

# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



**Heidi Brayman Hackel and Ian Frederick Moulton, eds, *Teaching Early Modern English Literature from the Archives* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2015). xii+274 pp. ISBN 978 1 6032 9156 9.**

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Although its editors do not explicitly make the claim, *Teaching Early Modern English Literature from the Archives* marks a new direction in the MLA's venerable 'Options for Teaching' series. In its fortieth year, the series returned after a three-year hiatus with Heidi Brayman Hackel and Ian Frederick Moulton's resource-laden collection devoted to 'the many ways that early modern source materials can ... be productively integrated into undergraduate literature classrooms and graduate seminars' (p. 2). The volume, in promising to show how 'traditional and electronic archives are very much in conversation with each other', deviates from the traditional concerns — newly popular genres, overlooked writers, and recuperated literatures — of the series (p. 2). In this regard, *Teaching Early Modern English Literature from the Archives* not only shows readers how they might access Renaissance texts but also invites them to consider how different modes of access can shape our understanding of the past. Longtime enthusiasts of the series may not even need to open the book to sense the change in priorities. That much becomes evident from the materiality of the book itself, with cover art in the paperback and electronic versions that dispenses with the reserved pastels and period-specific illustrations of many recent covers. What's more, Hackel and Moulton's volume, even at 274 pages, is significantly shorter than previous installments in the series — a sign perhaps of the MLA's acknowledgment that readers may be yearning for nimbler, more immediately relevant teaching aids in an era increasingly anxious about its ability to manage information.

But, as becomes obvious when one reads its decidedly low-key introduction, *Teaching Early Modern English Literature from the Archives* seeks to balance its attention between old and new, traditional and emergent technologies and methods. Editors Hackel and Moulton do not open their collection with a manifesto beyond insisting, ‘we must do what we can to put early modern books into our students’ hands’ and they largely sidestep theoretical inquiries into what constitutes an archive in today’s multilevel, interconnected world (p. 4). Fair enough, for their immersion in the topic speaks for itself; and one presumes that readers who come to the volume in hopes of enhancing their pedagogy will not quibble with this decision. Indeed, for instructors whose graduate careers coincided with the expansion of indispensable digital archives and who very likely received additional hands-on training in the research libraries of modern America and Britain, the notion that students can learn a great deal from treating, creating, and managing archives will come as no great surprise. But where the book is apt to impress believers and skeptics alike, and where its greatest strength lies, is in the techniques presented in its 24 individual essays. The focus throughout the book, if it’s not clear by now, is firmly on how to work with archives and how to thoughtfully work them into a syllabus, and in this objective Hackel and Moulton succeed admirably. To say that the volume has much to offer open-minded readers is to undersell it, for in a provocative yet understated way, it becomes its own content: that is, an archive of sorts that, in its varied yet highly organized contents, promises to facilitate new ways of thinking in the classroom and maybe even beyond.

The volume’s two dozen essays are organized into five parts: ‘Introducing Archives’, ‘Building Archives’, ‘Teaching Texts’, ‘Beyond Literature’, and ‘Resources’. This final section, compiled by the editors, does not contain an essay (despite the title ‘Finding Archives Online’) but rather functions as a resource guide laid out as a list of major archives, websites, finding aids, and related topics. A short summary follows each entry. Of the remaining four sections, the first two house the collection’s most innovative and timely essays for reasons I will explain in a moment. The next two sections — ‘Teaching Texts’ and ‘Beyond Literature’ — are resourceful in a more traditional sense. More often than not, the essays starting on page 115 highlight neglected or underappreciated works or offer productive pairings of non-literary and literary texts. Sometimes the focus is on Shakespearean drama but not to the detriment of other works. Detailing how the teaching of a certain text or genre can be enriched through the complementary use of databases and other online resources, the essays in these sections would have fit quite comfortably in one of the MLA’s ‘Approaches to Teaching’ editions. Several argue for the value of teaching rarely examined genres (music training manuals, emblems, atlases, news pamphlets) or

non-English-language texts. Georgianna Ziegler's essay, the longest in the collection, concludes Part 4 and outlines the vital historical sources most relevant for students of early modern literary culture.

Two essays in sections 3 and 4 deserve special notice: W. Scott Howard, Peggy Keeran, and Jennifer Bowers's 'Archives on Trial: Executing *Richard II* and *Eikon Basilike* in the Digital Age' and Laura McGrane's 'News and Material Culture in Early Modern and Restoration England: Using and Making Digital Archives'. What distinguishes these essays from the other contributions is not exactly the freshness of the methods or assignments they outline but the wider, more probing perspective they assume in relation to archival work. For instance, Howard, Keeran, and Bowers make the point that 'electronic resources and interpretative strategies resonate so strongly with the temper of the Renaissance, when the boundary between text and context was quite fluid', helping students to see 'how literary works and digital archives are not static objects but dynamic sites where interactive design conditions the possibilities for collaborative and constitutive inquiry' (pp. 160, 154–55). In the same vein of thought, McGrane writes that, during the work her students undertake with the *Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Collection Newspapers*, they 'make a cognitive shift' and 'must recognize the archive as tool and argument as they begin their experiment of producing and presenting cultural work in minidigital formulations' (p. 216). The goal is to create an 'archival argument' in support of a public-facing project — an endeavor that provides a worthy model for all of us teaching in the humanities (p. 218).

The essays in Parts 1 and 2 dive into the topic with the same energy fueling McGrane's ambitions to nudge students to assume 'the parts of amateur archivist and scholar' (p. 220). Astute readers will notice the East Coast provenance of the Part 1 essays, nearly all of which were written by scholars and librarians from institutions in the Northeastern United States. Perhaps we should not be surprised, given the centrality of the Folger Shakespeare Library to the research of so many early modern scholars, that the collection opens with essays by Sarah Werner ('Bringing Undergraduates into the Archives') and Heather Wolfe ('Manuscripts and Paleography for Undergraduates'). The next contribution, by University of Pennsylvania librarian Shawn Martin, ponders the appropriate balance between 'informational' and 'artifactual' research: 'Electronic resources can revolutionize informational research but cannot begin to replace artifactual research. The key is to teach how to navigate this difference' (p. 36). Martin is also the first of several authors in the collection to observe how *Early English Books Online (EEBO)*, the most widely used archive in the field, conceals or erases the physical features of a book, particularly its size.

The following two essays by Evelyn Tribble and Arnold Sanders stand out as the most speculative and, in some respects, skeptical of all the contributions to the collection. Tribble picks up Martin's point about *EEBO* and cautions readers about the effects of our dependence on digital resources, which tend to obscure the 'social embodiment of knowledge' offered by a material object: 'Without knowledge of the origins of the electronic images, we are apt to misinterpret them. To use such images in scholarly research, even at the undergraduate level, we must know what they are not telling us as much as what they are' (p. 41). Drawing on recent cognitive studies, Sanders offers a comparable assessment of students' experience of online reading in detailing his own efforts to teach a course called 'Archeology of Text'. Through a series of 'laboratory assignments', opening with the inspection of a 'cadaver book', the course (available online at <http://faculty.goucher.edu/eng241/>) helps 'students grasp the importance of collaborative work in making documents meaningful' (pp. 50, 49, 51). The trend toward practical application, in the form of methods and assignments, continues in the essays — by Patrick M. Erben and Katherine Rowe — that round out Part 1. Both Erben and Rowe provide readers with extremely detailed descriptions of how to model archival work for students, with Rowe's contribution on the history of digital recreations of (and visits to!) virtual theaters in *Second Life* offering one of the book's most ambitious student projects.

Many of the essays in Part 2 of *Teaching Early Modern English Literature from the Archives* were written by the architects of well-known databases in the field of early modern studies. In the context of Hackel and Moulton's objectives, however, what really distinguishes this group is that it includes members who have been instrumental in publicizing the pedagogical efficacy of online archives and, in some cases, recruiting students to help create and maintain them. The first essay, by Zachary Lesser, offers yet another pragmatic lesson in how instructors can best introduce undergraduates to digital archives. His argument is that students benefit from gaining familiarity with databases — such as the one he himself co-built, *DEEP: Database of Early English Playbooks* — that are deliberately 'limited in scope' and treat 'narrower genres of books and their metadata' than the expansive *EEBO* (pp. 77, 81). Sheila T. Cavanagh, Gitanjali Shahani, and Irene Middleton's 'Engendering the Early Modern Archive' makes a strong claim for the value of using an archive such as the *Emory Women Writers Resource Project (EWWRP)* as a way to 'facilitate individual apprentice opportunities' for students (p. 88). Bringing *EWWRP* and its mission into the classroom, the authors admit, may prove challenging to an instructor, but doing so can help students discern 'the complex processes by which female-authored

and female-centered texts are retrieved and transmitted from past to present' (p. 83). The next essay, written by the team behind the *English Broadside Ballad Archive (EBBA)* at the University of California, Santa Barbara, examines how the very act of exploring the contents of the archive becomes 'an excellent testing ground for ... theoretical, technical, and presentational questions' (p. 96). Patricia Fumerton, Simone Chess, Tassie Gniady, and Kris McAbee urge students and scholars alike to think about how the process of 'constructive deconstruction' can allow users of *EBBA* 'to create miniarchives meeting any number of needs' (pp. 92, 94). The last essay in the section is by Janelle Jenstad, whose *The Map of Early Modern London (MoEML)* seeks to recreate the archive as a spatial experience using a sixteenth-century map of London. The map includes entries of important sites and buildings and, as Jenstad explains, developed in part from her students' contributions. For Jenstad, the benefits for students working on *MoEML* are clear: in 'perceiv[ing] their work to be highly visible' to its online visitors, students learn that 'taking ownership of their writing is intimately connected to their awareness of audience' (p. 108).

To conclude, I offer a few words that I hope will be helpful for readers pressed for time — readers, I think, who are not likely to tackle a volume like *Teaching Early Modern English Literature from the Archives* in one sitting, cover to cover. (After all, that level of unbroken engagement is best left to the reviewer.) Thus, it deserves mentioning that all of the essays in the volume can be read swiftly as they average nine pages in length, including minimal footnotes and bibliographies that rarely surpass a page. Many contain essay prompts for students working in and on archives. A few of the contributors supply, in appendices, entire assignments (Erin E. Kelly's 'Online Emblems in the Classroom' and Angelica Duran's 'Not *Either-or* but Rather *Both-and*: Using Both Material and Electronic Resources') and one essay, Joshua Eckhardt's 'Teaching Verse Miscellanies', manages to incorporate an entire semester's reading schedule. Moreover, aside from a few minor miscues — some repetition in the 'Engendering the Early Modern Archive' essay and the misidentification of Sir Philip Sidney's brother as Richard on page 178 — the book is impressively free of errors. Hackel and Moulton have given us a fine book and, what's more, a useful one. But as I suggested above, readers will probably get the most out of the volume by taking up its many constitutive parts one by one — preferably while they are designing their syllabi in the days and weeks before the start of the semester.