

R E V I E W S

TRACKING CHANGE

Lou Burnard, Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, and John Unsworth, eds. *Electronic Textual Editing*. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2006. Pp. 419. \$28.00 paperback + CD.

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As books gained in popularity, over the centuries (since the invention of moveable type), and they became a standard for teaching and learning, so emerged the study of books in their own right. In effect, scholarly editions of texts took shape and became staples for the academic community. It seemed, at the time, that printed books were the only logical medium for the product. However, as technology embodies a new standard of learning, scholars began experimenting with electronic forms and undertook the study of electronic text publication. Their studies are creating a new field altogether. The problem lies in the cohesion of a field that is defined by regulations although no regulations have yet to be developed. As print texts become digitized, new questions emerge regarding authorship, editing procedures, formatting, and reader relationships with text—questions which are being addressed with individual practice and experimentation. In the meantime, editors are discovering opportunities offered by electronic editing in both critical and noncritical approaches.

Electronic Textual Editing, an anthology edited by Lou Burnard, Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, and John Unsworth, and containing twenty-four articles by various authors, explores the benefits of electronic publication while maintaining that the key goals of editors do not vary between the media of printed and electronic text. While publishing works electronically—and often on the World Wide Web—has altered reader perception and the availability of texts, and produced both opportunity and setbacks, simultaneously, the editor of any publication must retain responsibility for maintaining author intentions and reader usability. This is where the issue of electronic editing's position emerges. While editors maintain the same responsibilities in both electronic and print editions of work, the two media differ greatly and produce distinctly unique roles. Currently, the term "electronic textual editor" is viewed as something analogous to that of the traditional scholarly editor. This book's goal is to establish the role of an editor who crosses the line that separates these entities. That is, the volume's editors wish to show how a primarily print textual editor can transform into an electronic textual editor and can wear both hats simultaneously. The book's editors do this by using the first part of the volume to explore the theoretical insights of editors in both media and using the second part of the book to highlight practical procedures and introduce the textual editor to electronic and digital guidelines.

In the book's foreword, G. Thomas Tanselle stresses that, regardless of a text's presentation, readers will receive it in the context of its original medium. He exemplifies this point with the current treatment of primarily oratorical literature, claiming that "the invention of printing from movable type greatly facilitated the production of tangible verbal texts, but it did not change the questions that readers need to ask about the nature of a



verbal work” (3). Therefore, as new technology allows the opportunity to publish ancient artifacts for the first time, the reader must keep in mind the original production and understand that while editors can make significant approaches at deciphering authorial intent, the transition of the original medium (print) to one that is digital will significantly change the manner in which a text is received and interpreted by an audience. Nevertheless, the editor’s task is to preserve, as much as possible, the original quality of a text, placing the responsibility of working *with* the text *onto* the reader. Presentation, therefore, of something such as a facsimile of a medieval text can be greatly improved with image-based originals appearing in digital form—a result of the generally discouraged manipulation of original texts through print editions of texts that were perhaps initially confusing for the reader. With developing technology, the user of an ancient monograph or medieval-punctuated text may receive options of viewing both original versions and digitally altered interpretations of these texts, within one click of a button or even simultaneously.

The first part of the volume, entitled “Sources and Orientations,” begins with general theoretical explorations of textual editing and advances to articles that regard specific literary subjects, thereby attempting to define aspects of electronic textual editing. In the first article, “Editing in a Digital Horizon,” Dino Buzzetti and Jerome McGann explore the advantages of working with electronic copy. They state that “information stored in different kinds of media—musical and pictorial information as well as textual and bibliographical information—can be gathered and translated into a uniform (digital) medium and of course can be broadcast electronically” (58). This argument is developed by citing such examples as Rice University’s attempt to become the nation’s first all-digital university press. A goal of this project is to provide electronic manuscripts of work in the field of art history, a field much reliant on visual production. In addition, programs and websites such as those of the multimedia-enabled encyclopedias include links and tools to experience multimedia that is otherwise difficult to obtain and often unavailable to the public.

The development of electronic texts is both a hindrance and an aid to literary criticism. For poetry, initial concerns focused on the text’s reliance on its layout to communicate to the reader. Because formatting is an essential aspect of interpreting and criticizing poetry, limited programming at the onset of electronic editing may lead to a loss of many of the very aspects on which the art depends. Neil Fraistat and Steven Jones articulate in their article “Editing Poetry Electronically,” the point that “Poetry as a form ... tests and sometimes strains the resources of any textual encoding system” (106). Thus, the process of encoding has developed and changed as a result of various user needs. In designing electronic volumes of poetry, or any form of document, it is essential that readers be able to navigate between links and to search for individual texts. Fraistat’s and Jones’s large online project, *Romantic Circles*, has altered the design of web pages that host poetry in varying versions, and they cite Shelley’s poem “The Devil’s Walk” as a specific example of this. They say that the poem, posted on three quarters of a web page and accompanied by two additional frames of annotations, “made a good choice for an experiment in electronic editing, in part because of the form of its material embodiment as a single surviving copy ... of a multistanza ballad printed on a large-format broadside sheet” (109). Thus, with proper formatting (including the possibility of using multiple frames on one page) allowed users visiting *Romantic Circles* from all over the Internet to experience a work in a state resembling the original, which might have had only limited audiences previously.



Julia Flanders notes the position of the editor as taking a new shape in the digital age. She realizes how essential it is for an editor to remove himself from changing original bloopers and retaining the original form of an archive. She achieves this aim with her *Women Writers Project*, a digital anthology, by including both original and reformatted versions of texts. In projects in which artifacts of the writing process is available (that is, as textual formats are altered to include editorial changes) is available, one should give the reader the choice to witness as many versions as are possible. Therefore, if the aim of an electronic edition is to reproduce a text as closely as possible to its original publication format, then the editor should include “mistakes” such as typos or marginal notes—even antiquated character types if they are available. As electronic texts become more advanced, the ability of editors to achieve exact replicas of original texts will emerge and develop.

Unsurprisingly, Bob Rosenberg takes an overall positive approach to the impact of digitization in his article “Documentary Editing.” His project, which involves converting the original work of Thomas Alva Edison from personal notebooks and notes to digital reproductions in the form of a comprehensive website, relies on the gains achieved by the Web. He understands that regardless of the medium that an editor uses, “editors must devote the profession’s characteristic, meticulous attention to selection, transcription, and annotation” to their work (92). At the same time, he notes the improved opportunities that electronic work presents. Rosenberg exemplifies his argument of an editor’s role in selection by detailing his project’s decision to date images according to their related text (as when an image’s exact date is unknown) instead of omitting them completely from the project (99). Thus, priorities in electronic work presumably lie in producing all available material and may include factual detail in cases in which raw material contains more importance than its linked dates. He notes that “the Internet’s potential for displaying sound and motion opens fascinating possibilities for annotation” (99). In the case of *The Edison Papers*, the advantages of providing users with live supplements to material outweighed the problem that “linking images to their document information was a painstaking process” (97).

Throughout his experience working on the Edison project, Rosenberg encountered many philosophical and theoretical issues, of which he remarked that “the practical issues predominated” (97). It seems that, in general, the work of editing electronically is focused on providing to users as much material as possible in the most effective way possible.

For the most part, the volume is scattered with terms that don’t bear any clear distinctions. Edward Vanhoutte seeks to define and organize editing jargon and draw lines between labels of materiality, access mediums, and functionality. The very treatment of this issue showcases the problem of new technology and the headaches it is creating as it emerges as a foreign medium. It also shows the need for set guidelines and procedures to take shape in order for the inevitable digitization of texts to occur in organized, precise fashion.

Consequently, some aspects of newly emerging electronic editing will be painstaking and unavoidable, and editors will have to decide if the risk is worth the reward. In order to ensure authenticity of texts as they transition from print (or original form) to electronic material, editors may experience tedious procedures of checking new versions of text with the old ones. Undeveloped authentication programs have required editors at times to go to extreme measures of checking and rechecking word-for-word documents pre-publishing them electronically. In addition, editors “are forced” to accept new responsibilities (ac-



tually old ones for textual scholars) concerning authorial intent and structural meanings until software becomes able to handle specific coding requests (270).

In addition, the very presence of editors and authors in the electronic world is making them a part of a copyright and permissions debate that surrounds publication. As Mary Case and David Green point to in their article “Rights and Permissions in an Electronic Edition,” which appears in the second half of the volume, all media is at the mercy of copyright law. However, how, exactly, the law applies to digital work is still unclear and “hotly contested” (346). Thus, as part of the new digital environment, scholarly electronic editions have inadvertently faced the challenge of interpreting copyright laws to maintain respect for the work of others.

Finally, the fate of electronic textual editing—if anything, like that of print publication—will define itself as time goes on, changing and taking shape to address the numerous issues such as authenticity, insufficient editorial knowledge and/or comfort with coding and technical jargon, copyright permissions, and countless formatting opportunities provided by new media. As the volume editors explain in their introduction, it took over 500 years to naturalize the book, so there is no telling how long it will take to establish scholarly texts in the emerging electronic world. All one can do is sit back, track the changes as they occur, and embrace the opportunity that digitization presents for textual editing.