Literature and the Digital Humanities

(Book Proposal)

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Contents

Statement of Aims

The purpose of this volume is to introduce the field of the digital humanities (DH) to an audience of literary students and scholars. The challenge of writing such a book lies in the great diversity of practices that go by the name of the "digital humanities." For example, the 2015 Digital Humanities Summer Institute at the University of Victoria offered more than fifty-two classes on topics that ranged from programming to video editing and knitting.

To make sense of this complicated landscape, I present a clear map of the field, divided into three distinct regions or subfields: computational methodology, knowledge design, and critical making. These regions structure the descriptive part of the narrative. Not meant to be exhaustive, each of the book's three central chapters contains a case study that characterizes the subfield. Comprising Part II and the core of the book, these chapters connect recent developments in the digital humanities with long-standing concerns in literary study.

Flanking these central chapters is an argument about the past and the future of both disciplines. In Part I, I argue against the common, "shallow" historical vision of the digital humanities. According to many accounts, the field has its roots in mid-twentieth-century collaborations between Roberto Busa and Thomas J. Watson, the founder of IBM. By contrast, I expand that intellectual history to include formalism and structuralism more broadly, along with applied practices, like print making and textual scholarship, which have always been pertinent to the study of literature.

Following the case studies of Part II, Part III looks to the future, articulating three powerful critiques leveled against the digital humanities. The first of these critiques accuses the field of excessive positivism, implying that the digital humanities advance through the academy by the implicit logic of expansionary neoliberalism. The second criticises the field for its lack of attention to issues of gender, race, class, and ethnicity. Finally, I outline the beginnings of a global DH movement, which takes issue with the field's privileging of the English-speaking, North-American, European-centric view of the world. Rather than dismiss these concerns, I point to recent developments—projects and publications—that take the field in new and more critically-aware directions.

The book concludes with a discussion on the reception of DH in literary departments. I contend that to make a lasting impact, the practice of digital humanities needs to better connect to the theoretical foundations of literary studies. At the same time, the practice of the digital humanities offers a way to expand the purview of literary scholarship.

Chapter Outlines

Part I: Pasts and Presents

Chapter 1: Literature and the Digital Humanities

The first chapter introduces the reader to the field of the digital humanities, particularly as it relates to the study of literature. My goal in this chapter is to answer two main questions: What are the digital humanities? and Why do they matter? To answer these questions, I present the reader with several exciting developments in the field. These developments generally fall into one of the three related categories that structure the core of the book. Through this summary of the state of the field today, the reader will become familiar with its major organs of publication, conferences, and professional organizations. Throughout, I place an emphasis on the "DH way" of doings things, which complements traditional scholarship by emphasizing collaboration, project-based research, experimentation, and artifactual knowledge.

Chapter 2: Intellectual Roots

The second chapter addresses the long history of the digital humanities. It begins with two foundational moments: the coinage of the term itself and the field's previous incarnation as literary and linguistic computing. In counterbalance to the "shallow" version of DH's intellectual history, I then relate each of the three subfields to deeper, long-standing concerns in literary scholarship, connecting computation to formalism and structuralism. I then show how recent efforts to digitize texts and to make critical editions available online relate to textual scholarship and to book history and design. Finally, I draw parallels between critical making and critical theory. These juxtapositions build a case for a shared intellectual lineage, formative of both fields.

Part II: Theory and Practice

Chapter 3: Computational Turn

Chapter 3 deals with the first of the three broad subfields: computational methodology. I begin by contextualizing the turn towards "distant reading" in literary studies within the larger "computational turn" affecting disciplines across the university. The various approaches to distant reading include macro-analysis in literary studies, culturomics in social science, e-discovery in law, automatic essay evaluation in education, and medical informatics in medicine, among others. These diverse approaches to the study of texts in varying contexts are bolstered by a common set of tools and methods. In describing the computational toolkit available for literary studies, I present not only the possibilities but

also the challenges of using quantitative methods to advance humanistic inquiry. The chapter concludes with a case study on "Style at the Scale of the Sentence," by Sarah Allison et.al, which appeared in Franco Morretti's influential Literary Lab pamphlet series.

Chapter 4: Knowledge Design

I summarize the second broad category of activity under the rubric of "knowledge design." This category includes long-standing literary scholarly practices of critical edition-making and textual scholarship. On the basis of a case study of the ECDA (The Early Caribbean Digital Archive), I discuss the difference between print and digital archives. Taking the "How is it Made?" approach pioneered by Miriam Posner at UCLA, I deconstruct the archive's architecture to reveal a complicated blend of technologies that enable scholars to build new ways of interacting with textual material.

Knowledge design, as I then argue, is fundamental not only to the *study* of literature, but also to the material structure of the literary encounter, which affects all higher modes of reading, writing, and interpretation. For example, the simple act of bringing documents together into an archive can have significant long-term effects on an author's reception and legacy. All forms of contemporary textuality (including print) pass through some form of digital being, and are thereby transformed in the process. I build on Jerome McGann's concept of "text deformation" to argue for the importance of the technological specifics of that metamorphosis. To know what and how the text means, one now also must understand how it is shaped by its medium. And despite their apparent similarity, books and e-books place fundamentally differing constraints on the process of reading. For this reason, the design of literary artifacts cannot be left to technologists alone. Because the form of the book is in flux, fields like book history can now extend their expertise into actively shaping the future of the literary artifact.

Chapter 5: Critical Making

To conclude Part II, I identify the third region of DH as "critical making." Embodied in the work of collectives like the Critical Making Lab at the University of Toronto and of scholars like Johanna Drucker, Matt Ratto, Anne Burdick, and Garnet Hertz (among many others), critical making supplements thought, the traditional realm of a literary scholar, with rigorous practice.

But what does it mean to "build" or to "make" in a literature department? Like critical theory, critical making is aimed at social transformation. *Literary* critical making involves regaining control over the material contexts of textual knowledge production. The chapter centers on a case study based on *sx:archipelagos*, a project to revamp a prominent postcolonial journal into an open-access publishing platform, powered by free software. This case study opens the way to

a discussion of literary technologies like Pandoc and Markdown, along with political developments in the fields of open access and free software. These tools and practices have wider institutional significance in making scholarly research more accessible to a greater portion of the world.

Part III: Futures

Chapter 6: Criticisms

In Chapter 6, I advance three lines of critique against the digital humanities. The first sees the computational legacy of the field as an implicit continuation of a positivist and reductive mode of literary analysis. The field's explicit concern with instrumental reason consequently makes it susceptible to the expansionary logic of the marketplace. The second critique demonstrates that the field has long lacked subtlety when dealing with issues of gender, race, class, and ethnicity. Finally, the emphasis on high-performance computing and big-data analysis advances a distinctly Western, English-speaking vision of the digital realm. We must acknowledge that the tools and methods native to the digital humanities often develop in parallel with those used globally, to advance political goals like censorship and surveillance.

Chapter 7: Ways Forward

In the last chapter of the book, I maintain that the digital humanities cannot mature as a field without taking into account the grave concerns outlined in Chapter 6. I proceed to describe the emerging outlines of the "second wave" in the digital humanities that is more global, more nuanced, and more critically aware than the first. In conclusion, I contend that in order to thrive, the field needs to better connect emerging digital practices to a robust sense of literary thought and history. More than a set of methodologies, the digital humanities ultimately enlarge the sphere of literary-critical activity. But the expansion of the field comes also with new responsibilities: the need for more training, resources, and digital literacy.

Appendices

"Appendix I: Annotated Reading List" will contain an annotated list of seminal books, articles, and projects that can be used as a "springboard for further research or study" (as per the Series Guidelines).

"Appendix II: Glossary of Terms" will contain a glossary of key operational terms.

"Appendix III: Becoming Digital" will contain a schematic for self-directed study in the humanities and a blueprint for a possible curriculum for a certificate-granting program in the field.

Review of the Main Competitive Books

There is a paucity of texts that occupy the niche targeted by the Literature and Contemporary Thought series at the intersection of DH and literary studies. The existing books can be classified into two major groups: one, geared towards the more general audience of the humanities at large; and another, specific to individual constituent disciplines.

The formative cluster of books about the digital humanities in general includes:

- *Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. John M. Unsworth, Susan Schreibman, and Ray Siemens (Blackwell, 2004);[1]

- *Understanding Digital Humanities*, ed. David M. Berry (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012);[2]

- *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, ed. Matthew K. Gold (Minnesota, 2012);[3]

- *Digital_Humanities*, by Jeffrey Schnapp, Johanna Drucker, Anne Burdick, Peter Lunenfeld, and Todd Presner (MIT, 2012);[4]

- *The Emergence of the Digital Humanities*, by Steven E. Jones (Routledge, 2013);[5]

- *Hacking the Academy: New Approaches to Scholarship and Teaching from Digital Humanities*, ed. Daniel J. Cohen and Joseph Scheinfeldt (Michigan UP, 2013);[6]

- *Defining Digital Humanities: A Reader*, ed. Melissa Terras, Julianne Nyhan, and Edward Vanhoutte (Ashgate, 2013);[7] and

- *Advancing Digital Humanities: Research, Methods, Theories*, ed. Katherine Bode and Paul Longley Arthur (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).[8]

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[1] 640 pages. $235.95 cloth, $59.95 paper.
[2] 336 pages. $110 cloth, $30 paper, $16.50 e-book.
[3] 504 pages. $99.75 cloth, $34.95 paper, $20.86 e-book.
[4] 152 pages. $24.99 trade and e-book.
[5] 224 pages. $39.95 cloth and e-book.
[6] 176 pages. $70 cloth, $22.95 paper and e-book.
[7] 314 pages. $120 cloth, £25 paper and e-book.
[8] 352 pages. $105 cloth, $30 paper and e-book.

A small number of recent books have begun to direct generalist DH approaches and methodologies to the questions and traditions governing their specific area of expertise. To this category we may attribute:

- *Writing History in the Digital Age*, ed. Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki (Michigan UP, 2013);[9]

- *Digital Critical Editions*, ed. Daniel Apollon et al. (U of Illinois, 2014);[10] and

- *Oral History and Digital Humanities: Voice, Access, and Engagement*, ed. Douglas A. Boyd and Mary A. Larson (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).[11]

Some of the few major volumes in the nascent "second wave" of DH, as it relates to the study of literature include:

- *Reading Machines: Toward an Algorithmic Criticism*, by Stephen Ramsay (U. Illinois Press, 2011);[12]

- *Macroanalysis: Digital Methods and Literary History*, by Matthew L. Jockers (Illinois, 2013),[13] which itself builds on the influential *Distant Reading*, by Franco Moretti (Verso, 2013);[14] and

- *Digital Literary Studies: Corpus Approaches to Poetry, Prose, and Drama*, by David L. Hoover et al. (Routledge, 2014).[15]

In *Literature and the Digital Humanities*, my approach builds on these volumes to view the history of the discipline to its developing research program as an evolutionary process. Going beyond computation, I describe DH as an expansion of the literary-critical tradition, opening it up to new archives of study and to new methodologies. I want my reader to leave the book with a sense of possibility: perceiving rich and yet unexplored areas of scholarship that urgently need our attention.

Definition of the Market

The primary market for *Literature and the Digital Humanities* includes:

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[9]322 pages. $80 cloth, $29.95 paper and e-book.
[10]368 pages. $65 cloth, $30 e-book.
[11]256 pages. $90 cloth, $25 paper, $16.50 e-book.
[12]108 pages. $65 cloth, $25 paper.
[13]208 pages. $90 cloth, $30 paper and e-book.
[14]224 pages. $95 cloth, $29.95 paper, $24.95 e-book.
[15]216 pages. $135 cloth and e-book.

- advanced undergraduate courses in literary studies wishing to introduce their students to the field of digital humanities and computational culture studies;

- introductory-level graduate courses for all doctoral and masters students entering the field of literary studies, covering DH as part of their "Intro to the Field," "Pro-seminar," or "MA seminar," as required in most language and literature programs globally and across the country;

- the large share of self-directed graduate students whose institutions do not offer DH training;

- faculty and staff (e.g. librarians, officers of scholarly publications) interested in expanding their research and activity in the field.

A secondary market for the book includes students and scholars in engineering schools interested in finding productive intersections between literary studies and computer science.

Several prominent institutions are beginning to offer degree- or certificate-granting programs in the digital humanities. These include undergraduate, MA, and PhD programs at King's College London, University College, London, and University College, Cork; the undergraduate and MA programs at Loyola University, Chicago; the Digital Humanities Minor at UCLA; the DH undergraduate program at Michigan State University; the DH and Technology program at Brigham Young; the MA program in Humanities Computing at the University of Alberta, Canada; the MA program in DH at CUNY; the Digital Cultures and Creativity undergraduate program at the University of Maryland; the MA in DH at Brandeis University; the MA in Digital Humanities at the University of Virginia; the Media Technology and Games program at the IT University of Copenhagen; the MA and PhD in Digital Humanities at Maynooth University, Ireland; the Digital Media and Cultural Theory undergraduate program at Hampshire College, Amherst; the Certificate program in DH at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; the Arts, Media & Engineering undergraduate program at Arizona State University; the Bachelor of Science in Digital Humanities program at the Illinois Institute of Technology; and many others, along with undergraduate minors and non-degree-granting research centers that offer courses too numerous to mention here.

Although I have concentrated my summary of potential markets on universities in English-speaking countries (primarily Canada, the Republic of Ireland, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States), there are significant markets for English-language work in DH globally. Institutions in Sweden, Germany, Israel, and Denmark, among other places, are particularly strong in this field and commonly assign English texts.

Format and Timing

I estimate chapters of 10,000 words in length, which in combination with the appendices will put the manuscript at roughly 80,000 words. The book will have 6–12 line drawings (figures and tables). I plan on having a draft of the manuscript ready by February 1, 2016.