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## Presidential Address--I Dreamed of Editing

Esther Katz

New York University, [esther.katz@nyu.edu](mailto:esther.katz@nyu.edu)

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# I Dreamed of Editing

Esther Katz

**I**t is a well-known fact that one's dreams are interesting only to the dreamer and perhaps his or her therapist. Yet, as the *Talmud* says, "A dream which is not interpreted is like a letter which is not read."<sup>1</sup> Dreams, (not just our own, but those of others) continue to be fodder for all kinds of analysis and supposition. That was certainly true of Margaret Sanger. Since the 1915 death of her small daughter, she had a fascination with the spirit and psychic worlds, and believed strongly in the foretelling quality of certain dreams. She even kept a "Dream Journal."<sup>2</sup> As an editor, I am naturally fascinated by those dreams and include them in my edition. Some are quite bizarre. For example, we included the following dream Sanger told Havelock Ellis about in 1930:

Last night I dreamed of Bernard Shaw—I was lying on his bed (innocently) with him—his hands very bandaged from broken wrists & he was pink & fat—very jolly with children (his own) running about—

Later I dreamed that like a flash of light came a picture of the Madonna & Child on a wall in front of me—a beautiful painting filling all the side of the wall in front of me. The queerest thing was that when the flash came I made the sign of the cross on my self as the Catholic Children are taught to do—Then at once I was amazed that I did that—So that I seemed to be in two states of consciousness at once—It was a nice dream so full of color & motion. All because I started to dream of Shaw....<sup>3</sup>

I can't begin to speculate on the meaning of a chubby Bernard Shaw, his wrists broken, sharing a bed with Margaret Sanger. Sometimes her dreams were more direct. On Sept. 1, 1939, the day the Germans invaded Poland, Sanger recorded this:

<sup>1</sup>R. Hisda in B. *Talmud*, Berakoth, 55a.

<sup>2</sup>For "Dream Journal" see *Margaret Sanger Papers Microfilm Edition, Smith College Collections* [MSM-S] (Baltimore, 1996), Reel 70:509.

<sup>3</sup>Sanger to Havelock Ellis, May 28, 1930 (MSM-S 5:700-705).



Esther Katz  
Presidential address delivered at the 26th annual meeting  
of the Association for Documentary Editing  
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Last night I dreamed I was dead—I felt dying & life seemed to have gone—Behind my bed was a great figure with wings & light radiating over my head. It was a pleasant radiation & I awoke feeling that Pepper [her deceased dog] was on my bed, & lap & sleeping peacefully my body was doubled over her warm body & my head on hers. It was a pleasant experience & I actually seemed to have died during the night<sup>4</sup>

I too have been remembering my dreams of late. But while I rarely have dreams about Margaret Sanger or the Project (my unconscious apparently being too busy with my conscious neurosis to spare the time), lately I have been having the following recurring dream:

I'm at this ADE meeting in Indianapolis and someone asks me about the presidential address. Suddenly I panic because I had completely forgotten to write one. So I dash up to my hotel room and frantically try to put some thoughts down on paper. I wake up.

Sanger was clearly concerned about the future in 1939, as the world teetered on edge of global conflict and dreamt about escaping into death. Given the state of today's world, I'm sure I too have anxiety dreams about the future, and as ADE President, I have surely had dreams about the Association—but I don't remember them. I remember only this recurring performance anxiety dream. But if I can't remember what my dreams *about* the ADE are, I do know, what I dream *for* the ADE.

Since the mid-1980s, when I came to my first ADE meetings in Providence and then in Nashville, not really knowing anyone, I found myself quickly accepted and befriended by a group of smart, dedicated professionals who not only were experts in their scholarly fields, but were actually interested in issues of transcription and annotation. This was a marked difference from my experience at the larger, more impersonal, and gatherings of tense, posturing graduate students and not-tenured junior faculty I was used to at the OAH and AHA. The ADE provided a safe haven and a forum for those of us who were new to editing, who could have their questions answered, share their expertise, learn new approaches.

The structure of the organization tended to be somewhat of a mystery when I first arrived. It seemed a bit elitist to my little rabble-rousing feminist soul, but then I made a discovery that was at the same time both encouraging and troubling. Almost as soon as I voiced an opinion, I was handed a task and a committee. Here, I concluded, was a group of people who truly

<sup>4</sup>Sanger, "Dream Journal," MSP, MN-SSC (MSM S70:511-12).

knew how to exploit new members. If the ADE is not a perfect organization, it has certainly met most of the needs of our community for over 25 years now.

But in the last two decades editors have been inhabiting a rapidly changing world with a host of new challenges. We all know the litany—funding has grown permanently tighter, the academy has grown even more removed from the rest of our culture, and the editing community itself began to change as there are fewer of us who are established full-time faculty and part-time editors. Rather more of us are full-time editors with part-time teaching positions or non-faculty professionals. Indeed, fewer and fewer editors have the financial security and cachet of tenure. At the same time, editors were being thrust into a lion pit competing for funders' red meat with what the NHPRC defined as our archival counterparts. In an effort to fight for our share, we were forced to try to distinguish ourselves from archivists, librarians, museum curators, groups with whom we have no quarrel except we want their funds. More and more often we were being asked to defend our profession and justify our editions. In addition, as we have all heard with deadening repetition, new technology has been emerging and editors have had to scramble to keep up. My editing students roar with laughter when I tell them I can still remember the days when editors were using Wang computers. Yet we did keep up and we did modernize and we did hang on and we're still here. But more and more of us are out of breath.

As we moved into the twenty-first century, the challenges accelerated and expanded, and as an organization we need to face the new realities of this changing world. Currently, the ADE mission is: "to provide a scholarly community for people interested in editing historical and literary texts and to promote the use of these records by students, teachers, and scholars." I think we do very well at providing the "means of cooperation and exchange of information" among editors. We do less well, however, at "promoting broader understanding of the principles and values underlying the practice of documentary editing."<sup>5</sup> To effectively meet the challenges of the 21st century, I believe the Association is going to have to change. We're going to have to accept certain new essentials.

First, we are no longer a small, intimate group who are all in the same boat. We are a more heterogeneous community and we face long-term, more complicated problems. To handle these, we must have more year-to-year

<sup>5</sup>ADE "Constitution." <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/ade/about/constitution.html>

continuity. We need a permanent ADE office, with an organizational address, phone number and e-mail. And we need someone permanent to staff the office and essentially administer the organization, as well as field phone calls and e-mail, and handle a range of other administrative tasks. And this cannot be a volunteer position, as our Secretary is now. We need a paid executive secretary or some other kind of paid administrator.

We might also consider changing our administrative structure. I propose that the office of president become a two or, better yet, a three-year term. (and note that I propose this at the end, rather than the beginning of my term). This will give the president time not only to initiate projects, but see them through to completion. For example, if the ADE decides to submit a proposal to the NEH for a project, the president can work on it from proposal to implementation. I know this will mean sacrifice in terms of time, but I believe it is necessary. An additional bonus is that we won't run out of potential candidates for president before we bring in new members.

Third, we need to organize and implement a public relations plan to make people more aware of who we are, what we do, how important our projects are, so we don't have to *keep* proving our worth at every funding crisis. Back in 1996, Rich Leffler reminded us in his excellent Presidential Address that we are the Association for Documentary *editing* not *editors*; that we are scholars as much as we are editors, and through our work we can shape the course of historical scholarship.<sup>6</sup> Two years ago NEH head Bruce Cole stroked our egos by calling our editions "intellectual monuments" and editors the "gatekeepers and standard bearers."<sup>7</sup> Yet we still face the same perception problem, that Michael Stevens pointed out back in his 1998 paper when he quoted Karen Winkler declaring in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* "documentary editing doesn't quite have the cachet of traditional research."<sup>8</sup>

The perpetuation of this notion was addressed more recently in a July 2004 lecture by historian Pauline Maier. She noted the publication of a wave of Founding-Era volumes that "make available to readers more documents

<sup>6</sup>Richard Leffler, "Documentary Editing: Some Essentials," *Documentary Editing* 18:1 (March 1996), 2.

<sup>7</sup>Bruce Cole, "Scholarly Editions and the National Endowment for the Humanities," *Documentary Editing* 24:4 (Dec. 2002), 90.

<sup>8</sup>Karen J. Winkler, "A Historian's Sweeping Projects Seek to Change our Understanding of Slavery," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Aug. 14, 1998, p. A13; quoted in Michael Stevens, "The Most Important Work?: Reflections on Twenty Years of Change in Documentary Editing," *Documentary Editing* 20:4 (Dec. 1998), 81.

than any scholar of an earlier generation was likely to read.” And “more documents,” she reminded the audience, “generally mean new understandings, and more documents that are easier to use gild the lily.” But she was struck by the seeming abandonment by younger historians of the history of the American Revolution at precisely the moment that these volumes were being published. Maier talked about a “disjunction” between the scholarly interests of these younger historians and the general reading public. Older historians, or historians writing for general audiences are using our editions—she uses McCullough and Ellis as examples—and, happily for us, she concluded that these new volumes are “richly repaying the public for those tax dollars the NEH used in subsidizing their publication.” And though by definition our editions will rarely be cutting edge, Maier, a self-described older historian working on a history of the Ratification that relies heavily on both the *George Washington Papers* and the *Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, found she was “finding a lot of evidence that runs against established truths.”<sup>9</sup>

Clearly editions remain critically important to scholarship, but the ADE has not sufficiently exploited this. The ADE needs to play a more aggressive role in helping to re-establish documentary editors in the public mind as scholars. An organization has to define itself and its own image. Historian Kitty Sklar reminds that “historians do a relatively poor job of explaining their work process to others.”<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, both the nature of our work and its values have to be given a better, more widespread public face. We need a more coherent mission statement, one that is both more expansive and more detailed, and we need to get it out. Our new web site is a start, but we have to stay focused on this. We need to expand the Association’s public presence, on line, in print, anywhere and everywhere we can. We need to enhance our media presence, increase our press contacts, issue regular press releases, perhaps have a media contact person, and create a vehicle for making certain ADE members speak with one voice. We also need to make sure that our individual and project achievements are well-covered by our host institutions, communities, and scholarly organizations. We must take the time to blow our own horns and, in the process, promote the value and practice of editing.

<sup>9</sup>Pauline Maier, “How the History of the American Revolution Has Changed,” *Humanities* (July/August, 2004).

<sup>10</sup>Kathryn Kish Sklar, “Teaching Students to Become Producers of New Historical Knowledge on the Web,” *Humanities* (July/August 2004).



We ought to take a far more aggressive role in defining and publicizing our best practice policies for selection, transcription, and annotation. We've done a lot already. Books like Kline's *Guide to Documentary Editing* and the Stevens & Berg *Handbook*, and our own online Electronic Standards, are notable achievements, but we need to do more. The ADE promotes a range of disciplinary and theoretical approaches to serve the needs of editors, but we need to do a better job of letting the scholarly community know that those best practices also serve their needs.

We also need to cultivate closer relationships, integrate ourselves more tightly into the major scholarly groups like the OAH, AHA, MLA, ASA, etc. We should become formally affiliated with them, and press harder on getting these associations to review and publicize our editions, and the work of our members. We need to engage these groups into encouraging more people to produce editions and to help formulate the subjects for new editions. We also need to find ways to pressure more universities into crediting editions as scholarly research, and qualify them as dissertations and tenure and promotion vehicles. In other words, the ADE has to become a more effective advocate for more than just funding. We need to focus on the incorporation of our goals into those major scholarly organizations.

The ADE has already begun to focus on the implications of electronic technology on editions, but we need to do more. Our experience as editors who have perfected the art of presenting manuscript material in scholarly published form can form the basis for a wider movement to make available electronically the primary sources of American history. But we also need to address the impact of on-line documents on traditional editions. How will traditional editions fit into this new world? Will our transcription policies change if the public can so easily examine originals? Will the extent and nature of our annotation have to change? It would be foolish not to re-think the place of printed volumes of edited, transcribed documents when a digital edition can be searched for a particular term or concept, or if we can produce readable image editions, and with various levels of creativity even make them searchable. How can we re-conceptualize our traditional print editions to enable them to enhance digital editions, not be replaced by them? The ADE needs to pick its organizational head out of the sand and examine these questions, before another group or funding agency does it for us. We need to use the ADE to re-situate our editions in both print and electronic environments.

We also need to collectively create a set of organizational goals for elec-



tronic editions. It is necessary to provide more systematic technical help and advice to our members, but at the same time we should avoid forcing editors to become “tech heads” or “web wonks.” I have never supported the idea of editors taking on the role of typesetter and I don’t support becoming our own electronic experts. We need to think about some form of institutional structure that will support and assist those editors actively involved in the digitization of scholarly editions (as opposed to electronic records), as well as community-wide standards for the creation, dissemination, and long term preservation of electronic scholarly editions. We can learn from those individuals, groups or projects already producing electronic editions and help those that want to. Perhaps we are looking at a Center sometime in the future, perhaps not, but we need to talk about what we editors need and want, before someone or something else tells us what we’re going to have. We also should expand our role in vetting on-line documents, acting as gatekeepers for digitized primary source material. We’ve roamed around the edges of all these issues, but we haven’t really faced them head on, or developed an articulated organizational policy.

We seem always to be reacting to changes in the strategic or policy changes of our federal funding agencies. But this practice of “ad hoc” advocacy, where we explode with sporadic spurts of activity, is not in our best interests. We’ve gone some way in addressing this by joining the National Coalition for History and the National Humanities Alliance, but we need to articulate our own long-term goals in terms specific to the needs of editors. I think we need to create our own five-year plan, so we know where we want to go. We can then formulate a response to the policy changes of our funders or supporters that are less reactive, and more reflective of our long-range best interests.

Dr. Seuss in *The Lorax* reminded us: “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot / Things aren’t going to get better, they’re NOT!”<sup>11</sup> Many of the goals and suggestions I just outlined are not new—I’ve been hearing them at ADE meetings for several years. And we are, after all, a relatively small association with limited resources. So we must rely on the commitment of our members. In 2002, past president Beth Luey reminded us that though “none of us have time ... all of us still have to contribute.”<sup>12</sup> We need to come to grips with the fact that we are a volunteer organization. We must do this not just by contributing time to our committees (although that’s critical), but

<sup>11</sup>Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax* (New York, 1971).

<sup>12</sup>Beth Luey, “Service with a Smile,” *Documentary Editing* 24:4 (Dec. 2002), 104.

also by writing reviews of other editions for *Documentary Editing* and other journals, and generally doing anything necessary to keep our editions in the center of scholarly endeavors. Our organization will not survive if members pay their dues, enjoy the meeting, but do nothing else. The burden has to be shared by all of us. As I said yesterday, you project directors can spread the joy by encouraging your staff to participate in the ADE and attend these meetings. We need to cultivate new members willing to give up some time to the organizations. We should make sure the charges we give each committee are do-able and equitable, that each member pulls his or her weight. In other words, our committees and Council have to be staffed by members willing to give time they don't have.

My goal tonight is not to take on the role of Association scold or chief whiner (though I am quite adept at both), but rather because I believe this can all be done. Marcel Proust said in *Remembrance of Things Past*: "If a little dreaming is dangerous, the cure for it is not to dream less but to dream more, to dream all the time."<sup>13</sup> I dream we can make all this and more happen. I dream we can insure a long life for our profession and this organization. But to do that, I suggest we also consider this Yiddish proverb:

"If you want your dreams to come true, don't over sleep."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Part 2, *In a Budding Grove*, "Seascape." (1919, English translation by Joe Johnson, New York, 2002).

<sup>14</sup>Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullman, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Cambridge, UK; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2002).

