Encountering Ephemera 1500-1800

Encountering Ephemera 1500-1800: Scholarship, Performance, Classroom

Edited by

Joshua B. Fisher and Rebecca Steinberger

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To Catherine, Isaac, and Eli and in loving memory of Susan Fisher

To Luca

In memory of our friend and colleague, Adam Max Cohen

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

What you encounter in the following pages originated as a panel session entitled "Re-thinking Ephemera in the Classroom" at the 2004 annual meeting of the Group for Early Modern Cultural Studies (GEMCS) in Orlando, Florida. During that session's dynamic dialogue between audience members and presenters, the idea developed to offer a collection of various approaches to teaching ephemera in the early modern and 18th century literature classroom. Having gone through several iterations—as anything dealing with ephemeral matters will do—we offer you the fruits of our labor and hope that faculty, students, and scholars alike will find it innovative and helpful.

We thank the students from Misericordia and Wingate Universities along with students from the numerous other institutions represented in this volume for shaping the way we think about the impact of ephemera on the texts we investigate in our early modern courses (and especially Shakespeare and Restoration and 18th century British Literature).

We also acknowledge the generous support of the Faculty Development and Faculty Research Grants Committees at Misericordia University. In addition, we thank the Rare Books and Music staff at the British Library. Without the technological prowess of Edward Halloran, the manuscript would not have come together as seamlessly. Most importantly, we thank our loving families whose support has been consistent, generous, and valued beyond words.

Joshua B. Fisher
Rebecca Steinberger

INTRODUCTION

TOWARD A PEDAGOGY OF THE EPHEMERAL

JOSHUA B. FISHER

I. The Myth of Indelible Print

In 1610, Sir Thomas Bodley famously wrote to the Stationer's Company after agreeing that the Bodleian library should be furnished with one copy of each book that the Stationers published. Among the kinds of printed materials that Bodley requested *not* to be sent were plays, proclamations, almanacs, and other such "idle books and riff-raffs" that might compromise his efforts to fill the library with "none but such [books] as are singular."[1] Bodley's insistence is striking for several reasons. First, the idea of "singular" books underscores how the library as an institution could be conceived as a depository for stable and monumental texts, knowledge, and cultural artifacts.[2] Bodley's confidence in the authoritative and static nature of "singular" printed books invigorates the idea of print as fixed and unchanging, at least to the extent that print is capable of being protected from change within the storehouse/fortress of the library. Second, and in keeping with this protective concern, Bodley's insistence seemingly reinforces socio-cultural stratification with regard to print and readership. Labeling undesirable texts as "idle" and "riff-raffs" situates such materials squarely within an inferior social category, the term "idle" in particular resonating with early modern England's vagrant classes.[3]

Yet Bodley's concern here is not so much about maintaining a socially exclusive archive as it is about ensuring the myth of stasis and indelibility within the confines of his library. Referring elsewhere to undesirable texts as "baggage books," Bodley divulges anxiety about the mobility of texts within early modern English culture. Recent scholars such as Patricia Fumerton and Adam Fox have emphasized this kind of mobility, making a strong case for the fluidity of production, transmission, and dissemination across scribal, printed, and oral media. Broadside ballads performed orally in market stalls and fairs could find their way into the personal

commonplace books of the gentry. Popular plays almost always originated in manuscript prompt books with later printed versions incorporating both the written sources and the oral recollections of actors and spectators. Poems written to circulate within exclusive coterie circles were sometimes later included in printed miscellanies that would then intermingle with ballads and songs within orally transmitted contexts and sometimes even found their way into the theatrical realm of plays (as in the case of Ophelia's "rosemary…for remembrance").[4]

In line with the transformative potential of discourse across media, much has been said about the so-called stigma of print that made many late sixteenth and early sixteenth century writers reluctant to offer their writing into the realm of print for fear of falling into the hands of indiscriminate (mis)readers. But where scholars have typically interpreted this reluctance as an effort to reinforce class distinctions, the stigma attests more to the mutability of discourse within the dynamic realm of the print marketplace. Margaret Cavendish voices these kinds of concerns in her *Philosophical Fancies* (1653), where she likens her writing to an offspring being turned out into the world:

> But be it bad or good it is my own,
> Unless in printing 'tis a changeling grown.
> Which sure I have no reason for to doubt:
> It hath the same mark, when I put it out.
> But be it fair, or brown, or black, or wild,
> I still must own it, 'cause it is my child.
> And should my neighbours say 'tis a dull block,
> 'Tis honestly begot, of harmless stock.
> By motion in my brain, 'twas formed and bred,
> By my industrious study it was fed.
> And by my busy pen was clothed—though plain
> The garments be, yet are they without stain.
> But be it ne'er so plain, nor rich, and gay,
> Fantastical 'tis dressed, the world will say.
> The world thinks all is fine that's in the fashion,
> Though it be old if fashioned with translation.[5]

Like so many other prefatory addresses in the early modern period, Cavendish's serves as a modest disclaimer for an increasingly discriminating reading public. More importantly, though, the concern that her writing will grow into a "changeling" as a result of print attests to the transformative capacity of discourse across scribal and printed media (here negotiated through the raced language of miscegenation), highlighting the mutable and protean conditions of production, transmission, and dissemination

within the space of early modern culture. It is this transformative capacity that Bodley works to undermine in his insistence on "singular" books within the space of his library. And it is the ephemeral and transitory underpinnings of early modern discourse and culture that is the subject of this collection.

II. Ephemeral Consciousness

Librarians, archivists, hobbyists, and collectors typically define ephemeral printed material as a "flimsy or insubstantial…transient document produced for a specific purpose and not intended to survive the topicality of its message or event to which it relates."[6] Within this context, the category of ephemera typically includes such items as printed broadsheets displaying advertisements or bills, posters, tickets, receipts, cigarette cards, color lithograph labels such as those found on late nineteenth through mid twentieth century fruit crates and cigar boxes, and booking forms, among other such temporary materials.[7] While collectors and archivists usually emphasize the distinction between ephemera and other minor publications such as pamphlets and serials comprising the category of *grey literature*, many scholars particularly within the fields of literature and history have recognized significant blurring across these distinctions. Traditionally, cheap printed materials have often been categorized together in the interest of asserting binary distinctions between marginal and canonical texts. Here, distinguishing a transitory and ephemeral text from a dominant, canonical one has less to do with questions concerning the text's original intended duration of use and more to do with the perceived stability and endurance of its literary qualities (hence Bodley's concern with "baggage books"). Seen in this light, it becomes more difficult to draw a clear distinction between ephemeral printed texts and so-called marginal works more generally: ballads, chapbooks, political pamphlets, and other "cheap print."

This distinction becomes less of a concern, however, when considerations of textual production and transmission are factored in. These include the "ephemeral traces" of texts, including oral and musical performance, physical gestures, and other non-textual and for the most part non-extant or transitory elements that accompany the dissemination and transmission of such materials. When a broadside ballad was sung orally in a market stall as part of the financial transaction of sale, the transitory and ephemeral nature of the performance stood as a defining aspect of the work both in terms of advertising the ballad for sale and in giving rise to further opportunities for shaping and defining the text

through transmission (for example, by bystanders who might overhear or even mishear and then transmit the song within a tavern or inn). Thus, ephemerality is a key component in both the creative and the commercial livelihood of the text.

In recent years, literary scholars and historians have worked to complicate the marginal/canonical binary, in part by recognizing how attending to the material processes of textual production, transmission, and dissemination highlights the potential unfixity and mutability of texts (and textual relationships) whether discussing broadside ballads or coterie poetry.[8] By shifting the focus to the processes by which texts are constructed and construed, the prospect of recognizing any text (regardless of its canonical status) as a static and fixed entity becomes difficult and in turn, the ephemeral qualities that define and constitute the text's materiality come more sharply into focus. In addition, recent critical attention to early modern print culture as well as social class formation has helped to bring cheap print into the center of scholarly and pedagogical conversations. Important work by Margaret Spufford, Tessa Watt, Adam Fox, Sharon Achinstein, Patricia Fumerton, Bruce Smith, and others during the last three decades has called attention to the ways in which broadsides, chapbooks, pamphlets, and other cheap print participates in the processes of early modern cultural production while elucidating material and social practices.

Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz's essay collection *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture* builds on Arthur Kinney's seminal work in the 1980s compiling and editing rogue pamphlets. This distinct subgenre of cheap print consists of inexpensive printed handbooks written by authors ranging from Robert Harman, Robert Greene and Thomas Dekker to anonymous hacks that expose readers to the illicit practices, manners of speaking (cant), and clandestine secrets of the underground rogue culture. While Kinney himself views the rogue literature as significant in that it reveals "nothing less momentous than the birth of the novel in England," Dionne and Mentz (along with many other recent scholars) view the material in terms of its socio-cultural relevance in the early modern period. As they explain in their introduction, "Since the late 1990s, there has been a suggestive convergence of revisionist-historicist and poststructuralist accounts of the underworld literature as a site of discursive and ideological *contest*, where the making of culturally inscribed social differences—class, race, gender, and nation—are written in and through this experimental hybrid form of faux journalism."[9] Seen in this light, cheap printed materials such as rogue pamphlets shed their status as either curiosities of an inferior, popular literature or as foundational building blocks serving

the interest of an emerging literary genre. Instead such materials play key roles in helping to illuminate early modern cultural values and practices and to contextualize more traditionally canonical works in their social frameworks.

Along these lines, the "ephemeral spaces" across and between discourses—what might be called the "ephemera of cultural poetics"[10]—plays a key role in shaping literary texts. These might include, for example, the interrelationship between Shakespeare's theater and the ballads, popular tunes, poetic miscellanies, and political pamphlets that both surround and pervade the drama. In the present volume, John A. Carpenter takes up this exploration in his chapter "Sennet, Flourish, Tucket: Contextualizing Shakespeare's Early Modern Musical Shorthand" as he considers the theoretical and pedagogical ramifications of ephemeral musical stage directions in Shakespeare's plays, exploring extant evidence of early modern stage music, and situating musical stage directions within the heritage of early modern thought imbuing music with power. Nadia Bishai explores the neglected area of early modern playwrights' production of non-dramatic texts, most of which are now categorised as ephemera. In doing so, she seeks to extend our knowledge of the production of such texts, provide a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics among plays and popular literature, and interrogate definitions and divisions within established literary categories. Eric Leushner's chapter "Beginning with the Ephemeral: Reading the Eighteenth century Preface" investigates the textual space of the preface as a privileged site of literary production, existing both in a liminal position before the book and between the ideal parameters of the public sphere and the institutional elements of the literary marketplace. In these contexts, ephemeral matters constitute both the *material* (texts not intended to last or designed for limited cultural life) and the *process* (fleeting and transitory aspects of cultural production). Whether discussing the circulation of cheap print, the performative traces of music and gesture in Shakespeare's plays, or the diffuse cultural influences that both surround and pervade literary texts, attending to ephemeral matters underscores the dynamic unfixity of early modern and eighteenth century cultural practices.

Theorizing the dynamic unfixity of cultural practices including discourse production and transmission has been an important development in recent literary and philosophical scholarship. Where Deconstructionists have exposed the mutability and instability of discourse and the semiotic systems in which discourse functions in order to show how all meanings are provisional rather than intrinsic or essential,[11] recent developments in critical theory offer a more productive apparatus through which to "find

potentialities in instabilities."[12] Building on the work of Derrida as well as a range of Poststructuralist critics including Judith Bulter, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari, Bryan Reynolds posits his theory of *transversal poetics* to understand processes of subject-definition within the dynamic space of early modern culture. Relying upon spatial metaphors to understand subjectivities and their conceptual territories,[13] Reynolds identifies "sociopolitical conductors" comprising "the familial, religious, juridical, media, and educational structures—the replicators, transmitters, and orchestrators of thoughts, meanings, and desires—that interconnect a society's ideological and cultural framework." The interrelations between these conductors and their products "generate conceptually dynamic assemblages, or 'articulatory spaces,' which are discursive environments that surround, enmesh, embody, and laminate charged topics, objects, and events."

For the present discussion, Reynolds' notion of "articulatory spaces" helps to conceptualize the dynamic and intersecting realms of discourse production and transmission (performative, scribal, textual, oral, and gestural) in early modern England.[14] Within this context, attending to the ephemeral complicates questions of authority, agency, and originality, and offers a conceptual rethinking of the dynamics of early modern and eighteenth century literary culture. Through this kind of critical lens, subjectivities within literary texts (whether canonical or otherwise) might themselves be identified as ephemeral.

This notion of ephemeral subjectivities broadens the scope of the term to include everything from elusive and nebulous social, sexual, and gender identities in early modern drama to the "ephemeral consciousness" of a writer such as John Taylor the Water-Poet, whose 1630 folio publication of his collected pamphlet writings entitled *All The Works of John Taylor the Water Poet* attests to his unrelenting fascination with the ephemeral potential of printed text (see Fisher's chapter "Ephemeral Traces in Seventeenth-century Domestic English Travel Writing").

Similarly concerned with the notion of an ephemeral consciousness**,** Rachel Ramsey's chapter "Rediscovering and Reconstituting the Past: The Legacy of Thomas Coram's Foundling Hospital" describes how students are called upon to assess the function of ephemera in the shaping of history, becoming active participants in the very process of identifying and reconstructing what "represents" Thomas Coram's 1720 Foundling Hospital. To investigate the temporary, the transitory, the time-bound, and the elusive is not only to complicate the conventional binary distinguishing the ephemeral from the classical and canonical (giving rise to the pleasures

of the fleeting), but more importantly to highlight the ephemeral and dynamic spaces in which such distinctions break down.

III. A Pedagogy of the Ephemeral

Recognizing ephemera both in terms of *material* and *process*, as outlined above, provides a powerful pedagogical tool to conceptualize how texts as well as selves are historically and culturally determined. By identifying the self and the reality surrounding the self as unfinished and always in the act of becoming, as attending to the ephemeral makes possible, students become complicit in the powerfully constructive processes of inquiry and dialogue. In addition, attending to the wide nexus of ephemeral traces and spaces through which discourse (including critical analysis) takes shape prioritizes active engagement in the dynamic process of interpretive inquiry.[15] In this context, ephemeral matter can serve as a crucial conductor to stimulate such inquiry. In his discussion of ephemera in the eighteenth century literature classroom, Jad Smith describes twenty-first century advertising ephemera as "scaffolding for the interpretation of functionally analogous ephemera from an earlier period and, ultimately, for a chronological awareness of the history of consumer logic in Western cultures."[16] As Smith describes in his chapter "Teaching Ephemera: Consumption, Feeling, and the Eighteenth century Culture of Charity in the Contemporary Classroom," engaging students as interpreters of contemporary visual ephemera helps them to realize their own empowered positions as 'readers' of culture and to identify the limits of "modern-mindedness" by coming to recognize the historical continuity of cultural logic.

Along similar lines, M. G. Aune in his chapter "The Student Miscellany Project: Exploring the Ephemeral in Early Modern Literary Culture" calls attention pedagogically to the dynamic processes of material production in early modern culture. Describing an assignment in which students compile their own early modern poetry miscellany, Aune shows how such engagement provides a productive means for students to explore questions of early modern print and manuscript cultures and how these cultures shaped and continue to shape lyric poetry. Hillary Nunn's chapter "Virtual Ephemera: Computers, Classrooms, and 'Monumental' Texts" demonstrates how the World Wide Web plays a valuable role in showing that "original" texts are themselves ephemeral, and can indeed be suitably represented in the ethereal realms of cyberspace. Calling on the scholarship of both print history and electronic media, Nunn's essay explores how the Internet brings an inherently productive instability to the

study of Renaissance texts, providing a more dynamic and therefore more accurate image of the already-changed texts under study. Focusing on online ballad databases and resources such as EEBO and the Early English Broadside Ballad Archive, Eric Nebeker and Liberty Stanavage, in their essay "'Will Ye Ha' a Ballad?': Teaching Shakespeare with Ballads" demonstrate how an emphasis on the culture of early modern broadsides in the classroom can both enhance and complicate students' readings of Shakespeare's plays (particularly *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and especially *The Winter's Tale*) while underscoring the interconnections between the drama and the cultural landscape of early modern England.

Each of the essays in this volume offers new ways of thinking about ephemera as a critical category concerned not only with texts but also with production, transmission, and dissemination of texts/performances in relation to ephemeral traces and spaces. That is, to recognize the ways in which ephemera helps to understand and elucidate dynamic processes of cultural fashioning and becoming. While numerous recent studies have investigated early modern print production and dissemination from a variety of angles,[17] the present collection is unique in its pioneering efforts to treat ephemera as both a culturally nuanced critical category and a pedagogical tool. Each contribution provides discussion of pedagogical strategies and implications that helps to make a case for incorporating so-called marginal/non-canonical matters within the classroom not simply to contrast or supplement dominant texts but rather to better understand processes of cultural production, circulation, performance, and author-fashioning. In addition, the volume incorporates both an early modern and eighteenth century focus, therefore making a claim for the cultural continuity across these periods, especially with regard to print culture and its impact. Finally, the collection offers insightful and fresh contributions on a number of forward-looking and innovative topics including utilizing electronic resources for accessing and studying early modern texts and manuscripts, early modern editorial and printing/circulation practices, seventeenth century domestic English travel narratives, music in Shakespeare's plays, eighteenth century prefaces, political writing, broadside ballads, and charity/hospital culture. While diverse in their exploration of a range of topics and areas, all of the essays share a key theoretical focus on the significance of ephemeral matters both in terms of scholarly and pedagogical implications.

Notes

[1] Quoted in Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Professions of Dramatist and Player in Shakespeare's Time 1590-1642* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 52.

[2] The destruction of the great library of Alexandria as well as much more recent examples in Sarajevo (1992) and Baghdad (2003-2004) attest to the power of the library as a signifier of cultural stability and stasis. To eradicate the library is to undermine the very foundations upon which notions of culture and community are situated.

[3] Among numerous pamphlets, proclamations, and other publications that situate idleness in socio-economic terms, see for example *A lyttle treatyse called ye Image of* idlenesse (1558), *The Enimie of Idlenesse* (1568), *Orders appointed to bee executed in the citie of London, for setting roges and idle persons to work, and for relefe of the poore* (1582), and *A proclamation for suppressing of the multitude of idle vagabonds, and auoyding of certaine mischieuous dangerous persons from her Maiesties court* (1594). See Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

[4] For a compelling discussion of such processes, see Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also Joshua B. Fisher, "'He is turned a ballad-maker': Broadside Appropriations in Early Modern England." *EMLS* 9.2 (September 2003): 3.1-21. http://purl.oclc.org/emls/09-2/fishball.html

[5] Margaret Cavendish, *Philosophical Fancies* (London, 1653). 86.

[6] Christopher Makepeace, *Ephemera: A Book on its Collection, Conservation, and Use* (Hants and Brookfield: Gower Publishing, 1985), 10.

[7] In recent years, the popularity of PBS television's antique appraisal show *Antique Roadshow* as well as the online resale sites such as craigslist.org and ebay.com have significantly expanded the cultural currency of ephemeral matters printed or otherwise. A recent search on ebay for unused tickets from the defunct 1950s and 60s era Pacific Ocean Park amusement park in Santa Monica, California, for example, revealed that such materials sometimes sell for upwards of 300 dollars for a single unused ticket. Additionally, Internet culture, with its infinite webspaces, blogospheres, podcasts, and advertising (pop-ups, spam, banners, etc.) provides rich new territory for constantly expanding and contracting ephemerality.

[8] See for example Cathy Lynn Preston and Michael J. Preston (eds), *The Other Print Tradition: Essays on Chapbooks, Broadsides, and Related Ephemera* (New York: Garland Press, 1995). See also Arthur F. Marotti and Michael Bristol (eds), *Print, Manuscript, and Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2000). For an important collection of Renaissance poetry that reconceptualizes the parameters of the canon, see especially David Norbrook (introduction) and H. R. Woudhuysen (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Renaissance Verse 1509-1659*. (London: Penguin Books, 1993).

[9] Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz, *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 15.
[10] James Mardock, " 'That is an old device ': Ephemeralizing the Canon." Unpublished paper presented at the 12th annual meeting of the Group for Early Modern Cultural Studies, Orlando, Florida. November, 2004.
[11] Derrida's term *différance* articulates how meanings both differ from and defer to other meanings and therefore always remain contingent and provisional within the space of discourse. See *Of Grammatology*
[12] Bryan Reynolds, *Transversal Poetics and Fugitive Explorations*, (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2006), 9
[13] See Henri LeFebvre, *The Production of Space* (Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
[14] Where earlier critics such as Stephen Greenblatt identify subjective "self-fashioning" as an individual's self-circumscription within (or in response to) the institutions and strictures of official culture, Reynolds argues that state power is only one such shaping force. In addition to the "subjective territories" of state power, "transversal" as well as "open" territories provide powerful conductors for subject becomings and comings-to-be.
[15] Resonating with Paolo Freire's model of problem-posing education, Bryan Reynolds offers the *investigative-expansive* model of critical inquiry. Rather than seeking to isolate texts by way of conclusive and finalized answers (i.e. the dissective-cohesive model), investigative-expansive inquiry seeks to engage texts and interpreters through the socio-cultural, historical, political, and institutional valences and conductors that comprise a text.
[16] Jad Smith, "Teaching Ephemera: Consumption, Feeling, and the Eighteenth century Culture of Charity in the Contemporary Classroom," [internal reference]
[17] See for example the following: George Justice, *The Manufacturers of Literature: Writing and the Literary Marketplace in Eighteenth-Century England* (Wilmington: University of Delaware Press, 2002); Arthur F. Marotti and Michael Bristol, eds. *Print, Manuscript, and Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England*. (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2000); Cathy Lynn Preston and Michael J. Preston, eds. *The Other Print Tradition: Essays on Chapbooks, Broadsides, and Related Ephemera*. (New York: Garland Press, 1995); Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain 1700-1830*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550-1640*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

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CHAPTER ONE

VIRTUAL EPHEMERA: TEACHING "MONUMENTAL" TEXTS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

HILLARY M. NUNN

"All information, all data, in the computer world," Jay David Bolter notes, "is a kind of controlled movement, and so the natural inclination of computer writing is to change, to grow, and finally to disappear."[1] While Bolter refers specifically to the transitory nature of writing that originates in the digital realm, his comments offer a surprisingly accurate description of the life cycle of many early modern literary works as well. When writings from the Renaissance manage to survive for our modern viewing, it is often because they migrated into print at some point, yet this does not make them immune from the pattern that Bolter outlines. To newer students of the period, the increasing significance of printing in the Renaissance might initially seem to lend solidity to published literary works, "preserving" them in type and preventing their disappearance, yet rude awakenings often follow as students learn of the variations among different copies of works as canonical as Shakespeare's First Folio. At the same time, such works prove so central to English departments that many students, consciously or not, see them as building blocks of their literary studies. The recognition of such shaky foundations leaves students with nagging questions: How could the "real" versions of such important works have slipped away from view? And how, many students in my master's level Renaissance Poetry and Prose class come to ask, have so many centuries worth of editors gotten away with changing such important works without apology?

My classes at The University of Akron, and no doubt similar ones at other colleges and universities, are filled with students who are stunned to learn of the instability of the canonical texts that they have long pictured as carved in stone. More often than not, students experience this revelation

as frustrating before they can see it as potentially exhilarating. When they learn of the influence that early printers and centuries of editors have exercised over Renaissance literary works, students often strive to forget textual instability rather than to concede that the pieces we read are in fact ephemeral in their own way, resting on what Stephen Orgel calls "a hard core of uncertainty."[2] Variations among manuscript copies and early printings not only complicate what is already difficult material, such inconsistencies also interfere with students' culturally inscribed reverence of authors as central as Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Donne.

While there is definitely an irony in emphasizing the ephemeral in a course that deals with the ultra-canonical works of these authors, asking students to confront textual variations has helped to unpin these works from the reflexive veneration–and, it must be added, intimidation–they often produce. On my campus, Renaissance Poetry and Prose calls purposeful attention to different presentations–during the early modern era and in the centuries since–of literary works we set out to study. Rather than read from an anthology or course pack, students each week find and bring to class different editions of the works under study, comparing editorial practices from a variety of centuries and sources. Not surprisingly, students exhibit a great deal of trepidation in the early days of the class. They want to believe the speaker of Shakespeare's sonnets when he proclaims that "Not marble nor the gilded monuments / Of princes" could outlive his "powerful rhyme"[3]; they envision, after all, the verses as securely fixed within their well-loved and extensively annotated copies of the collected works. When students discover the huge degree of variation among different editions of the readings under study, however, their faith in literature's ability to stop time, to function as an unchanging glimpse into the past, is shaken. Furthermore, secondary readings about early printing practices force students to ask where their texts came from, and how alterations to the texts–by the printers, earlier manuscript readers, and centuries of editors–have influenced literary works that they had come to consider so "timeless." The many different copies in our classroom of any given work force students to consider the ways in which the notion of "original" publication proves ephemeral in itself.

To counteract the frustration that comes with this disillusionment, the course centers on investigating how these suddenly insubstantial works have been presented in print and on the World Wide Web. In the process, many students develop a preference for facsimile presentations of both the canonical and lesser-known Renaissance texts on the syllabus, yet these facsimiles come with their own frustrations for students who instinctively trust that these early printings contain "authentic" and therefore "correct"

representations not just of a work's words, but its organization, punctuation, and spelling. The students' realization of the uncertainty underlying even these facsimiles–often along with the absence of any earlier text to check their assumptions against–further complicates the notion of authorial intent to which many yearn to cling.

Given the assumptions of print's solidity that students bring to the course, it is perhaps surprising that by term's end, many seem convinced that the Web provides the most valuable resources for finding and reading Renaissance texts. On one level, this seems completely in line with research preferences of twenty-first century students, who often find research in the library stacks taxing. But their often-expressed attachment to printed books–portable and ripe for note-taking–makes the new appreciation for electronic copies of primary works notable, especially given that many are initially concerned with finding historically "genuine" versions of the course readings. Many students profess their preference for online facsimiles, themselves a curious blend of our day and the early modern. Even though the Web is itself notoriously changeable, with editors "silently" correcting or even removing Web pages without notice, students also come to prize the huge online archive of transcribed early modern texts the internet provides. Interpreting the naming of scholars and research libraries as adequate evidence of an online edition's academic nature, the students reveal their practical side as they praise the portability and easy accessibility of Web editions and facsimiles. In the end, then, students overwhelmingly turn to texts with arguably less rooting in print to study those literary works they had originally yearned to treat as set in stone. As the students' work has demonstrated, moreover, the fluidity of the Web can offer a valuable tool for underscoring the extent to which even the most canonical early modern texts prove ephemeral, and often the unstable realms of cyberspace provide an ideal mode for illustrating the changes that such texts have undergone over time. All told, the internet brings an inherently productive instability to the class's study of Renaissance texts, providing a more accurately shifting, and certainly less concrete, image of the consistently changing literary works under study.

Textual Fluidity, Then and Now

Considering that they deal with memorial reconstructions of in-class happenings, essays that examine the teaching of a given course rely on what is essentially ephemeral material; this chapter is perhaps even more ephemeral, since the Web-based resources it invokes have likely undergone multiple transformations since this essay's publication. The

variety and capability of websites in coming years will no doubt make elements of this chapter appear quaint as well. On my campus, access to electronic resources has increased greatly in the gaps separating the four different occasions my Renaissance Poetry and Prose class has been offered (Spring 2005, Spring 2008, Summer 2010, and Summer 2012). Yet some of the online sources once available have been subsumed into other collections, or have disappeared altogether from the Web. Economic considerations too have made access to other electronic sources unstable as well.[4] Such changes occur so quickly on the Web that cyberspace can seem entirely unpredictable, and even the most thoroughly documented references to online sources can lead readers on hunts for materials that seem to no longer exist. Hence, the Modern Language Association's guidelines for documentation insist that all references to online sources carry a date of access.[5] Subsequent readers, as a result, can be assured that a given reference once actually existed, though knowing one could access a Web page in November of 2005 is of little assurance for those who encounter only an error message when they attempt to trace a source.

This state of computerized flux stands in stark contrast to the stability that even some current scholars see for Renaissance literature as a field of study. "What is distinctive about the early modern period," Matthew Steggle writes, "is the extent to which its literary canon is made finite and describable, first, by the invention of printing during that period, and second, by the relatively small numbers of books printed."[6] Steggle's comments, made in praise of the amazing scope and general thoroughness of A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave's *A short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English books printed abroad, 1475–1640* (often referred to as *STC I*) and Donald Wing's *Short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America and of English books printed in other countries, 1641–1700* (*STC II*), implies that their massive scholarly achievement has created a set, all-encompassing canon.[7] Since *STC I* and *STC II* aim to list all known works from the era, making them part of this manageable group of available and valued texts, finding anything beyond their bounds – anything, that is, that could be called ephemeral – within the early modern period would seem nearly impossible. Steggle grants that uncovering other early modern books is conceivable, noting any new find "would be worth publishing with a view to ensuring its incorporation in the next revision of *STC*." The *STC* catalogs, though elastic enough to make room for additional printed texts, nonetheless provide boundaries that define the early modern canon. As a result, Steggle concludes, "The *STC* catalogues hold out the possibility of perfectibility";[8] it is worth noting, too, that Early

English Books Online (EEBO) encourages the notion of unimpeded access to *STC* titles on those campuses where the electronic text collection is available.[9]

Steggle's observations mirror the claims of stability that Renaissance writers often made for their texts. According to oft-invoked conventions, a poet's written words could effectively stop time, preserving a lover's youthful beauty, capturing and reifying moments of glowing ardor, and guaranteeing the beloved's perpetual life-giving fame well beyond the hour of his or her death. In my course, Shakespeare's *Sonnets* have provided the most vivid example of such claims. After telling his beloved, for example, that "Your monument shall be my gentle verse, / Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read," the speaker goes on to promise, "You still shall live–such virtue hath my pen–/ Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men."[10] Shakespeare certainly was not alone in invoking such imagery in his efforts to preserve a mortal human lover in an almost bodily sense. Students see a similar urge to glorify and solidify driving the intensely detailed descriptions of Edmund Spenser's "Prothalamion"; and Donne's "A Valediction of my Name in the Window."

Yet early modern authors also prove aware of the fleeting nature of their efforts to reify their experience–and reputation–through writing. John Taylor tells his tale of the paper boat in *The Praise of Hemp-Seed*, discussed elsewhere in this volume, in an effort to make his fame extend beyond the event's witnesses, though the work simultaneously betrays a deep awareness of the fleeting nature of the notoriety that the printed word can offer.[11] Ben Jonson's "On My First Son," for example, reveals the transience of even his "best piece of Poetry" even as he tries to immortalize his dead child through verse.[12] Any monumental power these verses may possess is further undermined by the alterations that language undergoes as poems are transformed into printed objects, where details ranging from spacing to spelling, from typeface to poem order, can affect the meanings a reader sees in a work.

Students in my course couple these observations with secondary source readings, among them Arthur F. Kinney's *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1500-1600* and Donna B. Hamilton's *A Concise Companion to English Renaissance Literature*.[13] There, they discover that, when Renaissance literature circulated in manuscript, writers had little control of their work's reception and use; their poems were copied into commonplace books (often with variations, either intentional or unintentional), referenced by other authors who wished to piggyback on another work's fame, and transferred into print without their knowledge. Appearing in print, after all, was seen as close to harlotry, especially for

women, and the most refined poets may well have felt cheapened by having their work put into such wide circulation. The use of initials to identify an author, rather than a full name, hint at identity rather than supply it; who a given "T.R." might be, too, is often lost on us even though it may have been common knowledge among early readers. Indeed, even in the Renaissance, it could have separated those with access to exclusive literary coteries from those who simply had the means to buy a particular book. Poems that moved in courtly circles established a network of those in the know–particularly, in the know regarding the circumstances of composition often lost on readers who simply bought print copies–thus endowing many poems with a pertinence that faded once the works made it into wider circulation. [14]

During the course, students come to realize that print anthologies exhibit different levels of concern for capturing these ephemeral effects, offering widely varied degrees of context. Print anthologies often furnish footnotes providing bits of information that at one time may have been common knowledge, offering historical context connecting poems to rich court scandals that would otherwise be lost. Witness the footnotes to Wyatt's "Whoso List to Hunt" in currently popular classroom anthologies, which allow (perhaps even direct) students to see the poem they might otherwise call obscure as a juicy piece of court gossip.[15] Given the private undercurrents involving the author and the king that such presentations encourage, students see what dangers might come to those whose works slipped beyond their control into a more public realm of print.

Just as print could be seen as a threatening means of creating unsupervised, freely circulating texts of murky provenance, the danger associated with online texts seems even greater now to many who worry about textual rigor. While most individual editors of scholarly editions stake clear claims to their projects, the origins of other online texts are unclear. This can result from the complicated histories of text projects, like the Text Creation Partnership, which creates searchable online texts through an intricate production process that encompasses people ranging from Ph.D.-holding literary scholars to electronic resources librarians[16]; on the other hand, such vagaries can occur because a secondary student did not sign her name to a text she posted as part of a class Web page. Similarly, online collections of early modern works available via library subscription generally name the printed books that serve as the sources for their online searchable texts, but they offer nothing to help novice users assess the quality of those usually public-domain editions; furthermore, the databases may not reveal how their texts were created and often do not openly indicate transcription accuracy rates. For students, simply

navigating the various databases and Web-based resources can be so difficult that they never think to take up such questions.

At the same time, the Web routinely obscures indications of the passage of time and differences in quality, causing beginning researchers to assume everything it displays is of equal worth. This leveling effect, according to Bertrand Gervais, renders the Web a means of seriously impairing the power of the written work. "A text on a screen has almost no value," he proclaims, because "the mediation by the computer has rendered its presence immaterial." He continues:

> With fragments read on internet sites, this immateriality is characterized by an absence of spatial-time determinations. Where is the text? What is the status of what appears on the screen? Instead of a corporeal text, the sheer materiality of page and book, we have the ghost text of cyberspace, a figure as untouchable as it is ephemeral.[17]

Gervais holds that this unanchored text deprives readers of the contextual cues that otherwise influence and deepen reading. Text without paper, he comments, simply eludes many readers, who cannot see its value outside the framework of a book. My course, however, is designed to help students learn to interrogate what exactly they are reading, how it came to be, and what might be gained or lost in different presentations–whether online or in print–of the text.

Classroom Logistics and the Shifting Text

In Spring 2005, students in my first Renaissance Poetry and Prose class had little notion that they were going to be exploring how printing and publishing interfere with Renaissance authors' claims to setting their work in stone. In fact, during the seminar's first meeting, students were more curious about the class's lack of textbooks. Like Stanley Fish's students, they asked a variation of the question, "Is there a text in this class?"; while the students initially intended the first meaning Fish describes in his famous essay–that is, "Will we have a book?"–they quickly realized they were going to have to deal with the more theoretical questions of what constitutes an early modern text in the first place. Their limited exposure to Renaissance literature had come mostly from anthologies, which regularize spelling and presentation and thus mirror the normalizing institutions that, in Fish's words, create meanings that appear so "natural" that "it takes a special effort to see that they are the products of circumstances."[18] Ironically, I had initially thought to require students to

find different editions of the syllabus's texts in response to the scarcity of affordable textbooks that both included the works on the reading list and that offered adequate context for those works. Then it struck me that the course's scavenger hunt approach would help students understand the drawbacks of available textbooks; at the same time, it would show how editorial decisions shape meaning by playing up or toning down the varying interpretations that can arise when considering a work's appearance in different contexts, printed or otherwise.

Students are usually initially relieved when they see the low cost of books for the course, but that turns to apprehension when they realize the time investment–and theoretical challenges–presented by tracking down the course texts. The goal is to have multiple versions of a work present in the classroom during each meeting so that students can compare not just the notations that editions offer, but also variations in presentation ranging from spelling and typeface choices to broader differences like the ordering and omission of verses, the glossing and footnoting of texts, and the presence or absence of introductions and historical material. By the end of the term, each student is required to find, read, and bring to class six different sorts of texts:

- A facsimile, either from a printed, microfilmed, or electronic source
- An electronic, scholarly edition
- An electronic edition aimed at undergraduate students
- A version of the work as printed in a student anthology
- A printed student edition, single author text
- A printed edition aimed at a scholarly audience

Initially, my main point in this distribution was to expose students to the wide variety of print and online sources available. Not only did I want students to see different representations of the texts, I wanted them to see the degree to which these representations varied from one another. In the process, students would see, or so I hoped, the expectations that modern editors and early printers had of their readers' knowledge of factors ranging from vocabulary, classical references, and historical context. Then, we could discuss how different levels of access to this ephemeral knowledge, as reflected in or omitted from texts brought to class, influenced student readings.

Each term, the first class meetings have involved extensive demonstration of the sources that would lead students to the required texts. Not surprisingly, students express the greatest uncertainty when determining what sources can be labeled as electronic scholarly editions, and rightly so. I point out that the still-evolving standards for what constitutes scholarly