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Prof. Alison Booth

DH 8991: Introduction to Digital Humanities

28 March 2022

Curricular Intervention: Digital Editing & Medieval Manuscripts

Readings:

Bryant, John. "Introduction: The Fluid Text" & "Editing the Fluid Text: Agenda and Praxis." *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen*. University of Michigan Press, 2002. pp. 1-16 & pp.141-172.

"Episode 3: Digitizing the Bannatyne MS." *Coding Codices* from the Digital Medievalist Postgraduate Committee, March 2021,
<https://podcast.digitalmedievalist.org/episode-3-digitizing-the-bannatyne-ms/>.

"Episode 4: Marco Polo and the Art of Editing." *Coding Codices* from the Digital Medievalist Postgraduate Committee, April 2021,
<https://podcast.digitalmedievalist.org/episode-4-marco-polo-and-the-art-of-editing/>.

Foys, Martin K. "Medieval Manuscripts: Media Archaeology and the Digital Incunable." *The Medieval Manuscript Book: Cultural Approaches*, edited by Michael Johnston and Michael Van Dussen, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015, pp. 119–139. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature.

Projects/Tools:

- [Piers Plowman Electronic Archive \(PPEA\)](#)
- [The Bannatyne MS Project](#)
- [Marco Polo Digitale](#)
- [Edition Visualization Technology \(EVT\)](#)
- [VisColl \(Collation Visualization\)](#)
- [Beasts2Craft](#)
- [Text Encoding Initiative \(TEI\)](#)
- [Early English Books Online \(EEBO\)](#)
- [TEAMS Middle English Texts Series](#)
- [bookdown: Authoring Books and Technical Documents with R Markdown](#)

- (in-progress): <https://leeloren.github.io/silence/>

Rationale:

Notions of “print culture” and “digital culture” have been thoroughly discussed for a long time in the scholarship of how we read, but it is only fairly recently with texts like Johnston and Dussen’s *The Medieval Manuscript Book: Cultural Approaches* (2015) that a serious consideration of “manuscript culture” is now taking place. With this new consideration of the uniqueness of and the value that comes with understanding manuscript culture, we are also seeing reconsiderations of how we approach the editing of medieval texts in the digital age.

In the selected readings for this curricular intervention, I have included two episodes of the podcast *Coding Codices*, which is produced by the Digital Medievalist Postgraduate Committee (follow on Twitter [@digitalmedieval](#)). I have found every episode of this podcast to be amazingly enlightening (see especially “Episode 9: Biocodicology: From Dust to Data”), but I have limited my recommendations to the two episodes particularly concerned with digital editing. These two episodes include fascinating interviews with young medievalist scholars who are currently in the process of developing their own digital editions — one of the as yet unedited German tradition of the Marco Polo travel narrative and one of the Bannatyne Manuscript, a sixteenth century Scottish anthology of literature. Their digital editions (as they exist now) are linked in the Project/Tools section where I have also included what is probably the most well known digital edition of a pre/early-modern text, the Piers Plowman Electronic Archive. **I would like us to consider the varying approaches these digital editions take. What does the production of these digital editions provide the reader? And how are they still lacking? What advances can still be made here?**

I would argue that the best approach to editing medieval texts looks something like John Bryant’s concept of the “fluid text,” which he applies to the digital editing of Melville’s works

(and which we encountered in Week #8 of our course via the [Melville Electronic Library](#)).

However even with Bryant's model, digital editing can seem like little more than the production of a digital facsimile — a product that could just as easily exist in an extensive enough material book (perhaps a multi-volume work) and that suggests a teleological progression toward a final book product at the end of a long “revision narrative.” I think that digital editions could do even more when it comes to bringing readers closer to medieval texts, and **I would like us to think together about how we might think about digital editing differently. What can we do as editors to enable readers to visualize medieval texts more effectively and to experience manuscript culture more fully?**

Finally, I have also included some tools specifically geared towards the digitization and digital editing of pre/early-modern manuscripts. I would especially like to highlight VisColl, which is a new tool released by The Schoenberg Institute for Manuscript Studies at the University of Pennsylvania Libraries for modeling and visualizing the physical collation of medieval manuscript codices. It has been a notorious challenge to archivists to properly describe and catalog codices as these textual objects are bound and rebound, pulled apart and stitched together over hundreds of years. **How can we as digital humanists better represent these centuries-old text objects?**

Loren, this is a substantial intervention—great sources and projects, a significant issue that resonates for bibliography in the print era as well (of course, for all manuscripts to date). Even relatively recent books are hard to “read.”