How to Be Non-Assertive in the 'Assertive Edition':Encoding Doubt in the Auden Musulin Papers

Früwirth, Timo

Timo.Fruehwirth@oeaw.ac.at
Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage,
Austrian Academy of Sciences

Carloni, Massimiliano

Massimiliano.Carloni@oeaw.ac.at
Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage,
Austrian Academy of Sciences

Grigoriou, Dimitra

Dimitra.Grigoriou@oeaw.ac.at
Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage,
Austrian Academy of Sciences

Mayer, Sandra

Sandra.Mayer@oeaw.ac.at
Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage,
Austrian Academy of Sciences

Stoxreiter, Daniel

Daniel.Stoxreiter@oeaw.ac.at
Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage,
Austrian Academy of Sciences

Auden Musulin Papers

W. H. Auden (1907-1973) was one of the most influential 20th-century English writers. His poetry was central to the modernist avant-garde in 1930s England; in 1939, he emigrated to the United States, where he received the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. For the last fifteen years of his life, Auden divided his time between the US and Austria, where he wrote most of his late poetry (Quinn 2013, 56; 2015, 243). However, while Auden's English and American periods have been intensively researched, the poet's life and work in Austria are still under-investigated and have attracted scholarly attention only since the early 2000s (Mendelson 2004; Smith 2004). It is in the emerging field of Austrian Auden Studies (see, especially, Denzer / Seidl 2014; Neundlinger 2018) that the Auden Musulin Papers (AMP) project (ACDH-CH, Austrian Academy of Sciences) is situated: an open-access scholarly digital edition (SDE; v0.2 pre-released 2023-03) makes available Auden's previously inaccessible 'working correspondence' to Welsh-Austrian writer Stella Musulin from the period 1959-1973. The collection includes letters, literary papers, speech drafts, and legal statements by Auden, as well as Musulin's unpublished Auden memoirs, which are the most comprehensive biographical resource for Auden's Austrian period.

An 'Assertive Edition' of Auden's Austrian Papers

This SDE of literary papers and correspondence written by one of the most acclaimed poets in English literature seeks to meet the highest standards of textual scholarship, in ways that address philological research interests in the linguistic and material aspects of the documents. At the same time, the AMP documents are highly relevant as sources of biographical data as well as historical information with regard to political, social, legal, and cultural discourses in 1960s/1970s Austria. The question of how digital editing technologies can be aligned with philological as well as biographical/historical concerns is particularly critical as the AMP project aims to pilot an approach that is transferable to a future comprehensive SDE of all Austrian Auden documents (including legal documents as well as the full contemporary Austrian media coverage of the poet's life and work in Austria).

The method of 'assertive edition' proposed by Vogeler (2019, 2021) indicates a potential editorial solution. By means of embedding Semantic Web technologies (specifically, RDF) in TEI/XML markup, the 'assertive edition' model aims to create "deep links between structured data and text", balancing the data needs of historically-oriented research (extractable structured data, processable through databases) and the requirements of textual scholarship (Vogeler 2019: 309-310, 312, 318; 2021: 73, 74, 79, 81).

Modeling Uncertainty and Interpretation

Vogeler highlights the specific epistemological status of the data extractable from such an 'assertive edition': he stresses that the editorial "information on facts asserted by the transcription" include "interpretations of the text based on the context and the expertise of the editor" (2019: 318). In the AMP project, research-based interpretation has been involved at different stages of the editorial work, such as in connection to metadata (authorship, date, place) and text transcription. Most especially, we have encountered uncertainty in relation to identifying entities, such as persons whose names are truncated, masked, or omitted ("Harrison's", "a German friend", "the one-whose-name-we-never-mention"); other examples include uncertain references to dates, places, and events.

While the editors' work that responds to such uncertainty will be rendered transparent in natural language and indicated through UI design—in order to empower users to engage with these aspects of uncertainty and interpretation—we also seek to make this interpretive activity explicit in machine-readable formal representations of the information asserted by the documents. Therefore, in the context of a vibrant current strand of research addressing issues of uncertainty in various areas of the DH (see, for example, Kuczera et al. 2019, Mariani 2021, Daquino et al. 2022, Windhager 2022), we want to investigate the 'affordances' (Vogeler 2021) of SDE technologies to represent uncertainty, interpretation, and hypothesis. In particular, we will explore the potentials of RDF (especially, RDF meta-statements through reification and property singleton) solutions to indicate certainty values; uncertainty-aware external ontologies (CIDOC CRM and HiCO) to encode vaguen-

ess/approximation; as well as nanopublications for specifying interpretive arguments. While TEI P5 does support properties to encode certainty levels, we suggest that additional data modeling can increase flexibility and precision as well as offer extended options for data query and visualization.

We will conclude by proposing solutions that, beyond their applicability to our project(s), can contribute to the scholarly debate on uncertainty-awareness, in the particular context of the 'assertive edition' SDE framework.

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