the primary materials in their fields. Mass digitization projects, which typically use quick and dirty automated methods to digitize vast quantities of texts, attract a lot of attention in the popular press, though editors—while likely availing themselves of the remarkable convenience of such projects—often cringe at the projects' shortcomings in metadata, accuracy, representation of compositional and publication complexities, and annotation. Large, scholar-led digital editions have also grown up over the past decade, with a handful of usually canonical figures receiving comprehensive coverage in online editions. However, we have noticed that editions of a smaller scale—for example, ones that may study a single text, a small collection of texts, or a grouping of noncanonical texts—have conspicuously not fared as well.

Back in the early oughts of this century, when we were working as graduate students on the *Walt Whitman Archive* ([www.whitmanarchive.org](http://www.whitmanarchive.org)), it seemed to us that we were about to see a great wave of new digital materials for literary study and that those materials would be, first and foremost, digital editions. However, while we can point to examples of well-done scholarly editions, they have not been produced at the rate that many digital humanists likely expected a decade ago. The tremendous promise that excited us as graduate students has not been fulfilled, and the traditional anxieties of scholarly editors persist. Digital editors still face the old concerns about whether editorial work will be valued by hiring and promotion committees, and they must confront the intimidating obstacles of undertaking a digital project, including finding server space, technological support, and an enduring venue for publication, as well as gambling on work that is likely to never earn that most important of academic blessings, peer review. Reflecting on these obstacles, we proposed *Scholarly Editing: The Annual of the Association of Documentary Editing* in the hope that it could offer to small-scale editions a stable publication environment, some technical advice, and most importantly, peer review, all of which would be a significant and innovative service to both would-be editors and to the general public, who have had limited access to so many fascinating documents from cultural history. And, since we are partnering with the Center for Digital Research in the Humanities at the University of Nebraska-

Lincoln (cdrh.unl.edu), which is housed in the UNL Libraries, the digital journal *Scholarly Editing* will benefit from the same long-term stewardship as the rest of the digital scholarship published by the Center.

Our publication of these short editions is happening through a fairly straightforward system: we gather proposals from editors and select the best proposals for graduation to the next step; we then get TEI-XML files and schemas from the editors; after the XML is received, we modify our house stylesheets for proper rendering of the digital edition on the web (or, in rare cases, implement editor-provided interface design). Once all parties—journal editors and edition editors—are satisfied with the interface, we submit the editions to peer reviews. Upon successful review, the editions are published. (Simultaneously, we have accepted submissions of essays on the theory and practice of editing that have also been peer-reviewed prior to publication.)

In addition to offering an important venue to editors, we also see this publication as providing a balance to certain trends within digital humanities, the nebulous umbrella term used to describe any number of humanistic undertakings aided by computers. To be blunt, we believe that over the last decade, and especially more recently, "digital humanities" has come to be defined more by the digital than by the humanities. We suspect that this results from many factors, including a broadening of the term "digital humanities" to include such a wide range of scholarly pursuits that very little yokes them together, apart from a general interest in developing or implementing technology-driven (or, at least, technology-enabled) methodologies. Most definitions of the term "digital humanities" illustrate this point. For example, in Matt Kirschenbaum's recent essay in the *ADE Bulletin*, "What is Digital Humanities and What's It Doing in English Departments?," he cites the Wikipedia entry on "Digital Humanities" (written by people active in the field), commenting, "as a working definition this serves as well as any I've seen"<sup>1</sup>. That definition is appropriately wide:

The digital humanities, also known as humanities computing, is a field of study, research, teaching, and invention concerned with the intersection of computing and the disciplines of the humanities. It is methodological by nature and interdisciplinary in scope. It involves

investigation, analysis, synthesis and presentation of information in electronic form. It studies how these media affect the disciplines in which they are used, and what these disciplines have to contribute to our knowledge of computing.

Though we do not quibble with this as a working definition of the field, it is telling that beyond the co-existence of "humanities" and "computing," and perhaps the inclination to interdisciplinary teamwork, there is little to unite the varied people who self-identify as digital humanists.

Most conversations in the "digital humanities" community, then, tend toward the technology and the methodology: this is what unites the medievalist and the Western American historian, the classicist and the librarian. This has also resulted in a professional culture that identifies innovations in technology and methodology as paramount, and the most headline-grabbing accomplishments in digital humanities are fixated on these innovations. Conspicuously absent from this trend, however, are celebrations of content-rich digital humanities projects. The valuing of technological innovation has made it a little more difficult for editors to create digital editions comfortably within the community of digital humanities, as the base technologies for creating digital editions have been fairly stable for nearly a decade. It used to be that digital humanities scholars would proclaim mightily about the power of new systems of access and distribution. "Imagine," we would shout, "what will happen when all of author X's work can be edited and published online, for free, allowing unfettered access to senior scholars and students alike!" But, in the rhetoric of the last few years, such innovations as these seem to have bored people. They've grown so used to the ability to access materials through the web, to the results of text markup and interface design, and to the ways in which the web has reorganized—and continues to reorganize—scholarly communication, that there is little enthusiasm for new projects that find their bread and butter in such technologies. This shift in focus from content development to technological innovation, a trend that sometimes seems driven by innovation for innovation's sake, can at its worst seem to posit a "hipster ethos" for the digital humanities community—that the quality of the work you do is not so important as staying at the edge of innovation, always one step ahead of the unfashionable masses. However, we are concerned that viewing technological

innovation as a value in itself will have pernicious effects on the development of digital humanities, both by estranging the field from scholarly humanities content and by asserting to our colleagues that digital humanities is a field open only to those few scholars who have the institutional resources to develop tools that are technologically cutting edge. It is our contention that what we are doing with *Scholarly Editing* is both innovative and, pleasantly, rooted in a long scholarly tradition. The innovation is in the details: the nature of the publication, the form of the scholarly communication, and the method by which we will publish, combined with the technology underlying the editing. The tradition is in the value we have placed on scholarly editing as a worthy enterprise, an enterprise that need not worry over the vagaries of academic hipness. We are basing our editorial vision on a notion that digital tools—new or established—should be utilized only if they are serving the needs of humanistic inquiry.

In this, our debut issue, we include three small-scale editions that evidence the value of combining careful editorial attention, humanistic expertise, and developed digital methodologies. "The Inscription of Walt Whitman's 'Live Oak, With Moss' Sequence: A Restorative Edition," edited by Steven Olsen-Smith, recovers Whitman's revisions to this significant poem about same-sex attachment, revisions that have been neglected by print scholarship, and offers suggestions in how these restorations might change our understanding of the text. In "A Selection from 'Uncle Tom's Cabin: A Critical Edition': 'Topsy,'" Wesley Raabe and Les Harrison present a "fluid text" edition of one of the most significant sections of what is perhaps the most important work of fiction in nineteenth-century America and a key text in American racial history. Five different versions of the text, ranging from the original serial publication to a luxury book version, show how the complicated mid-nineteenth-century American literary marketplace resulted in textual change. In "The Firstling/Erstling/He Complex," Tanya Clement and Gaby Duvay present a dizzyingly complicated manuscript cluster by the eccentric Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven, allowing the reader to explore through a sophisticated and dynamic interface how the texts relate to one another.

This issue also offers essays that explore diverse concerns within the field of scholarly editing: Ronald Broude discusses the challenges of editing music in "Musical Works, Musical Texts, and Musical Editions: A Brief Overview"; John Fierst describes the textual complexities involved in editing a Native American

captivity narrative in "A 'Succession of Little Occurrences': Scholarly Editing and the Organization of Time in John Tanner's *Narrative*"; and Paul Grant-Costa, Tobias Glaza, and Michael Sletcher discuss the promise of cooperatively editing neglected historical documents in "The Common Pot: Editing Native American Materials." Finally, in keeping with the tradition of the print journal, we offer reviews of new publications, a compilation of recent editions, and President Susan Perdue's 2011 address to the Association for Documentary Editing.

We hope *Scholarly Editing: The Annual of the Association for Documentary Editing* demonstrates to readers the powerful revelations about the documents of our shared cultural histories that are made possible through editing.

## Notes

1. Matt Kirschenbaum, "What Is Digital Humanities and What's It Doing in English Departments?" *ADE Bulletin* 150 (2010): 1-7.