

Book Reviews



Hockey, Susan. *Electronic Texts in the Humanities: Principles and Practice.* Oxford: Oxford University Pr., 2000. 216p. \$70, cloth (ISBN 0198711948); \$19.95, paper (ISBN: 0198711956).

I recently had a meeting with a freshly minted MLIS who had been hired to bring up a “digital library” for a local consortium of schools. Among the long list of tasks that comprised her agenda was a request to mark up sets of transcribed documents from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I asked her why they wanted them “marked up.” So they could be searched, she replied. Searched for what, I came back. That was not clear to her—nor, I suspect, to those who made the request in the first place. I should have given her my copy of Susan Hockey’s impressive review of humanities computing. There, she would have received a detailed introduction to the history and practice of text encoding. Reading Hockey’s thick descriptions of various encoding practices and projects may have induced her into vertigo, but at least she would never again be naive about Hockey’s topic.

Despite its subtitle, Hockey’s book is more of a conspectus of humanities computing projects since the later 1960s. Herself an accomplished member of the tribe of encoders, Hockey has a sure grip on the field, its achievements, and its limitations. Her book, she asserts, fills a niche: “It explains how computers can help researchers and teachers in the humanities, particularly those who work with text-based material.” It is resolutely NOT, she continues, a book about the Web or the Internet, relative latecomers to the field of the electronic text. Although she is confident that more and more projects will migrate to Web-based formats and that Web tools will improve to facilitate this process, her book focuses more on earlier, stand-alone projects than on recent ones. Thus, readers expecting an extended look

at, say, the Rossetti or Blake electronic archives at the University of Virginia will not find it in Hockey. On the other hand, she is superb in sketching out the theoretical and technical prehistory of contemporary examples.

Text encoding is a relatively simple, straightforward process. It involves marking or tagging words and/or phrases according to some descriptive convention such that the words will be recognizable and retrievable by a computer programmed accordingly. That said, nothing else is simple or straightforward about electronic texts. What does one encode, and why? What text, texts, or corpus? Which words? How does one interpret the retrieved series? At every point in the encoding process, decisions are made and interpretations rendered. Far from being reifications of objectivity, Hockey reminds us, encoding projects are really layers of interpretation and judgment. Retrieving words and phrases may seem neat and clean, but on analysis they are anything but that. In fact, studies based on encoded texts have always been, in and of themselves, quite problematic. Encoding participates in Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle: To study the object, you necessarily change the object. The encoded text has been invaded, violated. It has been preinterpreted.

Hockey reviews many examples of this phenomenon as she tours us through the large concordance projects—the Bible, the Bard, dictionaries, et alii—and national corpus projects that have accounted for a substantial chunk of electronic text projects. She also examines major editing projects (e.g. Gabler’s *Ulysses*) and various attempts at stylometric analyses and attribution studies. Through each of these genres, Hockey proves to be both a sympathetic and a critical guide. She is sympathetic with the aspirations of the

projects, the nuances of encoding practices, and the discipline and rigor of the work. She is less happy with the results of these projects, the limitations of available tools, and the fact that many of the best databases are now legacy systems with uncertain futures. Most readers should find her an even-handed and judicious guide who is careful to stress that electronic texts and corpora represent but *one* approach to a variety of linguistic and stylistic issues and that they should always be used in conjunction with other tools and approaches. Moreover, she is frank about the labor-intensive nature of encoding: It is not an inexpensive textual tool by any means. And this makes it all the more crucial to be able to evaluate the benefits of text-encoding projects in comparison with costs. I cannot resist sharing at this point my wish that the people who imposed EAD on us had as much foresight. But that is another conversation.

As much as I learned from Hockey's book, I thought it flawed in one respect. Readers coming to it without sufficient background in the subject will be put off and probably discouraged by its long passages on encoding practices. For Hockey, this sort of thing is probably second nature. For many readers, however, it may only confirm their worst suspicions of text encoding as an arcane, nerdish pastime, best avoided by serious scholars who know how to think, read, and write. If the book has a second wind, perhaps Professor Hockey could edit out the more tedious examples of encoding practices from an otherwise admirable and commendable text.—*Michael Ryan, University of Pennsylvania.*

Urgo, Marisa. *Developing Information Leaders: Harnessing the Talents of Generation X.* London: Bowker-Saur (Information Services Management Series), 2000. 221p. \$70 (ISBN 1857392531).

Although numerous books and articles have been published about Generation X, this one is unique in that it relates the talents of Generation X to the world of libraries and information centers. This gen-

eration should not be ignored: It brings new perspectives to the twenty-first-century workplace and will confront a whole new set of challenges as its numbers grow in the library profession. A Gen Xer herself, Marisa Urgo is knowledge manager at the U. S. Office of Minority Health Resource Center. One of her ongoing professional priorities includes researching and writing about the recruitment and retention of the next generation of information professionals. Her passion for this subject is apparent. Her writing style is clear and readable.

Urgo begins by addressing the various definitions of Generation X; the Gen Xers' reputation as slackers who care little about society or its future is soundly refuted. On the contrary, Gen Xers bring innovative ideas concerning technology, communication, and library promotion to the working world. Throughout the book, Urgo stresses that although technology is influencing change in the library world, it will ultimately be people, especially Gen Xers, who will introduce and sustain the most meaningful changes. Gen Xers are prepared; they've grown up in a society characterized by constant change and welcome its challenges.

Urgo explains that Generation X librarians have a different perspective on work than those from previous generations; they see their relationship with their employers as being "an even exchange of expertise for pay and benefits." If employers are willing to invest in their Gen X employees, their employees will be willing to invest in them. Gen Xers desire a workplace that allows them flexibility, skills development, and the opportunity to be creative. Urgo outlines the ways in which managers can improve their relationship with their Generation X employees and, at the same time, improve their library or information center by taking advantage of the zeal and creativity that Gen Xers possess. Managers need to encourage their employees to take risks that might ultimately enhance library services and also to offer training and development opportunities that give Gen Xers an