

## BOOK REVIEWS

OHGE, Christopher. 2021. *Publishing Scholarly Editions: Archives, Computing, and Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 144. ISBN 9781108720182, Paper \$12.95. ISBN 9781108803915, eBook \$10.00.

Peter Stallybrass described the rise of the novel in the modern era, and the linear, immersive style of reading on which it was predicated, as a “brilliantly perverse interlude in the long history of discontinuous reading” (STALLYBRASS 47). Positing the origins of this history in the appropriation of the codex form of the book by early Christians, Stallybrass’s account delineates a long chronology in which a normalized practice — reading a novel from beginning to end — is revealed to be an anomaly. In the even lengthier history of textual transmission, the scholarly edition might be similarly considered as anomalous. The set of concerns that have shaped its evolution — the accurate and stabilized representation of a “work” conceived as the creation of an identified author, for an individual reader seeking reliable access to this authorial text — emerged belatedly. And while we should hesitate to impute causality to the role that the rise of printing technologies played in this development, they do seem especially well suited to the paradigm, geared as they are to the reproduction of a text in multiple near-identical copies, each one appearing to embody these values — fixity, durability, non-corruptibility, clarity of source — in its physical traits.

What happens when we import this singular historical model of textual transmission into the new medium of the digital, and undertake the editing of digitized text — malleable, evanescent, highly amenable to context-free copying and repurposing, and therefore by nature often difficult to source — as if we were editing a work for publication as a printed codex? This is the central question that Christopher Ohge’s provocative book, *Publishing Scholarly Editions: Archives, Computing, and Experience*, takes on in five chapters that probe not what a digital scholarly edition should be but what it should *do*. “The abiding spirit of this book is what editing *does*, as opposed to what it *is*”, he writes. “Rather than defining concepts or theories”, Ohge endeavors to “demonstrate the significance of *making* editions — the editorial practices and aesthetic affordances of editing works of literature with current technologies” (6).

The shift from being to doing is encapsulated in the book's title, which emphasizes not editing or editions *per se* but *publishing*, an activity that focalizes editorial work on the concrete instantiation of an edition in the real world, in circulation and use. "Editing is fundamentally grounded in publishing", Ohge affirms (16). In this sense, the question is not simply what editions *do*, but what readers do, or want to do, with digital editions. Ohge asserts that readers do not necessarily want from digital editions what we take printed editions to do best, to offer a clean reading text. "Many editors are still stuck in a document- and codex-oriented mode that expects book reading to translate into screen reading, even though studies have been suggesting that users of digital resources prefer basic and advanced searching for specific information over long-term browsing" (10–11).

The centrality of publishing, for Ohge, requires taking stock of the defining role of technology in editorial work: "Technology has always been at the heart of textual transmission, and it should be a focus of textual scholarship" (16). In turn, the focus on the nuts-and-bolts mechanics of transmission calls for a philosophical perspective that Ohge invokes throughout his book — pragmatism. Citing William James and Richard Rorty, he prioritizes the effectiveness of outcomes — constrained as they are by realities that relentlessly undermine "purist" (13) efforts to eliminate errors and definitively establish intentions — and his analyses are imbued with a sense of equanimity. Citing Samuel Johnson's principle to "correct what is corrupt, to clarify what is obscure, but also to maintain a 'middle way between presumption and timidity'" (13–14), Ohge seeks compromises between what have traditionally been opposed theoretical choices.

Polarizing debates about what a text should be — whether the expression of an author's intent, or a version defined by a specific reader response or by "social forces" (36) — are left aside in favor of an exploration of what a digital edition can actually accomplish. This "can do" is conceived in both a positive and a negative sense. The positive stresses the affordances of digital technologies and publishing opportunities to address a number of long-standing quandaries that can trouble scholarly editions. A digital text can, for instance, help unravel what Ohge, following John Lavagnino, calls "the problem of two audiences", a symptom of printed critical editions that are divided into a clear reading text in the front and an often forbidding editorial apparatus relegated to appendices or notes in the back of the volume (93). Ironically, the "general" reader is deprived of an engagement with the text's transmission history, not despite but because of the exhaustiveness of the documentation of this history, which the general reader is unlikely to peruse or unable to follow. Digital editions can leverage tech-

nology to represent more effectively the fluidity of the text for all readers. Ohge points to the “fluid text” approach used to edit the texts at the Melville Electronic Library (MEL) ([melville.electroniclibrary.org/editions](http://melville.electroniclibrary.org/editions)), where Ohge serves as Associate Director (94). Ohge develops a number of fascinating examples in his book, which he labels “Exhibitions”, drawn from his own impressive editorial work on nineteenth-century American literature. The second chapter on “The Author” concludes with an extended example of the edition of *Billy Budd* included in the MEL, which uses “digital approaches to convey passing theories of intentionality” (41).

A second exhibition in Chapter 3 on “Data” illustrates how network visualizations can be integrated into a digital edition, demonstrated through an edition of Mary Anne Rawson’s anti-slavery anthology *The Bow in the Cloud* (1834). This chapter builds a compelling case for a more expansive conception of an edition tailored to the digital medium, rooted in the idea that “[e]diting and computation have always been interlinked” (54) and that an edition can be a data set: “An edition of this kind would not necessarily be published as a codex-like reading object but rather as a collection of data sets that can be computed (and reckoned) with text analysis tools” (58). In the framework of “computational editing” (62), a traditional reading text might be considered not as the default or most-desired interface, but instead as one type of data visualization among others. In a timely and crucial reflection on digital editions as data, Ohge endeavors to bridge a divide that has defined, often in unproductive ways, the digital humanities, between editorial and curatorial work, on the one hand, and analytical work, on the other, a divide that has extended to the technologies used, whether the highly structured data models offered by XML or the processing of unstructured plain text using programming languages like R and Python. Ohge does both. And typically, he invokes pragmatism in his call to integrate the two sets of methodologies for working with text (58). The new modalities of digital editing as computational editing remain a focus in Chapter 4 on “The Edition”, which opens with a section on the move “beyond Editorial Bookishness”. A digital edition, Ohge writes, “is a collection of data to be stored and processed into interfaces; it is a corpus to be mined and queried by users; it is information asking to be curated by scholarship for meanings and experiences” (96).

Understanding what a digital edition “can do” in a negative sense is to confront all the difficulties that digital editing and publishing present. This is, in many ways, the gist of the book, building up to its concluding chapter on “The Challenges of Publishing Digital Editions”. Here, “publishing” evokes all the real-world obstacles relating to economics, accessibility, and

resources that hinder or limit the realization of a digital edition. For Ohge, this is especially exemplified in the case of a digital-editing protocol like the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI). The TEI offers an extremely rich XML-based toolset for editing literary and cultural texts. But analogous to the impact of an exhaustive editorial apparatus in a print edition, the very richness of TEI as an editorial tool becomes an impediment to its functionality as a publishing platform. “While the TEI XML is the most pragmatic method of encoding scholarly documents, it is not the most pragmatic method of *publishing* them” (101). As a highly customizable and complex encoding vocabulary, TEI is an obstacle to publishers needing streamlined, scalable, and standardized pipelines, ones moreover that, in the end, mostly seek to replicate in digital format the basic legibility of a bookish page, without taking much interest in the underlying semantic encoding that TEI allows (and which can be fruitfully processed as a database).

Thus, notwithstanding some early explorations — Ohge describes how Oxford University Press considered TEI when it launched Oxford Scholarly Editions Online in 2008 but decided in the end to create its own in-house XML schema since “TEI’s complexity would prove to be disproportionately expensive for digital publication of existing print editions” (113) — publishers have not adopted TEI, choosing simpler, less editorially rich and, for them, more practical options. And TEI has not been embraced as a submission format. Meanwhile, each TEI-based project must develop its own “bespoke individual publishing system from the ground up, independently of a publisher” (109). A custom-built platform can effectively leverage the richness of TEI. But it comes at significant costs, above all of sustainability — dependent as such tailored platforms tend to be on time-limited grants and temporary access to technical resources — and discoverability, without, for instance, the support of the marketing department of a publishing house.

Ohge foregrounds minimal computing as one way to navigate the dilemma pitting editing against publishing. But his objective in this engaging and thought-provoking book — one necessary for our juncture in time — is to raise questions more than to offer answers (certainly not easy ones). Indeed, the last chapter raises a question that is critical to the future of scholarly editing: “What, then, is the meaning and function of the publisher in the digital age?” (116). In reality, this question is essential to the future of humanistic scholarship generally, and Ohge’s probing exploration of it is one of the most important dimensions of his book.

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## Work Cited

STALLYBRASS, Peter. 2002. "Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible". In *Books and Readers in Early Modern England*, edited by Jennifer ANDERSEN and Elizabeth SAUER, 42–79. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

EDWARDS, Gavin. 2020. *The Case of the Initial Letter: Charles Dickens and the Politics of the Dual Alphabet*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. Pp. 169. ISBN 9781526146298, Hardback \$120.00. ISBN 9781526146281, eBook \$120.00.

In *The Case of the Initial Letter*, Gavin Edwards traces the multifaceted nature of capitalization across Charles Dickens's works in the context of a century where capitalization was both normalized in texts and expanded in potential meaning. Edwards examines how "capital" meanings arise and evolve in printed texts, and how the relationship between author and printer allows (or suppresses or changes) those meanings. Dickens, with his clout and control over his publications, due to his popularity and financial success, proves an ideal author for a study of this kind.

Edwards begins with a brief history of the transition, around 1820, to standardized capitalization: upper case for proper nouns, the beginning of sentences, the major words in titles. The "dual alphabet", as Edwards calls it — lower and upper case — exists before the printing press, and "Gutenberg took over the practice of beginning all sentences with capitals from an increasingly widespread scribal practice" (11). (A "single alphabet" would be lower case for all words, as promoted by Herbert Bayer at the Bauhaus in the 1920s.) From the mid eighteenth century to the early nineteenth, printers — such as John Smith in *Printer's Grammar* (1755) — reacted to the "typographical instability", the various "hybrid systems in use", and began restricting capitals to "proper names and Emphatical words" (3). As well, there was in Romantic poetry generally a move to a democratic, "typographical levelling", so that even "Emphatical" words were now in lower case. Consider the difference between Heaven and heaven, Man and man, or I and i. To study the "politics" of the dual alphabet in the nineteenth century, then, is to consider not only the turn to a limited use of capitals, but also the potential significance of them after 1820 when they do appear: as we read Dickens's novels we can ask why this word is capitalized and that one is not. The appearance of non-standard capitals would be a distinct choice, and so too a lack of capitals — such as in Augusta