

Mussell, James. *The Nineteenth-Century Press in the Digital Age*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 (pp xvii+256). ISBN 9780230235533.

James Mussell registers the irony of *The Nineteenth-Century Press in the Digital Age* appearing as a printed monograph, rather than an electronic resource, and in it, he takes up many urgent questions debated on blogs, listservs, and other digital media. It is, however, worthwhile to have a book (actually available in electronic and hardcover editions) that takes stock at this particular moment, even as the states of archives, law, and technology are quickly evolving. Gearing the book toward nineteenth-century scholars, Mussell provides a candid assessment of the state of the field and clarifies key issues. As a researcher on the Nineteenth-Century Serials Edition (*ncse*), a small but well-documented archive that attempts to be explicit about the transformative processes of developing digital editions, Mussell's assessments are based on research and practice.

Mussell contends that scholars must understand the nineteenth-century production of newspapers and periodicals—with their ephemerality, sequential versions, reissues, collected editions, and corporate identities—as well as the digital process by which we encounter them today. He emphasizes that to create a digital version is not to reproduce an edition, but to create a new one. He offers as a metonymic example that, to save on storage space, some archives trim the blank margins of a page; although preserving the texts and fonts, this practice changes their relative weight on the page and alters the reading experience (67-68). Mussell emphasizes that miscellaneity and seriality are crucial components of the nineteenth-century periodical (50), but digital archives—with access to (sometimes only seemingly) complete runs and with search mechanisms based on OCR—transform the sense of both features.

In Chapter One, “From the Margins and for the Margins” Mussell explores several cruxes, some interpretive and some institutional, that impinge on scholarship. Arguing the primacy of establishing “where and when [a work] was published (in the broadest possible sense); and secondly, what it looked like in print” (29), Mussell insists that these material components are constitutive of journalistic genres. Turning to the institutional frameworks that allow digital reproductions, Mussell argues that “Without the political will to put public money into digitalization projects, it is difficult to see how libraries, unless they can draw upon their own endowments, can produce such resources [as the *Times Digital Archive*] independently of private finance” (50). Exploring the consequences of various funding schema, Mussell clarifies the tactical compromises made by institutional stakeholders on whom archives depend.

The second chapter, “Bibliographic Codes and Visual Modes,” develops the

concepts of the page as a fundamental unit for many newspapers and periodicals; their forms are visually determined by fonts, illustrations, headlines and mastheads, poetry, columns, and blank space deployed on particular pages and repeated across runs. It offers a story of two technological moments: the nineteenth-century's press developing its generic conventions through available printing methods and its anticipation and constructions of readerships; and the twenty-first-century's digitization as an iteration of production, in which browsing, searching, and screen display transform the experience of the reading. In the third chapter, featuring a neatly suspenseful narrative of the development of the *ncse* website, Mussell and co-author Suzanne Paylor distinguish between two primary conceptualizations of on-line presentation. The *archive* features extensive materials, usually in the form of pdf files backed by serviceable OCR with some organization akin to library classifications, while the *edition*, though resembling the editorial attention of print editions, can mobilize digital capabilities to highlight hypertextual and material interconnections. Ultimately Mussell and Paylor use the terms heuristically to indicate a continuum of practice and to urge an explicitness about the specific processes of transformation chosen by digital creators.

The final chapter, "Newspapers and Periodicals in Class," argues the pedagogical benefit of students working with digital materials is at least three-fold. First, it allows classes to study the press through primary (though mediated) sources. Students may consider "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" as the opening words not only to a novel, but to the first issue of *All the Year Round*, the temporality of the fiction doubling back on the temporally-named journal and resonating with many of the articles that follow. Second, it allows students to develop proficiency with digital conventions and operations. Finally, it strips the mystification of the internet that makes print material appear seamlessly and untransformed and complete, rather than as deeply conditioned (and often fragmented) by its digitization.

For those of us who have been active but relatively uninformed users of the various databases of periodicals and newspapers, Mussell (and Paylor) provide, along with an extensive bibliography, an engaging theorization and chronicle of our current digital moment, as well as plenty of evidence that the community of nineteenth-century scholars should engage critically with our twenty-first-century possibilities at both editorial and institutional levels.

Mark Schoenfield
Vanderbilt University, USA