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The ludic edition: playful futures for digital scholarly editing

Jason Boyd

It is now obvious that digital technology has a great deal of potential to expand and enrich the scope and value of the scholarly edition, both in terms of what can be incorporated into such an edition and in terms of what forms such an edition can take. Yet, to date, this potential has only been partly (some would say barely) realised. Perhaps the most significant and unique expressive and persuasive form to have emerged from computational technology is the video or computer game (see, for example, Bogost 2007; Bogost et al. 2010; Flanagan 2009; Isbister 2016; Wardrip-Fruin 2009), yet how this new form might enhance humanities scholarship, and the digital scholarly edition in particular, is not particularly well explored and remains an unresolved issue. This essay argues that all editions are a form of adaptation of an original work and that a ludic adaptation (ludic from the Latin *ludus*, game, sport, play, fun) of an original work (in other words, a game) can be a scholarly edition. Game design, therefore, when it is focused on adapting a literary work in order to generate new insights, can be understood as an act of creative/critical edition making. Three digital games adapting canonical literary texts are discussed to demonstrate the possibilities of the ludic edition: *Walden, a game* (2017), *Elsinore* (2019) and *80 Days* (2014). The essay concludes with a call for digital scholarly editors to take a more prominent role in the creation of ludic editions lest a new form of digital edition develop that does not have a place in digital humanities scholarship.

The computational potential of the digital scholarly edition

The practice of creating scholarly digital editions (or digital scholarly editions) of literary texts has now a substantial body of examples of and scholarship about the problems and possibilities and various methodologies of digital editing (for example, Apollon et al. 2014; Bryant 2002; Deegan and Sutherland 2009; Deegan and Sutherland eds. 2009; Driscoll and Pierazzo 2016; Hockey 2010; Pierazzo 2015; Sahle et al. 2020–; Schäfer and Gendolla 2010; Shillingsburg 1996; Shillingsburg 2006). A fairly sophisticated example, although only one of many that can be currently accessed online, can be found at *Digital Thoreau*. Focused on a single text, *Digital Thoreau* includes *Walden: A Fluid Text Edition*, which, using the Versioning Machine tool (http://v-machine.org/), enables comparison of seven drafts and a published edition of Henry David Thoreau's 1854 book. *Digital Thoreau* also includes *The Readers' Thoreau*, an online edition of *Walden* that enables users to socially annotate the text at the paragraph level, using a WordPress plug-in, CommentPress. Most recently, the project has added the *Walden Manuscript Project*, which provides an interface to study a digitised *Walden* manuscript from the Huntingdon Library. *Digital Thoreau*, then, comprises editions of *Walden* that can be used by textual scholars and Thoreau specialists for comparative and genetic textual analysis and exploration of Thoreau's compositional practices, and by teachers, learners and interested online readers for study, annotation, and discussion. As *Digital Thoreau* shows, there are multiple kinds of editions that can be conceived of (and created) and that are aimed at particular audiences who wish to study the work for a particular purpose and that consequently embody a particular approach to and perspective on the work: ultimately, all editions offer an interpretative framing of the work and seek to help their audiences enrich their understanding of it through the particular affordances and modes of exploration and interaction they provide, as made possible by the medium being used.

Yet despite the sophistication of *Digital Thoreau*'s and other online editions, for some scholars of digital editing, they fall well short of the

potential that digital technology can have for digital scholarly editions. In 'Barely Beyond the Book?', Joris van Zundert laments that the vision informing most digital scholarly editions 'is a re-representation of the book' (Zundert 2016, 103). Even more plainly, he states: 'Most digital scholarly editions, in fact, are all but literal translations of a book into a non-book-oriented medium' (Zundert 2016, 103), 'apparently for no other reason than to fulfil the same role as the print text' (Zundert 2016, 104). Ultimately, van Zundert's concern is that the digital scholarly edition will amount to little more than 'a mere medium shift' that will 'limit [the digital scholarly edition's] expressiveness to that of print text, and…fail to explore the computational potential for digital text representation, analysis and interaction' (Zundert 2016, 106).

There is indeed much 'computational potential' that has not been fully explored by scholars when it comes to thinking how literary works can be represented, interacted with, and studied in digital form. The procedural interactivity that is one of the common and distinctive features of using computational works can enhance the expressiveness of the digital edition through a ludic approach. This was in effect the approach that Jerome McGann, Johanna Drucker and others took when thinking about digital textuality, and which led to the design of *Ivanhoe*, 'a game of interpretation' (Drucker 2009, 66; also discussed by McGann 2001, 209–48), so called because the initial object for interpretation was Walter Scott's 1819 novel of the same name. In Drucker's formulation, a text becomes reconceptualised as a game world, the experience of which (the story) is constructed by an individual's interactions with that world: 'A text became defined as a field of potentialities, through which a reading intervened. We conceptualised a text, thus, not as a discrete and static entity, but a coded provocation for reading: constrained by those codes, a text is formed anew with each act of interpretive intervention' (Drucker 2009, 20). Interrogating the idea that the materiality of texts is 'a stable fact, unproblematic, a priori, and self-evident', '[b]y contrast, *Ivanhoe* assumes a complex system in which a work is produced by the dynamic interplay of an individual interpretation and a set of possibilities structured and encoded in an emergent field' (Drucker 2009, 97).

Similarly, in 'Gaming the Edition: Modeling Scholarly Editions through Videogame Frameworks', Jon Saklofske et al. outline a prototype for a scholarly editing environment – what they describe in the article as 'the scholarly edition as a social edition enabled by game-based processes' and as 'a scholarly editing game'. Like earlier prototypes, such as *Ivanhoe*, these are ludic environments for collaborative or social editing or, more broadly, interpretative exploration; as described by Neil Fraistat and Steven E. Jones, they are 'editorial environments that enable students to inhabit a poem or novel, engaging them in the process of arranging texts in order to interpret them, helping them to recognize the multiplicity of versions and the relatively ephemeral, contingent, and constructed nature of those versions, engaging them in the collaborative material production of literary texts' (Fraistat and Jones 2003, 71). Fraistat and Jones realised such an editorial environment with a game called *MOOzymandias*, which was intended:

> … as an experimental collaborative 'edition' of Shelley's famous sonnet about textually inscribed objects, the ruins of a colossal statue discovered by a traveler in the desert. In designing the space, we explicitly imagined the editor as playing the role of game master, defining challenges for players and guiding player interactions with the text, and we imagined the linked spaces inspired by the poem as a puzzle-adventure game for pedagogical and interpretative ends (Jones 2016, 122–3; see Fraistat and Jones 2003, 79–82 for a fuller description of *MOOzymandias*).

Jones provides a helpful explanation of how the aims of such ludic editing environments differ from those of social editions:

> The goal is not for a team of editors to labor for years to make a unique and carefully crafted textual object, edited in only one way and fixed in one form. The goal is to build open environments within which to manage and track the continuous reediting of many seed texts by loosely or temporarily affiliated collaborators, texts that can be vetted and can remain protected

and persistent, yet simultaneously remain open, shared, and infinitely alterable (Jones 2011, 289).

In effect, what Jones is describing here, as are Drucker and Saklofske et al., is a persistent online environment for ludic editing. The focus of scholars and students in these environments is on the process (editing), not the product (an edition). One objection, consequently, that can be raised about these kinds of ludic editing environments is that they do not seem to (or wish to) produce an edition or editions. Van Zundert observes that '[i]t has often been suggested that the capabilities of digital technologies should become the focus and practice of digital scholarly editing', a suggestion which these scholars have adopted; however, he adds with justification that this 'ideal is not materialising in the form of concrete digital editions' (Zundert 2016, 104). This is a problem: as Saklofske et al. rhetorically ask: 'Within digital environments, how much can we play with the kinds of work, skills, and participatory breadth required in current "scholarly edition" processes before that term no longer defines the kinds of work taking place?' – especially, it should be added, if a 'scholarly edition' does not emerge from these processes? Ultimately, the question that remains unresolved by ludic editing environments is: beyond the environment itself, what do they produce that can be used by the broader scholarly community in the way a scholarly digital edition is usable?

Expanding the computational scope of the digital edition

This question suggests that scholarly attention needs to move past creating ludic digital editing *environments* to creating ludic digital *editions*. To return to van Zundert's criticism, digital scholarly editing needs to expand beyond re-creating the book, the text, and this will change what has traditionally constituted meaningful and valid scholarly intervention and engagement with the work. This is a view that is shared by other theorists of digital scholarly editions. In 'Electronic Scholarly Editing', Martha Nell Smith defines each of the terms contained in her essay's title:

Editing makes works (poems, plays, fiction, film footage, musical performances and artistic and documentary material) publish–able (in books, films, television and radio and recordings) by eliminating unwanted material and organising what remains for optimal and intelligible presentation to audiences. In other words, editing translates raw creative work into an authoritative (not to be confused with definitive or authoritarian) form. *Scholarly* editing is editing performed under the aegis of research, learning, sustained instruction, mastery, knowledge building, standard setting. *Electronic* scholarly editing consciously incorporates phenomena associated with the movement and manipulation of electrons, those indivisible charges of negative electricity, through wires and radio waves onto screens and through speakers (Smith 2004).

Of particular note about Smith's definition is that *editing* can be performed on any media and result in productions (*editions*) that too can be in any media. Electronic or digital editing can create multiple types of what Smith calls 'digital surrogates', ranging from digital scans of print manuscripts and texts, to encoded editions based on OCR or keyboarded text, to lavishly annotated editions with notes, illustrations, reviews, adaptations and so on. This, combined with many of these editions being publicly accessible online, leads Smith to declare that 'we have entered a different editorial time.... While print editions are containers for static objects, artifacts that are by definition unchangeable once produced, the world of digital surrogates practically demands new models for editorial praxes...' (Smith 2004).

So in what directions could the scope of digital scholarly editions be extended? First, an 'edition' is a fairly capacious category: the *OED Online* describes an edition as: 'A particular form or version of a book or other published text issued at one time, e.g., at its first publication or subsequently following revision, enlargement, abridgement, or change of format' ('Edition', I.1.a). The last part of this definition aligns suggestively with John Bryant's notion of the *fluid text*: 'A fluid text is any work that exists in multiple versions in which the primary cause

of those versions is some form of revision. Revisions may be performed by originating writers, by their editors and publishers, or by readers and audiences, who reshape the originating work to reflect their own desires for the text, themselves, their culture' (Bryant 2013, 48). For Bryant, the versions comprising a fluid text include editions and adaptations, both of which contain a 'revision strategy' that establishes their distinctive 'textual identity'. Bryant explains that '[w]e know a version... by its revision strategy. A revision strategy may be defined as a set of textual changes designed to have a rhetorical effect that is meaningfully distinct, or distant, from its original' (Bryant 2013, 63). This certainly applies to scholarly editions that try to (re)create an ideal version of a text or to represent an author's intentions, but it also applies to editorial projects that try to offer a holistic sense of the versions of a work such as *Digital Thoreau*'s fluid text edition of *Walden*. It equally applies to what are usually considered by literature scholars as 'lesser editions' – for example, translations, abridgements like *Reader's Digest* Condensed Editions, Penguin Readers (literary texts adapted for learners of English as a foreign language), audio books, and comic book/graphic novel retellings. Bryant's conception sees these revisions or editions as belonging to a continuum, which equalises them and shifts focus away from hierarchical judgements concerning legitimacy of the revision and towards the purposes and value of the revision strategy. The question, 'Is it a scholarly edition?' usually means 'Does it inherently conform to established (or entrenched) scholarly conventions?' rather than 'Does it enable scholarly reflection/activity?' Even when the first question does include the second, the scholarly activity being envisioned is usually very narrow: the study of textual cruxes or variants or revision history. Scholarly editions, as traditionally conceived, however, do not and cannot exhaust the interpretative possibilities that editions can enable, and even the 'lesser editions' mentioned above can reveal in their making and their study aspects of a text such as the challenges it poses to expression in other languages (translations), its narrative superfluities or excesses (condensed editions), the complexities of its word usage and sentence construction (Penguin Readers), the rhythms and cadences of its sentences (audio books), and the visuality/spatiality/activity of its narrative (graphic novels).

Most of these 'lesser editions' and the activity contributing to their production would be distinguished from scholarly editions and editing by labelling them as 'adaptations'. Bryant notes that '[u]ntil fairly recently, adaptation has been taken as a form of textual corruption' (Bryant 2013, 50), but, if a revision strategy is the common feature that connects editions of many kinds, from the scholarly to the graphic, there is no justifiable reason why adaptations cannot be considered as a form of edition. Bryant argues that 'adaptation is an act of interpretation' (Bryant 2013, 49) and that, '[l]ike translators, [adaptors] transform a text for new or different audiences, and address new conditions and problems in a culture' (Bryant 2013, 48) – characterisations which apply to editions as well, including scholarly editions. The difference is not in kind, but in approach. When we recall van Zundert's call for scholarly digital editions that move beyond the book and make full use of the computational potential of digital technology, then considering digital adaptation as a type of editing is a way to envision scholarly editions that fully explore the possibility of the interactive and ludic in a digital environment. As Steven E. Jones writes, 'If we plot a trajectory through the positions of [D. F.] McKenzie and [Jerome] McGann [on the theory and practices of editing], I would argue, it takes us to today's digital environments – including virtual worlds and video games – as potential models for digital scholarship' (Jones 2011, 284).

Game making as edition making

Scholarly digital editing is a central activity within the community of practice that is designated as 'digital humanities,' but it remains unsettled whether game making is or should be a key activity in DH as well. Patrick Jagoda attempts to work towards a resolution of this question in his essay 'Gaming the Humanities'. Throughout the course of his essay, Jagoda makes several bold assertions: 'Rather than just one example, digital games serve as a critical test case that might help us think through the challenges and possibilities of the digital for research, scholarship, and learning' (Jagoda 2014, 191); 'Gamification is increasingly becoming a key problematic of – that

is, in different ways, a problem and possibility for – the digital human-ities.' (Jagoda 2014, 194); 'games raise fraught questions about the fundamental nature of the humanities' (Jagoda 2014, 195). Unfortunately, these assertions are not adequately supported or illuminated by his discussion of the games created at his Game Changer Chicago Design Lab, which focus on educating teens on a range of public health issues (teen pregnancy, access to medical services, sexual violence, sexually transmitted infections) and other present-day social issues which are not clearly connected to human-ities pedagogy or scholarship. This is not to say that these issues do not belong in the digital humanities; rather, the problem is that, despite Jagoda himself being 'a scholar trained in critical theory and literary criticism' (Jagoda 2014, 195), who is based in a Department of English, his essay on gaming the humanities is completely silent on how game-making might connect to the objects of study and research questions that are currently and will likely remain the focus of much digital scholarship arising out of human-ities disciplines, such as the study of literary texts and scholarly digital editing.

To address this oversight in Jagoda's provocative essay, the form of scholarship that I will explore through the discussion of the video games that follow is the *ludic edition*. My argument is that, unlike the conventional digital edition that van Zundert criticises (which fails to make full use of digital technology's computational potential) and unlike playful editing environments, which apparently fail to produce any edition at all, the ludic edition can balance the author-itativeness of the traditional scholarly edition and the playfulness possible in procedural digital work like video games. Like most games, ludic editions are intentionally designed and delimited by a creative team that is working within a particular interpretative and narrative framework while still ensuring that the work offers their users scope for self-directed exploration, interaction and experience. Ludic editions, I suggest, can be a powerful means of exploring 'the computational potential for digital text representation, analysis and interaction' (Zundert 2016, 106) that moves beyond the book.

While the following works were not explicitly envisioned by their creators as scholarly editions of the literary texts they represent, they offer models that can help scholars think through the features and possibilities of the ludic edition. These three examples suggest some possible characteristics of the ludic edition. First, discovery through playing (usually from the perspective of the Player Character or PC) becomes the primary mechanism of exploring the text, rather than following a fixed narrative or sequence of words: a predetermined goal and a series of challenges that must be overcome to reach that goal provide the main impetus in a transversal of the work. In an earlier paper on 'ergodic adaptation', I argue that such adaptations of literary texts cannot fully explore their computational, ludic potential if they feel compelled to faithfully reproduce the original text (Boyd 2019). Therefore, the second characteristic of the ludic edition is that it is focused more on the *work* (the premise, plot, and/or cultural imaginary arising from the sum of versions comprising the fluid text) than on the *text*; if the text is present, it is not the text in its entirety or in the format in which it was originally produced (for example, a text can become a voiceover or an enactment). Additionally, text is not necessarily the only or primary form of expression: it is intermixed with visuals and sound. Reading, observing and listening all become key activities in a ludic edition. Third, while they might not facilitate insights into aspects of the literary works that traditional scholarly editions do, such as compositional practices, authorial and editorial revisions, and textual cruxes and obscure references, ludic editions facilitate insights that are difficult if not impossible to capture in a conventional editorial apparatus: what is behind, missing from and around a work – insights which can diversify scholarly discourse about a text.

Experience versus text: *Walden, a game*

Produced by the University of Southern California's Game Innovation Lab, *Walden, a game*, is, as the title implies, a ludic edition of Henry David Thoreau's 1854 memoir of his experiment in self-sufficient living in the woods by Walden Pond, near Concord, Massachusetts.

Designed by a team led by Tracy Fullerton, the adaptation offers a 3D recreation of Walden Pond and environs (including a version of the town of Concord) as it might have looked during Thoreau's residency: because much of *Walden* is devoted to detailed, evocative descriptions of an actual place, a digital simulation is valuable because the pond and town as it existed in Thoreau's time can no longer be directly experienced.

Perhaps the most immediate question when considering *Walden, a game* as a digital scholarly edition is: Is there a text of *Walden* in *Walden, a game,* or does the game stand in for the text? The answer is that it is a combination of both. An example of Henry Jenkins's concept of the 'embedded narrative' (Jenkins 2006) the text of *Walden* is experienced mainly in two modes: by focusing on (zooming in on) elements in the environment, which will bring up a scrap of paper with text from *Walden* that relates to the element in question, and by picking up arrowheads scattered over the world, which trigger a voiceover reading of an excerpt from *Walden*. These found excerpts are collected in the player's journal (referencing the diaries Thoreau kept during his time in the woods), which can be reviewed by the player. Thus, the accretion of the text of *Walden* in *Walden, a game* mimics Thoreau's journal keeping, which constituted the raw material that was then shaped into more coherent thematic chapters with a narrative arc structured by the passing of the four seasons (in reality, Thoreau spent nearly two years and two months living in the woods by Walden Pond). Given this premise, *Walden, a game* is perhaps better understood as combining an exploration of Thoreau's experience of Walden Pond within the structure of *Walden* (the game is also structed by four seasons) and how that experience found expression in the book. In a traditional scholarly edition, it might be a section in the introduction or in an appendix titled 'Background' or 'Composition History', or a comparative edition linking Thoreau's diaries to the published text.

Walden does not only consist of chapters offering rich descriptions of the physical environs of Walden (which are expressed visually in *Walden, a game*); it also contains chapters offering concrete

details about how Thoreau set up and conducted his 'life in the woods', contained in such chapters as 'Economy', 'Where I Lived, And What I Lived For', 'The Bean-Field' and 'House-Warming'. As a first-person account of an experiment of simple, solitary living, it is amenable to being produced as an edition where the reader, as the player character (PC), engages in exploratory interactivity within a virtual space, something that computer games are of course highly effective at realising. Indeed, that *Walden, a game* should take the form of a very familiar genre in video games, the first-person open world survival role-playing game (RPG) is a recognition of the affinities between this game genre and the ostensible thesis of *Walden*. The player takes the role of Thoreau, playing from the first-person perspective, with the game play being focused on the physical activities that Thoreau engaged in when undertaking his experiment. Experienced computer game players will quickly spot quests and side quests and the familiar mechanics of resource management and lore gathering that are a part of most survivalist RPGs. (See SinaeAzule 2017 for an illustrative video playthrough of *Walden, a game*.)

The creators claim that *Walden, a game* 'offers more opportunities for reflective play than strategic challenge': 'Rather than an adventure of the body pitted against nature, students can experience the mind and soul living in nature over the course of a New England year' (Fullerton). Yet there was clearly a decision made that living in nature, even if virtual, should not be an idle affair. As regards the game play, which is robust, one of the aspects of Thoreau's text it helps to reveal is the extent to which it is a *distillation*, a highly crafted textual mediation of Thoreau's experience. It turns out the daily grind at Walden Pond, as experienced in *Walden, a game*, can be quite gruelling. One has to complete the building of one's cabin, chop wood, hoe, plant, weed and harvest one's beanfield, fish, eat, mend clothing, collect specimens for a biologist, survey, run errands in town and elsewhere, meet people and so on. One often has so much to do just to keep on top of things in an artificially shortened day (one's nights are lost by being forced to sleep soon after nightfall), that one can get the feeling that one is engaged in a one-man

sylvan rat race. Finding time to wonder, to explore, to commune with nature ends up being very challenging unless one has excellent time-management and game-playing skills. Trying to re-create experiences such as Thoreau's lying on the bottom of a canoe and drifting about Walden Pond until the canoe washed up on a bank appear to be impossible, as are his magically described excursions on the Pond at night. The compulsion to work in *Walden, a game* makes it difficult to adopt Thoreauean stances such as that in the chapter 'Sounds':

> There were times when I could not afford to sacrifice the bloom of the present moment to any work, whether of the head or hands. I love a broad margin to my life. Sometimes, in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a revery, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house, until by the sun falling in at my west window, or the noise of some traveller's wagon on the distant highway, I was reminded of the lapse of time.

Playing *Walden, a game*, one comes to realise that *Walden* narrates the essence – the best – of Thoreau's experience, not the quotidian round. Perhaps the opportunities for contemplation Thoreau so compellingly describes were more the exception than the rule. *Walden, a game* helps highlight, in a virtually experiential way, that *Walden* is a highly mediated representation of Thoreau's actual daily life at Walden Pond and should be evaluated as a work of artful literature rather than as a work of faithful reportage.

The issue of the extent to which playing a character or avatar enables a player to identify with and truly *know* or empathise with the experience of that character is a justly controversial one; in the case of *Walden, a game*, does playing as Thoreau help us know what being the historical Thoreau at Walden Pond was truly like? In some key respects the player's experience of the virtual Walden Pond falls short of the experience as a reader of Thoreau's textual

recreation. This is not really a question about the sophistication of the technology; rather, what *Walden, a game* helps the player understand is that the greatness of *Walden* as piece of environmental and philosophical reflection comes from it being a particular individual's observational and descriptive powers as a witness and as a writer and not just through the concrete activities Thoreau engaged in at Walden Pond – so a mechanical re-enactment of these activities does not give us full access to Thoreau's experience (nor does *Walden*, it should be added). When it comes to Walden Pond as a natural phenomenon, the greatness of Thoreau's text and Thoreau as a writer (in a chapter like 'The Ponds') is his ability to convey the wonder of a place that his readers have never personally viscerally experienced, and his manner of conveying the living and changing nuances of Walden Pond are not based just on physically seeing the pond, but on an extended and deep communion with a place by someone particularly receptive to things that many would not even notice. To an extent, the excerpts from *Walden* in *Walden, a game* mediate this, but they also have the effect of pointing out to the player the disparity between how historical Thoreau saw Walden and how PC Thoreau is seeing virtual Walden. The 'transcendentalist glow' that the landscape visually takes on if one plays effectively does little to recapture the wonder that comes from reading Thoreau's rhetorically powerful description, say, of the many colours and textures of the water of Walden Pond under different conditions and from different vantages in different seasons. So, in a very real sense, one of the benefits of the ludic edition of *Walden* is that it throws into relief the uniqueness of the man, his processing of his experience and its expression in the resulting text. *Walden, a game* shows us how experiences and texts recording those experiences are not commensurate, and playing the game enables us to return to *Walden* with a fresh perspective on and an enhanced appreciation of it as a work of art and philosophy, as much of a virtual and artistic recreation of Thoreau's life at Walden Pond as is *Walden, a game*.

Textual silences and omissions: *Elsinore*

Elsinore (2019), the first game produced by Golden Glitch, offers a 3D rendering of the castle and environs of Elsinore from an isometric perspective (see Dyer 2019 for a playthrough of the game). The player character is Ophelia, and the game opens roughly at the same point as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* starts: Act 1, scenes 2 and 3. Rather than focusing exclusively on the action and dialogue of *Hamlet* as contained in Shakespeare's text, *Elsinore* explores what might be 'left out' of a text that, as a stage play, has particular constraints such as performance duration, number of characters and the necessity of presenting concurrent events consecutively. At the start of the game, Ophelia finds herself in a predicament different from the one she faces in Shakespeare's play (even if the consequences are the same): in a dream she sees (as in the play's plot) herself sinking through water and the deaths of Polonius, Gertrude, Claudius and Laertes. Subsequently, during play, she is confronted by a hooded figure who stabs her to death, after telling her that her death will be staged to look like she drowned. But after her murder, Ophelia awakens in her bed. She discovers she is trapped in a time loop and has to find how to escape, in the process learning about the past and present of the castle and its inhabitants, including the history of her mother, the 'foreign-born' Elise, as well as Hamlet's paternal grandmother Queen Astrid, and the mysterious Lady Simona (all characters not in Shakespeare's play).

The time loop is a clever strategy to allow the player to be in different places at the same time so that they can witness simultaneous events and interact with particular characters at specific moments of time. In effect, this uses and extends the conceit of Tom Stoppard's 1967 play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (what are characters in *Hamlet* doing when they are not 'onstage'?): while Ophelia can be at the events dramatised in *Hamlet*, she can also be at 'offstage' events that are happening simultaneously with these events. By doing so, the player learns much about the state of Denmark that takes place 'behind the scenes', and what the player learns is a catalyst for reflecting on what the play does not tell us

about (its silences), and what it does not include (its omissions). *Elsinore* does not so much rewrite *Hamlet* as deepen and extend it, elaborating on aspects of the world the play can only superficially touch on or is silent about, such as the origins, nationality, ethnicity, past history and personal desires of the characters.

One of the first things that strikes the thoughtful player of *Elsinore* who has read *Hamlet* is that Shakespeare's play offers little detail about the origins of many of the characters. The dominating and largely unspoken presumption is usually that, unless explicitly indicated, characters in Shakespeare's plays are white and (mostly) Danish, despite most of the characters' names being based on Greek (Ophelia, Laertes), Latin (Claudius, Marcellus, Polonius ['the Polish man']), Italian (Horatio), French (Fortinbras), and German (Gertrude) anthroponyms, with the notable exceptions of the Danish-derived Hamlet and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Why, *Elsinore* implicitly asks, should the whiteness of the characters or the court at Elsinore be presumed? Besides Laertes' departure for Paris and Hamlet's stated desire to return to university at Wittenberg (in Germany), the play is so inwardly focused on court politics that one can easily not attend to the fact that Helsingor (the historical Elsinore), just north of Copenhagen, was not some rural backwater, but a crucial seaport – the gateway to the Baltic Sea (in *Elsinore*, Ophelia observes at one point that '[a]ll passing ships must stop and pay their tolls to us'). People from many countries would have found their way to the Danish court by sea or road, like the 'tragedians of the city' (2.2.352) do in *Hamlet*, like Elise (the mother of Laertes and Ophelia) or like Horatio, in *Elsinore* a person of colour who was born in India, the natural or illegitimate son of a Venetian spice merchant and a woman from Calicut (Kozhikode). Horatio was taken to and raised in Venice by his father and made his way eventually to Denmark, where he entered the King's service as a soldier. In short, Denmark (and Shakespeare's England) was not as white as might be imagined, and *Elsinore* deliberately imagines it otherwise. Although it is not an integral part of the main escape-the-time-loop scenario, the narrative contains considerable details about race and racism, culture and class, as well as about sexuality and gender

identity. The game play, which requires players to talk with all the non-player characters continuously and in considerable depth, or listen in on the conversations between NPCs, makes these details unavoidable. This adds a richness and a sense of generative possibility to the world and text of *Hamlet* that prompts a series of speculative lines of reflection and inquiry that could diversify how we read, perform and adapt Shakespeare. Although it is now commonplace to stage productions of Shakespeare with a diverse range of actors, and there is a long tradition, stretching back to Shakespeare's time, of cross-gender casting, what *Elsinore* poses to the player, if we imagined not the actors but the characters of *Hamlet* as something other than Danish/European, white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, able-bodied, neurotypical people? What would that do to the meanings of the play? Ophelia's biracial parentage, for example, adds an additional complexity to her position at court and to her relationship with Hamlet. In playing *Elsinore*, *Hamlet* no longer stands as a fixed and closed text; it becomes not a writerly but a readerly text (in Roland Barthes terms), enabling reflection on historical and contemporary understandings of race, ethnicity, migration, class, sexuality and gender (Barthes). In this, *Elsinore* does more to diversify and advance digital Shakespeare than any digital edition of *Hamlet* has done, no matter how sophisticated or innovative the editorial markup or user interface. This is because *Elsinore* offers editorial commentary and guidance not just about what the play text contains, but on what it does *not* contain, something which a conventional scholarly edition governed by conventional editorial principles would have difficulty trying to incorporate.

Historical milieus and mores: *80 Days*

80 Days by Inkle Studios is a ludic edition of Jules Verne's *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* (*Around the World in Eighty Days*) (1873). The novel narrates the journey and the route taken by Phileas Fogg and his valet Jean Passepartout that enabled them to success-fully win a wager that one could (in the later nineteenth century) travel around the world in 80 days. *80 Days* discards Verne's text

and with it the fixed route, keeping only the main characters and the premise (the challenge to circumnavigate the globe in 80 days or less). It uses an interactive visualisation of the terrestrial globe to map a locative branching hypertext that can be expanded and navigated among many different paths (the narrative contains over half a million words of story, 150 cities to visit and over 10,000 choices). This allows for interesting, challenging and repeat game-play, as one strategises about routes and the next destination while keeping financially solvent, healthy and out of local troubles (see Gamespub 2018 for a walkthrough of the game).

The historical setting of Verne's novel, with its largely outmoded ideologies of nation, race, class and gender, is thrown into relief through a steampunk revisioning and counterfactual history of the nineteenth century, where women, sexual minorities and racialised populations and nations assume a much more prominent role in global society, and European imperialism and colonialism have encountered significant pushback. As the scriptwriter of *80 Days*, Meg Jayanth, writes in a blog post entitled 'Victorian Futurism':

> Verne was one of the pioneers of science-fiction: his novels mixed wild invention with careful, plausible explanations. His stories imagined the future – but to the modern reader, his visions can be marred by the prejudices and assumptions of the past.

> We wanted to take Verne's sense of exhilaration and optimism about the future, and expand upon his perspective. We wanted to build a world that isn't comfortably settled into Victorian values, but is as slippery, changing, and as challenging to a contemporary reader as Verne's works were to his own (Jayanth 2014).

80 Days preserves the essence of Verne's novel – an adventure story about a high stakes race around the world – but enables a satisfyingly gameful experience by not being faithful to either the original's text or the plot. It shows why ludic editions require a high

degree of autonomy from both an original's *fabula* (narrative events) and *syuzhet* (narrative organisation) in order to offer a satisfying and meaningful playful experience. Indeed, the ludic needs to be at the centre of and the driving force behind such editions, rather than an add-on or enhancement to a digital reproduction of the original text.

What does *80 Days* achieve as a ludic edition that conventional digital scholarly editions cannot? In a conventional scholarly edition, it is very difficult to systematically annotate an historical literary text's saturation in the *mores* of the time (or, as Jayanth writes, the extent to which Verne's and other novels of the time are 'comfortably settled into Victorian values'), such as class and other pervasive and largely tacit social structures and behaviours, instrumentalist and extractive understandings and attitudes towards the natural world, and the taken-for-granted biases towards women, foreigners, non-white people and the activities and cultures associated with them. Other groups, such as LGBTQ+ people, are almost entirely absent, and if present, routinely villainised. In the latter instance, what is not there textually, even though it was there historically, is especially difficult to annotate in a critical edition. *80 Days* is a ludic edition that shows how Victorian values have shaped the original text by showing what that text could have been had it been informed by 'a world shaped by indigenous retrofuturisms in Africa and Asia and the Americas, which resist and disrupt the conventional narrative of history' (Jayanth 2014), a world which enables the player/reader to confront and interrogate how the Victorian milieu informs the narrative that Verne's novel tells.

A plea for scholarly ludic editions

Theorists of digital editing have spent so much time with their eyes fixed on the ideal or impossible (or the past) that they have over-looked the possible and the actual: videogame adaptations or ludic editions of literary texts. Game-making can be an editorial practice that produces a digital edition that has scholarly value, even if that

value is not currently recognised amongst digital humanists and digital scholarly editors. Ludic editions are being and will continue to be produced; the problem is that in many cases, the development of these editions is not being informed by the knowledge of scholars of textual editing. This is not a plea to abandon the conventional digital scholarly edition, but to expand the digital scholarly edition by exploring the computational potential that can be realised in a ludic edition. Given the increasingly dominant place computer games are assuming in cultural production globally, literary scholars cannot limit themselves to the study of games as cultural artefacts but need to explore how game design can be used for core activities in humanities scholarship. A theory and practice of the ludic edition is an obvious path with plenty of models to consider when considering how editorial practices can be extended using digital technology, practices that will take the scholarly digital edition beyond the book and into the interactive virtual spaces of the video game.

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