Review of **The Blackwell Companion to Digital Literary Studies**. Edited by RAY SIEMENS and SUSAN SCHREIBMAN. Pp. Xviii + 620. Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture 50. Malden, MA, Oxford, Carlton, Victoria, Australia: Blackwell. 2007. £95.

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Once again Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman have produced a remarkable collection of writing about scholarship and resource creation in the area of digital humanities. This volume on digital literary studies is, as it were, a companion to their earlier *Companion to Digital Humanities*. As such it promises to be be equally significant to the field and, should be equally well used and highly regarded in universities both in Europe and North America.

The companion provides a very thorough survey of research and resource development in numerous area of digital literary studies, written by an impressive collection of leading scholars. It is intended as a general introduction to the multiple aspects of the field, but many of the chapters go beyond this to provide fascinating discussion of the problems and scholarly possibilities of different aspects of this highly diverse area.  As such it is impossible in this space to do justice to the entire range of subjects covered in the Companion's thirty one very detailed chapters, and so what follows will survey its general structure and comment on themes emerging from the book as a whole.

The book is divided into three sections, on traditions, textualities and methodologies. In the first section chapters are concerned with periodic areas of study, such the classical, medieval, early modern, and so on. They review the digital resources available and the type of scholarly questions that are being researched in their area, and include some speculation about future scholarship made possible by digital resources. Perhaps the most outstanding of these is by Crane, Bamman and Jones of the Perseus project, (Ch. 2) who not only survey the state of resources in classical scholarship but

raise vital questions about the requirements for future digital libraries for classicists and discuss how the availability of a greater range of digital texts may affect the way that researchers handle evidence for editorial decisions. It is an example of true digital literary study in that it combines a high level of discussion of technical, computer scientific matters, with a subtle discussion of the business of scholarly editing.

The second section, textualities, is highly comprehensive and includes chapters on a huge range of digital literature, from interactive fiction and digital poetry, from digital text as art installation, to blogging. Some areas, such as hypertext theory, may be familiar to most readers. Yet, however expert a reader might believe herself to be in digital literary studies, so great is the range of subjects covered that it seems likely that almost everyone will find at least one chapter about material that they had not encountered before.

The final section discusses computational methodologies that have been used to study literature. This section is probably the most uneven of the three in terms of the level of the material. Several of the chapters share the virtue of being able to introduce new methods to non-experts as well as engaging with more complex intellectual issues that will interest the more knowledgeable scholar, for example those by Hoover on quantitative analysis (Ch. 28) and Price on scholarly editing (Ch. 24). These engage with questions familiar to the literary scholar, such as personification in Woolf or the problems of establishing the ideal copy text, then demonstrate how such issues may be addressed with digital methods. However, other chapters in this section are pitched at a level of detail that is probably only comprehensible to the digital humanities expert, for example those on the Text Encoding Initiative, (Ch. 25) cybertextuality, (Ch. 23) character encoding, (Ch. 31) and format issues. (Ch. 30) Although such issues may be fascinating to the reader already undertaking technical research, such a lack of engagement with the non-expert is somewhat unfortunate in a volume of this type.

Although this final section is also very wide-ranging there were a few issues that might have been given a chapter of their own, for example, the important questions of preservation and sustainability. These are touched upon, for example by Choudhury and Seaman (Ch. 29). However, such issues, including questions of how to document digital resources, are vital to the long term use and availability of digital materials, as Price (Ch. 24) makes clear. It is also surprising that the question of the use of digital resources was almost completely ignored in this volume. This is significant since, as Damian-Grint argues (Ch. 5) "... little thought appears to have been given to the way in which the texts might be used" (p.116) and that as a result resources, although plentiful, may not be of a sufficient quality to be helpful for serious research.  A chapter on how to design digital resources with user needs in mind would therefore be of great help to any reader of this companion wanting to find information to help them create a high quality digital resource

As various contributors, such as Van Hulle (Ch. 7) and Wardrip-Fruin, (Ch. 8) point out, non-linear reading pre-dates the advent of digital hypertexts. As proof of this assertion, it is probably quite unusual to read a volume such as this companion from beginning to end. It is almost certainly designed for readers to pick the chapters that are of interest to them, as needed. However the experience of reading the entire text was suggestive of some of the recurring themes in the volume, and thus of most current concern in the area of digital literary studies.

It is not surprising that numerous authors were concerned with questions of how digital reproduction of text varies the way that we interact with it as readers. So for example there was repeated concern with the question of hypertext and non-linear reading, and new ways in which interactive media allow is to become part of texts and narratives. Textuality itself is conceived of very broadly in this volume to include not only the printed word, whether digitised or not, but also more immersive environments such as gaming, virtual communities, and textual performance in art

installations, all of which raise fascinating questions of where the boundaries of literary studies may lie in a digital world, if indeed there need be any.

It is perhaps more surprising that there was a pervasive appeal to history, previous forms of textuality and earlier reading practices. Continuity is stressed as much as change by several writers. Vandendorpe, (Ch. 10) for example provides a fascinating account of how reading practices have changed, and remarks on the irony that in a post-codex reading space we have returned to the metaphor of the scroll to navigate electronic documents.  Drucker (Ch. 11) also points out that the best way to design new electronic books is not to fetishise the functions of the codex with unnecessary ersatz page turning, but to study how printed books developed functions to aid reading and textual organisation, such as page numbers, running head, indices, etc. Her contention is that if we understand how visual design features help books work as successful functional objects, we may be better able to understand what best translates to the electronic medium.

This kind of appeal to the past seems entirely understandable and appropriate. What is perhaps less predictable is that so many of the authors in this volume appeal to past forms and practices almost as a sense of giving authority and legitimacy to scholarship concerning the electronic medium. When asked to survey their disciplinary area numerous authors adopt the method of producing a chronology of important work that has been done over the years. It is almost as if proving that a digital literary form has had a longer period of existence than the reader might have expected proves its worthiness as an object of study. This seems slightly worrying. It appears that we in digital humanities may betray a certain insecurity about the importance of what we do, and need to appeal to history as a kind of legitimating force.  Rather in the way that the designers of many of the early university degrees in English Literature felt that this young discipline must prove its worth by studying the development and history of the language and its origins, so it seems that digital literary scholars feel, for example, that the study of hypertext is lent more gravitas if reference can be made

to Tristram Shandy or James Joyce.

This is surely somewhat regrettable. If we believe in our discipline, and can claim that it addresses questions that are worthy of study in their own right, we should be proud of our scholarship, whether or not it has ancient roots. The great strength of this volume is that it surely does establish beyond the need for such self justification that digital literary studies is an important, fascinating and diverse discipline, with every right to assert the importance of work being done in its name. It may not have a venerable past, but this collection is strongly suggestive of a fascinating future.

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