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Stefan George Digital: Exploring Typography In A Digital Scholarly Edition

1 Introduction

The digital scholarly edition *Stefan George Digital* (StGD) is, as its name implies, dedicated to the oeuvre of the German author Stefan George (1868-1933).¹ As part of my PhD thesis, StGD is concerned with the role and application of typography within the printed collections of George's poetry and the formal canon, and development of the so-called *Stefan-George-typeface* (*St-G-typeface*). To capture typographical information within the digital edition, I have tested two approaches that this short paper will discuss: the application of a TEI-based model and the development and the integration of an ontology.

2 Subject matter

More than any other poet in modern German literature, Stefan George (1868–1933) engaged with writing – particularly typography² – in exceptional ways. From 1897 on, he almost completely abandoned his cursive handwriting, using instead highly stylized block letters. From 1904 on, this individual book hand was transferred into metal:³ the third edition of *Das Jahr der Seele* (*The Year of the Soul*) was the first volume printed in the so called *St-G-typeface*, a Sans-Serif typeface which emerged when the German dispute between Serif and Black Letter typefaces was in full swing. Accordingly, St-G forms a third, alternative typeface, strongly inspired by modern Sans-Serif typefaces such as the Akzidenz-Grotesk of the Berthold foundry. Furthermore, St-G includes letter shapes of

¹ The digital edition Stefan George Digital is developed in the context of a DiXiT (Digital Scholarly Editions Initial Training Network) fellowship, funded under Marie Curie Actions within the European Commission's 7th Framework Program.

² Although the term typography includes both the micro- and macro-design of a print (and both are equally important when engaging with George's work), this paper will focus solely on the level of micro-typography, by which I mean the level of the choice, design, and arrangement of types.

³ It is still unclear who designed the St-G typeface, though it is presumed that both the book designer Melchior Lechter and the printer Otto von Holten were involved.

Roman and Carolingian scripts as well as of the Greek alphabet (Kurz, 2007). Between its inception and 1927, the *St-G typeface* was changed several times, so that it now exists in various versions.

3 Problem statement and project goals

George linked his poetry and his understanding of aesthetics to the design of his books by introducing an individualized typeface. He broke with typographical conventions at the time by applying a Sans-Serif typeface, by basing the design on his own handwriting, and by referencing historical script models in its formal features. The extraordinary design of St-G and the fact that the author himself was involved in its creation calls for special attention in a scholarly edition. However, previous editions neither include a detailed recording of the printed publications nor their typographical analysis. StGD aims to close this gap by providing a digital scholarly edition that allows for exploring typography in George's poetical work.

In the first phase of research, I will create a digital edition of printed poetry collections by George. I will develop a model to identify and describe typographical forms as well as to allow for citing them. In a second phase of research I will enhance the corpus of StGD with handwritten drafts, thereby allowing further investigations of the relationship between George's book hand and the typeface.⁴

4 The digital edition

The corpus of StGD consists of 29 printed editions of Stefan George's poetical works published between 1890 and 1933. Individual works are represented in the corpus variable numbers of times according to their textual and typographical variation.⁵ Currently all volumes are encoded according to a customized XML/TEI schema and enriched by bibliographical metadata through FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records) and METS (Metadata Encoding and Transmission Standards). The full texts will be enhanced by corresponding facsimiles, provided via a IIIF (International Image Interoperability Framework) compliant image server using the OpenSeadragon viewer. At the end of the project (April 2017), all contents of the digital edition will be openly available through a Creative Commons (CC-BY-NC-SA) License via the FEDORA-

⁴ The second research phase is planned in the context of a five-months visiting fellowship within the *DigiPal* project at King's College London in Spring 2016. Presumably the initial results of this collaboration will also be presented shortly in this paper.

⁵ i.e. *The Tapestry of Life (Der Teppich des Lebens)* is represented four times (1900, 1901, 1904, 1932), *The Star of the Covenant (Der Stern des Bundes)* two times (1914, 1928).

based asset management system GAMS (Geisteswissenschaftliches Asset Management System).⁶

5 Focus of the paper

Due to the significant role of typography in George's work, the creation of a digital scholarly edition calls for special attention to graphical features within the documents. This means that typography needs to be classified (i.e. typeface family, font) and its features need to be modelled. The latter includes the description of typographical forms, the identification of stylistic models, and the definition of the semantic function of types in the text. Such typographical enrichment is particularly challenging since neither a commonly shared vocabulary to describe typographical features nor a widely accepted type classification system exists. With regard to this lack of a common standard, StGD has mainly tested out two methods of typographical enrichment which will be discussed in this paper: the application of a TEI based model and the development of an ontology to describe typography.

5.1 Typography and the TEI

A distinction can be drawn between two different purposes of encoding features of writing: representation and information enrichment. The first purpose is covered to a great extent by the TEI gaiji module⁷ and the application of Unicode. Recent editing projects like *Hugo von Montfort: the poetical work*⁸ demonstrate the potentials of these methods, even if they also show that performing them throughout a complete edition is work-intensive and impractical. Concerning the capture of information about writing, especially about typography, the possibilities offered by the TEI are more restricted. Although the element `<typeDesc>`⁹ as part of `<msDesc>` allows for a description of types in prose, there is no TEI vocabulary to describe types and their features in a formalized way. The paper will report on the benefits and drawbacks of the already implemented elements and attributes and demonstrate their application to material at hand.

5.2 Typography and Ontologies

There are barely any digital projects dedicated to the modelling of typography. Those that exist include the *Type Repository of Incunabula*¹⁰ at the Berlin State Library, a database

⁶ < <http://gams.uni-graz.at/> > [all quoted URLs accessed 6.3.2016]

⁷ < <http://www.tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/de/html/WD.html#D25-20> >

⁸ Website of the digital edition *Hugo von Montfort: the poetical work*: < <http://gams.uni-graz.at/collection/me> >; example of a XML/TEI encoding: < http://gams.uni-graz.at/archive/objects/o:me.1r/datastreams/TEI_SOURCE/content >.

⁹ < <http://www.tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/en/html/ref-typeDesc.html> >

¹⁰ Website of the *Type Repository of Incunabula*: < <http://tw.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/> >; example of XML encoding: < <http://tw.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/materials/ma04679.xml? xsl=no> >

which identifies and catalogues incunabula types. It applies a relatively flat project-customized XML schema that describes types in prose. However, the digital modelling of handwriting has made significant progress over the last decade, since Arianna Ciula coined the term “Digital Palaeography” (Ciula, 2005), and the modelling of typography can benefit from this research. Recent research projects like *DigiPal*¹¹ and *ORIFLAMMS*¹², though not created in the context of digital scholarly editions, emphasize the strong tendency towards the application of semantic web technologies for the modelling of handwriting (Stokes, 2011 and 2012; Stutzmann, 2013). This paper will discuss their advantages for the identification, formal description and citation of typographical forms. Moreover, it will give an overview of the technology or modelling language (i.e. RDFs, UML, SKOS) that might be the most suitable for the purpose of StGD. In this context, the paper will strongly take into account aspects of practicability and re-usability of the model.

6 Research questions

By modelling and analysing typographical information, the digital edition opens up Stefan George’s poetical work for the following research questions: (a) Which formal features does the St-G-typeface contain and what are they referring to?; (b) How has the formal canon of the typeface developed between 1904 and 1927?; (c) Is the development of the book design across George’s work linear or is it marked by any significant breaks?; and (d) How are text and typography interrelated in George’s work, and how is typography applied as a stylistic device?

7 Context in Digital Humanities

StGD is contributing to the field of digital scholarly editing, the focus of which is shifting increasingly to the materiality of the edited documents. This tendency has been encouraged by movements such as New Philology as well as by textual concepts such as the “material text: (Shillingsburg 1997) and the idea of text as interaction of “bibliographical” and “linguistic code” (McGann 1991). In this context writing – as the interface between the text’s message and its documentary carrier – plays a significant role and is particularly difficult to capture (Schubert, 2010). The goal of StGD is to aid in the development and promotion of a future best practice method for the modelling of typography in digital scholarly editions. Furthermore, the project’s thematic focus contributes to the field of digital book history. By putting typography in its focus, StGD represents a first step towards the burgeoning and as-yet-unexplored field of Digital Studies of Typography.

¹¹ < <http://www.digipal.eu/>>

¹² < <http://www.agence-nationale-recherche.fr/?Project=ANR-12-CORP-0010>>

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