

Digitizing Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture. Brent Nelson and Melissa Terras, eds.

New Technologies in Medieval and Renaissance Studies 3; Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 426. Toronto: Iter Inc. and Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012. viii + 498 pp. \$85.

Bookbindings, broadside ballads, atlases, jewelry: this volume touches on an impressive range of medieval and early modern physical objects, though, of course, comprehensive coverage would be impossible. The textual object is given prominence in this collection, which features essays on the Little Gidding harmonies, manuscripts, and early *Hamlet* quartos. But, as Nelson and Terras explain, physical objects themselves are not the end point of these inquiries: “it is culture that is the ultimate object of study” (2). The methodologies offered for digitizing and presenting early modern material culture are as varied as the objects and texts themselves, including digital editions, virtual reality, electronic catalogues raisonnés, and databases. The range of topics and approaches is both the strength and weakness of this volume: many scholars will be interested in a handful of essays, but few will find them all relevant or interesting, as some of the essays require readers to bring their expertise in very different specialized subject areas to bear, from numismatics to Middle English linguistics and probability, from XML (extensible markup language) to paleography. Overall, this collection is valuable because it highlights existing digital projects, such as British Printed Images to 1700 (<http://www.bpi1700.org.uk>); presents digital tools for research, such as the Image Markup Tool (http://tapor.uvic.ca/~mholmes/image_markup/); and shows future directions for established projects, including the English Broadside Ballad Archive (<http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu>).

Some of the essays in the collection serve as primers for those interested in beginning digital projects. For instance, James Cummings introduces the manuscript-description capabilities of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI; www.tei-c.org). Judith Siefring and Pip Wilcox’s article complements Cummings’s by showing the potential value and challenges of detailed attention to primary sources in their discussion of the application of the TEI for the Shakespeare Quartos Archive (www.quartos.org). By outlining the rewards and challenges of digital projects, these essays can help scholars frame new research questions and projects. Patricia Fumerton, Carl Stahmer, Kris McAbee, and Megan Palmer Browne offer the encouragement that “the technical challenges associated with creating a scholarly digital archive are minor in comparison to the host of theoretical ones presented by the very nature of the artefacts being archived” (260). Lisa M. Snyder warns about challenges relating to academic peer review and the difficulties in outlining the scope of digital projects, which can be limited by funding, user expectations, and sustainability. Athanasios Velios and Nicholas Pickwoad raise the issues of quality, cost, time, planning, and training as vital considerations when creating successful digital projects.

Despite Peter Stokes's mention that this is a "dual print/digital" publication (157), the digital component of this book is slim: there is an e-book available by separate subscription through Iter, which offers only PDFs of the volume, albeit with hyperlinks and color images. Even those links given in the book are not permanent: the UCLA Catalogue of Digitized Medieval Manuscripts (<http://manuscripts.cmrs.ucla.edu>) has, since this volume's 2012 publication, ceased cataloging new digitized manuscripts; some of the projects discussed are "no longer accessible" (140); and some of the sites lead to error messages or seem to be no longer functioning. The overall message of the essays, however, is that despite the challenges facing electronic projects, it is incumbent on scholars to undertake digital work, not only to make the texts and objects we study more available and searchable, but also to open new avenues of exploration.

Nelson and Terras express their desire that this volume "will inspire scholars in the humanities to imagine new ways of engaging and representing their materials of study — both the objects themselves and their historical contexts — to produce new ways of seeing and understanding" (15). Indeed, this collection meets these goals; furthermore, by thoughtfully creating and curating structured information, these projects are making medieval and early modern culture available for future scholars using new digital tools and taking different approaches. Nelson and Terras's book is valuable because it showcases particular approaches to different material objects; we need more collections of this kind that challenge us to analyze the ever-expanding field of digital resources we use and make.

LAURA ESTILL, *Texas A&M University*