



## **Student Scholarly Identity and Multimodal Making**

### **with a Digital Anthology Project**

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#### **Overview: What the Digital Anthology Does**

The creation of the “Digital Anthology Project,” a rigorous literary research, writing, and web-based publishing assignment, was our answer to the challenge we set ourselves one summer when designing and teaching upper-level survey courses: one of us “Literatures in English to 1600” (Corey) and the other “Literatures in English, 1800-1900” (Miranda). Although separately teaching two very different periods, each with their own unique pedagogical challenges, we collaborated to design a large-scale assignment that could scaffold our two courses at the level of both structure and inquiry. At the level of structure, the assignment’s multiple steps and ongoing development would lend organization and skill progression to the syllabus. At the level of inquiry it would equip our students to learn the significant patterns, forms, events, and texts characterizing each course’s literary period; further, it would equip our students to learn how literary periods and other institutional categories are themselves epistemological constructions always negotiated between past and present and continually under scholarly interrogation and revision. To this pedagogical challenge we added another: we wanted to immerse our students in a process of research, production, and mediation that felt immediately relevant to their lives and simultaneously helped them appreciate that such practices as selecting, editing, framing, and

making always inform the practice of arranging literary texts in a cohesive cultural narrative or canon.

Our strategy to meet these two challenges hinged on having students create their own literary anthology. How better, we thought, to guide students through a period-based survey than to use as *both* the lens *and* object of study this important literary tool? Focusing on the anthology (and, in other variations on this project, the critical edition<sup>1</sup>) enabled us to make three pedagogical moves in our courses: to spotlight the collaborative, generative, and institutional work undertaken by scholars in the humanities, thereby moving students away from thinking of scholarship as primarily an exercise in solitary writing and research; second, to continually and even uncomfortably immerse students in the many fluid and interconnecting layers of context (historical, theoretical, etc.) informing a body of literature; and, third, to repeatedly guide students in honing the skills of a literature class: interpretation, research, and analytical writing. Using the anthology as both lens and object, we spent the semester with our students (largely English majors and minors) not only reading the literature of our respective periods but also analyzing and deconstructing the anthologies used to deliver and frame those texts as a period; we then asked students to work in groups (over roughly three-quarters of the semester) to plan, produce, and digitally publish their own anthology.

We hoped this project would lead to a resonant learning experience in our classrooms. Indeed, it did—performing well beyond our very high expectations. The project fostered thoughtful classroom discussions each week as students regularly and organically stretched their analysis to a meta-reflective level, addressing not only interpretive issues of the specific texts

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<sup>1</sup> In her courses on fiction and Transatlantic print culture, Miranda has assigned students to analyze critical editions published by companies such as Norton, Broadview, and Longman and then, in groups, to produce their own digital critical edition of a short story or novella. She has presented this assignment at pedagogy workshops hosted by the Dickens Universe (2010) and the British Women Writers Conference (2011).

under discussion but also moving to issues surrounding the text's production, circulation, and shifting relationship to other bodies of meaning, such as other texts and schools of thought. In addition to fruitful discussions, the project also inspired sophisticated student scholarship as students published beautiful digital productions integrated with strong claims about the period, well-written syntheses of dense material, and a variety of embedded media, including archival documents, pictures, and videos. The project inspired, moreover, enthusiastic reviews as students consistently articulated on course evaluations a sense of empowerment and educational ownership. While we expected this assignment would drive a rich classroom experience, something we had not expected was its pedagogical flexibility. The Digital Anthology has taken on a life of its own as both we and several colleagues (inside and outside our home institutions) have adapted it to a variety of other courses, including lower-level introductions to poetry and fiction and upper-level courses devoted to specific periods and topics, such as Romanticism, Transatlantic literature, early American epistolary culture, and nineteenth-century print culture.<sup>2</sup>

From our pilot semester as well as subsequent course variations, one of the most powerful things we have found is that this multimodal writing project reinvents the traditional role of "student writer." Students enter our classrooms expecting to write papers. And yes, they do write *quite a lot* through the course of this project. But, as scholarly editors, they learn to become nimbler and to think in more complex ways about what, why, and to whom they are writing. No longer are students responsible for generating and advancing a single interpretive thesis written for an abstract audience they cannot concretely identify. In other words, while students of the traditional research paper certainly understand that they are writing for an

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<sup>2</sup> As one example, see Emily Friedman's "Austen's Competition: Teaching the Nineteenth and Twenty-first Century Literary Marketplace" in *Romantic Circles*, Spring 2015.

“academic audience” theoretically interested in the issue, author, or period, in reality they often feel they’re writing into the void, for the benefit of only themselves and their teacher (and possibly classmates). As editors bringing a new digital edition on the market, students now write for a much more tangible public with whom they, as themselves daily consumers of online media, feel concretely engaged. And rather than a single argument, they must produce a variety of arguments synthesizing, organizing, and critically framing a broad terrain of text and body of ideas. All the core skills of a literature course—primary- and secondary-source research, thesis and claim generation, drafting, and revision—take on new life as students make sophisticated choices to meaningfully frame literary texts within larger historical, theoretical, and formal contexts and, thereby, grapple with the fraught practice of canon making (and breaking).

While we do not wish to supplant or critique the claim-driven interpretive research paper as a valuable pedagogical tool, we offer the Digital Anthology as a robust alternative. We have found this project immerses students in an ongoing, semester-long process of rigorous research, analysis, argumentation, drafting, and revision that fosters intellectual community. Students must undertake sustained research in the relevant archives and continually plan, draft, and revise if they are to bring narrative coherence to their literary selections through introductions, headnotes, footnotes, and appendices of supplemental material. As with traditional research papers, students spend the semester making and testing claims. Rather than claims about a specific author, text, or issue, however, students advance claims about the period or body of work: patterns they’ve identified, anomalies that disrupt or challenge received wisdom, specific historical documents or events that shed light, trouble, or inform our interpretation, choices in translation or selection, and so on. Furthermore, students must navigate between making broad claims and specific claims as they move between large categories, trends, or historical phenomena and individual

texts or authors. What this project additionally accomplishes, which traditional research papers typically do not, is ongoing practice in hands-on collaboration. Together, the 3-4 members of this “publishing house” or “editorial team” must define the logic guiding their anthology (is it thematic? chronological? etc.) and must continually interrogate the criteria guiding their selections (what gets in? what’s left out? why does one text stand in as a representative of others?). Given the project’s size and scope, students cannot “go it alone”; they must embrace and refine exactly the kind of teamwork skills that will be required of them as professionals after graduation: delegation, setting timelines, being responsible to others, and reviewing and responding productively to one another’s work. What’s more, by producing *digital* anthologies, students tackle timely questions about the future of “the book” as a medium and the rise of multimodal literacy, adding yet more urgency and agency to their role as student writers.

Such an ambitious project—teaching a thick set of research, reading, writing, interpretive, and collaborative skills—requires dedicated time in the syllabus and careful scaffolding of steps over the semester. Although the project is highly flexible and open to experimentation in a variety of courses, what we offer in the following two sections comes primarily from Corey’s course due to its focus on early English literature. Next, in the “Logistics” section, we offer an assignment sheet detailing the project’s learning goals and requirements as well as a loose set of lesson plans. Following that, we offer a “Results” section discussing examples of student work and student responses from both courses during the pilot semesters.

## **Logistics: How the Digital Anthology Works**

### **I. Assignment Sheet (for distribution to students)**

#### ***Project Description***

Over the course of this semester we will read a series of literary texts and historical documents spanning hundreds of years of literary history. The texts we're reading largely come to us through our course anthology. This anthology, like any collection of medieval texts, acts as a space that allows and demands texts and historical periods be structured, be constructed. In addition to addressing the literary content of anthologies, we will also think carefully about how editors' choices and publishers' priorities operate to both open and foreclose interpretative possibilities. By foregrounding particular issues or contexts and by making careful choices about what kinds of supplementary documents and materials to include, editors play an important role in shaping how readers engage with texts and historical periods. Now, finally, it's your turn to take the editorial reins! In "editorial teams" of 3 or 4 students, you will craft and digitally publish your own scholarly anthology.

### ***Learning Objectives***

The Digital Anthology Project requires that you identify, analyze, and practice activities of literary interpretation, periodization, and canon-formation. Specifically:

1. By placing yourself in the role of a scholarly editor responsible for producing a new anthology, this project positions you to approach the literature of early Britain not only as an individual reader but as an institutional organizer, *a meaning maker*. As such, you will learn to identify the common patterns, traits, and terminology as well as anomalies and events that characterize medieval and Early Modern English literature.
2. As the editor, you will move from identification to application as you use your knowledge of the period to evaluate a broad terrain of primary and secondary materials (representing both the period and modern scholarship), select and compile representative materials, and

then organize those materials into a coherent narrative framework for your anthology's reader.

3. By surveying a range of possible contexts for interpretation and, from these possibilities, making deliberate choices for not only your course peers but a wider internet public, this project challenges you to analyze the meaningful (and meaning making) relationship constantly negotiated between context, text, mediation, and interpretation, thereby exposing you to the wide variety of possible and productive contexts always competing for attention and representation within our institutional tools, such as anthologies and syllabi.
4. By requiring you to locate materials in the appropriate archives and, ultimately, to write significant paratextual material—including an introduction, headnotes, footnotes, and appendices—this project requires you to develop skills in scholarly research, synthesis, thesis generation and support, drafting, and revision.
5. Finally, by collaborating and co-writing in groups (as an “editorial team” or “publishing house”), this project guides you in practicing the teamwork and communication skills at the heart of intellectual community, a skill set necessary not only in the humanities and publishing industry but also in many of the fields and professions that you might pursue later on.

### ***Required Contents***

Your team's anthology must include the following components:

- **Cover:** An image and title that act as your reader's gateway into the anthology.
- **Jacket Blurb:** A short (150-200 word) description of the anthology's purpose and features, like those usually found on the back cover.

- **Scholarly Introduction:** A brief (1,000-1,500 word) detailed introduction that synthesizes what you take to be the most important and useful information pertaining to the focus, benefits, and perspective of your anthology.
- **Primary Texts:** Each student in the group is responsible for contributing 5 primary texts located by your own research methods using digital archives, such as the Internet Medieval Sourcebook, Luminarium, and ITER. (Be aware that some links on these sites may no longer function.) Primary texts may be excerpted or included whole; any decision not to excerpt a longer work should be explained either in the anthology's Introduction or in the Editor's Note. Each primary text must be accompanied by a short (250-300 words) introductory headnote.
- **Footnotes:** Each student will contribute at least 2-3 footnotes to each primary text. These may be definitions of significant and/or unfamiliar words (using the *OED* or *MED*), and/or they may be detailed explanations of the text's allusions to historical figures and events, geographical places, and other texts and authors.
- **Images:** Each student in the group will contribute at least 1 image. As a group you will need to decide how you want your images to function: as period illustration, historical context, or modern interpretation/representation. Each image should have a caption.
- **Translation of Middle English:** Each student will choose 25 lines of one of your primary texts that is in Middle English and translate the lines into modern English. Some possible texts to choose from would be *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, any part of the *Canterbury Tales*, or Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Love*. There are two options for this section: 1) you might do a scholarly, word-for-word, grammatically-correct translation that glosses words in the passage that are unfamiliar or ambiguous using the

*OED* or *MED*. Or, 2) you might do a creative “loose” translation of the passage. You may choose to imagine the excerpt as a song, rap, poem, political speech, commercial, e-mail, or any number of other modern forms of expression.

- **Appendices:** 3 or more appendices (1 per group member) devoted to contextual material. This material can range from historical documents (for example, extracts from letters written by or to the author, religious or government documents, treatises, maps, illustrations, source texts, etc.) and/or modern day material (for example, excerpts from key pieces of scholarship devoted to an author and/or text, adaptations, etc.). Finally, each appendix must include a headnote (500-600 words) synthesizing the terrain of this particular context and briefly situating and synthesizing the featured examples.

### *Supplementary to the Anthology*

- **Anthology Proposal:** By midterm, your group must determine the vision organizing your anthology’s structure (is it thematic? chronological? theoretical? etc.). You will write a brief (500-600 words) proposal to your “managing editor” (me, your professor) answering two questions: what is the objective of your anthology; how will it introduce students to the study of this period? You must also include a proposed timeline outlining major benchmark deadlines for research, drafting, and revision as well as a schedule of slated group meetings.
- **Editor’s Note:** Each editor will submit a separate document that includes: a Works Cited, an outline of his or her specific individual responsibilities within the edition, and a detailed explanation (1,500-3,000 words) of his or her editorial choices. For instance, if it was your job to assemble author letters, it should be clear that you read dozens, and you should explain as succinctly and concretely as possible why you chose to include these

particular examples (did they: demonstrate a pattern? include illuminating anomalies? etc.). Dedicate a moderate amount of space (250-300 words) in your note to discussing your Middle English translation; explain your text choice, glossing practices, and compare your translation to the one found in a scholarly anthology (e.g. Broadview, Norton, Oxford, Blackwell).

- **Group Work:** You should plan to meet with your group multiple times over the course of the semester following the outline you provided in the Anthology Proposal (see above). Starting in Week 4, every Friday will be dedicated as an Anthology Research Day or Workshop Day. These days are open for your group to meet or do independent research. Initially, you'll want to: discuss primary text choices and begin brainstorming possible key terms for footnoting; what types of documents you'd like to investigate for the appendices; where you might look for cover images, etc. Later, you'll want to reconvene and share the material you've begun to collect, perhaps each bringing in an idea for a cover image and then voting on which one you collectively think offers the best gateway to your anthology. Finally, you'll want to be clear and deliberate in the way you delegate tasks; make sure everyone has an equal share in both the gathering, writing, and editing required to produce your anthology.

## II. **Potential Lesson Plans** (written for instructors)

### *Lesson 1: Bringing Attention to Anthologies*

**Learning Goal:** For students to become conscious of anthologies as more than containers, to see them as a collection of choices which shape reader engagement.

**Activity:** Early in the semester bring into class several anthologies (Broadview, Norton, Garbaty, etc.); take several minutes to analyze components of the anthologies. Prompt students for an

initial discussion with something like: “For example, look at our course anthology, the Broadview: What do we notice about it? How big is it? What does the cover look like? How many texts are in it? What sorts of information does it have in it? How do these aspects of the anthology make the period look? What kind of period is it? We’re just told this is “Concise Volume A” and not given any dates unless we look at the texts that are included.”

Next, have students get into groups of 2-3. Have each group spend time examining another anthology, taking notes on how it compares & contrasts with the course anthology. Then switch anthologies and repeat. Ask students to report what they found in terms of similarities and differences. How do the other anthologies make the period look? What kind of period is it?

Questions about periodization and period representation might require further prompting to garner student responses. One might prompt students to note: dates of earliest and latest texts; whether and how many texts are written by or largely focus on women; weight given to “religious” or “secular” texts; presence or absence of Continental texts; inclusion, organization, and/or distribution of genres (e.g. romance, chronicle, lyric poetry, hagiography, etc.).

You may choose to introduce the digital anthology assignment at the beginning or end of this lesson, establishing the consideration of anthologies as a major course component and connecting students’ initial thoughts about issues of periodization and canon formation to a major course assignment.

### ***Lesson 2: Assemble Editorial Teams***

**Learning Goal:** For students to begin articulating their interests as scholars of Early English texts and to find like-minded classmates.

**Activity:** Briefly review project assignment. Then ask students to perform a quick free write: 5 minutes on what has drawn their attention so far in the course about this literature. Depending on

the directions taken in previous class discussions, students may note interests in the following: power structures; economy/exchange/trade; feminist concerns about the roles women play; premodern constructions of gender and/or race and/or disability; psychoanalytic attention to desires, anxieties, and pleasure; form and/or aesthetics; representations of space and place.

Provide students with a nametag sticker. Then, ask students to encapsulate in one word what they have just generated with their freewrite. Give students just a few minutes to consider and then write the word on the nametag.

Once all students have written down a word on their nametag, it's "mixer" time! Students should spend 10-15 minutes circulating around the room. In that time, students should look for others who have similar interests listed on their nametags. Students should look to create groups of 3-5 members. By next meeting have students submit formal group lists and proposed group topics. (One possibility is to have students list a couple of "finalist" topics which they narrow down by performing subsequent preliminary research.) The next class session may be dedicated to meeting individually with groups to establish clear lines of communication about the project process between instructor and groups as well as between group members. Subsequent to group assembly, instructors may require editorial groups to create a formal proposal as part of this process (see "Supplementary" section in assignment sheet above).

### ***Lesson 3: Research Day(s)***

**Learning Goal:** For students to better understand and utilize relevant, available research tools.

**Activity:** Provide a sizeable list of locations for primary and secondary texts. Using the university's library online resources, highlight a few databases or archives—say, EEBO and MLA International Bibliography one day, and ITER and JSTOR another day. Research days should allow students to make progress along several lines: choosing primary texts for the

anthology; criticism to help students write their introductions, head notes, and glosses; texts/objects to include as appendices.

Students may be working on a variety of editorial tasks, depending on how they have worked out a timeline with their group members or whether they have formally submitted a timeline to the instructor. Generally, students' research goals for these days will change from finding primary sources to searching for secondary sources; encourage students not to get stuck in that first stage. Instructors may require regular research reports from editorial groups—small-scale (100-150 word) and low-stakes summaries of what and how much the group has accomplished as well as what challenges or questions have emerged.

#### ***Lesson 4: Multimodal Workshop(s)***

**Learning Goal:** For students to practice using desktop software and/or online interface to publish the anthologies.

**Activity:** Given the multimodal nature of the project, provide opportunities for students to practice using the application(s) required to produce the anthology. This may take the form of brief workshops on: how to integrate text with video/images in MS Word or Google Docs; harnessing a learning management system's features—such as Canvas's "pages" function; how to layout pages using Adobe's InDesign application; composing in or uploading to online platforms like Wordpress, Blogger, Weebly, or Wix. The choice of workshop topic need not depend solely on instructor expertise. Hosting a guest workshop from an institutional teaching and learning center, media center, or digital humanities institute might be another option; moreover, surveying students for multimodal expertise and inviting a student-led workshop would also be a powerful option because it foregrounds student agency over the work of the course.

Use examples and practice activities that directly pertain to the work of producing the anthology project. That is, if embedding images, sound files, or videos is not a priority or a part of the assignment in your version, focus workshop topics on other areas, such as effectively using section breaks and style changes in a long document using MS Word or Adobe InDesign. Integrating the workshop with other current work in the course is also a possibility. For example, have students practice choosing and integrating an image with a text currently under discussion in your syllabus schedule. For another media-related example, have students practice embedding YouTube videos into a web page by searching for and using recorded readings or performances of texts under discussion. Students might, for instance, post recordings of two different performances of a Shakespeare play as part of a unit doing comparative work on performance and reception. If the instructor wanted to closely integrate the production of the anthology with the work of the course, such an assignment could easily evolve into an appendix.

## **Results: What the Digital Anthology Produced**

### **I. Student Work**

As you can see from the assignment sheet and suggested lesson plans, the Digital Anthology demands much of both students and teachers. Of teachers, the assignment asks for careful, extensive scaffolding and the dedication of class time both to having students practice the variety of writerly moves the anthology asks and to discussing with groups their evolving project plans. Our lesson plan sequence suggests this, and we would especially encourage teachers to flesh out that sequence by including moments of reflection and peer review. We found that having students do regular check-ins with their group (even 5 minutes at the end of class), writing mini-reflections, and meeting briefly with the teachers increases the quality not only of the final product but also the students' learning experience along the way. In particular,

building time into the syllabus for brief, targeted group meetings with the teachers allows students to more fully process, articulate, and practice the intellectual moves they are learning. At these meetings, pressing students on the issues and tensions surrounding their specific selections, terminology, criteria, and organization, helps them more explicitly make the pedagogical move from passive identification and comprehension to active application. As much as the quality of the final product matters and as much as students find producing the anthology a rewarding experience, emphasizing process over product foregrounds the assignment's significant meta-cognitive dimensions. The more students see the assignment as being about making important *choices* and about *them* being the ones making those choices, the better. Indeed, as one student put it: "It was interesting to consider why works are important, how they fit together, and what context they were produced in (literary, social, + historical)."

This project also demands a great deal of teachers in terms of its technology component. Based on our experience, we would encourage teachers to resist assuming responsibility as "tech support." Indeed, we would suggest that teachers embrace—from the beginning of the course—that technology will make things messy and that messy is not only okay but, in fact, a terrific engine for learning. As the world becomes increasingly dependent on digital media, the ability to proactively and fearlessly teach oneself new tools becomes ever more valuable. We found that shaping our students' expectations by insisting "we're all in this together" increased the spirit of collaboration; it deemphasized our role as authority figures and empowered the students to experiment with tools and teach one another what they learned. Furthermore, as we suggest in the lesson plans, partnering with experts on campus—such as media specialists and technology support—can relieve some of the digital burden and have the added benefit of helping students see the course as an integrated part of their larger educational experience. In our pilot courses

and since, we've learned not to fear technological questions or roadblocks but to embrace them as collaborative challenges and to frame them to our students as an opportunity for building a valuable professional skillset in problem solving and digital IQ.

Beyond the technology, the anthology demands a great deal of students in terms of planning, meeting inside and outside class, and undertaking individual research and writing. Despite the project's heft, students regularly take the anthology's challenge in stride. In Corey's class, which had 29 students organized into 7 groups, editorial teams produced anthologies that were regularly 150 pages or more; this included both the primary and secondary texts the students gathered as well as the paratextual materials they wrote for the introduction, headnotes, footnotes, and appendices. We pushed or critiqued the editorial teams on some of their choices—why, for instance, one chose a certain image for their cover that seemed slightly discordant with their explicitly stated vision for the anthology. Because we chose to allow teams to make their own technology choices, we saw a variety of formats and functions. Students made productive use of digital affordances: hyperlinked footnotes that made pursuing additional information easy without being intrusive; hyperlinked geographical references that took readers to Google maps so that they might appreciate the very real terrain under discussion in the text; embedded media that allowed readers to see a history of creative illustrations, adaptations, spoofs, and satires; and interfaces that invited a modern reader to skim, surf, and closely read, depending on their interest. Certainly, we saw a spectrum of finished products from the visually stunning (in terms of images, colors, links, and functions) to the more basic (engaging and functional, if not particularly a feat of digital wizardry); but across our two sections we didn't see a single obviously subpar anthology.

Beyond the “material” level of the final product, the intellectual work and the writing were also impressive, consistently reaching or exceeding the caliber we would expect to find in a set of research papers written by English majors and minors (mostly juniors and seniors) in an upper-level course. While, certainly, we were interested in analyzing the choices our students made in terms of what to include in their anthology, we cared more about the way they articulated those choices and framed them with research from appropriate sources. As hoped, what we found was a consistently explicit effort in the anthologies’ introductions to formulate the relationship between editorial choice and educational/institutional purpose. This particularly found expression in relationship to the anthology’s reader—how they (the editors) defined their audience and explained their strategy for engaging that audience in the challenges, patterns, and unexpected pleasures of premodern literature.

One editorial group, who produced an anthology titled, “Anthology of Monsters: Men and Beasts in Premodern Literature,” defined their project as one capable of appealing not only to undergraduate readers new to the period but a much broader audience. They argued their anthology “would offer underappreciated themes to very well-read scholars while still utilizing the standard works for readers who might be newer to the period and have yet to uncover its allure.” Like all anthology editors, this group wants to identify which texts constitute the “standards” adequately representative of the period for a newcomer. At the same time the group sought an organizing logic connecting those standards and placing them in a broader theoretical context that will entice new readers and equally reward the “well-read scholars.”

In striking this difficult balance, these editors do two things simultaneously that we, as their teachers, found pedagogically productive. First and foremost, we see them working here (and throughout the anthology) not only to determine what constitutes a canonical “standard”

(which, for them, included texts such as *Beowulf*, *Marvels of the East*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and *The Tempest*), but—more importantly—to organize those standards in a way that features a meaningful relationship beyond what chronology offers. Second, we see them identifying a topic that provides multiple levels of readerly and scholarly access. At one level, monsters and monstrosity, they insist, entice young, modern readers to “uncover [this period’s] allure.” In other words, monsters work as a marketing tool, hooking readers into the as yet undiscovered pleasure of this period’s “underappreciated themes.” But monsters have depth, too, lending themselves to the rigors of scholarly analysis. The fluid, “interdependent relationship” between monster and victim, they argue, “is well exemplified” by both “the oldest text in this collection, *Beowulf*, and... the newest text *The Tempest*,” which “serves to remind us how integral monsters were and are to human society.”

Building this argument throughout the introduction and headnotes, these editors address (to varying degrees of explicitness) quite complex issues driving recent scholarship in medieval studies, including: race and disability, the solidification of the presence of cultural studies, and the posthuman turn. For instance, supporting and integrating their broad claim about the monster’s timeless representational appeal, the editors offer a narrower claim about the figure of the wolf in their headnote to *The Master of the Game* (which they excerpt, including only Chapter 7). The monster or beast, they argue, destabilizes categories used to solidify and distinguish the human; the monstrous beast “is terrifying because it is neither animal nor human, but a combination.” The editors frame the wolf and its representative example in *The Master of the Game* as a compelling example of this categorical fragility. This text, they argue, represents the wolf, first, as something clearly aligned with but separate from the human, man’s companion in hunting. Later, however, the text turns to the lore of “wolf bites,” “wer-wolves,” and the

appetite of this “intelligent carnivorous beast” for “‘evil’ vermin,” which reconfigures both wolf and human as mirror figures, each “capable of love and malice” and variously occupying the role of “prey” and “hunter.” Here and throughout, the editors develop their introduction’s interest in regaling the new reader with thrilling texts while also rewarding the “well-read scholar” with selections that lend themselves to ongoing scholarly inquiry. Making the explicit connection not only between novice reader and scholar but also between historical material and modern theoretical concerns, the editors argue:

To further facilitate the interest and investment of time which readers will lend to this work, many of the texts within focus on areas of interest which are still fascinating to a modern audience. There are themes of zoology, sociology, and psychology; of justice and mercy; of hunting and being hunted. This anthology is populated by stories spanning mythological and actual timelines, themes of bigotry and discrimination, fascinating accounts of strange sights told by returning travelers, horrific descriptions of crime and plague, and political morality tales.

These editors illuminate the monster’s representational power to express complex phenomena and connect their theme—rightly, we would say—to multifarious genres, topics, and disciplines in their attempt to articulate its compelling nature to a diverse audience.

Like the editors of the “Anthology of Monsters,” editorial teams tended to choose a thematic structure for their project. The main difference we saw in the quality of the anthologies pertained to the level to which the writers explicitly mounted and fully developed their claims. Some anthologies showcased arguments more intuitively than deliberately; in other words, the momentum of the argument created by their choices sometimes led the students more than the

students led the argument. One team, for example, who titled their project, “Anthology of Premodern Supernatural Literature,” were interested in a critical history of texts across what they call the “spectrum” of religious, mystical, spiritual, or supernatural literature. Much like the monster anthology group, the supernatural literature group connected their theme to compelling and longstanding discussions in medieval studies. Key to the way they framed their project was their sense that “in the premodern period, assertions to supernatural power were often exploited for gaining and maintaining superiority.” Through their sections, the editors sought to demonstrate, for example, the ways in which women deployed religious discourse as a means of gaining a modicum of power—whether that be social capital or institutional influence. The editors chose texts that ranged from a translation of the Old English poem *Judith* to Julian of Norwich’s *Revelations*; later texts included the section on religion in Thomas More’s *Utopia* as well as Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. In their introduction, the editors write:

The only way to escape the traditional female roles was to take on a persona of supernatural power, should it be as an anchoress or a sorceress. These positions of mystical or religious power allowed for them to garner and preserve authority outside of their usual stations. However, their femininity in association with the occult caused them to appear as untrustworthy and beguiling.

This group struggled to articulate the important shades of meaning between labeling a text or tradition “religious,” “mystical,” “spiritual,” or “supernatural.” This had the effect of eliding the differences between (as seen above) “pagan” magic and a Christian religious discipline; both fell equally under a common rubric of “the occult.” Moreover, the introduction leaves only implicit a claim that we would have liked to see more explicitly developed and supported: that premodern literature moved from being “religious” in nature during the Middle Ages to being more

“spiritual” or “supernatural” in nature in Early Modernity. However messily these categories function in the anthology’s introduction, the argument and editorial apparatus attend thoughtfully to feminist questions about women’s spiritual authority. In their headnote to *Judith*, for example, the editors parse the text’s portrayal of its titular heroine variously as seductive, righteous, and courageous in the pursuit of religious convictions. The editors’ attention to issues of spiritual authority across a wide variety of texts, moreover, pushed against the conventional wisdom that says the Middle Ages were more superstitious than a rational Early Modernity. In disturbing this too-easy superstitious/rational divide between the medieval and the modern, this team of editors directly engage thorny questions about periodization.

While all of the anthologies’ larger arguments (whether more or less explicitly mounted, more or less thoroughly developed) met the learning objectives we devised for the course and demonstrated a high quality of work, there were—to be sure—some less successful choices along the way. Even those, however, illuminated productive tensions that we leveraged during class discussions and individual group meetings to drive additional debate and analysis. The “Supernatural Literature” anthology, for instance, subtitled theirs a “Pocket-Sized Edition.” While the subtitle suggests highly excerpted texts with a condensed editorial apparatus, this anthology was the longest in the class coming in at 589 pages. This length was afforded by the digital nature of the anthologies; in other words, these editors could include texts wholesale, and they did. In making the choice to include the entirety of several texts the editors were striving to make their anthology “complete.” This completeness, however, jarred with their simultaneous desire to make the anthology handy and accessible. It begged the question: what does “pocket size” mean in a digital age? Considering that the third edition of the *Broadview Anthology of British Literature: Concise Volume A* comes in at “concise” 1888 pages, one can easily see that

the “Supernatural Literature” editorial group was trying to find a way to refashion established print publishing language for a digital context.

As we’ve said, the caliber of work across the anthologies in both sections that semester was quite high. The average group score in Corey’s class was 88.5% (B+) and in Miranda’s class was 90.1% (A-). The anthology constituted 40% of students’ grades in both courses, so success on the anthology often translated into high course grades. We should note that, while there are many ways to evaluate this project, we chose in our courses to balance an assessment of the group’s final product (the anthology) with an assessment of individual contributions, giving more weight to the latter. We asked each student to produce an individual “Editor’s Note,” submitted separately. For each student’s grade, the quality of the anthology as a whole product accounted for 40% of the project grade, while the student’s individual contributions, as detailed in their Editor’s Note, accounted for 60% of the project grade. Our division clearly weighed individual contribution more than group product in order to emphasize process over product and to reflect the ways in which the assignment has crucial meta-cognitive dimensions. The “Editor’s Note” provides a moment for students both to clearly iterate their specific contributions to the anthology and to view themselves as participants in the discipline of literary scholarship. Other instructors may, of course, weight these components differently, or use other means of assessment.

## **II. Student Responses**

Our students responded to this ambitious project with unequivocal enthusiasm. In an anonymous survey completed at the end of the semester, students were asked to rank various tools and elements of the courses (quizzes, assignments, lectures, etc.) on a scale from 5 to 1, with 5 being the most educationally useful in terms of learning about the literary period. The

verdict was clear: by an overwhelming majority, students found the digital anthology the most educationally useful tool for meeting the course objectives. Over 66% of the students in each course gave the project a perfect score of 5; moreover, 84% in Corey's course and 92% in Miranda's course scored the assignment as either a 4 or 5. Most tellingly, we had few outliers; across both courses, very few students ranked the project lower than a 4. In a total of 56 students organized into 13 teams across the two courses, only 1 student ranked the project a 3, 3 students ranked it a 2, and 1 student ranked it a 1. This survey's data—gathered on the last day of class and completed anonymously alongside the “official” departmental course evaluations—confirmed what we had already gleaned anecdotally: that with few exceptions, our students enthusiastically embraced the challenge of the digital anthology and credited it with adding a greater dimension to their knowledge of the period and to their classroom experience.

The official course evaluations bore this out as well. We saw a repeated strain of exuberant vocabulary describing achievement, agency, pride, and a profound sense of learning. One student called the project “a wonderful exercise in critical thinking.” Another said the project provided an “interesting focus” with “different stakes,” adding: “I loved the final project. [I'm] so proud of what I created.” Another student admitted, “as much as I dislike group work, this project taught me a lot about the time period and helped me to better understand the literature.” Indeed, we saw several comments directly addressing the quality and process of learning. In response to a question about the “most rewarding” aspect of the course, a student listed “knowledge gained in research methods, particularly primary materials and criticism.” Similarly, another student appreciated the “ability to survey lots of material and to do it well, not reductively.” One student said the project “inspired me to think more deeply about what I'm reading just by considering the

context surrounding the work and its critical reception.” Articulating precisely the focus on process over product that we hoped to achieve, another student explained:

I think the process of creating the anthology was the most rewarding part of the course for me. It allowed me to use all the knowledge I had learned in this class and put it into producing this final work. I was able to learn, in a sort of “hands on” way, more about what we had been doing through the semester.

Likewise, we saw several comments echoing this contrast, including a student who insisted: “this project was so much more rewarding than the usual final paper we’re accustomed to doing. I appreciated talking about the period in a way where everything connected.”

To be sure, students registered the difficulties of the project, too. A common refrain in the student feedback was the challenging scope of the project, including its “heavy reading load.” As one student put it, the anthology was the most challenging part of the course in terms of its “size, scope, and collaboration.” Another insisted, “sometimes the amount of work was overwhelming compared to the other time period courses.” A third put it more simply: “The digital anthology [was challenging] because it was huge.” We consistently saw comments such as “it was a lot of work, a lot of research” and “the reading load for this class was *too* heavy.”

We also saw students register the way the project unsettled them and pushed them outside their comfort zone. One student eloquently noted that the anthology was the “most challenging aspect of the course” because “it was uncharted water, an entirely new territory for me, and I was terrified I couldn’t do it.” But the challenge, while daunting, was also invigorating, as this same student wrote: “I really amazed myself at what I learned and how it could be utilized.”

Another student expressed a similar feeling of discomfort, saying: it was “almost as if we were doing our own teaching and learning.” Such a comment speaks to the ways in which the digital

anthology project requires students to pursue issues, questions, texts, interpretations, and translations of their own choice and making. This can be uncomfortable to some students, but most of them described it as a productive discomfort. This same student listed the anthology under the “most rewarding” question, declaring: “our group made something really cool, informative, and unusual.” Finally, although the anthology was a group endeavor, many students also expressed finding a great deal of individual reward. One student, in speaking to the appendix she designed, compiled, organized, and wrote for her group’s anthology, insisted this project offered “a chance for me to research an individual aspect of the period and its role in literature that really interested me.” Another student declared: “my expectations of this course were exceeded, both for my knowledge of the period and the level of excitement I now have for its literature.”

Throughout the evaluations, we saw an overwhelming majority articulate pride and pleasure in tackling such a considerable scholarly project and ambitious course syllabus; and we feel confident that this enthusiasm for the project informed their response to the course at large. In Corey’s course, for instance, 81% of students responded on the evaluation that they “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that they “would rate the quality of this course as outstanding”; and 86% of students “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that they “learned a lot in this class.” Likewise, in Miranda’s course 93% of students “strongly agreed” or “agreed” they “would rate the quality of this course as outstanding”; and 81% of students “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that they “learned a lot in this class.”

## **Conclusion**

As we have said, the digital anthology demands much of both students and teachers. And we have been asked by colleagues: *is it worth it? to you and to them?* Our unqualified answer is:

yes. From our own experience and from talking to colleagues who've experimented with the project in their courses, we have found the project consistently imbues the course—almost from the start—with a more reflective, meta-critical level of analysis and discussion, which rewards everyone in the classroom, teachers and students alike. This project not only gives the syllabus a clear, progressive scaffold, it gives the students an intellectual one too, allowing them to begin more quickly and naturally maneuver around the literary texts of the period. Because they eventually start coming to the weekly readings not only with the wary eye of a student but with the critical eye of an editor (asking, why is this text placed here? What does it function to represent? Why does the editorial apparatus package it in this way?), they quickly begin assuming more agency and authority in the interpretive process. We have found this cuts down on students looking to us, their teachers, for “the answer” or the text’s “meaning” because, starting early in the semester, they recognize that meaning is always under negotiation at a series of trans-historic levels.

Although producing, teaching, and grading these anthologies requires a great deal of work, we can say that no assignment we've designed or taught does this much pedagogical work for a course, lending itself to such rich discussions and tight connections between course content and course structure. Through its various iterations, we've seen that this assignment brings literature of remote periods within a contemporary frame of reference that electrifies students, pushes them to stretch their intellectual boundaries, and makes visible to them in timely, tangible ways the work of humanities scholarship and of the digital humanities.

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<https://once-and-future-classroom.org/student-scholarly-identity-and-multimodal-making-with-a-digital-anthology-project/>

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