

## Joanna Baillie's *Witchcraft*: from Hypermedia Edition to Resonant Responses

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This paper will report on the first year of a 3-year grant funded by the *Fonds québécois de la recherche sur la société et la culture* led by playwright Patrick Leroux (overseeing the creative component) and Michael Eberle-Sinatra (overseeing the academic component). The specific nature of this group project is nestled in the promising dialogue to be established between Romantic literature scholars, a theatre practitioner, and a scholar preoccupied with the pedagogy of Romantic drama using hypermedia as a template and an engaging interface.

When artists teach, they never quite relinquish their initial creative impulse. Historical works, while being taught for their intrinsic value and larger pertinence within a literary context, nevertheless solicit a resonant response. Classroom exercises in both academic and creative courses suggest that many students engage in a similar empathic manner when allowed to prod, question, and interact actively with a studied text.

The “creative” component of this research-creation project with strong pedagogical intent is precisely linked to an artistic response to the source text, Joanna Baillie's *Witchcraft*. In addition to the edited text, its scholarly annotations and commentary, and the filmed Finborough production of the play, we will create workshop situations with actors and students in which the play will be explored in rehearsal prompting us to investigate other manners of staging the work and illustrating,

through filmed documentation, the *process of reading a text for performance*. Short video presentations of key creative and interpretive issues will be edited for inclusion in the hypermedia presentation. The actual process, whether filmed or not, will allow the actors and creative faculty to fully immerse themselves in Baillie's world and work in order to fuel their resonant responses to them.

This second creative component, the *resonant response*, will take the form of short theatrical pieces conceived for film. The nuance is essential as the pieces will not be short cinematic films but rather short-filmed theatrical pieces. The emphasis on speech, dramatic action, and relationship to a defined theatrical space will differentiate these pieces from more intimate, image-based cinematic pieces. The resonant responses could be as short as two minutes or as long as ten minutes, in order to fully explore very precise formal issues (a character's speech, the subtext in a given dialogue, what we couldn't stage during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century but feel we could now). These creative pieces will be developed with Theatre, Creative Writing, and English literature students and faculty.

Existing TEI guidelines for scholarly encoding do not account for the unique relationship between a play script and performance practice and history. Scholarly encoding typically views the structures of texts in relation to the protocols that guide how readers interpret documents. But dramatic scripts require different kinds of reading and, thus, different kinds of encoding. Performance-informed inquiry into play texts depends on a reader's ability to think about the range of possibilities—both historically distant and contemporary—for theatricalization of a line of dialogue, a bit of physical action, or a visual space.

Additional historical materials on the theatre and culture of Baillie's era will be provided by team members. For our hypermedia resource to organize multi-media materials in ways that will help students in literature classes to use the hypermedia edition of the play, we will need to develop innovative customizations of TEI encoding guidelines. Discovering how best to support a student reader's work with a historically unfamiliar dramatic work provides an important test case for existing guidelines for XML encoding of drama.

This project will take an innovative approach in several senses. It will use hypermedia to try to solve a classroom problem created by plays with little performance history or connection to familiar theatrical styles. It will also test the limitations of the TEI scholarly encoding guidelines by exploring how, in the case of play scripts, building hypermedia resources requires creative, user-oriented strategies of encoding. The research-creation program will illustrate how contemporary artists can engage with historical works, while shedding light onto the theatrical creative process. Finally, our *Resonant Response to Joanna Baillie's Drama* will combine scholarly research on Romantic drama, practice-driven analysis, the creation of new work, and hypermedia expertise.

This particular research-creation program is singular and innovative in its combination of academic close reading, dramaturgical analysis, dramatic writing and theatrical performance, filmed theatre, and a resolutely pedagogical preoccupation with a full and thorough exploration of the possibilities of hypermedia edition.

In addition to creating a prototype hypermedia edition, the project seeks to find out:

- what value performance annotations can add to a teacher's work with students on a seldom-performed play;
- how the Text Encoding Initiative's (TEI) scholarly encoding guidelines can best be customized to design hypermedia play editions;
- how the process of collaboration among faculty and students in humanities and communications disciplines can enrich understanding of technology's interaction with interpretation.