

EARHART, Amy E. 2015. *Traces of the Old, Uses of the New: The Emergence of Digital Literary Studies*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Pp. 172. ISBN 9780472072781, Hardback \$60.00. ISBN 9780472052783, Paper \$34.95. ISBN 9780472900688, Open Access.

In this era of digital humanities self-critique, Amy Earhart's *Traces of the Old, Uses of the New: The Emergence of Digital Literary Studies* is a welcome contribution to the conversation about the underpinnings of the digital humanities, specifically its development within the context of English literary studies in the United States. The book can be divided into two parts: chapters one through three, which "trace the literary approaches — textual studies, new historicism, and cultural criticism — that underlie contemporary digital literary scholarship" (90), and chapters four and five, which discuss current trends in and future avenues for the field.

The first three chapters each pair one of the aforementioned approaches with a key kind of digital humanities artifact, namely the electronic edition, the digital archive, and what Earhart calls "digital literary recovery projects", respectively (63). These chapters focus on "representational" work, "with technology primarily used to create idealized or better versions than would be possible in print" (91). In her analysis of textual studies' role in early digital humanities, she demonstrates the kind of knowledge gained by a scholar who both studies the history of her discipline and has worked in the field producing the kind of work about which she speaks. She both credits textual studies for being the governing approach to the production of electronic editions and faults it for its "problematic relationship to diversity" (35), for failing, that is, to adequately address issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality. Earhart urges the field to perform its analyses (textual, literary, or otherwise) in light of sociocultural context. It is not surprising, then, that Earhart discusses the move toward producing archives and away from editions in positive terms. She sees new historicism as underpinning this turn, remarking that "Greenblatt may have launched our contemporary understanding of new historicism, but Jerome McGann brought new historicism to the digital age" through his theorization of the social text (41). In the third chapter, on digital literary recovery projects, Earhart is at her most provocative, challenging her readers to consider (1) the value of DIY-style projects "that used digitization to expand what [project creators] saw as an outmoded new critical literary canon that excluded work by women, people of color, queers, and others" (63); and (2) the digital humanities community's complicity in the "stigma" applied to the "simple

technologies” (such as HTML rather than the typically preferred TEI) used for these sites, a stigma that has in part led to their decline and a general lack of preservation efforts (84).

Turning from the past of digital literary studies to its present, Earhart considers digital humanities’ much discussed culture of tool building and said tools’ use for visualization and data mining. This “interpretive” approach to digital literary studies stands in contrast to the “representational” forms discussed previously (91). She argues that “[s]cholarly analysis is being altered by algorithmic approaches that are beginning to produce evidence that might answer the long-standing digital humanities claim of presenting new findings through technological interventions, what might be called technological interpretation or algorithmic interpretation” (91). (She sees such computational analysis as “a potential break from the past” but one could also interpret it as a return to humanities computing’s roots, which included stylistic analysis, an inherently interpretive pursuit.) Such analysis can only be as good as its data lets it be. Earhart points out several dataset limitations in the collections we now have that “mar the effectiveness of otherwise superb tools” (112). She shows how datasets can be incomplete, how they exclude different kinds of authors, and how, due to outdated criteria for text selection, they may lack works that are now considered important.

Earhart says that if “we do indeed believe in digital humanities as transformative then we must continue to excavate and to rebuild the structures that underpin our work and our community” (127). *Traces of the Old, Uses of the New* is one such “excavation” of a discipline, namely digital literary studies in English (and primarily within the context of the United States). As much digital work has been done outside of the United States and outside the confines of English literature, one hopes the book will be followed by many others that do the same kind of thing for other literatures and other geographic locations — as well as for digital work in non-literary fields and interdisciplinary work. We need to understand the history of digital humanities from the points of view of disciplines that deal with visual culture, musicology, information science, and more. We need to understand it from the points of view of scholars working in Asia, Africa, Europe, and South America. We need to understand it in the context of as many area studies as possible. Our best hope for a “transformative” digital humanities will likely be intersectional.

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