(De)Colonizing Literary Digital Annotating:
A Student's Experience in the Classroom

Yeonwoo Koo

Master's Student, Department of English Language and Literature, Yonsei University
ywkoo99@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is the author's personal experience and interpretation as a student whilst participating in Professor Kyung-Sook Shin's English Literature graduate course, "Literature and Technology II: Feminisms and Digital Humanities," during the 2019 spring semester at Yonsei University, South Korea. Exploring the intersections of literary feminist theory and digital humanities, this paper examines not only the content, but also the methodology and political effects of collaboratively digitally annotating Elizabeth Barrett Browning's epic novel/poem, Aurora Leigh *(1856) through the medium, Google Docs. In particular, this paper observes the students' interaction with the digital tools and literature-related pedagogy in two main parts. First, the democratic political nature of classroom culture when creating a new language/code during annotation. Second, the coexistence of cyberspace and the physical classroom space and its effect on time, specifically in the archival of the past, influencing of the future, and the splitting into the present multiverse. From a student's perspective in digital literary annotation, this paper shows that technology could become a way to decolonize and reprogram education to be more inclusive and collaborative.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the spring semester of 2019, I took an English Literature graduate course titled, "Literature and Technology II: Feminisms and Digital Humanities" taught by Professor Kyung-Sook Shin at Yonsei University, South Korea. As the title suggests, we explored the intersections of feminist theory and digital humanities, particularly through analyzing and annotating female poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning's epic novel/poem, *Aurora Leigh* (1856), along with other works of Victorian poetry. In her syllabus, Professor Shin outlines the course objectives as exploring how "[literature and technology] can be reconfigured, revaluated, and redefined in our pursuit as a humanist or a literary scholar by the advancement of digital technology". She divides her course into three parts: "1. Feminist reading of literary tradition and particularly Victorian poetry; 2. Introduces [*sic*] the students to some debates about digital humanities; 3. Trying to use the digital technology in our studying of literature," the final part constituting of our collaborative, digital annotations project [1].

This is somewhat of an ambitious project, because not only did we primarily conduct a thematic feminist analysis of the poem at hand, but also endeavored a feminist, decolonization methodology through the digital technology we used. Mainly, however, our methodology was confined to external, logistical issues. First, since

the *EBB (Elizabeth Barrett Browning) Archive* had already uploaded a partially annotated version of *Aurora Leigh* [2], our annotation project primarily focused on Books Two, Three, Four, Five, Eight and Nine in order to carve out our own space from the already existing scholarship. From one perspective, the students were still aware and under the influence of the dominant academia annotation prioritized over amateur students' notetaking. Second, though our ambitions were noble and grand, costs and technological deficiencies compelled us to resort to the relatively modest mode of Google Docs to do our annotation. That we turned to Google, the world's multinational technology company that monopolizes online services shows we were already complicit in the neocolonial, capitalist power mechanism despite our feminist, decolonial initiative.

However, after having studied feminist theories from Chandra Mohanty, Judith Butler, contemporary digital humanities theories, and how some scholars have even combined the two, we did learn a few valuable insights from our own digital annotating. Though avoiding the books already covered by the *EBB Archive*, we inevitably cited content from other established sources and inserted ourselves into the existing, scholarly literature behind *Aurora Leigh*. Despite relying on Google Docs, we were able to dismantle hierarchical structures inherent not only in technology, but also in the classroom as well. Thus, going into the course with the awareness of entering a transnational, transcultural cyberspace opens new perspectives not just in terms of (gender) politics, but culture, and temporality and spatial limitations.

From my own classroom experience—through the lens of a Master's student—I argue that when using a new technology and intersecting it with feminist theory, technology could become a way to decolonize and reprogram education to be inclusive, collaborative, and more. In this paper, I hope to share my experiences and thoughts as a non-Western student studying nineteenth-century English poetry in contemporary Korea and cyberspace, as well as discuss ways to further merge feminisms, pedagogy, and technology in one setting. The following paper will be divided as thus: 1) the classroom culture of creating a new language/code during annotation, and 2) the coexistence of cyberspace and the physical classroom space and its effect on time, particularly the archival of the past, influencing of the future, and the splitting into the present multiverse.

2. CREATING A NEW LANGUAGE

One aspect that I learned from the collaborative annotating through Google Docs is that when using any tool in a new environment, the group needs to establish working guidelines, a code of rules, a common language for everyone. Unlike a computer program language that requires more guided, expert learning, Google Docs is much easier because it is created for beginners to maneuver their way through the given tools without need for external help. Moreover, it is written in simple, everyday English and is a mainstream digital tool that our classmates were already familiar with, having had used it at least once before coming to this class.

Of course, that is not to say that our class began annotating immediately under complete, mutual understanding of the working language. Professor Shin had given us very loose guidelines in the beginning of our project: we should write our initials to indicate what each person had written and use footnotes for most of our annotations. Gradually, however, we began to make our own rules, such as color coding our initials so that it we could better differentiate whom it belongs to. I started highlighting my initials in blue, which was then picked up by Tyler, until the majority of the class had selected a color for themselves that was distinguishable from one another's. Some people adhered to one color for the whole project, some rejected the use of color, and others oscillated from coloring or not. Sometimes, we would even highlight the footnote number itself so we could easily locate it in the massive body of text.

In addition to expanding upon the given guidelines, we explored other functions on Google Docs as well. In particular, we used the comments section to serve several purposes, but mainly to accentuate visibility and importance. In Figure 1, Jayoon uses a comment to visually emphasize that the epigraph in Robert Browning's poem, "My Last Duchess," is a narrative convention that provides additional information when reading the whole poem. In other words, she renders the comment function into a visualization tool to indicate the importance of the epigraph to our class members. As the comment is positioned on the margins of the document, it visually indicates the importance of its content to not only the other students, but for Jayoon, herself. In *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books*, H.J. Jackson explores the marginalia—readers' response to the text

along the margins—and asserts, "A marked or annotated book traces the development of the reader's self-definition in and by relation to the text" [3]. Indeed, several of Jayoon's comments on epigraphs later became part of her term paper on using epigraphs in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*.

MY LAST DUCHESS

Ferrara

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,

Jayoon Byeon   Resolve
1:23 AM Apr 30

An epigraph. 'Ferrara' refers to Duke of Ferrara(a city in northern Italy), whose full name was Alfonso II d'Este.

Figure 1. Comment: Indicating an Epigraph

Another instance comments were used was to reinforce a meta-visuality element—to link the text to other visual sources. For the poem, "The Lady of Shalott," by Lord Alfred Tennyson, Jayoon indicates Pre-Raphaelite paintings inspired by Tennyson's narrative to add to our discussion of the poem. Unfortunately, Google Docs does not allow users to insert actual visual images in the comments. In Figure 2 of the following screenshot, Jayoon resorts to pasting the links of the paintings, which is ironically in written form.

The Lady Shalott

PART I.

[1] **On** either side the river lie

[2] Long fields of barley and of rye,

[3] That clothe the wold and meet the sky;

[4] And thro' the field the road runs by

[5]   To many-tower'd Camelot;

[6] And up and down the people go,

[7] Gazing where the lilies blow

[8] Round an island there below,

[9]   The island of Shalott.

[10] Willows whiten, aspens quiver,

[11] Little breezes dusk and shiver

Jayoon Byeon   Resolve
1:44 AM Apr 30

This poem served as a source of inspiration for many Pre-Raphaelite paintings. John William Waterhouse, one of the most prominent Pre-Raphaelite painters, seems to have been fascinated with Lady Shalott, as he created several paintings of the same subject during his lifetime.

- 'The Lady of Shalott' (1888) :
https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/waterhouse-the-lady-of-shalott-n01543
- 'The Lady of Shalott' (1894) :
https://www.johnwilliamwaterhouse.net/The-Lady-Of-Shalott-1894.html
- "'I Am Half-Sick of Shadows," Said the Lady of Shalott' (1915) :
http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/jww/paintings/22.html
Show less

Reply...

Figure 2. Comment: Indicating Other Visual Sources

Such limitations of comments places us into a mechanism of visualization politics. First, that writing substitutes the actual pictorial image may reflect the problematic hierarchizing of words over pictures. Despite the fact that pictures and words can coexist with equal significance on a page, scholars often dismiss picture books as childish and lacking academic value, a "widespread feeling that the combination [of words and

pictures] is somehow base or simplistic" [4].[1] Moreover, James P. Purdy also notes that

> With few exceptions (e.g., Google Search by Image), words remain the requisite search criteria, and texts require linguistic metadata to maximize search and retrieval possibilities. The renowned William Blake Archive, for instance, has a rather robust image search, but it relies solely on linguistic tags. Researchers need to rely on words for figure types, characters, postures, and attributes rather than sketches or drawings of image elements [5].

Through this interpretation, the infrastructure of Google Docs seems to reinforce the mainstream academic standard of valuing texts over images. Unless the picture is placed in the body of the document itself (thus situating us more intrusively and responsibly into the primary text), Google Docs leaves no room for the student or amateur editor to annotate in the margins with anything other than the provided, text-oriented language.

Second, that Google Docs can only rely on such visual elements (regardless of being texts or images) also reflects the favoring of the visual over other senses. In her article, "Using a Feminist Digital Humanities Approach: Critical Women's History through the Covers of 'Black Coffee,'" Jeanette Hall argues that there is a "ocularcentrism . . . privileging of the eyes over the ears" [6]. In order to dismantle such visual-oriented power mechanisms, Hall's digital humanities project "engages multiple senses in the hope of decentering the visual," something she defines as "A feminist approach to digital humanities [that] can allow for precisely these new kinds of understandings" [6]. From this aspect, Google Docs had been insufficient in decolonizing the traditional, (patriarchal) academic approach to annotating by only providing visual tools—specifically, textual ones.

Many students also utilized the visuality function of comments to post discussion questions as seen in Figure 3. Furthermore, I also used the comments as a visual signal to invoke help from my fellow classmates. In Figure 4, I ask Jace to elaborate further on Barrett Browning's allusion to Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in *Aurora Leigh* since I knew he had recently read it for another class.
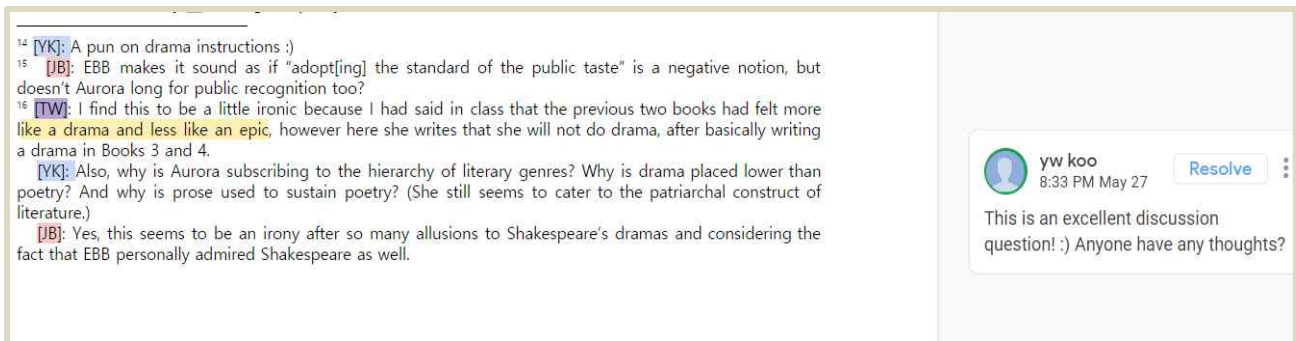
Figure 3. Comment: Asking Discussion Questions
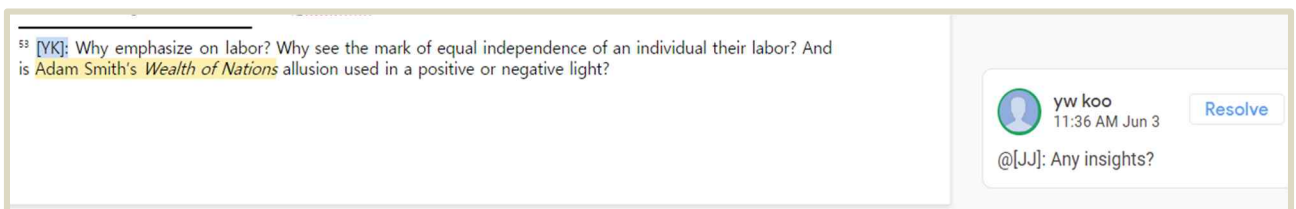
Figure 4. Comment: Invoking a Certain Student's Annotation

---

[1] In *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Scott McCloud writes (and also draws), "Traditional thinking has long held that truly *great* works of art and literature are only possible when the two are kept at arm's length" [4]. However, McCloud claims that the two have a very intimate, intersecting history in which words and pictures complement each other. See "Chapter 6: Show and Tell" in particular for further reference.

Perhaps the usage of comments to propose questions came about due to its visibility in the margins of the Google Doc in contrast to footnotes that are embedded in the main body of the text. Although comments are a more visual means to grab someone's attention, the fact that Google Docs' comments also has a "resolve" button seems to underscore the question-answer dialectic as well—once the question is answered, it can be marked as "resolved". For example, I had a simple question regarding Tyler's footnote on how a particular passage in *Aurora Leigh* could be a Biblical, feminist interpretation, which is answered and resolved by Jace's digital participation in Figure 5.
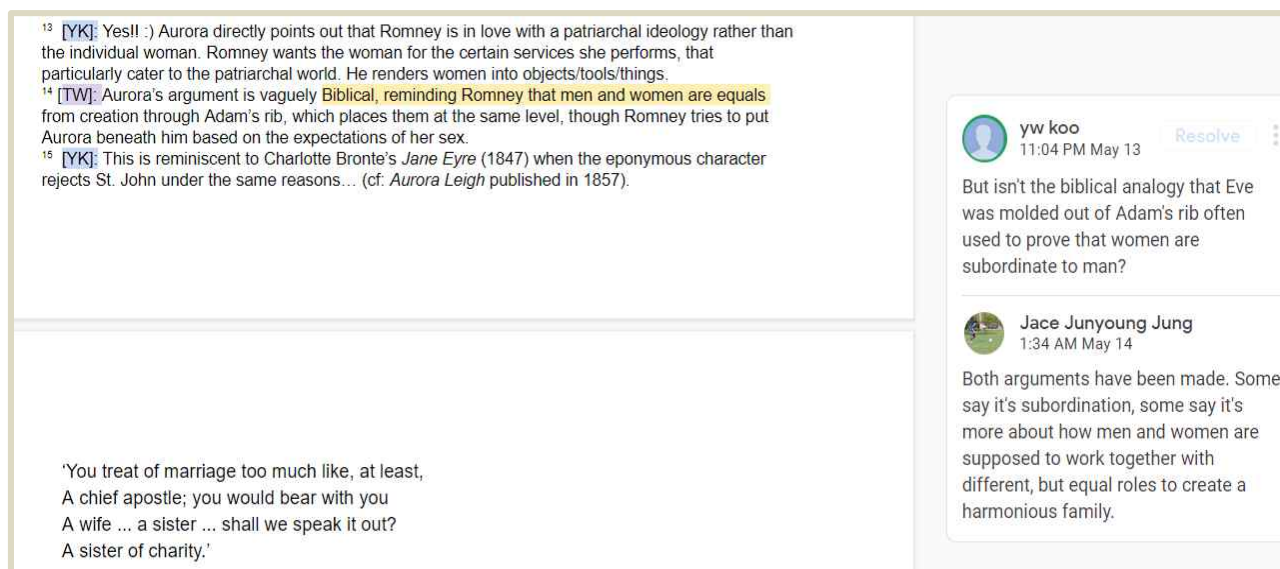

Figure 5. Answering/Replying to Comments

Some comments had been answered in this way, but no one ever used the "resolve" function during our annotations project. The "resolve" button erases the comment from view; it can easily be made visible again by going to "Share" and finding the comment's and post's history. Although we answered question-purposed comments, we still did not erase another person's comments/footnotes. Rather, we would create a dialogue/discursive footnote or comment section as seen in Figure 6, in which we reply to our classmate's annotation and amalgamate our answers under the same footnote. Here, Jace has replied to Tyler's footnote 6, Jayoon answers my question from footnote 7, and I have replied to Min-sung's tentative annotation on the notion of "fixed literary 'canon.'" This can be seen as an aspect of decolonizing technology in that even though we have the power to erase someone's archiving, we choose not to erase it. Instead, we allow everyone to participate in changing the collaborative annotation record. On a micro-level at least, everyone was partaking in a postcolonial, decolonization experience inside the classroom.[2]

---

[2] Since we never erased or "resolved" a comment, the problem of our annotations becoming redundant and unorganized arose. Similar to Wikipedia's democratic editing space in which anyone can edit or create an article, the same merits (everyone is an equal participating member to the archive) and demerits (the lack of guarantee of credible information) arises. Further research on this is needed to propose any substantial solutions, but my tentative opinion is that in the long term, the principle of self-regulated transparent citations and the wisdom of the public can maintain a fairly high level of academic quality.
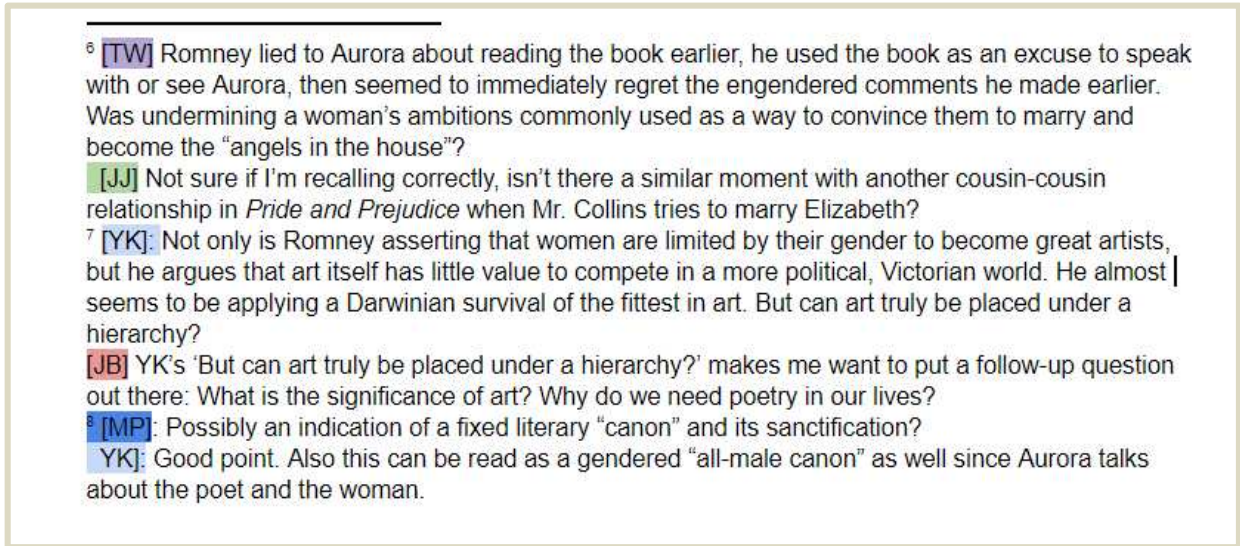
Figure 6. Discursive Footnotes

Not only did we create a working language through comments and other given functions, but language itself also became flexible and dynamic in many ways. First, is the usage of the so-called natural languages of humans—in this case, the usage of English and Korean. I realized that while I used the English version of Google Docs, some of our classmates used Korean. Though many of the functions are conventional translations ("Share" is "공유 [gongyu]" which is the most common translation used in computer-symbolic languages) there were slight differences, such as "comments" denoted as "메모 [memo]" in Korean.[3] Moreover, in the later part of our annotations, some classmates tentatively began to use both languages as well. As seen in Figure 7, Jayoon (red highlight) replies with "ㅋㅋㅋ" to my footnote, which is the Korean Internet slang signifying a literal laugh (the English translation of "haha").
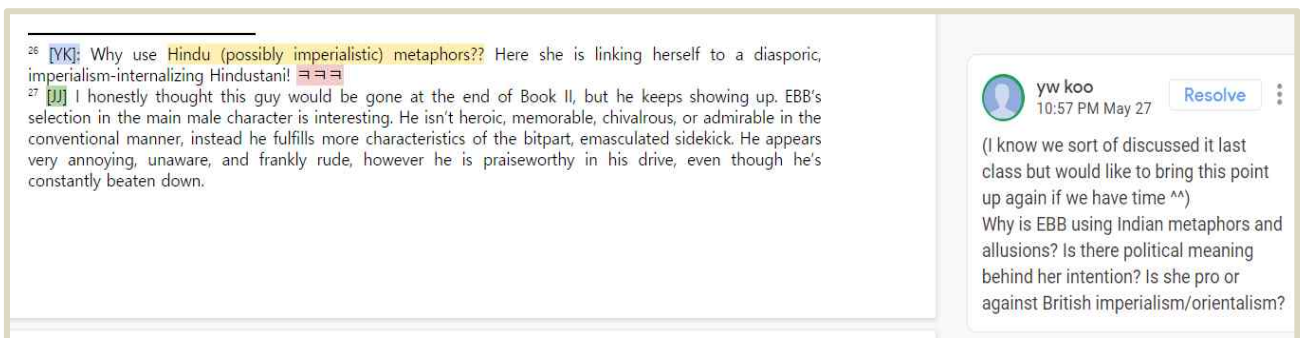
Figure 7. Discursive Footnote with Korean and Internet-Culture Language

Other instances of internet colloquial culture filtering into our Google Docs include emoticons like "^^" and ":)" to indicate smiling faces, and "@" or "to" someone's name to reference or address a classmate online (a language tool derived from social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.) In accordance to this enculturation of SNS mannerisms, Tyler mentioned outside of class that she wished there was a "like"

---

[3] I have not been able to find further examples of this for our class experiment on Google Docs, but the translation and connotations derived from each language could possibly elicit different meanings and hence different purpose-driven usages based on culture. Further research on this is needed.

button used in Facebook and Instagram to support or show appreciation for someone's annotation. Indeed, though our later annotations pertained to academic content, they included an affective element as well, such as "good point!" or "That's a good explanation :) I like it!". According to James P. Purdy's explanation of digitalizing humanities projects, "[digital archives] ask us to rethink what constitutes scholarly production as they blur the lines between academic and non-academic texts. In digital spaces, the boundaries around these categories become fluid and texts move more freely between them" [5]. Similarly, our digital project became tolerable of other (online) cultures and language use, synthesizing it into our academic annotations.

Entering cyberspace to begin our collaborative digital annotations project, our classmates created a new language or code by utilizing the given tools (footnotes and comments) and expanding upon real languages to meet our needs online. Interestingly, everything regarding our language or code was never pre-determined in speaking or writing. To borrow Adeline Koh's social contract analogy to describe digital humanities, if our class was in the process of creating a society in cyberspace, we never arrived at a stage of creating a terminated social contract [7]. Or if we did create a social contract, it was not in one terminated moment in which the social contract indicated a passing across a certain threshold. Rather, (if it can be seen as a social contract) it was an ongoing, elongated contract/code that was never spoken nor written into being. During our annotation project, we never directly talked about whether footnotes should look a certain way. But since Google Docs allows us to see what users are doing in live time, we were able to see our classmates color coding their footnotes, using comments in a particular way etc. in which we would emulate and perpetuate those codes into an established culture. One can even visibly see from which point a student experimented with a tool, and how it spread across our small community.

Likewise, our classroom created a democracy—an *ad hoc* democracy—in which we all participated in something none of us knew how it would visibly manifest. Language became dynamic, changing, and constantly in flux. That these rules were unspoken, however, shows that there was still room for those rules to be differently interpreted by everyone; we never set in stone about how to use those tools, but let everyone use them as they saw fit and nonverbally accepted or rejected it. Simply put, the creation of a new language or code was a significant and inherent part of our directly participating democracy. Or perhaps, since our society was such a small group of seven students, we could also create this idyllic annotating society and still produce a roughly coherent and growing corpus of literary analysis. Similarly, the American politico-historical figure James Madison writes, "a pure democracy . . . [is] a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person" [8]. Hence, as many political philosophers have stated, the qualities of direct democracy can only be sustained in a small, homogenous community in which everyone knows each other.

However, as Koh points out in her article, "Niceness, Building, and Opening the Genealogy of the Digital Humanities: Beyond the Social Contract of Humanities Computing," the rules that define the boundaries and academic responsibilities of digital humanities are also in danger of reiterating the harmful social structure, or what Koh labels the "Liberal Underpinnings of the Humanities Computing Social Contract" [7]. Koh explains that the social contract, "As a foundational mechanism for liberal democracy . . . has been criticized for the invisible ways in which it is based upon inherent class, gender, and race inequalities" which also seeps into the construction of digital humanities as an academia [7]. Similarly, the society our class created is unstable enough that once digitalized onto a greater scale, it is susceptible to such dangers as well. As a thought experiment, if we were to expand our classroom of seven students to a larger body, say fifty or more, would our idyllic democracy remain intact? When asking this question at the end of our digital annotations project, Tyler mentioned that the act of annotating may give rise to competition, and potentially denigrating comments as we often see online with a larger, anonymous public. Moreover, expanding the size not just to the public but merely to a larger classroom will give rise to the necessity of creating a written or verbal social contract. Hence, the fluidity and flexibility of our nonverbal understanding would become obsolete. Like any written law or code, the same problems that plague current society (the complexity of understanding the law; the delayed process of potentially amending the law; the need for a policing organization to execute the law, etc.) will arise and leave less room to experiment on an individual participation level.

3. THE COEXISTENCE OF CYBERSPACE AND PHYSICAL SPACE

This subtitle is a quote I roughly translated from one of our guest lectures at Yonsei University on April 29, 2019, from computer scientist, Professor Hyuk Yu of Korea University. In his presentation titled, "Can Our Party Last in the Era of AI?" he describes the Fourth Industrial Revolution as an era in which we will cohabit both cyberspace and the physical space. Similarly, our digital annotations project presented a new pedagogical lifestyle in which the physical space (our classroom setting) and cyberspace (Google Docs) coexisted simultaneously. Indeed, I discovered that while using Google Docs to annotate for our class, our course began to transcend not only spatial boundaries, but also influence time, and our perception of time as well. More specifically, in simple yet almost magical terms, we began to transform the concept of time and create new spaces, particularly through recording what had happened in our previous class (the past), preparing for the next class (the future), but also what happened during class (the present).

3.1   Archiving the Past

Our first approach, and perhaps the most natural segue into the digital annotations project was by documenting what we had already done in class. After a couple weeks on feminist and digital humanities theory, we began to read short Victorian poems; at this point of the semester, Professor Shin announced that we could start annotating the Google Docs she provided for that week's reading or write a (traditional) response paper. The next week, no one used the Google Docs but brought in a response paper. I think many of us were daunted by the task of annotating, particularly in such a public (cyber)space where everyone could view one's editing process in real time. Furthermore, none of us knew what the annotations were supposed to look like— we were under the impression that we had to create an expertly annotated *Norton Anthology*-esque document. In other words, we were caught in the academic standard of what deserved to be called "annotating." Thus, our first venture into entering cyberspace was to archive the past because it was a comfortable transition from our personal note-taking skills to a public domain since our tentative ideas had been somewhat endorsed during the previous class. Through an unspoken rule, we reflected onto the Google Doc file what we thought had been significant during the last class, and additionally cite whose idea it was, being more precise in citing line numbers, etc. In the following, I would like to share two examples of this earlier, digital approach in archiving the past.

During our one of our classes, we discussed Barrett Browning's husband, Robert Browning's poem, "Porphyria's Lover." A short dramatic monologue about the eponymous speaker killing Porphyria by strangling her with her golden hair, our classmate Sungbean raised the issue that perhaps the speaker was not male, but female. I, too, had that question while I was reading the poem, but could not find enough evidence to support whether the speaker was of a different gender. However, Sungbean indicated a specific, crucial passage that showed the ambiguity of the speaker's sexuality. She pointed out that not only was the speaker never given a gendered pronoun, but also that he/she/it was described as "pale." In the poem, Browning writes, "A sudden thought of one so pale / For love of her, and all in vain:/ So, she was come through wind and rain" [9]. Here, Sungbean shows that the ambiguous syntax makes "one so pale" refer not only to the conventionally-interpreted Porphyria, but the speaker—hence, depicting the androgynous persona of a pale lover. I had also noticed that the epithet "white" was only used to describe Porphyria, but was unable to connect it to a larger theme. When I raised this detail during class as support to Sungbean's opinion, she in turn used my point to reinforce her tentative idea that perhaps the speaker was not another (gendered) being, but Porphyria's split identity. Indeed, by discovering the progression of pronouns from "she", "it" (describing Porphyria's corpse) to "we," Sungbean and I speculated together that the poem was not misogynistic homicide but suicide, or even a self-love avowal in which she kills the Angel in the House persona of herself to (re)claim self-identity and independence. In this way, both Sungbean and I started with our half-baked ideas that we were initially not going to share aloud in the physical classroom, let alone in the public cyberspace. We had details that were interesting, but were unable to connect into a larger, cohesive argument. During class, however, we were able to share these ideas that quickly escalated into a collaborative argument in which we gained the confidence to later record and organize onto our Google Docs. Figure 8 shows a double screenshot of myself highlighting

the discussion-catalyst passage of Sungbean's insight and my archiving her crucial point, with her initials and my footnotes.
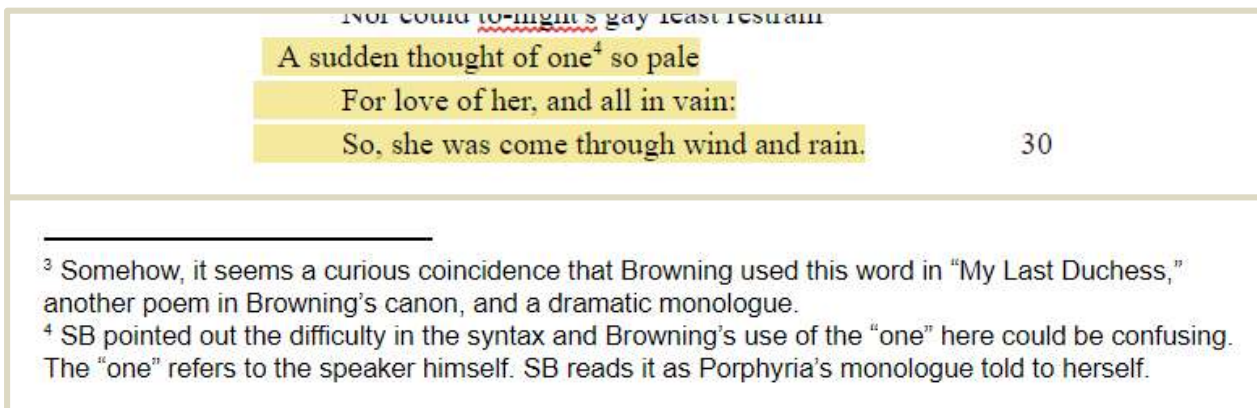

Figure 8. Collaborative Annotation on "Porphyria's Lover"

On a methodology-level, cyberspace enabled us to reflect a collaborative, compiled idea that had happened in the physical classroom setting by indicating the process of how the cooperation happened. Meanwhile, the physical space became a safe space in which we democratically participated in an egalitarian and collaborative practice. With this foundation, we were able to record our thoughts onto cyberspace—a complementing and synthesizing of the real and virtual world. Our participation and provided space allowed for an equality and dismantling of hierarchal structures. On a content-level, perhaps the idea that Sungbean and I created together was possible because as non-Western students who used Korean (a language that does not heavily depend on gender-based pronouns) we could subvert the more traditional (patriarchal) reading of this dramatic monologue to incorporate a female speaker, or even a split female speaker—a type of decolonization in the content of our annotations as well.

Another example from this archiving the past is when our class discussed Barrett Browning's poem, "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point." Tyler pointed out that there were logical and geographical peculiarities to the slave girl's narrative. In Figure 9, she had recorded this argument in footnote 7: "The addition of the cocoa-nut in line 76 creates a tropical or Caribbean origin or starting point for slave in poem, but leaves a hole in how the slave managed to get from the Caribbean to Plymouth Rock." Tyler's argument prompted my initial, very tentative idea that perhaps "The Runaway Slave" had more nuance as a gendered narrative, rather than a slave narrative. Before entering the physical space (class), I had noted that the slave's story may be an outer frame narrative that pointed to a more significant, gendered reading. However, I felt a bit reserved in voicing this idea, let alone recording it on Google Docs. In a previous class, we were assigned Brittney Cooper's article, "Intersectionality" (2015) in which she defends and supports Kimberlé Brenshaw's feminist concept, intersectionality, "an analytic frame that disrupt[s] the tendency in social-justice movements and critical social theorizing 'to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis'" [10]. Using intersectionality as a methodology, black feminists assert and have gained strong recognition that gender and race are not "mutually exclusive" but critical in understanding the black female subject. Likewise, I felt deterred from presenting my opinion to the class because it did not go far in depth of intersectionality but rather interpreted race and gender as separate spheres. As a second year M.A. student suggesting that race is a superficiality to address gender issues, I thought would reveal ignorance on my part as an academic neophyte. When Tyler pointed out the factual fallacies of the poem in our classroom, I felt more comfortable to add onto her point with my tentative theory, seen in Figure 10.

[79]   Over and over I sang his name,
[80]   Upward and downward I drew it along
[81]   My various notes,—the same, the same!
[82]   I sang it low, that the slave-girls near
[83]   Might never guess, from aught they could hear,
[84]   It was only a name—a name.⁷

———————

⁶ [TW] In lines 61 and 62 EBB seems to be highlighting the fact that slaves were dehumanized to the point where, they themselves seemed unaware if they were allowed to express or accept such human emotions from other slaves or if they themselves were capable of expressing such feelings.

⁷ [TW] The addition of the cocoa-nut in line 76 creates a tropical or Caribbean origin or starting point for slave in poem, but leaves a hole in how the slave managed to get from the Caribbean to Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts which would have a been a difficult journey for a slave, especially with a new baby.

Figure 9. Tyler's Footnote on "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point"

[239] Our wounds are different. Your white men
[240]   Are, after all, not gods indeed,
[241] Nor able to make Christs again
[242]   Do good with bleeding. We who bleed
[243] (Stand off!)¹¹ we help not in our loss!
[244] We are too heavy for our cross,
[245]   And fall and crush you and your seed.

———————

¹¹ [YK]: (This is my interpretation, so please feel free to argue against/for it!) I did a gendered reading of the text, in which EBB tells the male poets to "stand off" and let the woman's voice be written/heard without (male) intrusion. I think the slave narrative itself (with all its inaccuracies of location, the speaker's persona) etc. is only an outer frame that does leave room for an intersected race and gender analysis, but ultimately places more emphasis on the female voice. That she uses "your" to express specifically white men, and "we" to mean black women seems to assert for a female space and voice. (The blue highlights are the instances I think support my opinion).

Figure 10. Yeonwoo's Footnote on "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point"

Through these two examples, the physical classroom space became a safe space for me, one where I felt I could pitch my tentative ideas. Later, I added my idea with more in-depth footnotes when annotating on Google Docs, but it would not have happened if I had not felt the sense of security within the physical space first. In this way, the coexistence of the physical and cyberspace allowed my classmates and I to gradually experiment and overcome the solidified notion of "decolonial reading,"—in some ways, we were decolonizing decolonial reading by participating both offline and online. However, this can also be problematized as well. Since the classroom was rendered into a safe space, it became the prerequisite, dominant territory whereas Google Docs became a subordinate zone to archive what happened in the so-called "real" world. Likewise, the physical space and cyberspace are hierarchized and unintentionally reinforce the colonial power mechanism.⁴

———————

⁴ After the project when I asked our classmates whether they had felt that the physical space was more

3.2 Influencing the Future

Although the first two weeks of annotating were often based on archiving the past, our classmates soon became more comfortable with annotating until (through nonverbal agreement) we began to digitally annotate beforehand to prepare for the next class. Whereas we were unsure about annotating our tentative ideas and displaying it for our class to read, we became confident enough to take a leap of faith that our small, random notes could coalesce into a larger idea during class. Once the goal to collaborate and directly participate in the production of knowledge was tangibly felt, did we then begin to transform the future as well.

More specifically, technology enabled us to transform the future by influencing the next day's class. Since we footnoted certain passages, what we valued become visible to others so that they could view its importance as well. Indeed, during the next class, the professor and students mentioned specific footnotes, or would add onto discussion without mentioning certain footnotes because we already had an established understanding or prior online discussion. In the last few weeks of the course, we would even pull up the Google Docs on the projector and go through each footnote, or someone would volunteer with a theme or footnote they were eager to share. Similar to how our classroom became a direct, *ad hoc* democracy, everyone's participation before class had on influence in creating a future they wanted to happen in the physical space—everyone had a say in altering the future, physical space.

In this way, changes in time and space dualities began to shift as we more firmly incorporated technology and pedagogy into the course. Perhaps since we began archiving the past, we had to mine the material discussed in class from the real world, thus creating our dependence and hierarchizing of one space over the other. When we began using the Google Docs as a preparatory function, however, I think the plane leveled more equally between the physical space and the cyberspace. No longer did we depend heavily upon the classroom discussion to annotate our Google Docs, but we relied on Google Docs to give sustenance to our class.[5]

3.3 The Present Multiverse

Once we became comfortable using Google Docs to annotate the previous and prepare for the next class, our classmates began to bring their laptops not simply to reference their notes, but to actively engage in the class as well. In fact, while discussions were ongoing during the physical classroom, I could also see that several of the students were also partaking in cyberspace as well. It was an extremely active and collaborative moment. In a hurriedly screenshotted annotation shown in Figure 11, everyone's cursor (in different colors) is present online in Book 2 of *Aurora Leigh* (line 723-733). Here, while Tyler was giving her opinion in this passage, I was recording her interesting argument of linking *Aurora Leigh* to John Milton's characterization of Satan. While writing this footnote, someone checked my spelling as I was typing, and others were making their own footnotes too—their own versions of what was happening in the real world in real time.

---

prioritized and felt as a safe space, Jace replied that he was actually more comfortable annotating and participating through Google Docs. Jace explained that he could organize and better retrieve the exact information from his annotations on Google Docs—thus relying on cyberspace to participate in classroom discussions. Though Jace's account reverses my digital annotations experience, it still underscores the fact that a hierarchy is established to how we depend on physical exposure or virtual technology. Further discussion is needed on how to strike a balance and prevent the reiteration of hierarchized spaces in order to smoothly integrate into the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

[5] Thus, Jace's response that cyberspace was more comfortable than the classroom setting may be explained through not archiving the past, but the function that digital annotation also influences the future. By applying both the past and the future into the offline and online world, he perhaps felt the hierarchies shifting, or even balancing out. This will further be discussed in the following section, "3.3. The Present Multiverse."
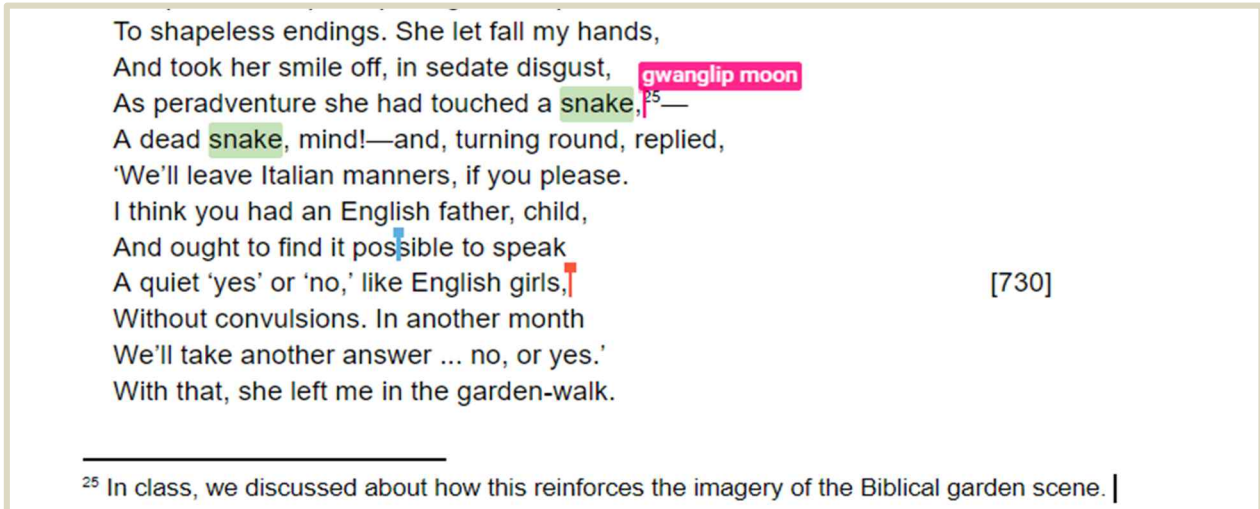
To shapeless endings. She let fall my hands,
And took her smile off, in sedate disgust,
As peradventure she had touched a snake,²⁵—
A dead snake, mind!—and, turning round, replied,
'We'll leave Italian manners, if you please.
I think you had an English father, child,
And ought to find it possible to speak
A quiet 'yes' or 'no,' like English girls,   [730]
Without convulsions. In another month
We'll take another answer ... no, or yes.'
With that, she left me in the garden-walk.

²⁵ In class, we discussed about how this reinforces the imagery of the Biblical garden scene.

Figure 11. Real Time In-Class Annotation 1

Moreover, as seen in Figure 12, our classmates became each other's scribe—while one person was expressing their idea during class, another would record it onto our Google Docs. In my comment on why Barrett Browning frequently employs Shakespearean allusions, Jayoon not only replied with her own answer, but she recorded Professor Shin's opinion as well. Interestingly, I was also typing while the professor gave her short lecture, but Jayoon and I had emphasized different points from the professor's response. Likewise, while class is ongoing in the real world in real time, each member was collaborating in cyberspace simultaneously through our Google Docs annotations.
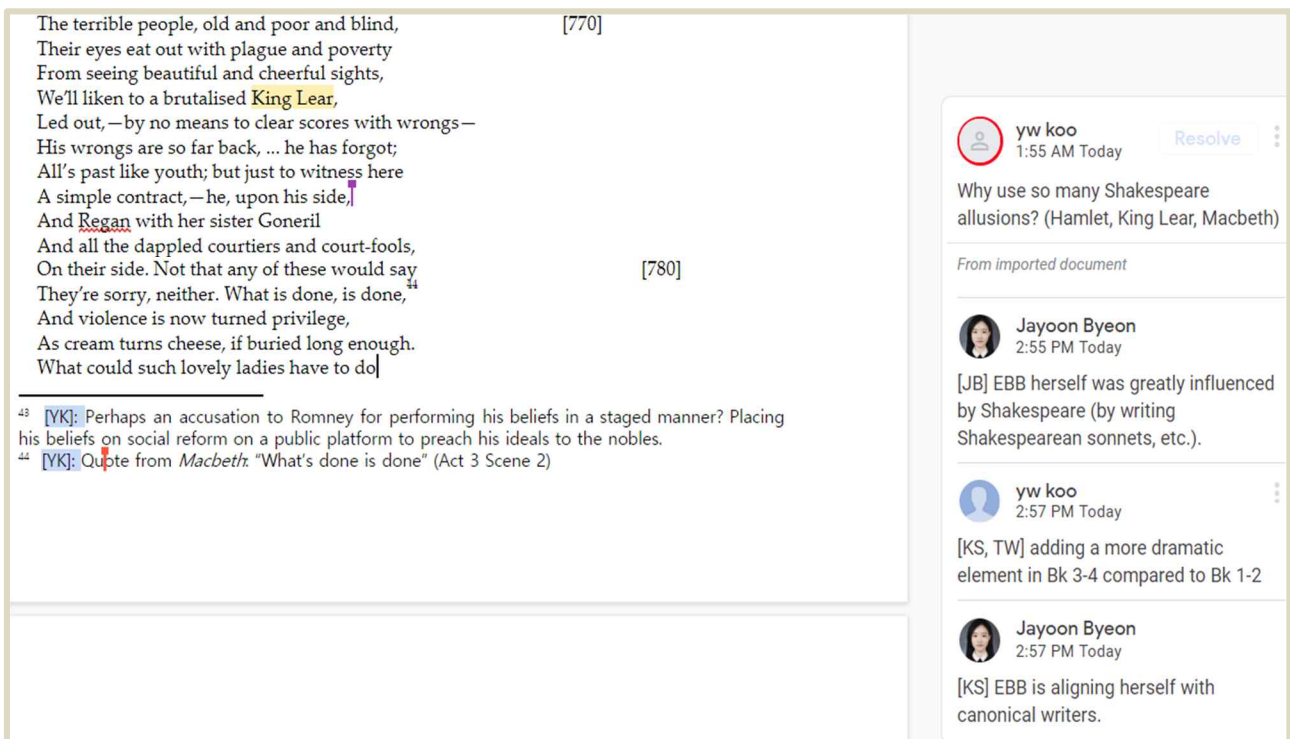
The terrible people, old and poor and blind,   [770]
Their eyes eat out with plague and poverty
From seeing beautiful and cheerful sights,
We'll liken to a brutalised King Lear,
Led out,—by no means to clear scores with wrongs—
His wrongs are so far back, ... he has forgot;
All's past like youth; but just to witness here
A simple contract,—he, upon his side,
And Regan with her sister Goneril
And all the dappled courtiers and court-fools,
On their side. Not that any of these would say   [780]
They're sorry, neither. What is done, is done,⁴⁴
And violence is now turned privilege,
As cream turns cheese, if buried long enough.
What could such lovely ladies have to do

⁴³ [YK]: Perhaps an accusation to Romney for performing his beliefs in a staged manner? Placing his beliefs on social reform on a public platform to preach his ideals to the nobles.
⁴⁴ [YK]: Quote from *Macbeth*. "What's done is done" (Act 3 Scene 2)

yw koo
1:55 AM Today   Resolve

Why use so many Shakespeare allusions? (Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth)

From imported document

Jayoon Byeon
2:55 PM Today

[JB] EBB herself was greatly influenced by Shakespeare (by writing Shakespearean sonnets, etc.).

yw koo
2:57 PM Today

[KS, TW] adding a more dramatic element in Bk 3-4 compared to Bk 1-2

Jayoon Byeon
2:57 PM Today

[KS] EBB is aligning herself with canonical writers.

Figure 12. Real Time In-Class Annotation 2

Thus, a parallel universe, or perhaps even a multiverse branched out during this moment. Space and time were no longer dualities, but began to merge and progress simultaneously—they were similar, but different from each other. What was happening during the physical classroom was occurring online in various versions and filtered through different interpretations. This can also be explained through quantum physicist Hugh Everett's "many-worlds interpretation." To prove that Schrödinger's Cat can simultaneously be alive and dead (not alive or dead), Everett claims that the world splits into one world where the cat lives and another where the cat dies. In simpler, poetic terms, "Every instance of *either/or* is replaced by an *and*. And an *and*, and an *and*, and an *and*, and another *and* . . . adding up to an infinitely all-inclusive, and yet mutually unknowable, web of many worlds" [11]. Similarly (though on a much simpler, non-scientific level), Google Docs enables us to split into the physical and cyberspace, and their respective past, present, and futures. Funnily enough, when I was presenting my paper proposal at the end of the course, I showed my classmates Figure 11 to the class along with my tentative many world's interpretation. Though all the cursors were color-coded to indicate they were different people, Gwanglip's cursor was marked with his name. Gwanglip wondered aloud why his cursor was there and that he had no recollection of marking that particular passage. He may have been spacing out into another (mental) universe—hence, another parallel world.

In addition to the more balanced (perhaps decolonial?) integration of the physical and cyberspace, time also became more tangible and decolonized during this experience. As the online and offline merged and bifurcated, the past annotation that was to prepare for the future class was put into use in the present; during the present as we annotated, the now slips through our fingers so that as soon as we record the present (or while we are annotating) it becomes the past. Rather than a linear chronology of time, Google Docs seemed to create a cyclical notion of past, future, and present merging together all in the span of one moment. In her article, "Wampum, Sequoyan, and Story: Decolonizing the Digital Archive," Ellen Cushman links digitalization to the concept of time. In what she calls "decolonial digital archives", Cushman incorporates Walter D. Mignolo's argument that "'time' is a fundamental concept in building the imaginary of the modern/colonial world and an instrument for both controlling knowledge and advancing a vision of society based on progress and development" [12]. Hence, Cushman asserts that "Decolonial archives operate through an understanding of time immemorial that belies the imperial creation of tradition marked along Western timelines" or linear chronology of time [12]. In our digital annotations project as well, the imperial linear timeline is subverted as time expands, shrinks and cycles into the past, future and present through the real and virtual world.

Not only does Google Docs record what happened in the classroom, but it reflects what will happen in the classroom, and then even goes as far as to divide the present into parallel universes that happen in the same time but in different versions of space. In this way, our digital annotations project seems to have gone further than previous web-based annotation experiments in the classroom. A similar case is the Annotation Studio developed by and used in humanities research and writing courses at MIT. However, in their report titled, "Annotation Studio: Bringing a Time-Honored Learning Practice into the Digital Age," James Paradis et. al only mention how cyberspace enhanced real classroom teaching and learning [13]. Here, they differentiated and hierarchized the physical space from cyberspace. In contrast, our project's distinguishing factor from previous annotation projects in pedagogy seems to more firmly integrate technology into the classroom that bridges the physical and cyberspace divide.

4. CONCLUSION

"Literature and Technology II: Feminisms and Digital Humanities" began as a course to see how the intersections of feminist theory can be applied in digital humanities, particularly through analyzing and annotating Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*. We initially tried to create a meta-feminist or decolonial approach by not only incorporating such content analysis in the primary texts, but also in the methodology of using digital technology. Though in my experience of the course we succeeded somewhat in dismantling canonized readings and annotations, hierarchal spaces and timelines, several problems still exist. For example, despite maintaining a relatively ideal, *ad hoc* democracy online, how do we resolve the issue of cluttering information and preserving the academic standard? How do we retain the same merits and demerits

if we expand to a larger classroom, or to the general public? Moreover, such decolonization of content and methodology is possible only under the assumption everyone has access to the same technologies. Thus, the issue of the digital divide prevents active, equal participation in either the past, present, future—questioning the very essence: is technology truly decolonizing and democratic? Though I have not been able to address all these problems and provide alternatives in this paper, we need to further explore how to merge technology and English literature pedagogy together when entering the Fourth Industrial Revolution as humanities scholars and students.

REFERENCE

[1] K.S. Shin, "Syllabus: Literature and Technology II," Yonsei University, Graduate School of English Literature and Language, Spring 2019.

[2] EBB (Elizabeth Barrett Browning) Archive. http://ebbarchive.org/poems/aurora_leigh.php.

[3] H.J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books*, Yale University Press, pp. 87, 2001.

[4] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Harper Perennial, pp. 140, 1993..

[5] J.P. Purdy, "Three Gifts of Digital Archives," *Journal of Literacy and Technology*, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp. 26-49, November 2011.

[6] J. Hall, "Using a Feminist Digital Humanities Approach: Critical Women's History through Covers of 'Black Coffee,'" *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 39, No.1, pp. 1-23, 2018, doi: 10.5250/fronjwomestud.39.1.0001.

[7] A. Koh, "Niceness, Building, and Opening the Genealogy of the Digital Humanities: Beyond the Social Contract of Humanities Computing," *Differences*, Vol. 251, pp. 93-106, 2014, doi: 10.1215/10407391-2420015.

[8] James Madison, *Federalist Papers No. 10,* 1778. https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/coretexts/_files/resources/texts/c/1787%20Federalist%20No%2010.pdf.

[9] Robert Browning, "Porphyria's Lover," in *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Eighth Edition, pp. 1278-1279.

[10] B. Cooper, "Intersectionality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, 2016.

[11] Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*, Penguin Books, pp. 415, 2013.

[12] E. Cushman, "Wampum, Sequoyan, and Story: Decolonizing the Digital Archive," *College English*, Vol. 76, No. 2, pp. 115-133, 2013.

[13] J. Paradis, K. Fendt, W. Kelley, J. Folsom, J. Pankow, L. Subbaraj & E. Graham, MIT Comparative Media Studies, White paper, "Annotation Studio: Bringing a Time-Honored Learning Practice into the Digital Age," 27 July 2013. https://cmsw.mit.edu/annotation-studio-whitepaper/.