A Nordic Tradition for Digital Scholarly Editions?

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Abstract

Printed books are finished products once published. Digital editions, on the other hand, may have an eternal life as updateable items, at least as archives. Since the work on digital editions started in the different Nordic countries more than 20 years ago, a consensus or convergence of practice seems to have grown in the planning and development of digital scholarly editions in the Nordic countries (here defined as Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden; for Finnish editions, especially those based on material written in Swedish) (Dahlström and Ore 2013). Whereas it is possible to find some examples of similar developments in other countries or continents, it seems that there are remarkable similarities between the Nordic countries. In this paper I want to discuss what factors have contributed to this situation, and to illustrate them by presenting some fairly recent digital editions from Nordic countries.

1. Introduction

When a traditional printed book is published, the author or editor has finished her task, and can go on to another project. Some projects that result in digital editions have also worked that way: the funding is there up until the work is published and then it is let loose to take care of itself. Similar things may happen to digital editions: the production is based on some kind of funding, and once the digital editions have been launched, the funding ends. If we look at a digital edition as something more similar to an archive than to a printed book on paper, we also see the need for an ongoing infrastructure that can guarantee that the edition will exist and be available in the foreseeable future. If we look at one of the first—probably the first—large-scale digital edition projects in Norway, the Bergen Electronic Edition of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s Nachlass (BEE), we see both features similar to a traditional book edition and of an archive. The BEE was published in collaboration with the

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Oxford University Press (OUP) on a set of CD-ROMs around the year 2000\(^1\) and the system used for search and display of the texts is based on the technology available for certain computer systems at that time. This publication was generated from an archive of encoded text files and a collection of digital images (facsimiles), and the archive is maintained at the University of Bergen, Norway.\(^2\)

Since 1995, the community working on Nordic Textual Scholarship has had a formal network with (now) biannual conferences and special workshops.\(^3\) There is much interaction within this community and many of the participants are involved in projects in more than one country. Among the editions mentioned in this paper are:

- The Bergen Electronic Edition of Wittgenstein’s Nachlass (CD OUP 2000; Wittgenstein Archive at the Univ. of Bergen, Norway (WAB))
- Søren Kierkegaard’s Writings (paper 2013; digital edition at Royal Library, Denmark)
- Henrik Ibsen’s Writings (paper 2012; digital edition at the Univ. of Oslo, Norway)
- Edward Munch’s Writings (eMunch still being published at the Munch Museum, Norway)
- Ludvig Holberg (digital edition under construction, Royal Library, Denmark/University Library in Bergen, Norway)
- Selma Lagerlöf (digital edition under construction at special website; the digital editions archived at Litteraturbanken, Sweden)
- Zakarias Topelius’s Writings (digital edition under construction at special website)
- Grundtvig’s Writings (digital edition under construction; the digital Grundtvig Archive at the National Library, University of Aarhus, Denmark)

And some of the larger archives for literary scholarly and often critical editions are:

- Litteraturbanken (separate funding, hosted at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Holds texts in Swedish by Swedish and Finnish writers)
- Arkiv for dansk litteratur at DSL (Society for Danish Language and Literature)

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• bokselskap.no, linked with NSL (Society for Norwegian Language and Literature), hosted at the National Library, separate funding

2. Digital Nordic Editions

The editions still in development or finished within the last five years span texts written within a time period from the early eighteenth century up until recent times—and if work on medieval texts is included, the start of the time span goes even further back. One edition which was published thirteen years ago, the Bergen Electronic Edition of Wittgenstein’s Nachlass mentioned above, also plays its part here through its influence on the ongoing projects. The texts include both published literature and unpublished private writing. One special case is the written works of the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, who did not publish his texts but left a large Nachlass.

The editions listed above have over time come to use much of the same basic technology. For instance, although the BEE used its own system for text encoding, MECS (Huitfeldt 1995), as did the edition of the complete works of Kierkegaard, the proprietary encoding was later translated into XML and is moving or has been moved into TEI-based encoding. Since the project for Henrik Ibsen’s Writings (HIW) started, TEI has been the preferred encoding system. HIW was started in 1998 and so used SGML/TEI for its first few years, but this was converted to TEI XML with the introduction of TEI P4. All the Nordic edition projects that have started after those mentioned above have been based on TEI XML.

A digital edition is not—or not only—classified by the text encoding that is used. Almost all the Nordic digital editions are being developed as archives of digital data where the edition itself is only one of several possible views into the complete archive. The following elements are usually included, at least in the archive: images (facsimiles of manuscripts and/or printed editions), encoded transcriptions of manuscripts and/or printed editions, new editions of the texts, usually stored as encoded text, and possibly facsimiles of a new printed edition and secondary data of various kinds.

**Figure 1.** Model of a digital edition/archive
3. Archiving the Edition

But what happens after a digital edition has been published? While the projects listed so far have been digitally created editions, there has also been a Nordic trend towards establishing national archives of digitally available texts, whether they are published as images of text (PDF and other facsimiles) or they display text produced from encoded text files. One of the possible Nordic twists here is that text archives are created and maintained at a national level rather than a regional or purely institutional one. And for all of them the published edition is not the formal end of the project: the long-term conservation of the archive is a built-in part of the project. This usually means that the digital archive is stored at a national institution such as a national library or a university (universities are mostly government-financed institutions in the Nordic countries), although there are exceptions such as Edvard Munch’s writings where the digital archive is stored at the Munch Museum.

Two factors seem to be converging in the development and maintenance of digital editions in the Nordic countries: a) certain large editorial projects, which may have national or other funding, develop complete editions of selected authors and build up complex archives of text and images, while b) at a national level there are institutions which provide long-term archives for digital editions, whether they are text editions or facsimile editions. On an international level the impression is that institutions like national libraries or the Library of Congress mainly have facsimile (image) archives, often containing newspapers.

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rather than literary works, and seldom holding scholarly/critical editions. Some examples are:

- Library of Congress (especially newspapers)\(^6\)
- National Library of New Zealand (newspapers)\(^7\)
- Bibliothèque national de France (manuscripts, facsimiles)\(^8\)
- National Library of Norway (includes the traditional option also found in the examples above: facsimiles of printed books and manuscripts)\(^9\)

4. Plans and status for some editions/archives

Earlier in this paper the Bergen Electronic Edition of Wittgenstein’s *Nachlass* was given as an example of an editorial project where the results are stored in an archive at a national institution (WAB, the Wittgenstein Archive at the University of Bergen, Norway). Another large project that also has influenced other Nordic digital editions is Søren Kierkegaard’s Writings (SKS, Søren Kierkegaard’s Skrifter).\(^10\) This project was located at the University

of Copenhagen in the editorial phase, and now the archive is maintained at the Royal Library in Copenhagen.

The Norwegian project for Henrik Ibsen’s Writings (HIW) was strongly influenced by the work done in SKS, with at least one member of SKS team being a member of the advisory board for HIW. In addition, for its first years the HIW had one member of the editorial group who had worked on the Wittgenstein edition in Bergen. Some years before work on HIW started, a digital text archive based on an earlier critical edition of Ibsen’s dramas and poems was built at the University of Bergen. The text files from this archive were given to the HIW and were edited to be used as base texts for this new edition. Independently of these two projects, a separate project constructed a facsimile archive of Ibsen’s manuscripts and letters. Most of the manuscripts and letters are stored at the Royal Library in Copenhagen, Denmark, and at the National Library of Norway. This facsimile archive has been used by the editors for the new critical edition; in addition, the facsimiles are linked to the new edited texts and so are available as part of the new edition. This is an example of collaboration and exchange not only of knowledge but also of data between Nordic projects.

As the digital Ibsen edition nears its conclusion—which includes an archive stored at the University of Oslo—experience and knowhow from this project is being used in other projects. One of these is eMunch: the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch left behind a large number of manuscripts and letters; which are now published in a digital edition with an

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13 Manuskriptprosjektet [Manuscripts Project], Center for Ibsen Studies, last updated May 18, 2000, http://www.dokpro.uio.no/litteratur/ibsen/ms/indexe.html.
archive stored at the Munch Museum (one of the museums owned by the city of Oslo). Experience from the Ibsen edition is also involved in the national archive for critical digital editions called boksekskap.no which is located at the National Library of Norway and was first established by the Norwegian Literature and Language Association (Det norske språk- og litteraturselskap). A number of the texts published here have used digital texts from Dokumentasjonsprosjektet at the University of Oslo as base texts.

Danish and Norwegian literature have a long common history, and people with experience from the Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Ibsen editions are also participating in the new digital edition of Ludvig Holberg’s works. The partners in this project include the Royal Library in Copenhagen (Denmark) and the University of Bergen (Norway); the University of Bergen will maintain the archive produced in the project.

Two other Nordic countries with a common literary history are Sweden and Finland. Although literature written in Swedish in Finland is published by Finnish institutions and literature from Sweden by Swedish institutions, Litteraturbanken at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, acts as a repository for digital critical editions in Swedish from both countries. One project that both plans to establish its own digital web publication and will deposit the editions in Litteraturbanken is the project editing the works by the Nobel Prize

winner Selma Lagerlöf. And even without as close a linguistic connection, both Danish and Norwegian projects are influenced by ideas from the two other countries. One example here is the design used for synoptic display of variant texts used in Zacharias Topelius’s Writings (Finland) which has inspired both the digital edition of Ibsen’s works and the Danish digital edition of Søren Grundtvig’s works. For Grundtvig’s works, the University of Aarhus, Denmark, will be responsible for the archive. Similar to Litteraturbanken in Sweden and bokselskap.no in Norway, there is also a national literary archive apart from those housed at libraries and universities: Arkivet for Dansk Literatur run by Det danske sprog- og litteraturselskab.

5. Conclusion

From the examples given above, some features common to the Nordic digital edition projects can be observed: (1) The editions are team-based and there is exchange of information and data between projects and countries. (2) Planning for long-term archiving is an integral part of the edition/publication project. (3) Digital archives/editions are deposited within national organizations/institutions or institutions of a similar stability.

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18 Zacharias Topelius Skrifter, accessed March 7, 2014, http://www.topelius.fi/index.php?p=texts&bookId=1#itemId=1_1&columns=[[ti],-1],[lt],-1],[va],0]]


References
