
Frozen Social Relations Editing Dickinson and Time for a Thaw: Can the Colonial Become Postcolonial?

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Abstract

At a time when postcolonial, feminist, critical race, sexuality, queer, and class critical inquiries have had such a profound effect (and for decades) in the humanities, the configurations of mainstream, major official editions often appear to be framed by 1950s politics of exclusion and occlusion that diversity-embracing scholars and theorists have worked so long to transform, so much so that one emerging feminist editor imagines that queer editorial worlds must be built in the "digital margins." What are the consequences of such frozen social orders when they are made to seem objective features of intellectual life in the editing of Emily Dickinson? Besides identifying consequences of those frozen social orders, this paper begins to offer some answers for transforming editorial practices so that innovations are sociological and not only technical. Critical observations and innovative suggestions are grounded in critical examples from the valuable but limited Harvard University Press Emily Dickinson Archive (EDA; 2013 to the present) and Emily Dickinson's Poems As She Preserved Them (2016). Currently the EDA takes as its foundational texts Harvard's own variorum of Dickinson poems, features no editorial innovation and little innovation as a digital archive. Similarly, EDPASPT appears sometimes to take Dickinson's manuscripts as base text and in other instances relies on R.W. Franklin's interpretations. Examples are used to recommend ways in which methods generated by feminist criticism and theory, critical race studies, sexuality studies and queer theory, and class studies can advance and otherwise improve the work of scholarly editing, information studies, library science, humanities computing, feminist and queer scholarly praxes. The frozen social relations of old orders can and should be thawed in order to enable real sociological innovations, new kinds of synergies for knowledge production.

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