Tim McLoughlin

Bridging the Gap

Abstract

The paper looks at the challenges facing an editor who moves from print editions to working on an electronic edition. Among the first are the different kinds of language usage among editors of print and electronic editions; these – particularly that of ›reader‹ and ›user‹ – point up different expectations and different goals in the two mediums. Questions thus arise as to the purpose in editing an electronic edition and their impact on the way the electronic editor thinks about the text. The implications of the word ›user‹, are explored especially in relation to annotation. Annotation in turn calls for attention to how the text is marked-up in TEI. Throughout the change from the one medium to the other, the editor has to reassess his relation to what he thought were the critical priorities of the text, as well as to his user. The final part of the paper looks at issues of navigation and the demands to think critically about the dynamics of the edition. That takes the editor back to the fundamental question about the purpose of an electronic edition.

Unfamiliar territory – Editing (New Style)

This paper arises from work on a project to produce an electronic edition of the correspondence of the Irish painter James Barry (1741-1806). Two caveats are important at the start: first that editorial issues to do with a person's correspondence are in many respects different from those in literary texts, so some of the following points will not apply to work on editions of a literary text; second, the paper is written from the perspective of someone with experience in print-based editing, not skilled in the new technology, who is attempting the transition into the unfamiliar territory of electronic editing.

The paper aims to recount and reflect on some of the problems and hurdles encountered. Editors wishing to bridge the gap may well be forgiven for assuming that in the cross-over there will be no shaking of the editorial foundations. After all, they may presume, the familiar long established conventions of editing transcend shifts in technology. There is

comfort in the belief that scholarly standards apply across media – print, electronic or otherwise, and by and large they do. What difficulties there are impinges less on the principles of scholarly editing than on questions about how and why to present the text in the new medium. But by a curious twist, these questions then rebound on the principles. Nothing in his previous experience could have forewarned the print-editor of the new ethos. The textual territory may not be unfamiliar, but the way scholars in the electronic medium think about the text and its users, their preoccupations and expectations seem disconcertingly alien.

The point surfaces in a different guise in current debates about what exactly changes in the cross-over: do electronic editions »offer a new ontology and new ways of reading«?[1] The sub-stratum of such issues needs to be looked at in some detail because it reveals serious questions, such as what happens to a text when it is transposed from manuscript or print to the electronic medium.

Any attempt to answer such questions needs a reminder of the way the two brands of scholars – print medium and electronic medium – talk about the task of editing, the language they use, the suppositions behind their choice of words, their presumptions about the relation between the reader (or user) and the text.

The language of practitioners

The basic vocabulary of print-based editors relates to the ›book‹, the ›reader‹, the ›text‹ and ›reading‹; electronic editors talk about the ›text‹ but in terms of the ›user‹, the ›archive‹, ›data‹, ›searching‹ or ›browsing‹. Faced with a laptop screen, it is easy to slip into the habits of this latter usage, but the slippage belies a radical change of relationship between the editor and the text.

What then are the presumptions behind these usages? For the print-based editor, the book is there to be read and understood: his prime task is to facilitate these two objectives: as Greetham puts it, »the text is thought to need the intervention of scholarship for its better understanding«.[2] Editors, like their publishers, put a value on what Horace called

---

[1] Greetham (2007: 33).
[2] Greetham (1995: 1).

the useful and the enjoyable.[3] The book is presumed to have something worth saying. That is the founding principle of the book trade: »writer and publishing agent meet and the primary decision on the writing's worth is taken«.[4] Much hangs on the word ›worth‹, but clearly the book should have something interesting or valuable to say and to do so in a manner that is pleasurable. And that is only known by reading the book.

When we talk about ›reading the text‹, the word ›reading‹ deserves pause, not least because it is an ambiguous word. The primary sense is of a continuous twofold activity, perusing as well as understanding words in a written or printed sequence. It is this sense of understanding the text that often requires the help of an editor. Editors, Tanselle says, sometimes forget »to recognise that the act of reading necessitates a critical approach to the text as well as to the meaning«.[5] Since the ›meaning‹ of a particular word depends partly on what surrounds it, and cannot be isolated from its context and may reverberate through a whole paragraph, or indeed the whole book, ›meaning‹ depends on how the reader reads. The supposition here is that the smallest units of the text interrelate with the whole, that the text has an organic wholeness. The scholarly editor's primary task is to assist the reader's comprehension, help towards his ›reading‹, facilitate his pleasure.

We read a text – be it a poem, a legal tract, a story, or a letter – for one or both of two reasons: it is useful and/or pleasurable. Robert Halsband, reflecting on his editing of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's letters, reminds would-be editors of this basic premise – »that the reader wishes to read the letters«, editors are there to produce »readable editions […] for all to see and enjoy«.[6] This has a ring of archaism when set aside the aim of an electronic edition as enunciated by, for example, the Centre for Scholarly Editing and Document Studies in Belgium: ›to provide multipurpose and flexible access to correspondence material‹.[7] No mention of reading, much less of its pleasures. The text has become ›material‹.

Further evidence of the print-based editor's presumption that his text, be it correspondence or essays or fiction, is there to be read, and read through, is evident at every stage of the editorial procedure, from choice

---

[3] Horace: »Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci,/ lectorem delectando pariterque monendo«; He takes the prize who mixes the useful with the pleasurable, giving the reader enjoyment and advice in equal measure (*Horace:* 1947: 343-44).

[4] Pollard (1989: v).

[5] Tanselle (1995: 14).

[6] Halsband (1958: 35, 37).

[7] Vanhoutte / Branden (2005) [1].

of a base text, to the handling of variant readings and emendations, to revisions, to presentation of the text, its annotations and appendices. The editor aims to provide the reader with that version of the text he presumes best serves either the author or the work itself, or both. From decisions on details of spelling, punctuation, capitalisation to questions about annotation, the editor is concerned to help the reader make sense of the text. The introduction consolidates that aim. The presumption throughout is that the reader will read the text through.

That primary presumption is but implicit and often absent in the language of electronic editing: words like ›user‹, ›search‹, ›archive‹, ›navigate‹ give no hint that the text is there to be read through or that it is an integrated whole. The language now takes on a functional timbre that suggests the text is an object for use. Whatever pains the editor takes to present it in a scholarly way, such language reflects a change of purpose. Whether this also reflects a change of ontology is a moot point:[8] the essence remains the same, but the manner of existence does not. If the argument for essence rests on utility, then the ontology has changed. If ontology is conditioned by epistemology and how we know, there is a case for arguing that the electronic medium affects the ontology of the text. A text as an object of study preserves its essence, but its uses change.

Some might argue this is less a change than an expansion, an extension of uses: the new medium allows for myriad new ways of approaching the text, few of which were available in the print edition. The point is beguiling, but it does not obviate the fact that the primary relation between the individual and the text – the pleasure of reading – has, to say the least, given way to other pleasures – browsing, searching, digging. The text is now an ›archive‹, a ›resource‹.

In the light of these arguments, the purpose of editing in the electronic medium needs to be thought through. If the electronic text is not only, and perhaps not primarily there to be read, what is its main purpose? To be available for whatever aspects or details a user might want to search for. Such an answer, frustratingly vague, is as close to the truth as we currently get. Take for example the homepage of the Mark Twain Project: under »User Guide« is the statement, »Mark Twain Project Online's customizable interface provides a powerful research and reading

---

8 I use ›ontology‹ in the metaphysical sense of the essence of being or existence, without those reverberations the word has acquired in the context of electronic text theories; for example, Susan Schreibman et al. speak of »developing an ontology or controlled vocabulary for a correspondence« (Schreibman et al. [4]); the word appears to be accruing other than its metaphysical meaning.

experience. Learn more about searching, browsing, and viewing options«. ›Reading‹ is reduced to an ›experience‹, and but one of many other activities.

So what shifts are necessary in the way the electronic editor thinks about the text? At one level, none at all. The tasks of scholarly editing remain the same, of selecting one or more versions of the text, of explaining methodology regarding transcription and emendations, providing editorial commentary. But on the level of context there are new challenges, not least because the use of the text has changed. One such challenge is for the editor to reconsider his estimate of the critical weighting of the components of the text. For example, one might ask about James Barry's correspondence, where the critical weight in these letters lies. What is the focus of the text? Private letters, personal interaction between a painter and his work, his employers, his family and well-wishers. They are about Barry's growth as an artist and the struggle he had with the milieu of artists and institutions in the latter part of the eighteenth century. What a print-editor might regard as subsidiary, ancillary and less critically important details – many of the people mentioned, some of the paintings referred to, the galleries visited, the books read – this kind of material would be lightly annotated in a print edition. But in an electronic edition these have the potential for a life and significance of their own. In the 1780s and 1790s the letters focus on his paintings in the Great Room of the Society of Arts and then his falling out with the *Royal Academy* from which he was expelled in 1799. The critical weighting is on Barry and his concerns about his work, and to a lesser degree on how the Council of the Academy handled Barry. Taken as a whole, that is what the letters are about. But such are the search resources in an electronic edition that what the editor might regard as the critical focus can be ignored by the user and other issues explored. In other words, certain aspects of the cultural and intellectual context of the letters may well interest a ›user‹ who does not come to the text to read Barry's letters. What was subsidiary and integral to Barry in a print edition has to be recognised in the electronic edition as potentially floating free from Barry. The ›user‹ may have no interest in Barry at all: the point of looking at Barry's correspondence may be to see what light it throws, if any, on modes and costs of travel in Italy in the eighteenth century. As soon as the editor pauses to consider what kind of reader/user might want to consult Barry's correspondence, any former kind of holistic view of the text has to be modified. The guiding question for the editor becomes alarmingly general: what is there in the texture of this work that might be useful to

searchers and researchers? The editor re-orientates himself to become archivist-editor.

This need to shift orientation, to be aware of new demands, generated largely by the fresh potentialities of the medium, is reinforced by other factors: for example, the physicality of the paper text has been transposed onto a reflective screen; it is no longer a physical object between covers – and all that that implies. The text no longer looks like a book. When we speak of the ›binding‹ of a book we are reminded that the physical shape of a book, its binding, its covers, lead the reader to presume the wholeness of the text within. The text on the screen makes no such statement. The text is available in what were previously unthinkable ways. Old style editorial foundations begin to shudder.

The ›text‹ will remain the same – an electronic text of a Hardy novel will be no different from a print edition text – but the editor will have had to bring a number of new sensitivities and skills to bear on it because his task is no longer to provide a text for the activity of reading, but a text that is usable. In theory the text remains a coherent sequential corpus with recurring preoccupations, major and minor themes, motifs, but in practice it has become something different, a resource that can be used for quite other purposes than reading. As the context of the text has changed, so have the ways in which we interact with it.

›Users‹

The word for the cross-over editor to chew on long and thoughtfully is ›user‹. What and who is a ›user‹? Who is the editor editing for? Previously, as editor of a scholarly edition of say Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the editor had a fairly clear idea at the outset as to who the readers would be – educated people, interested in this kind of literature (whether for reasons of education or leisure), those who have the money to afford the book or access to libraries and institutions that would acquire a scholarly edition. It is not difficult, considering the kind of text, the publisher and the market, to sketch the profile of an implied reader. At the core will be other scholars, serious reviewers, and whoever else might appreciate scholarly editions of eighteenth-century literature. In the electronic medium, such a profile may hold good for some if not the majority of users. But there will be many users who are not concerned with the novel as novel and have no inclination to read it. For some this will be the first time they have stumbled across Defoe. Web users may be curious to find

out about what a print editor would regard as minor peripheral details – Crusoe's diet, or clothes, or his goat; the user might have a particular interest in pets, especially parrots, in eighteenth-century literature, or the significance of the prophet Job to eighteenth-century adventurers.

In addition English will not be the native tongue of many users; the phrase ›world-wide web‹ is warning enough to the editor that he can no longer entertain presuppositions about cultural norms and ›common knowledge‹. Barry's use of the term >poet laureate< (sic), for instance, would not need a foot-note in a print edition in Europe or the United States, but what would users in Asia, Africa, China or South America make of a term so deeply bedded in Western culture? The range of possible users seems limitless. Yet, in the new electronic context, all such details take on a level of significance other than what they have in the text itself. The text becomes an archive of the culture, attitudes, customs of its day. Because the technology can take the user directly to such material, effectively retrieve whatever feature in or of the text is wanted, the editor needs to develop a kind of sixth sense for this kind of archival material and devise ways of marking it up, irrespective of its significance within the text.

A detail that might merit a brief foot-note in a print-edition might now call for additional attention as an archival item. For instance, Barry writes to his friend Dr. Sleigh about the Irish painter George Barret, »I have seen nothing to match with his last year's premium picture« ([ante 17] June, 1765). A print-editor might be satisfied with a note to the effect, »George Barret (c.1728-84), Irish painter, was awarded a premium of £50 for ›A Landscape with Figures‹ at the Society of Artists exhibition, April 1764 (*RSA Catalogue of exhibitions, 1761-83*)«. That explains the allusion to the ›reader‹, whose primary interest is Barry. However, the editor of the electronic edition cannot but realize that the ›user‹ may be ›searching‹ for more about the context and connections than the simple explanation gives. Free from the constraints of a publisher, the editor can expatiate at his leisure: the note could expand almost indefinitely (an inherent problem in annotating an electronic edition). In this example, the editor might settle for a version that explains a little more about Barret, and lay the ground for understanding Barry's enthusiasm for his work:

> George Barret (c.1728-84), Irish painter and friend of Barry, who had left Dublin for London in 1763 (Ann Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, *Ireland's Painters 1600-1940* (London: Yale, 2000), p.135), was awarded a premium of £50 for his picture ›A Land-

> scape with Figures‹ at the Society of Artists exhibition in April
> 1764 (*RSA Catalogue of exhibitions, 1761-83*); he also exhibited four
> landscapes of Wicklow. Barret was a committee member of the
> Society of Artists when it received royal approval in 1765 (*Annual
> Register, 1765*, pp.194-96). One of Barry's earliest paintings was
> ›Scenery in the Vicinity of Wicklow‹, c.1763-64 (Pressly, *Life and
> Art, p. 228*); so he might have worked with Barret before he left
> Ireland.

The note could add hyperlinks to web-sites that give thumbnail images
of Barret's work.

The significance of the mention of this picture in the text is that it
conveys Barry's admiration for Barret's painting; the electronic note
opens up other avenues of research – the biography of Barret and his
London context, as well as a hint that Barry's connection might have
been based on early work together in Wicklow. The note begins to read
like a mini-archive on Barret.

The point is that users do not behave like readers. Their inclination is
to appropriate what they want, rather than to reflect on emphases within
the text. Furthermore the user, preferably with the editor's help, will ap-
preciate links from this text to others that enlarge his knowledge of the
same kind of materials. The electronic text, once on the web, takes its
place – not as in a library, physically discrete, separate and side by side
with other texts – but in immediate dialogue with other electronic texts.
At the click of a mouse, the user can bring up on the same screen James
Barry's comments on his painting, since lost, *Antiochus and Stratonice*, im-
ages of paintings by Jacques-Louis David and Gherard Lairesse of the
same story, and Johann Winckelmann's detailed discussion of Lairesse's
painting. It might be argued that all that has changed is the speed of such
comparisons: before the age of the computer, a scholar could have done
the same in a good library, but would have needed much more time.
True, but the editor of an electronic text is at the service of people who
can search and find at this speed. His text becomes part of an interactive
library where powers of immediate retrieval mean any part of his text
might be linked with hitherto unrecognized bed-fellows. The text itself
has not changed, but its spatial and visual relation to other texts has.

Another dimension of this point is that the electronic edition can give
scholars simultaneous sight of text and manuscript in a format that is
both convenient, inexpensive and more imaginative than previously pos-
sible in print editions. Susannne Gossett regrets that her attempts to
produce an edition of Jacobean plays found in the English College in

Rome with facing page facsimiles of the manuscript failed because »there weren't the funds for such an expensive form of publication«: she adds, »Consequently, those who want to read these plays have to accept what they are given unless they are willing to travel to libraries and archives«.[9] An electronic edition of the plays would make this valuable library resource available, and indeed enhance it.

Editor as encoder

Such changes impact forcibly in the way the editor is expected to present the electronic text. What lies behind the text on the screen is a formidable meta-language of encoding, a layer of editing that is both time-consuming and demanding. In order to enable users to find their way quickly to whatever item in or aspect of the text they want, the editor encodes the text in such a way that the electronic medium will recognise and respond efficiently to the users' desires. Whatever aspects of the text are not encoded will not be available to the user. The encoding is a way to filter to the user those features of the text that the editor considers may be useful. Even the most conventional characteristics of the text have to be encoded – paragraphing, punctuation, italics; in addition, depending on the kind of text, a range of other materials, such as names of persons and places, dates – all to ensure that multiple aspects of the text are readily accessible. This meta-language is available to the would-be editor in several forms. A common version, XML, is described in the TEI Guidelines as, »widely used for the definition of device-independent, system-independent methods of storing and processing texts in electronic form«.[10] Whatever difficulty old-style editors have with such obfuscating language, they nevertheless have to realise that editing for the new medium requires a meta-language based on such a system. Furthermore, »encoding an electronic text«, says one critic, »is an act of interpretation«:[11] so it proves and it is a demanding aspect of the editorial task.

The first surprise for the print editor now looking to edit say an electronic edition of correspondence is that there is no agreed style-sheet, as would be given by say a publishing house or a general editor of a multi-volume edition. The only guidelines are how to encode the text. These

---

[9] Gossett (2005: 35).
[10] TEI (2005) [2].
[11] Hockey (2000: 5).

are not genre specific. They are flexible, optional, can be modified, even constructed by individual editors. Whichever meta-language the editor chooses for encoding, the application of that is a critical facet of editorial activity in that the editor's discretion works at what exactly to encode, what to make retrievable. Here guidelines are available, though again no one version is recommended ahead of another. One commentator advises the would-be editor,

> Some scholarly communities have developed their own guidelines for using the TEI guidelines, in which they specify a preferred way for handling things they often see or that are distinctive to their materials; if there is such a group in your area of work it's a good idea to consider following their lead.[12]

Mark-up technology is open-ended in that editors are encouraged to customise their usage to the particular needs of their project and to extend the syntax as they see fit. New territory indeed.

The second surprise is the amount of time it takes to encode. This is partly because there is so much of it, and partly because, as the editor slowly gets to grips with factors like the potential of the medium and the vagaries of the ›user‹, he finds he has to keep revising. Only after some months did I understand that each letter should be encoded as if it were the only letter in the correspondence the user might consult – which might well be the case. Therefore, every letter had to be marked-up, provided with a separate header and annotated as *ab novo*. Previously annotated information, on say historical figures or painters, had to be repeated in some form in every letter. One way around this tedium is to create a glossary so that the user could call up such information when needed; again, that entails extra work that a print editor might balk at. The presumption in a print edition that a foot-note on a person needs to be annotated only once, falls away. There are ways of economising in the electronic edition such as by a glossary, and by ›copy‹ and ›paste‹; these facilities but reduce the extra load; they do not remove it. No wonder that on some projects the encoding is handled by a person or persons other than the editor. My experience has been that an editor might need an additional 30% or more time for the project. As new considerations arise about the user or the design of the edition, research and editing have to be shelved, sometimes for long intervals, because the encoding

---

[12] Lavagnino (2007) [3].

needs to be revised or extended. Encoding, like Hamlet's ghost, is a haunting importunate presence.

Change of task, change of attitude
– The Correspondence of James Barry

What follows bears out Shillingsburg's remark, »It is easy to get lost or discouraged in the field of electronic texts«.[13] I started work on the texts for the Barry correspondence project some months before looking at XML and TEI guidelines for two reasons: first, I wanted to familiarise myself with the texture and cultural orientation of the letters before being distracted by other factors; second, my conversations and reading led me to the view not that there was an agreed meta-language followed by all electronic editors, but that editors seemed free to follow what meta-language they liked. This sense of openness and freedom left me somewhat disappointed, if not sceptical that this area of the discipline was but feeling its way. The reason, as Shillingsburg suggests, is that »we have not fully understood or exploited the capabilities of electronic texts«.[14]

I started editing the letters, as if for a print edition, before I had familiarised myself with ways of encoding, and soon realised that the letters I had already worked on would have to be revisited and marked up in a meta-language like TEI, a time-consuming and mechanical task that raised a puzzling question – what is the critical purpose of this mark-up? Is this just to satisfy the technical demands of the medium? Does it help the reader in ways over and above what print editing does? Am I serving the machine or the user? The answer is both; the discouraging point was that I had little idea of the capability of the machine and even less of the ›user‹. Yet the meta-language was itself a guide into the labyrinth. The early steps in mark-up were illuminating and inadequate. For example, I started encoding books according to the simplest of guidelines: Fryer, <title>Works of Barry</title>. I soon realised that <title> could, and, in the case of Barry, needed to discriminate between <title type= "book">Works of Barry</title>, <title type="painting">Adam and Eve </title> and <title type="sculpture">Adonis</title>. The compensation for the tedium of re-encoding was the assurance that a user curious about sculpture would

---

[13] Shillingsburg (2006: 11).
[14] Shillingsburg (2006: 88).

be able to go directly to that topic. The point was that I had to rethink my relationship with the ›user‹. Since this person might be interested in the most abstruse aspect of Barry's correspondence, I needed to pre-empt the most quirky of users by encoding virtually every detail that might be of interest – not just names of persons, paintings, sculptures, art galleries, but senders and recipients of letters, places, dates, be they in the body of the text or in the annotation. Refinement, honing of detail, was what the encoding implicitly was looking for and became the guiding principle. For instance, what about a letter that has no date or place? Whereas a hardback editor might use square brackets to indicate the uncertainty, the electronic meta-language allows information of a stated guesstimate, the degree of the guesstimate and who made it: this is an entry a letter from Barry to Burke for which no date or place is given. Internal and external evidence confirms that Barry was travelling from Lyon to Paris in February 1771; he appears to have started the letter in Lyon and ended it in Paris; so to say he wrote it in Paris is only partly true. How to convey this information? <head> <sender>James Barry</sender> to <adressee> Edmund Burke </addressee>-<date resp="tim" when="1771-02--" cert ="80"> February 1771</date><place resp="tim" cert="60">Paris</place></head>. The more refinements the more the revisions. Even though such kinds of precision may numb an editor's critical sense, it does spark another: what aspects of this letter – be it of language or reference – reflect cultural and other issues that might interest the user? There are no sure answers, but the meta-language gives the editor the tools to be as comprehensive as scholarship requires.

Navigation

The uncertainties, the open-endedness of such editing were softened by a new kind of question that brought the editorial task into clearer focus – what does the editor want the user to be able to do? The knee-jerk answer for Barry's correspondence is simple – to read the letters. But few will in fact sit down to read through Barry's correspondence, or anyone else's on the web. Why then work on an electronic edition of someone's correspondence? James Barry's correspondence is an interesting case for two reasons: first, because it is unusual. Most of his letters from Paris and Rome for example are addressed to the Burke family who were supporting him during his studies on the Continent; they are full of detailed discussions about the paintings and sculptures he saw and the work he

did there. There is virtually nothing about his personal life, nights out, friends, his day to day movements, chores or preoccupations. The early letters seldom, if ever, strike that intimate, personal note that makes correspondence enjoyable reading. Second, because the electronic medium allows the editor to provide images of the paintings and sculptures Barry alludes to and discusses. Barry writes to Burke from Florence, »There is a portrait of Raffael here at the Altoviti palace, which is indeed altogether in the style of Leonardo da Vinci« (Barry to Burke ([c. 4 May] 1770): the remark lies rather flat on the printed page, but if the user can call up the portrait of the banker Bindo Altoviti, and perhaps a portrait by da Vinci to compare it with, Barry's comments make so much more sense.

Why then edit the correspondence, or indeed make it available to modern readers? The letters serve most obviously as what Halsband calls »documents«,[15] archival material about Barry and painting in the eighteenth century. The electronic medium, hardly the place for sustained reading, provides the opportunity to search multiple aspects of these letters which give a unique insight into the mind, tastes and opinions of one of the century's major historical painters. The great benefit is the facility to show images of the paintings and sculptures Barry discusses and thus enjoys the intertextuality of word and picture. Whatever the narrowness of Barry's concerns and his own eccentricities, these letters give an unusual slant on art in the late eighteenth century, on how a particular painter, gifted, passionate and eccentric, grounded himself in the mastery of his craft, in the history of painting, and then established a particular place for himself in the competitive and cantankerous art world of London. The letters are important as eighteenth-century cultural history as concerns both Barry himself and leading institutions such as the Society of Arts and the Royal Academy. In short, Barry's correspondence lends itself to the ›user‹ rather than the reader.

Architecture

This realisation led me to rethink the dynamics in the relation between editor, user and text. Users don't necessarily read, they ›navigate‹; they want to be able to move about the edition at will. How they do this depends on two things: the application of the meta-language and, secondly,

---

[15] Halsband (1958: 26).

how the edition is designed, its architecture. Where will the user start and what options will be available for searching the edition? This area of design is a fresh challenge to the editor's critical grasp of his text: he now finds himself called on to visualise the dynamics of his edition. Whatever design or system of navigation is decided upon makes an implicit critical statement about the use of the edition. A kind of visual imagination comes into play guided by the editor's decisions on the dynamics between each of the constituents of the edition, decisions about what should be immediately accessible, what strings to make available on the home page, what can be accessed only by several stages of navigation. The editor has a flexibility, a freedom in these decisions so different from what applies in a print edition. Unlike a book, the electronic edition will have whatever architecture the editor thinks most appropriate to its use. The absence of authoritative models or organising principles of presentation means the editor operates in a kind of post-modernist arena of texts. The ongoing formulation of, additions to and suggestions for the Text Encoding Initiative Guidelines are further evidence of open-endedness, even an acceptance of incompleteness: to borrow from Susan Sontag, »Incompleteness becomes the reigning modality«.[16] In spite of his attempts to give the site a centre, namely the text (in Barry's case the correspondence), the editor accepts the presumption among his users of fragmentation, discontinuity, simultaneity, even pastiche. Not only can he use the site as he wills, but he can choose his own priorities, attend to and neglect without reference to the editor's priorities. Up to a point. The meta-language mark-up and the design of the navigation will determine the extent of such freedoms.

A case is often made however that the structure or design of the electronic edition should be determined rather by user needs than by an editor's critical priorities:

> The crucial point in the process of designing the data structure should be that different scholars have different intellectual requirements from resources. They are not always happy with how editors organize scholarly editions.[17]

The implicit choice behind such remarks goes beyond that between the priorities of the editor and the user: it takes us back to questions about the ontology of the text, in particular whether the edition should reflect

---

[16] Sontag (1996: 17).
[17] Czmiel (2008: 101).

in its editorial fabrication, from its textual apparatus to its annotation to its design, the generic character of the text. The point is not about the nature of textuality and its Protean manifestations. Rather, should the dynamics of the design reflect the nature of the text? How important is it that the design intimate in its myriad ways – not just in the title - that this is a scholarly edition of, say, letters? The discursive differences between different genres of text will presumably have some bearing on the way an edition of a specific genre of text is organised, presented and edited.
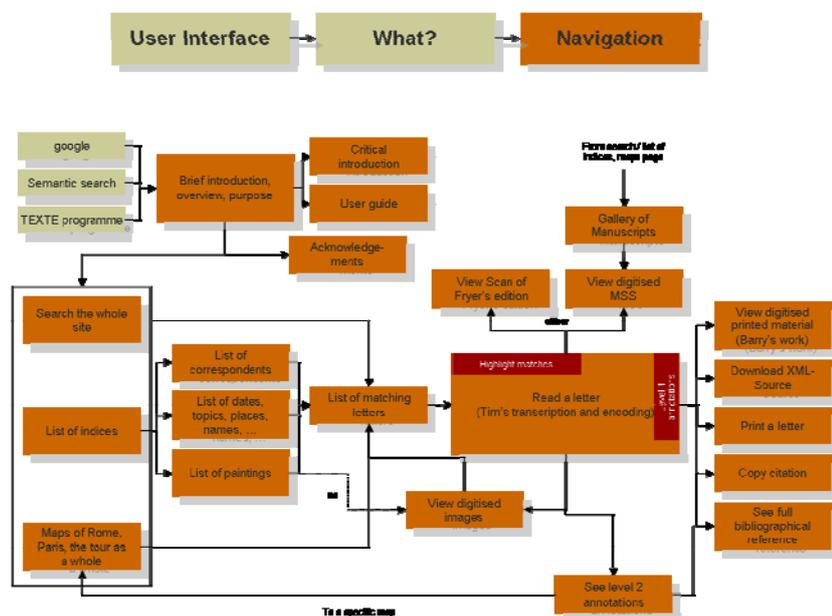

Figure 1: A Navigation Map for *The Correspondence of James Barry*

The tendency to consider user needs and expectations as the driving force in the design of an electronic edition runs the risk of neglecting the nature of the text that is being edited. The user has freedom of choice, but within a particular generic context. The design of the electronic edition of Barry's correspondence, an outline of which is given below, reflects an attempt to marry critical and user needs.[18] The user can quickly access most areas of the edition; for example he can by-pass the critical introduction and go straight to the whole site or to a list of indices. From

---

[18] I am grateful to Malte Rehbein of the TEXTE Project at the *National University of Ireland*, Galway for his considerable contribution to this design.

either of these, there is immediate access to a particular letter, its annotation and images. What the architecture emphasises, and this is a critical decision, is that this is a corpus of correspondence: the editorial thrust is to keep the user aware of this generic feature. Navigation is channelled through particular letters. At every turn the user is encouraged to read the letters.

Bridging the gap

The reasons for the current gap between editing for a print edition and for an electronic edition are neatly summarised by Shillingsburg:

> When an editorial project is defined primarily as textual scholarship in the hands of literary scholars who are amateurs in technology but who want electronic presentation and distribution, complicated textual issues often find only tentative technical solutions. Conversely, when a new editorial project is defined primarily as electronic rather than textual and is placed in the hands of technicians who are amateurs in literary and textual scholarship, beautiful and eloquent technical demonstrations present rather obvious, simple, or flawed notions of textual issues.[19]

So stark a statement suggests a kind of impasse. In practice the problem is not that we are engaged in a dialogue of the deaf, but in a meeting of two distinct cultural phenomena the genesis and history of each of which rests in differences of socio-cultural education. This is not a replay of the debates about culture raised by Matthew Arnold, or C.P. Snow and F.R.Leavis, though the roots of the issue lie there: Arnold said, with some bitterness, and perhaps prescience, the person who »works for machines […] works only for confusion«.[20] In the new scenario, there is no conflict of competing cultures – low vs. high, science vs. arts. The two need one another, yet neither fully comprehends the other. Apart from the given reasons for this, it is surprising to one coming new to electronic editions that so little research has been done on how users use an electronic edition. Research such as that carried out at University College, London on online resources in the Arts and Humanities is but a be-

---

[19] Shillingsburg (2006: 92).
[20] Arnold (1978: 215).

ginning: »No systematic survey of digital resource usage in the humanities has ever been undertaken – and the factors for use and non-use of digital resources are unknown«, say the researchers.[21] So much energy and imagination goes into predicating user needs, yet so little into the outcome. A better understanding of that seems imperative to both designers and editors.

The short-comings and lacunae in the present state of editing for digital editions are indeed enough to give a print-based editor cold feet. But that is no argument to turn a blind eye to what is happening. The work of scholars who have bridged the gap, like G. Thomas Tanselle, Jerome McGann and Peter Shillingsburg, is evidence enough that the disciplines of print-based and electronic editing are approaching a point of confluence, not conflict. The challenge is to bridge the gap, to work at integration. And that presumes agreement on a recurring and basic question: what is the purpose of the electronic edition?

> Either you had no purpose
> Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
> And is altered in fulfilment[22]

Bibliography

Arnold, Matthew
    1872   Culture and Anarchy. In: Miriam Allott (ed.): Matthew Arnold, Selected Poems and Prose, London.

Czmiel, Alexander
    2008   Editio ex machina – Digital Scholarly Editions out of the Box, Digital Humanities, 2008. Oulu.

Eliot, T.S.
    1944   Little Gidding, Four Quartets. London.

Gossett, Susanne
    2005   Emendations, reconstructions, and the Uses of the Past. In: Text 17, pp. 35-54.

Greetham, David
    1995   Scholarly Editing: a Guide to Research, ed. D.C. Greetham. New York.

    2007   Review of Electronic Textual Editing. In: Lou Burnard et al. (ed.): Textual Cultures 2/2 (2007), pp. 133-36.

---

[21] Warwick et al. (2008: 85).
[22] Eliot (1944: 50).

Jahrbuch für Computerphilologie 10 (2008), McLoughlin "Bridging the Gap" <http://computerphilologie.de/jg08/mclough.pdf> (23. April 2009)

Halsband, Robert
    1958   Editing the Letters of Letter-Writers. In: Studies in Bibliography xi, pp.25-37.

Hockey, Susan
    2000   Electronic Texts in the Humanities. Oxford.

Horace
    1947   Ars poetica. London.

Lavagnino, John
    2007   When not to use TEI. Electronic Textual Editing. Text Encoding Initiative [3].

Pollard, Mary
    1989   Dublin's Trade in Books, 1550-1800. Oxford.

Shillingsburg, Peter
    2006   From Gutenberg to Google, Electronic Representations of Literary Texts. Cambridge.

Schreibman, Susan et al.
    2005   Letters and Lacunae: Editing an Electronic Scholarly Edition of Correspondence [4]

Sontag, Susan
    1996   Under the Sign of Saturn. London.

Tanselle, G. Thomas
    1995   The Varieties of Scholarly Editing. In: Scholarly Editing: a Guide to Research, ed. D.C.Greetham, pp. 9-32.

Text Encoding Initiative (TEI)
    2007   Guidelines, P5: [2].

Vanhoutte, Edward / Ron Van den Branden
    2004   Describing, Transcribing, Encoding and Editing Modern Correspondence Material: A Textbase Approach [1].

Warwick, Claire et al.
    2008   If you build it will they come? In: Journal of Digital Scholarship in the Humanities, 23, i (April), pp. 225-28.

Websites

[1] <http://www.kantl.be/ctb/pub/2004/comedvanvanfig.pdf>
[2] <http://www.tei-c.org/Guidelines/> (22.02.2009).
[3] <www.tei-c.org/About/Archive_new/ETE/Preview/tanselle.xml> (22.02.2009).
[4]   <http://mustard.tapor.uvic.ca/cocoon/ach_abstracts/xq/xhtml.xq?id=203>

Tim McLoughlin
Research Fellow
TEXTE Project
Moore Institute

National University of Ireland, Galway
Ireland
e-mail: tmcloughlin@yahoo.com