Finalizing the Multiple-Text Electronic *King Lear* for Use in the Classroom

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Summary

As the teaching of Renaissance texts becomes more and more technologically enabled, it is even more significant that these technological enhancements are developed appropriately. Working with both lecturers and students, the Active Reading project has developed a number of different interfaces and tools for analyzing variants in multiple-text editions. The quarto and folio texts of *King Lear* are imposing in length alone, and for students to aptly demonstrate their understanding of the texts, it is important to create an appropriate learning environment. The most interesting element of the work appears to be how these interfaces or tools are being used actively in the classroom. By studying students' interactions with the online texts and recording their feedback, I have been able to form my own conclusions about the most useful ways of presenting a multiple-text electronic edition and adequately incorporating its textual variants. This paper will present the findings of these studies.

Introduction

The Active Reading project is involved in developing an electronic scholarly edition of a Renaissance text illustrating the textual variants between published editions of that work. Two quartos and the folio text of *King Lear* have been selected for development in this way, allowing the editorial processes to be unravelled, and the Active Reading process to be encouraged through interactive involvement. In examining several paper-based editions of a work for textual variants, readers may become disoriented between the editions, and find comparisons difficult to make. In developing an electronic edition that combines all the versions of a text, it is possible to form an interactive resource for comparison of variants, and indeed for composing new editions of a text and taking on the role of editor.

Initially, a prototype combining all the editions of a short twenty-one-line poem was developed. This was encoded in XML, and XSL and JavaScript were employed in producing the interaction methods. Pilot studies were undertaken, looking at the ways in which readers interact with the electronic edition and how they compare variants. The results of the studies enabled the development of a considerably longer text, that of *King Lear*. Initially texts were encoded with a scheme developed specifically for the project, but TEI (Text Encoding Initiative) standards have since been adopted to allow for more simplified sharing and greater dissemination of the material.

Empirical studies into the use of the tool and its effect on the process of Active Reading have enabled refinements in development. These studies examine the ways in which readers actively compare variants of a text - through recording interactive involvement, and by observing the editorial decisions they make. Two sets of user groups were established so that the edition could be observed in use. The first set of users were several groups of undergraduate students on the BA English Studies degree, taking the course "Introduction to Poetry". These students were looking at the edition within the confines of what would be their usual seminar session on electronic resources in the computing labs. The second set of users were postgraduate students either from the MA English Studies (Renaissance Literature) degree, or research students completing their work on Renaissance themes. This second group of students were observed using the edition in the same computer labs, but not within any formal seminar session. The results from these studies provide useful feedback directly from the student target users, who will be using the edition again within their future coursework. Overall the project is largely experimental, exploring the ways in which the material could most effectively be displayed, and looking at the ways in which readers interact with the texts and the variants.

Conclusions

This edition and the related research presents novel ways of comparing textual variants in editions of a Shakespearean text, and offers support for actively reading and understanding these texts. The edition has been used in teaching and as a learning tool, but is also intended to act as a template for the creation of future electronic editions. In designing and developing a new edition it has been helpful to be able to employ methods from the sphere of HCI (Human-Computer Interaction), and to understand the pedagogical requirements of the application, enhancing the experience for the reader.

In developing an electronic edition of this kind it is possible for the reader to compose new editions of a text, effectively taking on the role of editor. This paper aims to demonstrate the issues associated with developing the *King Lear* scholarly edition. The

findings presented will illustrate the advantage of using interactive technologies and text encoding tools to: a) provide a facility to examine textual variants independent of the text; b) allow active involvement in students' understanding of the text, and; c) offer greater insight into students' requirements when set the task of editing a multiple-edition text.