

## Rare Books Reloaded

Digital humanities archives have become a vibrant form of scholarly activity, with sites like the Rossetti Archive and the Walt Whitman Archive establishing rigorous standards. Yet a binary persists separating the “tangible” items these archives display and the “virtual” space in which they are represented. The tangible/virtual divide results in a legitimization of the material form that precludes the digital archive itself as worthy of analysis. Although book historians have participated in this process of binarism, their lens of multiple intentionalities is one of the most effective means of beginning to get at the ways in which the web, too, is material. Digitization takes time, resources, and human labor to operate successfully and inventively. This presentation will survey several current nineteenth-century digital projects in order to evaluate how they acknowledge the material circumstances behind their construction and how they describe their manipulation of the objects they display.

Because the archives, too, revel in their virtuality, their images provide the illusion that users are approaching the true material text. What a website creates is one more edition, completely distinct and even several steps removed from the original through the design principles of the archive’s creator, the influences of photography, Photoshop manipulation, and the transfer from three-dimensional to one-dimensional space. Despite these obstacles, within the digital archive lies the possibility for an exploration into the material form of the book. This presentation will end with a discussion of how digital archives can continue to experiment with the possibilities provided by the Web by more directly avowing how they act as mediators of physical objects and by providing their users with more direct options for that manipulation.