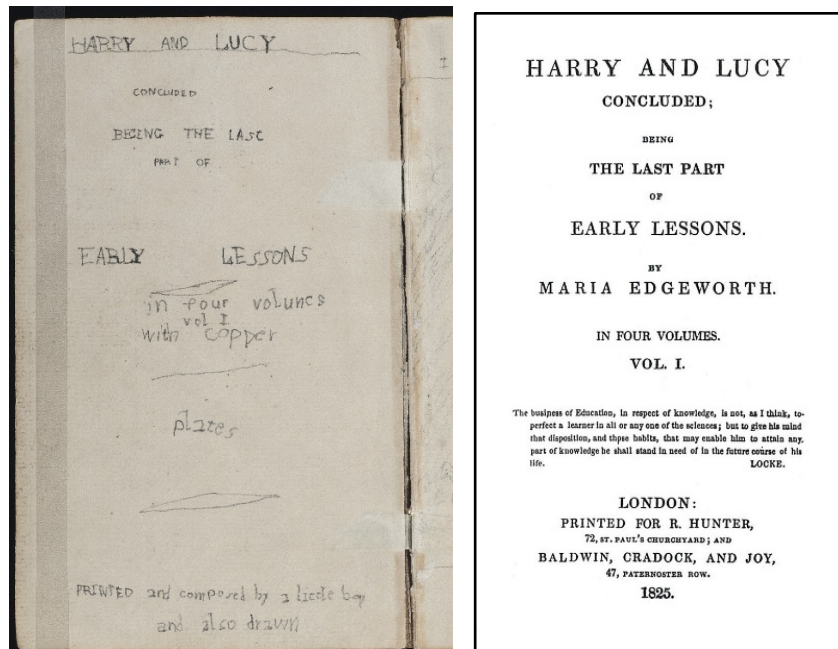


# MARKING UP THE WEIRDNESS; OR, TEI IS FOR GROWN-UPS

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“PRINTED and composed by a little boy and also drawn” (Fig. 1). The term *printed* can refer both to lettering by hand—print lettering as opposed to cursive—and to the technology of print, which this little boy, John Ruskin, was imitating (specifically, a published text by Maria Edgeworth [Fig. 2]). Young writers did not imitate print



*Figures 1 and 2. John Ruskin, title page (Fig. 1, left), MS I (John Ruskin Collection, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT). Title page, Harry and Lucy Concluded (Fig. 2, right), by Maria Edgeworth (1825).*

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passively. As Christine Alexander remarks, referencing Huizinga's definition of *play*, their imitation of print culture "is not simply mimesis" but "a variation, a commentary on, an interpretation, or a reproduction of the world around them" (31). Children enjoy the freedom to interpret printed symbols that adults have been conditioned to take for granted. Editors of juvenilia are tasked with crafting a representation of young authors' texts that captures this fresh encounter with print. However, our standard tool for Web-based digital representation of text, the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI), essential as it is to digital humanities, is better suited for encoding the originals of child writers' print sources than for representing the playfulness of their unconventional interpretations. In *Early Ruskin Manuscripts (ERM)*, the category of Ruskin's imitative play that has most frustrated a TEI solution is his punctuation.

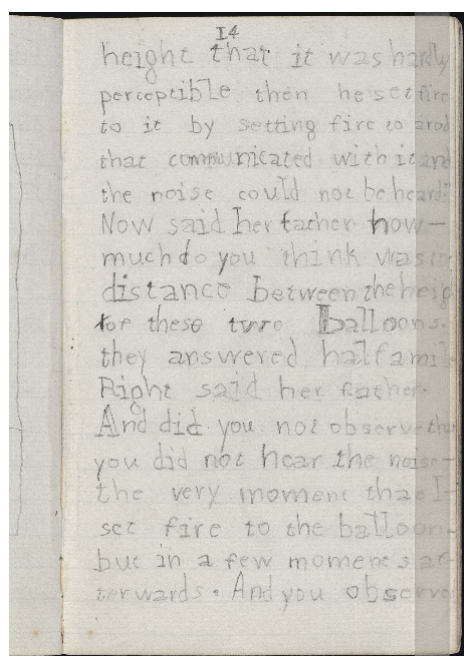


Figure 3. John Ruskin, from "Harry and Lucy Concluded," MS I, p. 14 (John Ruskin Collection, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT).

For a young writer determined to imitate the printed page, justified margins pose a challenge to dexterity. The right margin in particular requires fine adjustments in letter and word spacing in order to end each line precisely at a specified length—a task that is routine when composing type but tricky when hand lettering, as evidenced by samplers that Linda Jacobson exhibited for the June 2025 symposium on editing juvenilia collections. Some writers like the Brontës achieved a de facto right justification by filling a leaf to the gutter on a verso or the outer edge of a leaf on a recto. Ruskin solved the problem by inventing a punctuation mark, a horizontal line

of variable length to fill the space between the final word in a line and the margin, as in Figure 2 following the words *how*, *noise*, *I*, and *balloon*. The mark appears in the earliest extant juvenilia, the 1826 notebook MS I shown in Figure 3, and Ruskin kept it in his back pocket for use eight years later in MS IX, when a line even in his elegant copperplate script fell short of a perfect text block.<sup>1</sup>

In *ERM*, we have named this punctuation a *justification mark*. It cannot be represented fairly by the Unicode symbol for a hyphen even though Ruskin’s usage of the mark overlaps with the conventional use of a hyphen. In Figure 3, for example, Ruskin uses his mark to divide the word *afterward* on the line break (two lines from the bottom of the page), revealing the origin of his ersatz punctuation. To represent this specific usage of the mark, an encoder might justifiably insert the Unicode character for a hyphen. For the other four usages of the justification mark on this page, coding the mark used to fill the gap between the final word and the right margin

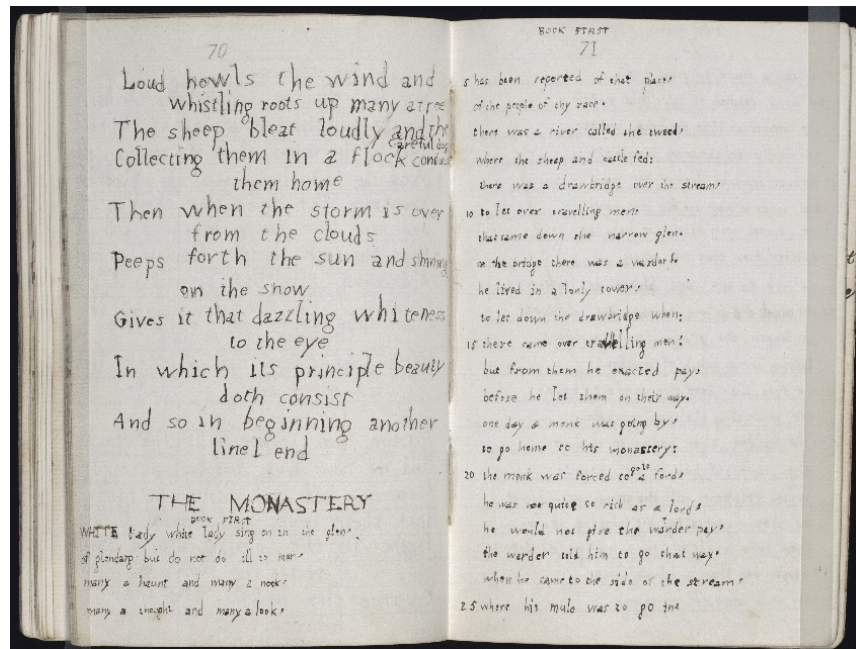


Figure 4. John Ruskin, from “The Storm” (left) and from “The Monastery” (left to right), MS III, pp. 70–71 (John Ruskin Collection, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT).

as a hyphen would falsify its meaning. Instead, the encoder must follow procedures in the TEI *gaiji* module—on the representation of nonstandard characters and glyphs. Even then, adopting these separate solutions would be misleading since Ruskin’s justification mark covers both these usages. In his fresh encounter with print, Ruskin was not exactly reverse-thinking the role of the hyphen in the history of Western writing and printing, but he was reuniting the marginal hyphen, which Johannes Gutenberg required for thousands of lines to square the columns of his Bible, with

its ancient usage before spaces divided words (see Houston 121–32). Why not employ that mark at the ends of words as well as between syllables?

The dynamism of such thinking can no more be represented by the Unicode character for a hyphen than can a single term comprise the contraries of *innocence* and *experience* in a Blake poem. In *ERM*, our compromise solution is to encode the mark using the TEI *glyph* element, defining its type as *justification mark*, while what the user sees is an en-dash along with a link to a reader’s note explaining our interpretation of Ruskin’s usage. This stilted procedure of course only draws attention to the laboriousness required to escape our habitual reliance on convention in order to witness the world of print through a child writer’s eyes.

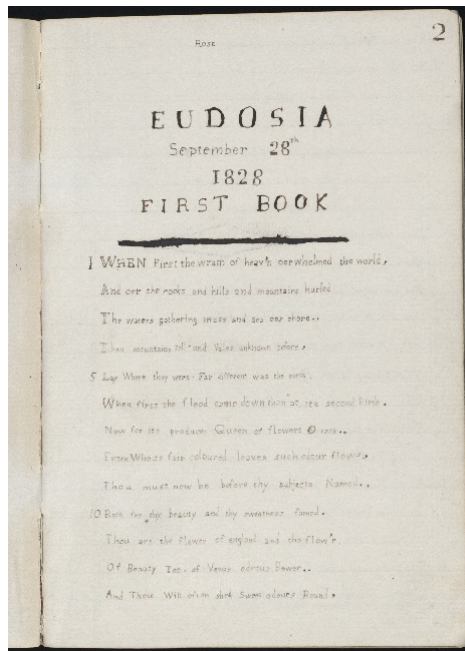


Figure 5. John Ruskin, from “Eudosia,” MS IV, p. 1 (John Ruskin Collection, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT).

After April 1827, when Ruskin first learned to use pen and ink (*Ruskin Family Letters* 156), his play with punctuation became even more confounding from our standpoint today as encoders. In the earlier juvenilia, especially in his poetry, Ruskin typically used no punctuation at all, not even periods, and rarely a comma (e.g. in “The Storm,” Fig. 4). Armed with a pen, however, he took to punctuating every single line of a poem—specifically, the end of each line—whether the line needed punctuation or not. In fair copies of three long poems of 1827–28, “The Monastery” (Fig. 4), “The Constellations,” and “Eudosia,” this end-line punctuation frequently bears no evident grammatical or rhetorical relation to the substance of the lines. Many of the marks themselves seem nonsensical: semicolons are upside down; colons do

not meaningfully divide or introduce anything; and, in the poem “Eudosia” (Fig. 5), the colons fall on their side, becoming something like two-point ellipses (or just taking a rest).

Whatever Ruskin meant by this weird punctuation, the TEI guidelines best suited to represent it would seem to be the section “Decoration” in the module “Manuscript Description.” Initially developed for encoding medieval manuscripts, the module admits that “it can be difficult to draw a clear distinction between aspects of a manuscript which are purely physical and those which form part of its intellectual content” (11.7.2.2). Just so, Ruskin’s marks seem to hover between a decorative and a functional purpose. Evidence of a purely decorative purpose is suggested by Ruskin’s failure to complete the obsessive punctuating. In fair copies of all three poems, the end-line punctuation abruptly stops at an arbitrary point in the poem (Fig. 6). The recurring neglect suggests that Ruskin added the end-line punctuation all at once, as a separate layer, after he had fair-copied the text, but quit when the task became tiresome. (In contrast, the scarce instances of in-line punctuation in these poems, such as an occasional comma, are properly letter-spaced, and therefore were likely inserted not as an afterthought but in the course of fair-copying.)

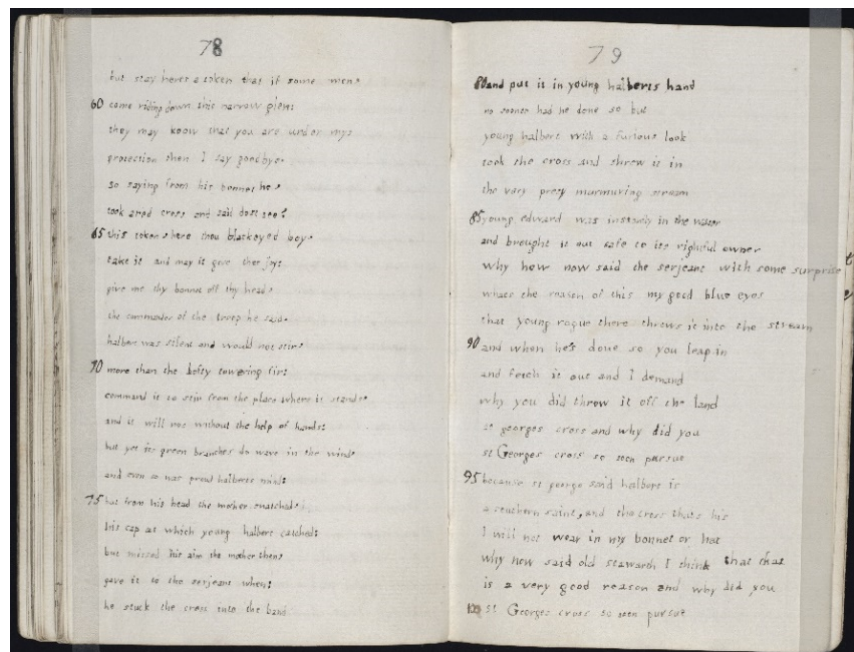


Figure 6. John Ruskin, from “The Monastery,” MS III, pp. 78–79 (John Ruskin Collection, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT).

If our speculation is correct that Ruskin added the end-line punctuation all at once, ERM’s programming is able to represent that final compositional stage by treating the punctuation as a layer separate from the main text—first, displaying the

poem lacking the end-line punctuation; second, displaying the punctuation layer alone; third, displaying both layers together. This solution has the advantage of interactivity, enabling as it does the reader to join in Ruskin's fun (until it apparently was not fun anymore). For that feature to work properly, however, each of the layered punctuation marks must be encoded individually using the TEI element for a textual addition, <add>. Use of this element, however, effectively removes the markup from the module on manuscript decoration and treats the marks as text, requiring each punctuation mark to be represented by a Unicode symbol. For the colons tipped on their sides, there does exist U+2025, the two-dot leader; and even the upside-down semicolon can be represented by U+061B, the Arabic semicolon or *fasila manqoota*, although this code renders with the hook pointing the opposite direction to Ruskin's. Necessarily, as in the case of Ruskin's justification mark, the reader will require a gloss that explains all this, and the gloss must include a disclaimer for the solecism of rendering the upside-down semicolon as Arabic, which it certainly is not, and the horizontal colon as an ellipsis, which it may or may not be. One can hear Ruskin laughing.

Timothy Gao, whose introduction to *Virtual Play and the Victorian Novel* we recently shared in the ISLJ Working Group, might suggest that, by hammering away at weird punctuation with TEI tools, *ERM* is missing the target of Ruskin's virtual play. The apparently nonsensical punctuation is perhaps more aptly viewed as the expression of a virtual world in which Ruskin was both poet and typographer. In the case of "The Monastery," which is a versification of Walter Scott's novel, perhaps he imagined himself specifically as Walter Scott and James Ballantyne. "By creating a screened and enclosed world which stylistically resembles the actual," Gao writes, "and can be treated and experienced in selective, advantageous respects like actual instances, the novel by virtue of its fiction may perform social and ethical functions which work with or against its goals as a depiction of society and ethics" (10). It is for another discussion what function Ruskin's virtual play at typesetting might have performed in these particular poems (likely more familial and psychological than societal and ethical). To conclude the present discussion, I am reminded how, when we initiated our Digital Humanities program at Southeastern Louisiana University, our colleague Joel Fredell along with our students, who were then editing *The Book of Margery Kempe*, met with some resistance—but also experience in common—at the 2011 TEI Conference when expressing their "hope that TEI will soon embrace encoding solutions that will make possible new levels of accuracy and transparency in presenting the graphic features of texts as they are witnessed in their material artefacts—coding that respects the original purposes and meanings of the thousands of characters for which print and Unicode have never offered equivalents" (Fredell, Borchers, and Ilgen, par. 35).<sup>2</sup> Whether representing the marks of medieval scribes or of young writers in the age of print, editorial methodologies strain to find ways to represent the invention of characters and inventive uses of characters.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See, e.g., “Calais” (prose), in “Account of Tour on the Continent,” *Early Ruskin Manuscripts*, [erm.selu.edu/witnesses/calais\\_prose\\_msix](http://erm.selu.edu/witnesses/calais_prose_msix).
- <sup>2</sup> Special thanks to Eric Bontempo for introducing Gao’s book to the ISLJ Working Group’s reading as well as suggesting a chapter in Gailey—“The Death of the Author Has Been Greatly Exaggerated” (pp. 107–40)—that speaks to limitations of TEI for purposes discussed here. For information about the ISLJ Working Group and how to join it, please contact Eric Bontempo at [emb23b@acu.edu](mailto:emb23b@acu.edu).

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- . “Manuscript Decoration,” module 11 of current Guidelines for Electronic Text Encoding and Interchange, [www.tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/en/html/MS.html](http://www.tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/en/html/MS.html).