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Theorizing the Digital Edition:

Textual Theory to Consider Before Getting Started

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Forget Me Not: A Hypertextual Archive

www.orgs.muohio.edu/anthologies/FMN/

Part of **Poetess Archive**

<http://unixgen.muohio.edu/~poetess/index.html>

WHAT IS A BOOK?

McKenzie, D.F. "The Book as an Expressive Form." *The Book History Reader*. Eds. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery. New York: Routledge, 2002. 27-38.

[N]on-verbal elements of typographic notations have expressive function in conveying meaning. (31)

WHAT IS TEXTUALITY?

McKenzie, in *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, works from "textual criticism":

[which is concerned with] getting the right words in the right order; on the semiotics of print and the role of typography in forming meaning; on the critical theories of authorial intention and reader response; on the relation between the past meanings and present uses of verbal texts. It offers an illustration of the transmission of texts as the creation of the new versions which form, in turn, the new books, the products of later printers, and the stuff of subsequent bibliographical control. (21)

David Greetham, in *Theories of the Text*, offers a definition of textuality that integrates economic, psychological and political theoretical styles with literary criticism:

It is, on the one hand, a place of fixed, determinable, concrete signs, a material artefact, and yet, on the other, an ineffable location of immaterial concepts, not dependent at all on performance transmission. It is, on the one hand, a weighty authority with direct access to originary meaning, and, on the other, a slowly accumulating, socially derived series of meanings, each at war with the other for prominence and acceptance. It is a place inhabited only by a sole, creative author who unwillingly releases control to social transmission, and it is also a place constructed wholly out of social negotiations over transmission and reception. (63)

WHAT IS A TEXT/WORK?

McGann, Jerome. *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1983, 1992, 2nd printing 1996.

To determine the physical appearance of the critical text—indeed, to understand that what is involved in such an apparently pedantic task—requires the operation of a complex structure of analysis which considers the history of the text in relation to the related histories of its production, reproduction and reception. We are asked as well to distinguish clearly between a history of transmission and a history of production. Finally, these special historical studies must be imbedded in the broad cultural contexts which alone can explain and elucidate them. (122-23)

McGann, Jerome. *The Textual Condition*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991.

Both the practice and the study of human culture comprise a network of symbolic exchanges. Because human beings are not angels, these exchanges always involve material negotiations. Even in their most complex and advanced forms—when the negotiations are carried out as textual events—the intercourse that is being human is materially executed: as spoken texts or scripted forms. To participate in these exchanges is to have entered what I wish to call here "the textual condition." (3)

The inquiry is grounded in the thought that texts represent—are in themselves—certain kinds of human acts. (4)

But the work of knowing demands that the map be followed into the textual field, where "the meaning of the texts" will appear as a set of concrete and always changing conditions: because the meaning is in the use, and textuality is a social condition of various times, places and persons. (16)

WHAT IS AN AUTHOR?

Shelley, Percy B. *A Defense of Poetry*. (1822).

[W]hen composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet. (504)

WHAT IS AN ARCHIVE?

Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Trans. Eric Prenowitz. Chicago, U of Chicago P, 1996.

In *Archive Fever*, Derrida suggests that the moments of archivization are infinite throughout the life of the artifact: [T]he technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event. (17)

Our search for teleological conclusion to our own existence predicates the search for an origin. Derrida describes this feverish search as “*mal d’archive*”:

It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive, right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there’s too much of it, right where something in it anarchives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, *an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement*. (91—emphasis added)

The unstable future according to the open archive produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future. (68)

The concept of the archive shelters in itself, of course, this memory of the name *arkhē*. But it also *shelters* itself from this memory which it shelters: which comes down to saying also that it forgets it. (2)

WHAT IS A HYPERTEXT?

Benjamin, Walter. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. NY: Harcourt Brace, 1968.

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. (220)

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. (221)

WHAT ARE LITERARY ANNUALS?

Excerpted from Harris, Katherine D. “Feminizing the Textual Body: Women and their Literary Annuals in Nineteenth-Century Britain.” *Publications of the Bibliographical Society of America*. 99:4 (Dec. 2005). 573-622.

Literary annuals are early nineteenth-century British texts published yearly from 1822 to 1860, primarily intended for a middle class audience (due to its moderate retail cost). Initially published in octavo, the decoratively bound volumes – filled with steel plate engravings of nationally recognized artwork and sentimental poetry and prose – exuded a feminine delicacy that attracted a primarily female readership. They were published in November and sold (12s. to 3£) for the following year, which made the annual an ideal Christmas gift, lover’s present or token of friendship: “‘The Annuals,’ wrote Southey in 1828, ‘are now the only books bought for presents to young ladies, in which way poems formerly had their chief vent.’ And the young ladies found them much more to their liking than the manuals of conduct.”

The literary annual was introduced to the British public in November 1822 with the publication of Rudolf Ackermann’s *Forget Me Not*. This popular and successful publisher’s experiment in literary miscellany caused an “epidemic” of literary annual titles. In 1828, 100,000 copies of fifteen separate annuals earned an aggregate retail value of over £70,000, the *Forget Me Not*,

Literary Souvenir, *Friendship's Offering*, *Keepsake* and *Comic Annual* the leaders among them, both in technological innovations and literary quality. By November 1829, the number had climbed to forty-three separate titles published in Britain alone.

Generally, 80 to 100 entries of prose and poetry were compiled for each annual, with over fifty different authors included in any one volume. Well-published, but “minor” poets (both men and women) earned a comfortable income by contributing to literary annuals. Even members of the Romantic and Victorian British literati were coaxed into contributing by lucrative financial remuneration, including William Wordsworth, Samuel T. Coleridge, Mary Shelley, Walter Scott, Robert Southey, Alfred Lord Tennyson, John Ruskin, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Browning and William Thackeray. Byron and P.B. Shelley’s writings were wildly successful in the annuals, though published posthumously. (See Index of Prominent Contributors <http://www.orgs.muohio.edu/anthologies/FMN/Authors_Prominent.htm>). Popular women poets, including Felicia Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon, were in demand for their domestic and sentimental contributions to annuals and were officially, yet begrudgingly, accepted into the professionalized world of authorship despite their “poetess” poetry.

The standard criteria defining a literary annual can be found throughout Ackermann’s first *Forget Me Not* volume, published November 1822:

- **Purpose:** Annuals are “expressly designed to serve as annual tokens of friendship or affection.” Ackermann establishes not only the purpose of the volume but also its sentiment and gift-giving status.
- **Publication Time Frame:** “It is intended that the Forget-Me-Not shall be ready for delivery every year, early in November.” Critics adhered to this criteria and lambast any publication that is published outside the holiday time frame (November through January) yet still claims to be of the literary annual genre.
- **Continual Evolution:** “[T]he Publisher has no doubt that, in the prosecution of his plan, he shall be enabled, by experience, to introduce improvements into the succeeding volumes.” Each editor hereafter uses the preface to proclaim improvements to his/her title for each succeeding year. This promise suggests a continued longevity to the title and asks readers to look for a better product the following year.
- **Authorship:** “[H]e shall neglect no means to secure the contributions of the most eminent writers, both at home and abroad.” Ackermann establishes the literary annual as more than an anthology with this promise; the authors are generally contemporary figures of the time period instead of the classic greats.
- **Originality:** “To convey an idea of the nature of the pieces which compose the bulk of this volume, it will be sufficient to state that they will consist chiefly of original and interesting Tales and Poetry.” This claim of originality will plague the editors of the annuals through the 1830s, but most continue the declarations of originality that Ackermann set up in this initial advertisement for the 1823 *Forget Me Not*.
- **Engravings:** “[W]hile his long and extensive connexion with the Arts, and the credit with which he has acquitted himself in his various undertakings in that line, will, he trusts, be a satisfactory pledge that his best exertions shall not be wanting to give to this Work in a decided superiority in regard to its embellishments, over every other existing publication of the kind.” Though this is a standard claim of superiority, Ackermann means to use his experience and established audience to create visual entertainment in addition to the literary. An annual must carry both in order to be considered within the family.
- **Useful Information:** “The third portion comprises a Chronicle of Remarkable Events during the past year: a Genealogy of the Reigning Sovereigns of Europe and their Families; a List of Ambassadors resident at the different Courts; and a variety of other particulars extremely useful for reference to persons of all classes.” Ackermann attempts to establish the literary annual genre as referential and useful across class boundaries. However, it is assumed that the working or lower classes are not included in this declaration because of the cost (twelve shillings). Because it is mere information, this element of was eventually discarded in favor of additional creative contributions.
- **Exterior Format:** “The Forget Me Not is done up in a case for the pocket, and its external decorations display corresponding elegance and taste with the general execution of the interior.” The diminutive size (3.5" x 5.5") represents a particular form of femininity that is portable in the pocket or the hand – specifically of a lady. Though the size eventually, the annual’s embellished boards mark the decadence of the entire genre and will be continued through its lifetime (even in the rebindings).

References:

- “*Forget Me Not: A Hypertextual Archive of Ackermann’s Nineteenth-Century Literary Annual.*”
Poetess Archive. Gen. Ed. Laura Mandell. <www.orgs.muohio.edu/anthologies/FMN/>.
L.E.L.’s Verses and the Keepsake for 1829. Eds. Kathryn Ledbetter
 and Terence Hoagwood. *Romantic Circles*. <www.rc.umd.edu/editions/lcl/keepsake.htm>

SAMPLE: EKPHRASTIC POETIC RENDERINGS

“The Brigand Leader and his Wife” by **Mrs. Hemans** (36)
from Friendship’s Offering, A Literary Album (1827)

Dark chieftain of the heath and height!
 Wild feaster on the hills by night!
 Seest thou the stormy sunset’s glow,
 Flung back by glancing spears below?
 Now, for one strife of stern despair!
 The foe hath track’d thee to thy lair.

Thou, against whom the voice of blood,
 Hath risen from track and lonely wood,
 And in whose dreams a man should be,
 Not of the water, nor the tree;
 Haply, thine own last hour is nigh,
 Yet, shalt thou not forsaken die.

There’s one, that pale beside thee stands,
 More than all thy mountain bands!
 She will not shrink in doubt and dread,
 When the balls whistle round thy head;
 Nor leave thee, though thy closing eye,
 No longer may to her’s reply.

Oh! many a soft and quiet grace
 Hath faded from her soul and face;
 And many a thought, the fitting guest
 Of woman’s meek, religious breast,
 Hath perished, in her wanderings wide,
 Through the deep forests, by thy side.

Yet, mournfully surviving all,
 A flower upon a ruin’s wall,
 A friendless thing, whose lot is cast,
 Of lovely ones to be the last;
 Sad, but unchanged through good and ill,
 Thine is her lone devotion still.

And, oh! not wholly lost the heart,
 Where that undying love hath part;
 Not worthless all, though far and long
 From home estranged, and guided wrong:
 Yet, may its depths by Heaven be sitr’d,
 Its prayer for thee, be pur’d and heard!



This engraving was published in the literary annual with Hemans’ poem. The engraving was created first and sent to Hemans with a request that she write a poem which reflected the action of the engraving.

SOME PROMINENT CONTRIBUTORS TO ANNUALS

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett
 Browning, Robert
 Bulwer-Lytton, Edward
 Byron, Lord (posthumously)
 Clare, John
 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor
 Dickens, Charles
 Disraeli, Benjamin
 Hazlitt, William
 Hemans, Felicia
 Hogg, James
 Hunt, Leigh
 Jewsbury, Maria Jane
 Lamb, Charles
 Ruskin, John
 Scott, Sir Walter
 Shelley, Mary
 Shelley, Percy Bysshe
 Southey, Robert
 Tennyson, Lord Alfred
 Wordsworth, William