

## **Digital Archives and Their Margins**

MLA Annual Convention, Boston

4 January 2013, 5:15 – 6:30 pm, Berkeley Room (Sheraton)

Panel sponsored by the discussion group for Bibliography & Textual Studies

Organizers: Alan Galey (University of Toronto) & Katherine Harris (San José State University)

When digital archives in the humanities took shape in the late 1990's as alternatives to traditional editions, there was optimism that archives could highlight texts, writers, communities, and even cultures neglected by scholarly editing. Many factors contribute to a work's marginality in the editorial tradition, including gender, canonicity, medium, language, and class. Digital archives, by contrast, held out the promise of an inclusivity that was unattainable in print.

How have digital archives, as venues for critical recovery projects, fared in the past decade? What are their successes and failures, challenges and opportunities, both expected and unexpected? What are their prospects for the future? How might the building and curating of digital archives yield opportunities to understand the dynamics of marginalization itself? How does the scale of projects affect those opportunities?

Other potential questions:

- What lessons can digital archive projects and users in the humanities learn from archival theory and practice, especially in its engagement with archival recovery projects?
- How can practices like interface design and visualization affect the representation of marginalized texts in archives, and what new affordances can digital media offer on this front?

## Papers:

### 1. **“Echoes at our Peril: Small Feminist Archives in Big Digital Humanities”**

Katherine Harris, San José State University

By offering a “stable publication environment” and peer review to small-scale digital scholarly editions, the 2012 inaugural issue of the revised *Scholarly Editing* (<http://scholarlyediting.org/>), under the editors Amanda Gailey and Andrew Jewell, attempts to balance the digital offerings of cultural materials beyond canonical authors and figures. In “Googling the Victorians,” Patrick Leary concludes his essay by asserting that whatever does not end up in a digital archive, represented as cyber/hypertext will not, in the future, be studied, remembered, valorized and canonized. Though this statement reflects some hysteria about the loss of the print book, it is also revealing in its recognition that digital representations have become common and widespread, regardless of professional standards. But, as Gailey and Jewell point out, digital editions and archives haven’t lived up to their promise to provide access to inaccessible and non-canonical materials—most among these are works by women. While Digital Humanities pushes ever outward toward innovation, the issue of feminist recovery projects and scholarly editions still persists on the margins. In order to attract funding, even users, these types of digital projects have to represent the stars of the literary canon. This, in effect, crushes the purposes of the archive—to provide access to an under-represented set of authors. My focus will be on working with small scale digital projects, like the Forget Me Not Archive (<http://www.orgs.muohio.edu/anthologies/FMN/>), that try to balance non-canonical women’s authorship with other methodologies, such as textual criticism and bibliography.

Katherine D. Harris (Tenured Assistant Professor, English and Comparative Literature, San José State University) specializes in Romantic-Era and 19th-century British literature, women’s authorship, the literary annual, 19th-century history print culture and history of the book, textuality, editorial theory, Digital Humanities, and pedagogy. Her work ranges from pedagogical articles on using digital tools in the classroom to traditional scholarship on a “popular” literary form in 19th-century England. Much of her work can be explored on her research blog: <http://triproftri.wordpress.com>

### 2. **“The Archipelagic Archive: Caribbean Studies on a DIFF Key”**

Alex Gil, University of Virginia

The Caribbean has been the crucible where many American experiments have been carried out for the first time. Its fragile textual heritage testifies to the birth of the modern world. Furthermore, as the late Benitez Rojo

famously noted, the archipelagos are marked by many crossings and repetitions, much like a Turing machine. Sadly, it is a readily observable fact that there's but a handful of self-identified or identifiable digital humanities or textual scholars working on and for the Caribbean. As with other kin academic groups, the divide is as much self-imposed, as it is a result of a failure of digital humanities and textual studies to expand beyond US-Eurocentric canons. Although the Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLoc) has made great strides in collecting materials and forging alliances across the Caribbean, its mission continues to be unnecessarily hampered by the fact that funding today is geared towards innovation and tool building. In my presentation I will make a call for a new generation of Caribbean, post-colonial scholars who are both digital humanists and a textual scholars. It is only a generation of committed and smart practitioners that can decolonize the world's archival memory. The fight, I will argue, needs to take place on several fronts: open-access, preservation, digital methodologies and scholarly communications. I will use as a model my own digital work on Aimé Césaire. In this work, I have strived to create an 'archipelagic' authorial archive: a) marking and visualizing the geo-temporal distribution of textual changes, using one of his dearest works as a test-case; b) feeding and curating an 'organic' bibliography of primary and secondary sources; c) developing HTML replicas of the originals in order to deform and reform them.



Alex Gil, a PhD candidate in English Language & Literature at the University of Virginia, works on otr-American literatures and culture, digital humanities and critical theory. His dissertation restages the bewildering trajectory of Aimé Césaire's early play on the Haitian Revolution, "Et les chiens se taisaient."

### 3. **"Universal Design and Disability in the Digital Archive"**

Karen Bourrier, University of Western Ontario

"Accessibility" and "inclusivity" have been key terms in both disability studies and the digital humanities. Both fields, which came to prominence concurrently in the mid to late nineteen-nineties, seek to integrate previously marginalized texts and identities. Often, those building digital resources have seen the terms "inclusivity" and "accessibility" as meaning including or giving access to the greatest number of texts. In my experience working on *Nineteenth-Century Disability: A Digital Reader*, focusing on sheer number of texts collected is not always the best way to ensure the greatest access to those texts. For example, commercial databases such as Google Books promise access to a huge number of nineteenth-century texts, but, in the absence of any editing or other contextual clues, this archive may prove difficult to navigate to those who are not already specialists in the field. Even more scholarly archives, such as *The Disability History Museum*, which

produce HTML texts which are tagged thematically for easy searching, but which provide no other editorial apparatus in terms of headers or footnotes, would make it difficult for an undergraduate to place a nineteenth-century medical text in context. This kind of structure, which focuses on the number of texts amassed, may have the unintended consequence of making the archive primarily accessible to scholars who already know what they are looking for and at.

In this paper, I discuss the process of building a digital reader collecting primary sources in nineteenth-century disability studies through the lens of Universal Design theory. Universal Design started as a theory of architecture that sought to create buildings that would be inherently accessible to everyone, able-bodied and disabled. The tenants underlying Universal Design—including use that is equitable, flexible, simple and intuitive, with perceptible information and a tolerance for error—have been adapted by scholars such as Jay Dolmage to develop a theory of Universal Design for learning. I adapt Dolmage’s theory to the digital environment, suggesting that to make the information in digital archives truly accessible, a greater emphasis on the context provided by scholarly editing is needed. While the purpose and dimensions of a digital resource that collects the letters of a nineteenth-century woman writer may be immediately apparent, for thematically-based archives, there is a greater challenge in making the organizing principles and historical context of the archive transparent. Often the purpose and dimensions of a digital archive, or even the identity of the editors, are not as immediately apparent as they would be in a print edition, making it difficult for undergraduates to assess the scholarly value of the resource and take full advantage of its contents. The ideal web-resource, I suggest, would be designed such that its dimensions, methods, and purpose would be easily apprehensible to all users; and would incorporate traditional methods of scholarly editing, including headers and footnotes, to the extent needed to make the content of the archive accessible to those outside the field.

## Bibliography

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Karen Bourrier is a SSHRC postdoctoral fellow at the University of Western Ontario. She has recently completed a book MS on disability and masculinity in the Victorian novel. Her articles have appeared in venues such as *Victorian*

*Literature and Culture* and the *Victorian Review*, and she has been an invited lecturer at the CUNY Graduate Center and Harvard. She is currently working on a digital reader on nineteenth-century disability, and on the popular Victorian novelist Dinah Mulock Craik (special issue of *Women's Writing* forthcoming). She received her PhD from Cornell in 2009 and has taught at Boston University.

4. **“Digital Humanities and the Separation of Access, Ownership, and Reading”**

Zac Zimmer, Virginia Tech

In this paper, I interrogate the connection between reading, digital humanities (DH) scholarship, and the political economy of aesthetics. Let us use "reading" to mean all of those multiple and varied methods of interacting with an individual literary text: Augustine's "pick it up and read it," Barthes' "pleasure of the text," poststructuralist deconstruction and new historicism, a lifetime reader browsing in a bookstore, a commuter reading an ebook on the subway... Let us use "DH scholarship" to mean the many methods of "distant reading" that rely on data mining, mass visualization, and all other "non-consumptive" uses of literary texts. As for the political economy of aesthetics, that term encompasses the changing economics of book publishing, the evolution of reading practices, and the shift to born-digital literature: i.e. the production, distribution, and consumption of literary things.

DH scholarship is providing new breakthroughs in archiving, distributing, preserving, and analyzing literary texts. The best known English-language DH projects represent some of the highest achievements of twenty-first-century humanism: the Walt Whitman Archive, the Rossetti Project, the William Blake Archive, the Women Writers Project, the Mapping the Republic of Letters project, to name only a few. And there are many developing initiatives to preserve and archive born-digital materials. Yet what do all of these projects have in common? Not one represents post-WWI print culture. This is because, due to the US Copyright Term Extension Act, no copyrighted literary text authored after 1923 has entered the public domain.

The only way in-copyright texts are available to DH scholarship is via "non-consumptive" use. This means, essentially, that the DH scholar can do almost any kind of analysis of the modern literary text, **provided that he not read it.**

This, then, is the dark side of the spread of DH scholarship: it naturalizes a split between a) access to; b) ownership of; c) reading of a literary text. During the reign of print hegemony, these three elements were intertwined in the most profound fashion; only the lending library managed to rupture the trifecta, separating ownership from access/reading.

Yet non---consumptive use, combined with new conceptions of Intellectual Property (IP) tied to renting/licensing/streaming, may represent

a definitive break in the access/ownership/reading trinity, since it destroys the implicit link between access and reading. No longer does the DH scholar need to *read* a text to do literary scholarship; he only needs *access* to mine the data in a non-consumptive fashion. How does this shift in scholarly paradigm towards "culturomics" connect to changes in reading culture, especially given that access-based, non-consumptive DH scholarship relies on a set of tools—data mining in particular—that are repurposed tools from the world of marketing?

DH scholarship is a valuable practice, but only as it connects to *close* reading: only as it makes us better readers, writers, creators and thinkers. It is only by critique DH scholarship that we will be able to separate the humanism implied in the "Humanities" from the data-for-marketing's-sake attitude of "Digital" non-consumptive reading.

Zac Zimmer is an assistant professor of Spanish at Virginia Tech. His research explores questions of literature, aesthetics, politics, and technology in Latin America. Previous publications on contemporary Argentine literature, utopia, post-apocalyptic fiction, and the commons have appeared in *The Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, *Latin American Research Review*, and *Revista Otra Parte*.