

Digital Documentary Editions and the Others

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It is a truth universally acknowledged that documentary editions have found a very welcoming home in cyberspace. Documentary editing has often been considered a lower form of scholarship, as suggested by its being commonly called "noncritical editing," a name that barely hides the conviction of its being a non- or prescholarly endeavor.¹ However, this allegedly humble form of editing has now taken a leading role in the digital arena, boosted, it seems, by the availability of digital facsimiles. This rise in scholarly esteem has led to a worried call by Peter Robinson for editors to go back to preparing multiwitness critical editions. While conceding that "one can welcome this attention to documents as a long overdue correction to the millennia-long concentration of scholarly editors on the work rather than on the document," he sees "dangers" because "if we make only digital documentary editions, we will distance ourselves and our editions from the readers"; furthermore, "such editions [i.e., digital documentary editions], with their narrow focus on editor and document, fall far short of achieving the potential of editions in the digital world."² Franz Fischer has presented a not dissimilar line: if not detrimental, the provision of proper critical editions is much more worth pursuing than diplomatic editions of the sources. As he declares, if "all texts are equal, critical texts are more equal than others."³ However, one must ask if this is really true. Does the provision of documentary editions represent a threat to the work of the editor and to the entire digital textual scholarship?

The fact that these scholars have felt the need to defend the benefit of critical editions based on multiple witnesses, associated with the fear that "[i]f we make only digital documentary editions, we will distance ourselves and our editions from readers,"⁴ clearly demonstrates the central role that documentary

editing has assumed in the digital environment. This is, in fact, the format chosen by many high-profile digital editions, for instance *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts*, the edition of the *Manuscrits de Madame Bovary*, the *Walt Whitman Archive*, the *William Blake Archive*, and many others.⁵ It is remarkable to note that as recently as 2007 Gabler felt the need to advocate for new attention to documentary editions, which, in his opinion, were still underestimated in the editorial scene, and he claimed that the digital environment is the most suitable for this type of edition.⁶ Apparently he was right; his position has been so successful that it has now, only a few years later, generated the opposite reaction among the scholarly community, namely a call for a renewed attention to critical editions based on multiple witnesses. Such editions may be produced according to different editorial methodologies, such as, for instance, copy-text, where different versions of the same work are considered as a single artistic endeavor with different level of authorial engagements; stemmatics, where the lost original or archetype is reconstructed from several witnesses, organized according to genealogical principles; or phylogenetic, where the variation of witnesses is organized following the models developed to map and predict genetic mutation.⁷ But before discussing whether the new centrality of digital documentary editions represents a real threat to digital textual scholarship, it is perhaps necessary to investigate the reasons why the digital medium has so much favored this type of edition over the critical edition based on multiple witnesses. We must first define the objects of such investigation.

For the purposes of this discussion, I define a documentary edition as an edition of a text based on a single document, which attempts to reproduce a certain degree of the peculiarities of the document itself, even if this may cause disruption to the normal flow of the text presented by the document. It can assume different formats, by presenting the textual content of the document as semi-diplomatic, diplomatic, ultra-diplomatic,⁸ or even facsimile editions, which differentiate themselves by the level of editorial intervention, ranging from the largest to the smallest concession to the reading habits of the public of choice. The documentary edition differs from transcription in the sense that a documentary edition is meant to be publicly distributed, while a transcription represents the private first stage of the editorial work; a transcription can become a documentary edition in the moment its creator (the editor) decides it is accurate enough and

follows accepted scholarly conventions well enough to be distributed publicly.⁹ As with all definitions, it is hard to convey the different aspects and shades of a multiform scholarly practice (and it might be noted that Kline and Perdue, in order to respond to the question "What Is Documentary Editing?" have preferred to give historical accounts of how it has established itself, rather than giving a definition as such).¹⁰ However, this definition could be considered as a useful starting point for the discussion that follows. Digital documentary editions (henceforth DDEs) have been defined as "the recording of as many features of the original document as are considered meaningful by the editors, displayed in all the ways the editors consider useful for the readers, including all the tools necessary to achieve such a purpose."¹¹ This definition includes not only the textual content but also the digital infrastructure (visible to the final user or not) necessary for the publication and exploitation of such content. DDEs can assume the form of diplomatic, ultra-diplomatic, semi-diplomatic, or reading editions on demand, thanks to digital (usually online) delivery of an appropriately encoded text, transformed in many ways by customized scripts and tools.

The availability of digital facsimiles and their ease of publication on the web have already been cited as one of the main reasons for the success of DDEs: enthusiasm for the opportunity given by digital photography made Kevin Kiernan propose the image-based scholarly edition and declare that this type of edition "subsumes the purpose of a diplomatic edition."¹² This claim has been already refuted elsewhere,¹³ but it is recalled here to highlight one crucial feature of diplomatic editions, namely that historically they were conceived and used as a substitute for facsimile editions when the latter were impractical or too expensive. Kiernan's declaration implies an assumption that, once digital images are made easily available, the need for diplomatic editions would fade. Time has demonstrated that this assumption is wrong. In fact, the availability and the improved publishing opportunities offered by the different digital formats (CD-ROMs, DVDs, and the Web) and the subsequent publication online of millions of digital facsimiles, has by no means made diplomatic and more generally non-image-based documentary editions redundant: quite the contrary. The fact that DDEs have proven to be one of the most successful digital editorial formats demonstrates that their alleged function as surrogate facsimiles is only one of their possible purposes, and possibly the least important one at that. Far from

being subsumed by image-based editions, DDEs have *de facto* incorporated them, because the most common format for digital documentary editions is the side-by-side layout, in which the diplomatic (or ultra-diplomatic) edition is juxtaposed with its digital facsimile. In this format the editor engages in a sort of competition with the facsimile where, as noted by Kathryn Sutherland, "the editor is continually on trial, open to account and correction."¹⁴ The dialectic relationship between the diplomatic edition and the facsimile representation, while demanding extreme editorial rigor, engages the users in close inspection of the transcriptions/translations¹⁵ enacted by the editor in a sort of imaginary competition. The diplomatic edition alongside the facsimile provides the reader with a simplified, mediated, interpreted version of "what's on the page"; therefore, the diplomatic edition, instead of being made redundant by the presence of the image, represents a sort of map and key for the understanding and navigation of that image. Just as a map of any given area of the Earth provides the user with a way to navigate an unfamiliar place, the diplomatic edition provides the reader with the tools to decipher the linguistic and bibliographic codes that inform the document.¹⁶ Therefore, while the provision of high-quality digital facsimiles has effectively made redundant the provision of diplomatic editions as a substitute for facsimile editions—since facsimile editions can now be provided easily—they have also revealed that diplomatic editions (and especially DDEs) are scholarly tools and not surrogates, the provision of which is worthwhile because they are indispensable interpretative tools. Consequently, the more we offer digital facsimiles of primary sources, the greater the need for DDEs will become.

The (implicit) recognition of this type of functionality has considerably helped the establishment of DDEs among scholarly practices, but this alone is perhaps not enough to explain their sudden success. The provision of digital documentary editions based on text encoding, which enables the possibility of presenting the users with many outputs from the same source-encoded files, has made DDEs a very powerful and versatile tool. Perhaps these types of editions could be called *paradigmatic editions*, as they embed many alternative options for the same string of text in a nonlinear way, as opposed to editions that can only display the text in one format (such as printed editions, among others), which could instead be called *syntagmatic editions*. Text encoding has in fact enabled editors to have their cake and eat it: features that were once normalized without mercy to produce

reading, critical (or syntagmatic) editions can now be retained and simply switched on and off at leisure to please different audiences, thereby opening the way to new scholarship and readership. In fact, one can store as much information or alternative points of view as one wishes for each string of text, following the paradigmatic axis, in a nonlinear way, and processed differently according to the editorial vision. These functions have attracted the attention of scholars for whom documents and documentary evidences have a central role, namely those engaged with New (or Material) Philology and Genetic Criticism: scholars that recognize themselves as belonging to these editorial orientations were in fact among the first to embrace the digital medium.¹⁷ As paradigmatic editions are able to store an indefinite amount of information, it is therefore possible to remain faithful to the document (retaining for instance, old and odd spellings, abbreviations, scribal errors, etc.), as well as to make concessions to the reader who is then given the opportunity to choose which version to read. This is the case, for instance, in the LangScape project, where the passages describing land bounds contained within the corpus of Anglo-Saxon charters are presented as semi-diplomatic, edited, or linguistically glossed texts.¹⁸

Yet this is not all: as it happens, digital critical editions based on multiple witnesses gave a decisive boost to the fortunes of digital documentary editions. This is due to the fact that collation—the essential, time-consuming activity that consists in the comparison of text proposed by many documents (the witnesses)—can be done automatically only if all the witnesses are individually transcribed. Experiments in digital collation were one of the first activities attempted by practitioners of the embryonic digital humanities: comparing strings is an activity for which computers are much more gifted than human beings, and so automatic or computer-assisted collation seemed almost inevitable.¹⁹ This task proved to be much more complicated than expected, yet the necessity of producing transcriptions of all witnesses in order to be collated has *de facto* generated many documentary editions once these transcription are made publicly available, one for each witness, for any critical edition. This is the case in the editions published under the umbrella of the *Canterbury Tales Project*, for instance.²⁰ Access to the sources has always been one of the biggest limitations offered by traditional critical editions, where only the categories of variants considered relevant by the editor were collected and organized in the *apparatus criticus*. Again, it seemed natural,

then, that together with a critical edition, the diplomatic edition of the sources would be offered for readers' inspection in digital form, where the space constraints that have determined the format and the selectiveness of the printed apparatus no longer apply.

Perhaps the main reason behind the success of DDEs is that we can unashamedly "do" them: the fact that there are already quite a few of them out there and that they have become so versatile and powerful have made them more attractive than ever. Editors have always had to face the question of what to edit, texts or documents (or texts of works vs. texts of documents);²¹ they have resolved this mostly by choosing texts (i.e., texts of works) over (texts of) documents, given the cost of and the traditionally smaller readership for diplomatic editions. This choice has been almost inevitable for works for which many witnesses survive: who indeed, apart from the editor and possibly a couple of other scholars, would be interested in buying and/or consulting seven hundred versions of Dante's *Commedia*, one for each of the surviving witnesses? Historically, in cases like these, the only sensible solution has been to reconstruct the version that corresponded most with the theoretical orientation of the editor,²² and to serialize the rejected variant readings in the apparatus. The result is the provision of a clean, reading edition, where the variants are conveniently marginalized at the bottom of the page or at the end of the volume, in the name of ease of reading. However, such a format has generated a fair amount of criticism because it gives texts a false impression of stability and purity, and makes it almost impossible to really appreciate the editorial work and the complexity of the tradition.²³ But, while this was (and in many respects still is) the most pragmatic solution for texts with a large tradition, it is not necessarily the best solution in other cases, such as when only one witness survives. However, a sort of critical edition has traditionally still been provided even for texts preserved in a single witness, with the provision of a clear reading text, with internal variations and apparent errors appropriately set aside, in order to avoid disturbing the reading experience. This is the case, for instance, with editions of Jane Austen's *Juvenilia* and other unfinished works unpublished in her lifetime. These were first published by R. W. Chapman from the 1920s; the text Chapman printed is a clean, "final" version, with all the authorial workflow that can be reconstructed through a deep investigation of the original source material relegated to notes at the end of the book. This has been the only way readers have

known these particular works, at least until the online publication of *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts Digital Editions* in 2010. In cases like this, it can be argued that the edition of the manuscripts as critical text is the only sensible way to edit the material. Certainly the provision of a critical text is of fundamental importance to the general readership; however, the edition of the manuscript as document can also be justified on scholarly grounds. This is demonstrated by the fact that the publication of the digital edition has generated a considerable debate around Jane Austen's authorial habits, with readers and scholars alike expressing their disbelief in discovering that she was not the polished, organized writer that was presented through the edited pages.²⁴ The reception of Hans Walter Gabler's edition of *Ulysses* shows the same situation: by presenting the documentary evidence of the autograph manuscripts in a synoptic manner, dense with symbolism, he shocked his audience, which was not used to being exposed to the messiness of the authorial work.²⁵ Indeed, the same story holds for many literary works: even when the survival of only one or a handful of witnesses could have made a documentary edition viable, this has rarely been done. When it has been done, it has been often attacked as "dangerous": Paul Eggert beautifully recounts the polemic led by Fredson Bowers, champion of the authorial intention and critical editing, against editors of variorum editions and documentary editions, a battle continued by Thomas Tanselle at the expense of historical documentary editors.²⁶

The battle for critical editing versus documentary editing²⁷ has been fought on many fronts: disciplinary, theoretical, methodological, and economic. The point here is that the attitude toward one or the other editorial framework (documentary or critical) has always been colored by strong theoretical positions. The question has very rarely been which editorial framework was best for the type of document under consideration,²⁸ but rather which was the theoretical orientation of the editor.²⁹ Of a different opinion is Peter Shillingsburg, who argues that a certain level of influence among theories ("orientations") is always present, determined by "particular circumstances surrounding a textual problem," but then his reference to "fierce editorial debates between partisans of these basic positions" shows how the influence among these orientations is more a "matter of fact" accident rather than a conscious theoretical decision, namely that editors tend to adopt converging methodologies in spite of their theoretical positions more or less when the materials

they are editing force them to do so.³⁰ Historically, this conflict has tended to pit historians against literary scholars,³¹ with the former traditionally associated with the documentary edition at least in the Anglo-American editorial tradition. From a theoretical point of view, advocates of documentary editions accused critical editors of hybridizing their texts from many sources, building texts that never existed and hence altering the evidence from the past.³² This latter attitude also characterizes the theoretical positions of New Philology, the arguments of which are based in turn on fundamental critiques advanced by Joseph Bédier regarding the Lachamannian method.³³

Another episode of this debate has focused on methodological issues, and in particular the rigor and accountability of criteria for transcription, with literary scholars (mainly Tanselle) accusing historians of having a cavalier attitude toward their transcription criteria. This episode served as a "wake-up call" for documentary editors, initiating a period of reexamination of their methodological approaches and procedures.³⁴

And again, the discussion has been over what readers want: a nice reading edition without any hint about a potentially complex tradition, or a critical edition with a critical apparatus and extensive commentary, or a documentary edition (or editions), possibly accompanied by many facsimiles to allow inspection of the original documents by themselves.³⁵ In this latter case the documentary editions have generally been considered unsuitable for the wider public, unreadable, or both. Genetic editing and genetic editions could also be included here: indeed, genetic editions resemble documentary editions a great deal, with the former also trying to embed information about the different phases of writing and rewriting of the manuscript. The most prestigious theoretical framework for the understanding and editing of draft manuscripts has been provided by the French school of *Critique Génétique*, which is concentrated around the activities promoted by the ITEM (*Institut des Textes et Manuscrits Modernes*).³⁶ Yet while the scholarly methodologies of the French school have generally been judged positively, printed genetic editions have been criticized as unreadable, unusable, time-consuming, and, in general, deceptive.³⁷ The obscure, intricate symbolism that necessarily characterizes such editions in print is perhaps the principal reason for their cold reception by the academic community.³⁸ Economic factors have

also been considered: the cost of producing a documentary edition has often been seen as not justified by the small number of prospective readers except in the case of very important, unique documentary sources.³⁹ In the United States, however, documentary and diplomatic editions have been used to a great extent for the publication of historical documents of the Founding Fathers (Jefferson's and Washington's, for instance), but this fact, instead of encouraging the diffusion of such an editorial formula, has increased the theoretical and disciplinary divide, with literary scholars consistently producing critical editions based on the editorial framework of the copy-text and historians championing documentary editions. A documentary edition for works of literature in the Anglo-American world seems to be rarer than, say, in France, Germany, or Italy,⁴⁰ and this applies also to authors for whom we only have works transmitted by one witness, such as, for instance, the *Juvenilia* or the unfinished novels of Jane Austen, as discussed above. French-style genetic editions or German-style *Historisch-Kritische Ausgaben* are even more rare in the English-speaking world.⁴¹ One can see, for instance, the relative misfortune of the edition of Austen's *Sir Charles Grandison* edited by Brian Southam, whose editorial choice has been rejected by Michael Hunter: "For, painstaking as it is, it fails to replicate all features of the original—not only different handwritings and letterforms, but also ink blots, different methods of striking through words, or exact details of the layout, for which only a pictorial facsimile suffices."⁴²

In Eggert's view the cultural hegemony exerted by the copy-text theory (the so-called Greg-Bowers-Tanselle line) can be held responsible for the perceived lack of interest in documentary editions by (mainly Anglophone) literary scholars. However, this methodological hegemony has been tolerated with increasing irritation by the scholarly community. The most famous reaction to this editorial approach is represented by Jerome McGann's theory of the social text and by the rise in favor of New (or "material") Philology. Both these theories focus on the importance of the material support: the "bibliographical codes" of McGann can be paired, in a way, with the *codex* of Cerquiglini.⁴³ Both these contributions were elaborated around 1990, more or less in the same period when digital editions began to be produced, thus it might not be a coincidence that practitioners of innovative textual theories have looked into an innovative publishing medium to convey their editorial products. Richard J. Finneran notes that the advent of new technologies "coincided with a fundamental shift in textual theory, away

from the notion of a single-text 'definitive edition,'" remarking that while "a traditional print edition is able to accommodate this new thinking in textual theory either awkwardly or not at all, digital technology is its necessary and inevitable realization."⁴⁴

As we have seen, documentary editions have been at the center of a long-lasting theoretical debate, as they have been identified as the ideal editorial framework of those scholars who reject the creation of critical editions based on multiple witnesses. However, *per se*, they are simply an editorial methodology that has no particular theoretical implication in itself. This is demonstrated by the fact that documentary editions have been serving different theoretical positions, that is, the "best-text" method,⁴⁵ the social edition, historical edition, genetic edition, and material philology, to name a few, without demanding one.⁴⁶ So documentary editions do not constitute or do not aim at constituting a theory of digital editions.⁴⁷ Rather, they happen to have been chosen as an editorial format by scholars who had a theoretical position, but not necessarily the same one. They are "tools," not theories. It is not surprising, then, that the elaboration of the new model of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) for the encoding of documents represents the result of the collaboration of scholars coming from many of the above-mentioned theoretical positions, as well as from different disciplinary areas.⁴⁸ A Venetian proverb says that "an umbrella can be useful for more than one rainfall"; here we can perhaps say that (digital) documentary editions can be useful for more than one theory. The reasons for their digital diffusion are therefore varied and diverse, but ultimately, in my opinion, once they have been attempted in digital form, scholars have discovered documentary editions to offer far more scholarly value than was suggested by the "noncritical" label and their supposed surrogate function. Furthermore, DDEs seem able to answer old and new scholarly questions that have never found a proper answer before, particularly not in print-based editions. Documents are information-rich sites, and "putting the text back into context" is bound to reveal much more about the text than if we considered documents as simple supports.⁴⁹ For instance, are quantitative data about spellings and use of punctuation able to provide evidences over the diffusion of literacy or the influence of certain type of publications? Is there any difference in the spelling habits or punctuation of men and women? How much does the type of writing

tools influence the tendency for revision? When and why do drafts become so messy, and is there any influence in the way the text is authored and in the type of work that is produced? The adoption of documentary editions is then likely to be connected with the desire to fill a gap in textual scholarship, now that the technology supports it and makes it a worthwhile pursuit.

While the provision of digital documentary editions *per se* does not represent an editorial theory, it is likely that new theories will be developed by experimenting with the increased representational capabilities offered by computers. Let us consider, for instance, the possibilities that are offered to editors who are interested in the process that has produced the manuscripts rather than in the end result, that is to say, the representation of the manuscript as process rather than as a static “normalized” photograph like that provided by a diplomatic edition. This approach recognizes that manuscripts embed an implicit dynamicity: writing is always a process that develops in time. This is even more true for authoring (as opposed to copying), which includes not simply linear writing but also rewriting, adding, deleting, transposing, and so on.⁵⁰ Draft manuscripts are complex, data-rich objects that require the long, patient work of scholars to unpack them and make them “consumable” by people other than the specialists. Because of the complexity offered by these materials, they have rarely taken a central role in scholarship beyond that of their editors. The problem is that draft manuscripts present texts before they become readable, before they become texts. The nonlinear, fragmented, paradigmatic textuality of most drafts proves to be opaque, tiring, and only rewarding if one commits a substantial amount of time to the task; they are often overlooked as a result, in spite of representing a mine of information on the work of authors.⁵¹ The printed-book model has proved to be unsuitable for the task of presenting such material in an accessible way to scholars other than editors, let alone for members of the general public. The digital environment, however, has shown great potential in dealing with the complexities of draft manuscripts, or pre-texts (the French *avant-textes*).⁵²

The interactivities we now expect in any web page can easily be used to the advantage of digital editions, making them much more accessible and, it is hoped, giving them a much more prominent role in the scholarly discourse. These principles are at the base of a small prototype of a few pages of a notebook of Proust’s, which has been developed with the collaboration of Julie André and

Raffaele Vigiante.⁵³ In this website the user is initially presented with the “clean” image of one opening of Cahier 46 (folios 46v–47r); then, by clicking on the image, the zones containing the transcribed text appear in the order in which they are presumed to have been written. Different colors have been used as background for the zones according to the different level of certainty and confidence that the editor had in ordering the sequences: the darker the color, the greater the uncertainty. In this way, a visual semiotic codification conveys the doubts and decisions of scholars in an intuitive way. A timeline bar marks the passing of time for the writing sequences, allowing the user to go back in time, so to speak, and reenact the process of authoring as many times as is wished. The zones of transcription can also be moved around at will to reveal the underlying facsimile, or they can be minimized and then restored following an order that differs from the one provided by the editor, enabling users and scholars to test new hypotheses. This prototype has been “powered by TEI,”⁵⁴ and in particular by the new documentary encoding proposed by the TEI as a sort of proof of concept in order to test its viability in a real project. Although the experiment has been quite successful and has inspired further research and theoretical reflection, it has proved to be quite labor-intensive and requires considerable technical skills: without a strong financial investment in the development of editorial tools it seems unlikely that this type of encoding will substitute the more “traditional” text-based TEI encoding. This consideration could also be made for digital critical editions based on multiple witnesses: without large investment in developing tools that can support the editorial work, it seems unlikely that this type of edition will take off on the web anytime soon.

However, tool development is held back by more than lack of investment. According to Tara Andrews, there is resistance within the editorial community that prevents the agreement necessary to enable the development of effective tools. She writes, almost bitterly, that “flexibility and customizability is currently much more important to textual scholars than the sort of standardization that would allow for true progress toward digital critical editions.”⁵⁶ DDEs, on the other hand, require less investment. If one is able to find an editor who is brave enough to accept the challenge offered by XML-TEI encoding, and is able to develop a style sheet or can find a small grant to support web development, then DDEs—including dynamic documentary editions on the model of the

Proust prototyp—become a viable option much more easily than other types of editions. Critical editions require considerable effort on many fronts, starting from the development of tools to support the many operations that are part of producing such an edition, such as transcription, collation, stemma generation, and web publishing, among others. Before this, however, and most importantly, is the development of scholarly agreement over standard manipulations and management operations like the ones just mentioned (transcription, collation, and so on). Is this agreement achievable? At the moment there are a few positive signals in this direction, but perhaps too few.⁵⁷ Andrews seems doubtful about the feasibility of such an agreement.⁵⁸ I have expressed a similar opinion;⁵⁹ faced with the options either of not having computing support or of compromising on scholarly traditions (not quality), scholars will choose to remain faithful to the habits and approaches of their disciplinary and national areas. One of the reasons for the TEI's establishment as the *de facto* standard data-model for the preparation of digital scholarly editions is precisely in the very “flexibility and customizability” which is dreaded by developers. Blaming scholars does not help here, though. One of the reasons for choosing flexibility over standardization may lie in the need to validate digital outputs and to convince the more “traditional” scholarly community. The recognizability of the editorial methods and interfaces, idiosyncrasies included, may be necessary to demonstrate that digital editions are “as good as” printed ones.⁶⁰

On the other hand, documentary editions come with much lighter baggage. They require less computational efforts, and having been neglected as poorer relatives of critical editions, they have resulted in a greater flexibility and adaptability to new conditions. Furthermore, as discussed above, the digital environment has proved to be a much more suitable environment for them.

Here I have listed many possible explanations why documentary editions are thriving in the digital environment while other editorial forms seem to find more difficulty in establishing themselves within the new medium. The convergence of scholarly, disciplinary, and technological reasons is, then, at the base of this unexpected development.⁶¹ But is the success of digital documentary editions a danger for textual scholarship and the digital humanities in general? According to Peter Robinson, the answer is yes, and this danger consists in “fall[ing] short of achieving the potential of editions in the digital world,” with the “flood of facsimile

editions in digital form” failing to address questions such as “how the received text changed over time, how was it received, how was it altered, transformed, passed into different currencies.”⁶² The discussion above shows how many different and complex conditions have favored the establishment of documentary editions in digital form, but perhaps, more simply, documentary editions may just be the best editorial scenario for some types of documents, like those listed in an article I co-authored with Peter Stokes in 2010.⁶³ A documentary edition is not only the best editorial solution but also, most often, the only scholarly justifiable choice in the following cases:

1. The process of making the document is at least as important as the text, meaning that the history of the making, as deduced from the document, represents perhaps the most important research object rather than the final product. This applies to some very stratified documents that contain many layers of writing, such as draft manuscripts, but also to historical “living” documents, like the medieval *libri vitae*, for instance, within which one can distinguish hundreds of hands that have added names and annotations for hundreds of years. In this case, an edition that does not investigate the evidence of the documents and does not put this at the center will seriously misrepresent its content and historical value. A more modern example is Puccini’s *Tosca*, the draft manuscripts of which result from the coauthoring process by four people over the course of two years. The final version of *Tosca* is rather uncontroversial, and it is quite different from that suggested by the evidence of the drafts, the importance of which resides, then, in witnessing the way Puccini and his librettists worked collaboratively. For these types of documents, the “text” simply cannot be considered out of context.
2. The text is determined by the documents, that is, some features of the supporting document have determined in a fundamental way the text’s content or its reception. Letters limited by space and by the convention of the genre can be mentioned here, but also fundamental works such as *Beowulf*, the only surviving manuscript of which has been through many events, such as a fire, and at least one reordering of the quires,

all of which have seriously undermined our understanding of the work itself.

3. The text is graphically presented, as in the case of graphic poetry such as *calligrammes*, a type of poetry practiced in particular by French poets of the past century (Guillaume Apollinaire is perhaps the most famous of them), or the medieval *carmina figurata*. In both cases, an edition that does not respect the precise layout of the original document will lose almost every aspect of the original work.
4. There is no text. Draft manuscripts, for example, have been defined as *avant-textes*, “pre-texts,” or “recipes to make texts” rather than finished texts.⁶⁴ Therefore, their evidence must be presented “as is” in the documents. In many cases drafts propose alternative, paradigmatic readings, with or without a clear indication from the author about which would be the final or preferred version. In these cases, too, the provision of “a text” seems unsuitable for the type of evidence.

Documentary editions, thanks to the digital medium, are establishing themselves in the editorial arena as equals to critical editions. This is done on scholarly bases: there are cases for which they are simply the best editorial framework. Seeing this as a menace means ignoring the scholarly reasons why they have been chosen to convey the editorial vision and understanding of the particular text. Franz Fischer maintains that critical texts are “more equal than others,” that they are more important than other types of texts such as diplomatic and documentary editions, but this assertion of his is like declaring literature to be more important than history, which, of course, is nonsense. History and literature both have their fundamental function and position at the heart of textual scholarship. Different editorial frameworks may be suitable to different types of text or to different types of research questions. There might be some editions that are therefore more equal than others, but this attribution needs to be contextualized considering the type of document, the type of text, the research question, and so on. Attributing the supremacy of one editorial framework over another *a priori* would be an error. The diffusion of DDEs is offering the opportunity of opening new paths to scholarship, exploring and unpacking the bibliographic and

“codicological codes” of our texts,⁶⁵ with consequences to textual studies that have yet to be quantified but are hard to overestimate.

While it is true that DDEs have found a comfortable home on the web, to blame them for the slow establishment of critical editions based on many witnesses also means ignoring the real reasons why critical editions seem to find more difficulties in the digital medium. Having been invented and informed by print technology, and having been the arena for the confrontation of many theoretical, disciplinary, and national debates, they seem to resist the switch to the new medium. This resistance can perhaps only be overcome by a deep rethinking of their functions, requirements, and publics.⁶⁶ Underlying this, however, is the need for a strong intellectual investment in standardization, which in turn requires interdisciplinary and international collaborations. It is this that is called for here, and perhaps then, once this is in place, critical editions with multiple witnesses may finally have their day in digital form.

Notes

1. See Mary-Jo Kline and Susan Holbrook Perdue, *A Guide to Documentary Editing* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 3, who feel obliged to insist on the amount of critical work necessary to produce a documentary edition: “The documentary editor’s goal is not to supply the words or phrases of a vanished archetype but rather to preserve the nuances of a source that has survived the ravages of time. Documentary editing, although noncritical in terms of classical textual scholarship, is hardly an *uncritical* endeavor. It demands as much intelligence, insight, and hard work as its critical counterpart, combined with a passionate determination to preserve for modern readers the nuances of evidence” (italics in the source). Paul Eggert defines the *Guide to Documentary Editing* as “a manifesto of intellectual independence from the Greg-Bowers school and a claim of methodological and theoretical coherence” (*Securing the Past: Conservation in Art, Architecture and Literature* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 184).
2. Peter Robinson, “Towards a Theory of Digital Editions,” *Variants* 10 (2013): 105–32, p. 127.
3. Franz Fischer, “All texts are equal, but . . . Textual Plurality and the Critical Text in Digital Scholarly Editions,” *Variants* 10 (2013): 77–92, p. 90.
4. Robinson, “Towards a Theory of Digital Editions,” 127.

5. Respectively: *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts: A Digital Edition*, edited by Kathryn Sutherland (2010), <http://www.janeausten.ac.uk>; *Le manuscrits de Madame Bovary*, Bibliothèque de Rouen, Centre Flaubert de l'Université de Rouen, <http://www.bovary.fr/>; *The Walt Whitman Archive*, edited by Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price, Center for Digital Research in the Humanities at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, <http://whitmanarchive.org/>; *The William Blake Archive*, edited by Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi, <http://www.blakearchive.org/blake/>.
6. Hans Walter Gabler, "The Primacy of the Document in Editing," *Ecdotica* 4 (2007): 197–207.
7. For a more detailed overview, see D. C. Greetham, *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction* (New York: Garland, 1994).
8. An ultra-diplomatic edition aims to preserve the layout of the document as well as its textual content.
9. For a historical overview of different types of edition, see Greetham, *Textual Scholarship*, 347–72.
10. Kline and Perdue, *A Guide to Documentary Editing*, 1–34.
11. Elena Pierazzo, "A Rationale of Digital Documentary Editions," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 26, no. 4 (2011) 463–77, p. 475.
12. Kevin Kiernan, "Digital Facsimile in Editing," in *Electronic Textual Editing*, ed. John Unsworth, Lou Burnard, and Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2006), 262–68, p. 266.
13. Pierazzo, "A Rationale of Digital Documentary Editions," 472–73.
14. Kathryn Sutherland and Elena Pierazzo, "The Author's Hand: From Page to Screen," in *Collaborative Research in the Digital Humanities*, ed. Marilyn Deegan and Willard McCarty (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), 191–212.
15. On the concept of transcription as a form a translation, see Peter Robinson and Elizabeth Solopova, "Guidelines for Transcription of the Manuscripts of the Wife of Bath's Prologue," in *The Canterbury Tales Project: Occasional Papers*, ed. N. F. Blake and P. M. W. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Computing Services, Office for Humanities Communication, 1993), 1:19–52: "transcription of a primary textual source cannot be regarded as an act of substitution, but as a series of acts of translation from one semiotic system (that of the primary source) to another semiotic system (that of the computer). Like all acts of translation, it must be seen as fundamentally incomplete and fundamentally interpretative" (p. 21).
16. "Bibliographical codes" is an expression crafted by Jerome McGann in *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). As McGann mainly refers to

- printed books, I have proposed in a forthcoming article the expression “codicological codes” as a similar concept applied to manuscripts (Elena Pierazzo, “Of Time and Space: A New Framework for Digital Editions of Draft Manuscripts,” *Variants* 2014 [forthcoming]).
17. See M. J. Driscoll, “The Words on the Page: Thoughts on Philology, Old and New,” in *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions, Variability, and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature*, ed. Judy Quinn and Emily Lethbridge (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2010), 85–102; and Jean-Louis Lebrave, “De l’édition informatisée à l’édition électronique,” in *L’Édition du Manuscrit: De l’Archive de Création au Scriptorium Électronique, Au Coeur des Textes*, ed. Aurèle Crasson (Louvain-La-Neuve: Academia Bruylant, 2008), 169–88.
 18. See the project website (<http://www.langscape.org/>) and Peter Stokes and Elena Pierazzo, “Encoding the Language of Landscape: XML and Databases at the Service of Anglo-Saxon Lexicography,” in *Perspectives on Lexicography in Italy and Europe*, ed. Silvia Bruti, Roberta Cella, and Marina Foschi Albert (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 203–38.
 19. See, for instance, TuStep, a software suite developed since the sixties at the University of Tübingen under the direction of Wilhelm Ott, assisting scholars in the creation of scholarly editions—including collation. See Ott, “Strategies and Tools for Textual Scholarship: The Tübingen System for Text Processing Program (TUSTEP),” *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 15, no. 1 (2000): 93–108. But see also P. Gilbert, “Automatic Collation: A Technique for Medieval Texts,” *Computers and the Humanities* 7, no. 3 (1973): 139–47.
 20. *The Canterbury Tales Project* is directed by Peter Robinson, <http://www.canterburytalesproject.org/index.html>. See a sample of *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, edited by Paul Thomas, at the publisher’s website: <http://www.sd-editions.com/AnaAdditional/NPEx/index.html>. Here, by clicking on “Compare,” one can compare different diplomatic editions of the various witnesses that compose the tradition of that tale.
 21. G. Thomas Tanselle, *A Rationale of Textual Criticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989). The terminology has been adopted by Robinson, “Towards a Theory of Digital Editions.”
 22. The oldest preserved, the best survived, the closest to the authorial intentions, the latest editions, and so on. Peter Shillingsburg does a very good job in putting different theoretical editorial position into an historical perspective: “Each generation seems to hope for the best answer and finds the effort of the older generations to be inadequate. Soon it will be our turn to have failed.” Shillingsburg, *From Gutenberg to Google* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 153.
 23. “The smoothness of the clear reading text, a hall mark of critical editing, in effect denies us an immediate awareness of the actual roughness of the textual record, and textuality itself.” John Bryant, *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing*

- for *Book and Screen* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 27. Peter Shillingsburg complains about the format and content of the apparatus which leave readers “between wanting [. . .] to know the variant versions of the work [. . .] and, on the other hand to forget the whole thing as more trouble than the effort of deciphering and sifting an apparatus was worth.” Shillingsburg, *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age: Theory and Practice* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 118. See also J. Lavagnino, “Access,” *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 24, no. 1 (2009): 63–76.
24. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-11610489>.
25. See the story beautifully told by Eggert, *Securing the Past*, 164–78.
26. Eggert, *Securing the Past*, 180–84. See also Kline and Perdue, *A Guide to Documentary Editing*, 1–34.
27. Or the battle of the intentionalists against the materialists, to use Bryant’s terminology (*The Fluid Text*).
28. By “best” it is here meant which editorial framework is better able to respond to the editors’ research questions. Fredson Bowers, in spite of being a strong champion of critical eclectic editing, seems to hint toward this direction in his essay of 1991, where he declares that it might be advisable in some cases to provide different editions for different types of readers, with documentary editions offered to scholars and critical editions for the general public (“Authorial Intention and the Editorial Problems,” *Text* 5 [1991]: 55, 61).
29. In the Italian tradition of textual scholarship (in which I was trained), the contrary is true: editors approach works to be edited differently, according to the type of tradition that transmits the texts, “contaminating” methodologies in the search of the “most economic working hypothesis accounting for the data we possess” (“I ipotesi di lavoro più economica che tenga conto dei dati”) (Gianfranco Contini, *Breviario di Ecdotica* [Torino: Einaudi, 1989]). Alfredo Stussi has elaborated an approach he calls *filologia d’autore* (“philology of the author”), which suggests, in particular for modern authors, that editors apply the method that is better able to account for the surviving evidence (Stussi, *Introduzione agli Studi di Filologia Italiana* [Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006]).
30. Shillingsburg, *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age*, 26.
31. “For the sake of convenience, they [i.e. documentary and critical editing] came to be known as historical and literary editing, a division many regarded as unrealistic and unfortunate” (Kline and Perdue, *A Guide to Documentary Editing*, 11).
32. See this position accounted for in Shillingsburg, *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age*, 17. The criticism of the critical editor is mostly implicit in Kline and Perdue, *A Guide to Documentary Editing* (cf., for instance, the mention of the “vanished archetype” at p. 3); however, it is mostly the principal argument of German editorial

- theories against Anglo-American copy-text orientation (cf. Shillingsburg, *From Gutenberg to Google*, 173–88, for an account of the debate).
33. See Greetham, *Textual Scholarship*, and Bernard Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variante: Histoire critique de la philologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), English translation by Betsy Wing, *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
 34. This criticism lies at the heart of the polemic between Tanselle and the ADI: see G. Thomas Tanselle, "The Editing of Historical Documents," *Studies in Bibliography*, 31 (1978): 1–56, and Kline and Perdue, *A Guide to Documentary Editing*, 19–22.
 35. Edward Vanhoutte, "Every Reader His Own Bibliographer—An Absurdity?" in *Text Editing, Print and the Digital World*, ed. Marilyn Deegan and Kathryn Sutherland (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), 99–110.
 36. More information about ITEM can be found at the Institute website at <http://www.item.ens.fr/>.
 37. Almuth Grésillon, *Éléments de critique génétique: Lire les manuscrits modernes* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1994), 195–202.
 38. A particularly good (or bad) example of this is represented by the genetic edition of Gustave Flaubert's *Hérodias*, edited by Giovanni Bonaccorso et al. (Paris: Nizet, 1991); this edition encompasses nine different types of arrows to mark the location of interlinear and marginal insertions belonging to four different revision campaigns. But see also Michael Hunter, *Editing Early Modern Texts: An Introduction to Principles and Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 118–20, for complaints about similar issues in documentary editions of early modern texts.
 39. See, for instance, the diplomatic edition of the Domesday Book by Abraham Farley and Herry Ellis in 1783.
 40. An exception is some of the editions sponsored by the Early English Text Society (EETS), whose focus is on Old and Middle English texts, covering works that have literary, linguistic, and historical interest.
 41. One of the rare exceptions is represented, for instance, by Hans Walter Gabler's edition of *Ulysses*, which has been mentioned before. It is not, strictly speaking, a *Historisch-Kritische Ausgaben* nor a genetic edition but an adaptation of their methodologies to specific case. It is not a surprise, then, that such an edition was conceived in a country with a more favorable attitude toward this type of edition (James Joyce, *Ulysses: A Critical and Synoptic Edition*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler [New York: Garland, 1984]).
 42. Hunter, *Editing Early Modern Texts*, 75.

43. Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant*; McGann, *The Textual Condition*. Cf. Driscoll, "The Words on the Page."
44. Richard J. Finneran, ed., *The Literary Text in the Digital Age* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), x.
45. Supported by Joseph Bédier, "La tradition manuscrite du Lai de l'Ombre: Réflexions sur l'art d'éditer les anciens textes," *Romania* 54 (1928): 61–96, 321–56.
46. Cf. Shillingsburg, *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age*, 16–27.
47. This is what Peter Robinson seems to fear the most: "The dominance of the document model of textual editing in the digital realm suggests that a theory of digital editions is emerging, based on page-by-page transcription of individual documents, which asserts that a digital edition should concentrate on documents alone" ("Towards a Theory of Digital Editions," 126).
48. The people that contributed to the elaboration of the new model are: Anne Bohnenkamp (Goethe Universität), John Bryant (Hofstra University), Aurèle Crasson (ITEM), Jean-Daniel Fekete (INRIA), Daniel Ferrer (ITEM), Hans Walter Gabler (Ludwig-Maximilians Universität München), Axel Gellhaus (Institut für Germanistische und Allgemeine Literaturwissenschaft der RWTH Aachen), Almuth Grésillon (ITEM), Claus Huitfeldt (University of Bergen), Dirk van Hulle (Universite of Antwerp), Jean-Louis Lebrave (ITEM), Wolfgang Lukas, Kenneth M. Price (University of Nebraska–Lincoln), Kathryn Sutherland (St. Anne's College, Oxford University). Members of the working group were Fotis Iannidis (University of Würzburg), Gregor Middell, Moritz Wissenbach (University of Würzburg), Malte Rehbein (University of Passau), Lou Burnard (University of Oxford), Paolo D'Iorio (ITEM), and Elena Pierazzo (King's College London).
49. See Elena Pierazzo and Peter A. Stokes, "Putting the Text Back into Context: A Codicological Approach to Manuscript Transcription," in *Kodikologie und Paläographie im Digitalen Zeitalter 2—Codicology and Palaeography in the Digital Age 2*, ed. Franz Fischer, Christiane Fritze, and Georg Vogeler, *Schriften des Instituts für Dokumentologie und Editorik* 3 (Norderstedt, 2010), 397–430, urn:nbn:de:hbz:38-43605.
50. Elena Pierazzo, "Digital Genetic Editions: The Encoding of Time in Manuscript Transcription," in *Text Editing, Print and the Digital World*, ed. Marilyn Deegan and Kathryn Sutherland, 169–86 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), p. 169.
51. See, for instance, some of the work done by Dirk Van Hulle over Samuel Beckett's draft manuscripts, and in particular D. Van Hulle, *The Making of Samuel Beckett's "Stirrings Still / Soubresauts" and "Comment dire / what is the word"* (Brussels: Academic Scientific Publishers, 2011). The book represents the theoretical counterpart of the *Samuel Beckett Digital Manuscript Project*, direction by Dirk

- Van Hulle and Mark Nixon and technical realization by Vincent Neyt, <http://www.beckettarchive.org/>.
52. Again, the works of Samuel Beckett included in the Beckett's archive, edited by Dirk Van Hulle, demonstrates how flexible and suitable the web is in accommodating the complexities of the draft manuscripts.
 53. See J. André and E. Pierazzo, "Le codage en TEI des brouillons de Proust: vers une édition numérique," *Genesis* 36 (2013): 155–61, and Pierazzo, "Of Time and Space."
 54. Citing one of the badges proposed by the TEI: <http://www.tei-c.org/About/Badges/>.
 55. See the experience of the Faust Edition Project in using the documentary encoding on a full-scale project: Gerrit Brüning, Katrin Henzel, and Dietmar Pravida, "Multiple Encoding in Genetic Editions: The Case of 'Faust,'" *Journal of the Text Encoding Initiative* 4 (2013), <http://jtei.revues.org/697>; DOI:10.4000/jtei.697.
 56. Tara Andrews, "The Third Way: Philology and Critical Edition in the Digital Age," *Variants* 10 (2013): 63.
 57. See the excellent work and reflections developed within the Interedition project (<http://www.interedition.eu/>); the seminars and meetings organized by the NeDiMAH network (<http://www.nedimah.eu/>); the recent workshop "Easy Tools for Difficult Texts" organized by the Huygens Institute for the History of the Netherlands in The Hague (<http://easytools.huygens.knaw.nl/>); and many other initiatives along these lines.
 58. Andrews, "The Third Way," 73.
 59. See Elena Pierazzo, "The Role of Technology in Scholarly Editing" (paper presented at the TEI Members' Meeting at the University of Würzburg, 2011), abstract available at http://www.tei-c.org/Vault/MembersMeetings/2011/tei_mm_2011/abstracts/abstracts_papers/index.html.
 60. But see also Tim McLoughlin's illuminating contribution over the intellectual difficulties that editors have to face once confronted with the standardization required by the use of digital methodologies: McLoughlin, "Bridging the Gap," in *Jahrbruch für Computerphilologie*, ed. Malte Rehbein and Sean Ryder, 10 (2010): 37–54, <http://computerphilologie.tu-darmstadt.de/jg08/mclough.pdf>.
 61. Unexpected by its own supporters: as mentioned above, in 2007 only Gabler was advocating for a renewed scholarly interest in documentary editions (Gabler, "The Primacy of the Document").
 62. Robinson, "Towards a Theory of Digital Editions," 127.
 63. Pierazzo and Stokes, "Putting the Text Back into Context."

64. Daniel Ferrer, "The Open Space of the Draft Page: James Joyce and Modern Manuscripts," in *The Iconic Page in Manuscript, Print and Digital Culture*, ed. George Bornstein and Theresa Tinkle, 249–67 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).
65. Pierazzo, "Of Time and Space."
66. See, for instance, the very promising research undertaken by Edward Vanhoutte in several of his contributions such as "Every Reader His Own Bibliographer" and "Defining Electronic Editions: A Historical and Functional Perspective" in *Text and Genre in Reconstruction: Effects of Digitalization on Ideas, Behaviours, Products and Institutions*, ed. Willard McCarty, 119–44 (Cambridge: Open Book Publisher, 2010).