Mary Erica Zimmer, Molly O’Donnell, and Elisa Beshero-Bondar

2015 TEI Conference and Members’ Meeting

Paper Proposal

Finding “Miss James”: Approaches to Annotation in The Mary Russell Mitford Archive

Scholarly annotation is a practice more invoked than defined. Yet amid competing metaphors, the insights of Christopher Ricks (2002) support a more granular view. Ricks’ sense of scholarly annotation as “supererogation”—that is, “doing more than is needed” to facilitate others’ practice—encourages one to consider activities performed and enabled by a scholarly note. Building upon Ricks and Michael Witmore’s 2014 TEI remarks, this paper will explore how digital modeling of scholarly annotation may enhance recalibration and discovery, simultaneously advancing knowledge while prompting further research.

Within Digital Mitford: The Mary Russell Mitford Archive, the challenge of locating the mysterious “Miss James” proves emblematic. Referenced solely by patronym, “Miss James” became a topic of heated conjecture during our 2014 workshop when multiple editors registered their shared questions about the same figure. In letters penned by Mitford in 1819 and after, “Miss James” emerged as Mary Mitford’s trusted friend and advisor. She was also, by Mitford’s own account, an opinionated humorist, offering her assessments of everything from shared acquaintances to literary works. While her Christian name and profession were later discovered by project editors, her history remains largely unearthed.

How might Digital Mitford texts develop her context? To answer, we mobilize insights brought forward through our editing team's TEI markup. Inspired by Douglas Duhaime’s visualizations of co-citation in the EEBO-TCP corpus, we view clusters of related data as forms of annotation—ones that, rendered judiciously, aid both scholars and those newer to Mitford’s work. Working with XQuery on our eXist database of project files, we assess the prevalence of relational categories our editors have tagged, then use these type counts to weight lists of high-frequency tokens in paragraph-level ranges indexed by a key term. Visualized, the resulting bouquets of knowledge suggest lines of inquiry while enriching and advancing the project’s editorial perspective.

Keywords: TEI tagging, innovation, corpus methods, annotation, digital editions

Topics: TEI and visualization; TEI tools for analysis, publication, and infrastructures; TEI in galleries, libraries, archives, and museums; TEI, editors, readers, collaborators

Speaker Bios:

Mary Erica Zimmer is a Ph.D. Candidate in The Editorial Institute at Boston University whose research addresses editorial theories and methods, histories of the book, and intertextuality. She also has a strong interest in models for undergraduate research. Her work on Digital Mitford’s data visualization team is complemented by her development of an online, browsable model of the bookshops and stalls in London’s Paul’s Cross Churchyard before the 1666 Great Fire. Her dissertation will serve as a companion to the Selected Poems of Geoffrey Hill.

Molly O’Donnell is the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, President’s Foundation Graduate Research Fellow. She has recently contributed to Victoriographies and the Norton Anthology, and was formerly associate faculty at Notre Dame of Maryland University. Her dissertation uses contemporary sociolinguistics to examine the nineteenth-century tales novel as a useful mode for exploration in the areas of genre, narrative, and gender studies.

Elisa Beshero-Bondar is Associate Professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg, where she has enjoyed working since 2004. She regularly teaches 19th-century British Literature, Early American Literature, Social Literature, and Science Fiction, as well as an interdisciplinary course on text encoding in the Digital Humanities. She is a member of the University of Pittsburgh's Digital Humanities Research Group (DHRX) and the Indo-Pacific Council (INPAC).