# BESHERO-BONDAR — Visualizing

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# Visualizing the Digital Mitford Project’s Prosopography Data

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This paper introduces the Digital Mitford project (http://mitford.pitt.edu), and its practices of correlating prosopography information from TEI markup of its range of texts and metadata in a heterogeneous database of letters and literary texts of multiple genres, by prolific 19th-century author Mary Russell Mitford. Our editing team marks prosopography data (the names of historical people, places, and events), plus publication titles and names of fictional characters by Mitford and the many other writers she references. Our prosopography markup contributes to a detailed, centralized file holding canonical references to correlate our project’s wide range of files. This in turn helps us to generate network diagrams, maps, and other useful visualizations and search features to navigate and document patterns of information in the Mitford corpus. We will share network graphs and other visualizations drawn from our prosopography to facilitate serendipitous discoveries among clusters of texts in the Digital Mitford database.

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Mary Russell Mitford was featured by Franco Moretti in his book *Graphs, Maps, and Trees*, in which he mapped a distinctive range of walkable locations in her popular text, *Our Village*. However, Moretti’s selection of this text reflects the bias toward prose fiction in digital literary studies, a bias we seek to redress in the Digital Mitford project, which aims to introduce and correlate Mitford’s letters with her staged dramas, her poetry, and her prose fiction. A long-lived, prolific, and highly networked writer of the first half of the 19th century, Mary Russell Mitford (1787–1855) set important precedents for women as professional writers, yet literary scholarship to date has been divided across period and genre lines in evaluating her most popular works. Scholars of the Victorian period have prioritized the popular prose fiction sketches of *Our Village* and have studied these as an index of peaceful English nationalism without attention to the politically provocative elements of her plays.1 Digital humanists, too, may only know about Mitford’s *Our Village* thanks to Franco Moretti. Meanwhile, scholars of Romanticism addressing the verse tragedies concentrate on their complex politics, their topical similarity to Lord Byron’s work, and their position within a newly forming liberal ideology of the 1820s—and these studies make only passing references to the *Our Village* sketches (see Newey, 2000; Saglia, 2005; Pietropoli (2008). To address these divisions, The Digital Mitford project formed as a large 20-member team of editors in 2013 and 2014 to attempt a comprehensive scholarly archive of Mitford’s writings, with a larger goal of compiling a database of information from Mitford’s collected writings and letters to help address the gaps in our understanding of the overlap of ‘Romanticism’ and ‘Victorian’ writing, and of poetic, dramatic, and prose forms in the 19th century. Comprehensive scholarly editing of Mitford’s correspondence together with her literary texts stands to bridge the substantial gaps in period-based literary scholarship, and serves to bring to light significant proposography data on the print publishing, artistic, political, and theatrical worlds in which Mitford circulated.

The Digital Mitford calls itself an archive but is actually a network of linked data—a database from which we can extract and study information we are collecting about people and texts of the 19th century. Ed Folsom (2007) and Kenneth M. Price (2009) have each discussed the Walt Whitman Archive as something more complex and expansive than an ‘archive’, though they, too, have used the word ‘archive’ for much the same reasons that we have: because the word meets conventional expectations of comprehensive storage paired with digital access of a large corpus of texts. Our collective project deploys TEI text encoding far more significantly to build a database of Mitford’s writings. Mitford appears to have shared with Whitman a strong inclusive tendency reflecting wide reading and conversational intersections with other writers and text, which makes for a richly diverse database.

We expect that our most important contribution to 19th-century studies will be a heterogeneous database containing XML markup of upwards of Mitford’s 2,000 known letters paired with her literary texts published over a long and successful literary career. Through our editing of Mitford, we aim to make available hitherto unknown data about publishers of periodicals, theatre managers and actors, poets, artists, as well as politicians and educators—an extensive network bonded by mutual influence and support.2 Unusual intersections are coming to light from our coding of Mitford’s letters, her journal, and *Our Village*, demonstrating, for example, that Jane Austen is discussed in the same documents with Lord Byron, William Macready, Gilbert White, and Walter Scott. In light of the prolific discussion of writers, performers, and public figures, we have begun producing network graphs to help visualize social interactions, as well as shared contexts in the discussion of fictional characters and literary texts.

The Digital Mitford project, at http://mitford.pitt.edu, involves a large team of editors working individually and collaboratively in set stages of work. Working with TEI XML, our project involves producing digital surrogates of Mary Russell Mitford’s letters, drama, poetry, and prose fiction and essays, to present these texts as an integrated unit, organized chronologically over a series of years. For the ongoing test-bed stage of our project, we have selected a period between 1819 and 1825, the period in which Mitford was especially active as a playwright and prose fiction writer—two very different genres in which she attained remarkable transatlantic popularity. This test-bed phase represents a complete and significant freestanding effort in its own right. Our editing of the hybrid cross-section of Mitford's texts from the 1820s is demonstrating hitherto unexplored intersections among Mitford’s letters, prose fiction, and verse tragedies during the decade in which her reputation as a dramatist and as a periodical contributor and publisher of fiction was growing in the English-speaking world.

This paper introduces the Digital Mitford’s practices of correlating prosopography information from TEI markup of its range of variant texts and metadata within its heterogeneous archive. The TEI’s guidelines include tools for marking and compiling contextual information in central places—an efficient system of indexing—so that our TEI coding not only presents texts for reading, but also tags and identifies contextual information systematically. Thus, our editing team marks prosopographical data (the names of historical people, places, and events) as well as titles of literary texts and names of fictional characters by Mitford and other writers referenced in the archive. We extract our prosopography markup from editing each text to develop a detailed, centralized file listing contextual information. We then ensure that each reference to a particular individual (often with variable names) throughout the archive points to a single entry in our centralized list of persons (or ‘personography’) that includes a complete and standard name, details on birth and death, significant life events, relation to Mitford, and other pertinent information, including relationships with other people, literary texts, fictional characters, events, and places. We are thus tapping into the potential of the TEI as a mechanism not only for archiving the content and structure of Mitford’s texts but also for compiling and connecting contexts and metadata across hundreds of files. Our coding work is internal and shared among the project team, and all project team members are working in TEI under the supervision and guidance of the principal editor and author of this paper.

Contextual markup of named persons, places, and texts supports our goal to generate indexes and search features as well as to produce charts, network diagrams, maps, and other useful visualizations to navigate and document patterns of information in the Mitford corpus, an extensive archive of many different kinds of texts. This paper will demonstrate our work in progress on data visualizations designed to assist navigation of the Digital Mitford Archive. We have begun to develop network graphs with a goal of facilitating serendipitous research discoveries among clusters of related material. We aim to provide data visualization tools to direct our readers to the important intersections illuminated in the prosopography: to connect the worlds of Mitford’s correspondence, her historical tragedies, and her prose fiction sketches in *Our Village*. Our network analysis plots will help to highlight relationships among letters and literary texts, and relationships between institutions—such as periodical publishers and theatre houses. We are also working on designing maps as a guide for users of our site to understand the London postal network of Mitford’s day, as well as relationships between fictional representations of places and locations known to Mitford. In discussing the visualizations produced from our test-bed markup, we hope to model and prompt discussion of new directions in digital archive development, to model XML editions as relational databases.

**Notes**

1. See, e,g., Lynch (2000). For a critique of the overemphasis on nationalism in recent criticism of *Our Village*, see Morrison (2008).

2. Describing Mitford’s interactions with just a handful of women writers, Katie Halsey (2011) has discussed the importance of sharing, promoting, and discussing texts as forms of influence and mutual support.

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