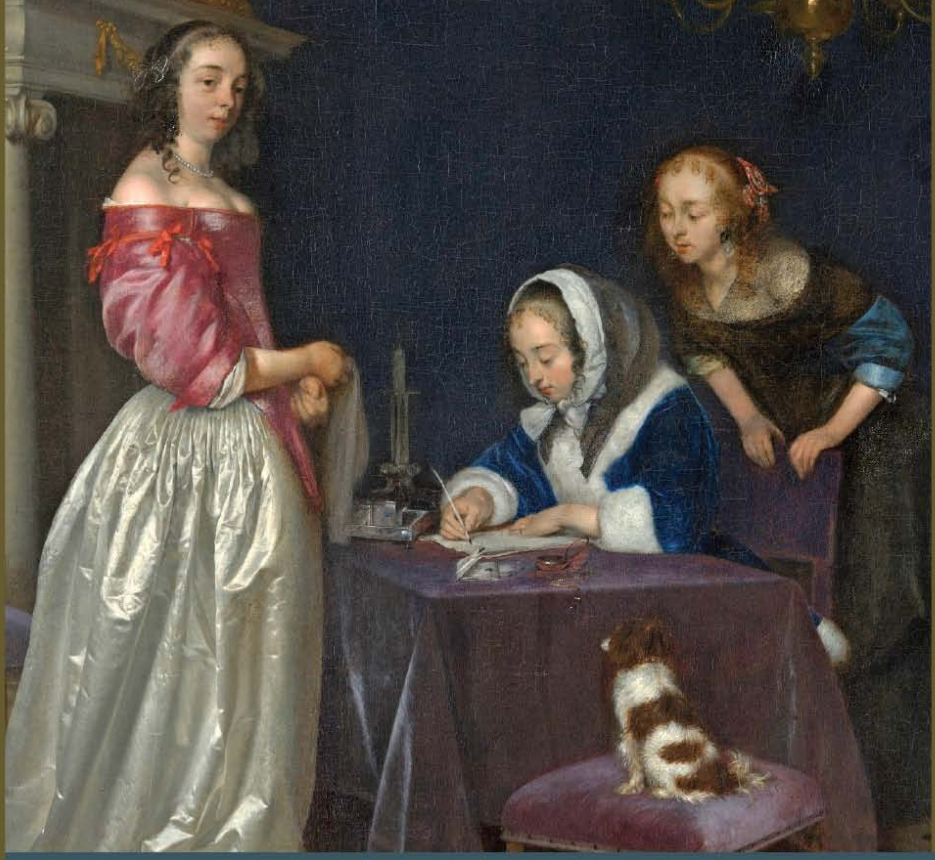

Teaching the Middle Ages

USING COMMONPLACE BOOKS TO ENRICH MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE COURSES

edited by
SARAH E. PARKER
and **ANDIE SILVA**

ARC HUMANITIES PRESS

TEACHING THE MIDDLE AGES

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN (Hardback): 9781641894197
e-ISBN (PDF): 9781802701258

www.arc-humanities.org
Printed and bound in the UK (by CPI Group [UK] Ltd), USA (by Bookmasters),
and elsewhere using print-on-demand technology.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE EDITORS WOULD like to thank the PSC-CUNY Research Award Program for their support in making this publication possible. Special thanks also to the Jacksonville University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Academic Affairs, the Allison fund for faculty development, the Canada Research Chairs program, and Hofstra University's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for generously funding the Open Access version of this volume.

INTRODUCTION

SARAH E. PARKER and ANDIE SILVA

IN HIS ADVICE to students on "How to Read Like a Renaissance Reader," Adam Hooks discusses the early modern practices of active reading and annotation frequently popularized in educational and advice books. Citing from John Brinley's *Ludus Literarius: or, The Grammar Schoole* (1612), Hooks highlights that becoming a dedicated reader is not simply an intellectual matter, but a question of making the most of the money and time we invest in our learning: "merely reading without actively engaging with, and therefore coming to an understanding of, a text means the 'loss of our precious time, and of all our *labour* and *cost* bestowed therein.'"[1] Hooks's blog is a useful reminder to students that the literacy and reflective practices required by college courses—especially courses focused on far-away periods like the Renaissance—need to be carefully honed. As those of us who regularly teach courses engaging with premodern and early modern texts will know, students can find literature and history courses alienating and insurmountably foreign, and fostering intellectual curiosity in our classes begins by showing students entry points that help them relate to their reading materials. Active reading practices can be extremely productive for managing and accessing large and complex reading loads, but making the most of students' intellectual labour means our assessment process must also support and reward engaged learners. In fact, even early seventeenth-century writers and publishers fretted over the goals of commonplacing as

1 Adam Hooks, "How to Think Like a Renaissance Reader," *Anchora*, August 2012, www.adamghooks.net/2012/08/how-to-read-like-renaissance-reader.html.

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Andie Silva is Associate Professor of English at York College, CUNY and Digital Humanities at the CUNY Graduate Center. Recent publications include her monograph, *The Brand of Print: Marketing Paratexts in the Early English Book Trade* (Leiden: Brill, 2019) and *Digital Pedagogy in Early Modern Studies: Method and Praxis* (co-edited with Scott Schofield), forthcoming with Iter Press, 2023.

an activity which, when done casually, might result in readers who "could amass quotations from books but could not figure out how to use them" and whose "readerly skills lay not in accumulating quotations and anecdotes, but in digesting extracts…into a unique whole."[2] We see this often in students who may have been extremely engaged in class discussion but end up turning in final papers that simply copy quotations from the text or their research without finding ways to effectively join the conversation with their own unique perspectives. If pedagogy research has consistently emphasized the shortcomings of exam-focused teaching,[3] and even research papers can reinforce elitist assumptions that only published scholars have access to the "true" meaning of a text, how else might we help our students develop a personal connection to the text they read while simultaneously practicing careful, historically grounded scholarship?

Using Commonplace Books to Enrich Medieval and Renaissance Courses proposes that commonplacing as a formal assignment can be especially productive for the modern student encountering the challenges of reading medieval and early modern texts. While discussing annotation practices can itself be helpful to students, the essays in this book suggest that commonplacing needs to be anchored in critical thinking activities to support active learning. Designing specific course work, learning outcomes, and graded assignments around commonplacing encourages and even demands active engagement with texts in ways that empower students as critics and interpreters. These are essential practices, both for students from a range of majors taking literature surveys to fulfill the humanities core and for students majoring in literary studies. Furthermore, commonplacing skills, such as gathering and organizing information, experimenting with new technologies, and leveraging new ideas from old texts and practices, are crucial to the modern-day job market, and therefore must be used responsibly when creating assignments in the classroom. As we consider how our virtual and hybrid practices might continue to be useful after the COVID-19 pandemic, commonplacing assignments can provide a way for students to focus on and make sense of classroom texts in a range of classroom environments.

Emerging out of the rhetorical traditions of Ancient Greece and Rome, commonplace books promoted a blend of excerpting, memorization, cre-

2 Jillian M. Hess, "British Commonplace Readers, 1706–1879," in *Edinburgh History of Reading: Common Readers*, ed. Jonathan Rose (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 9–29 at 9–10.

3 For one recent example, see Ken Baines and Marsha Marshall Baines, *Super Courses: The Future of Teaching and Learning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

ative writing, and journaling, making them the analogue equivalent to modern-day tools like Tumblr, Evernote, or Pinterest. This book covers a variety of methods for introducing students to commonplacing and provides instructors with concrete guidelines for using historical and student-generated commonplace books as a teaching and learning tool. The language and historical contexts of pre- and early modern literature can feel quite alien and inaccessible. This volume presents practical strategies for overcoming this barrier, challenging students to go beyond traditional notetaking through the engaged use of commonplace books. As this volume demonstrates, commonplacing can be an iterative and dynamic assignment that allows students to relate more closely to course material in a hands-on and creative way. Additionally, commonplacing offers students a sustained practice of experiential learning, encouraging the development of a knowledge-creation community that aims to question textual authority and actively join critical conversations as confident scholars. In the next few pages, we provide an overview of the history of commonplacing and its relationship to humanistic pedagogy before turning to examples of how contemporary scholars have reinvigorated the practice of commonplacing for the twenty-first-century classroom.

The tradition of commonplacing in medieval and early modern Europe traces its beginnings to antiquity. In Aristotle's *Topics*, a work that made up part of what is known as the *Organon*, he refers to common places (*koinoi topoi*) as a set of logical strategies that generate effective arguments.[4] It was up to the rhetorician to shape this partial information into persuasive arguments. Later Roman rhetoricians Cicero and Quintilian would emphasize the importance of *loci communes*, common places of argument, in their rhetorical manuals.[5] In the Middle Ages, scholars adapted these classical precedents to a Christian worldview, and the idea of the commonplace came to describe specific effective sayings that could apply to various argumentative contexts rather than the rhetorical strategies themselves. Boethius, one of the most important philosophers of the early Middle Ages, played a key role in shaping this early understanding of commonplacing. Suspicious of the use of commonplacing to support elegant style, as Cicero and Quintilian had suggested, Boethius argued for using commonplacing the way Aristotle

4 Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structure of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.

5 Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 112.

had outlined, as a key component in the crafting of an argument.[6] Two especially important medieval contexts where commonplacing prevailed were preaching and *dictamen* (persuasive writing, especially of letters).[7] Medieval authors compiled excerpts from biblical, pagan, and contemporary sources, creating works that later Renaissance commentators described as *florilegia*, from the Latin meaning a gathering of flowers, which writers and orators could consult.[8] These works were a prototype to the encyclopedia but, as Mary Franklin Brown demonstrates, they were closer to the crowd-sourcing model of Wikipedia's "highly polyvocal nature and tolerance of dissent" than they were to the established expert model of *Britannica*.[9]

By the early modern period, commonplacing was firmly entrenched in the classroom as a pedagogical practice to help the pupil organize and retrieve what could feel like an overwhelming amount of material.[10] Ciceronian emphasis on style, which Boethius and other medieval authors suspected of embellishment for its own sake without sufficient moral emphasis, came back into fashion with the advent of Renaissance humanism. Rodolphus Agricola, an important figure in early humanist education, promoted the use of commonplacing in his short but influential *De Formando Studio* (1508). Placing rhetoric at the heart of a humanist education, Agricola advocated that pupils collect quotations and sayings as they studied. As Crane argues, "Agricola is especially important to a history of the commonplace book because he re-establishes for the later Renaissance the logical basis for the practice of keeping one, and because his text enacts the shifting definition of 'commonplace' as a space or category and as a textual fragment subject to gathering."[11] Following Agricola, humanist scholar Desiderius Erasmus's influential *On the Method of Study* (1512) contributed to the popularity of commonplacing. Erasmus too advised pupils to keep a commonplace book that would organize noteworthy morsels of information, suggestions

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6 David Allan, *Commonplace Books and Reading in Georgian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 38.

7 Joan Marie Lechner, *Renaissance Concepts of the Commonplaces* (New York: Pageant, 1962), 46.

8 Ann Blair, *The Theater of Nature: Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 5.

9 Mary Franklin Brown, *Reading the World: Encyclopedic Writing in the Scholastic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 4.

10 Moss, *Printed Commonplace Books*, 134.

11 Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 17.

that were taken up by pedagogical authors across Europe. Commonplace books were a place where the student "recorded useful phrases, effective arguments and particularly successful rhetorical devices noted in the course of his reading, for his own future use (these commonplace books also served incidentally to provide the teacher or tutor with a check on his pupil's reading progress)."[12]

Renaissance humanists also looked back to the classical precedent of Aulus Gellius, the Roman compiler of *Attic Nights*. Gellius described his notetaking process as an *aide-memoire* to help him find information he had gleaned from sources, whether conversations with contemporaries or reading in subjects ranging from geometry to history. Anthony Grafton argues that Gellius "turned the notebook itself into a literary genre," and his example served as a model to Renaissance humanists who were eager to find ways to organize the influx of information brought about by the invention of the printing press.[13] Commonplacing allowed compilers to gather copious references clustered around a single idea, and thus played into the early modern fascination with *copia*, a rhetorical concept that valued energetic plenitude in speech. Erasmus's treatise on *copia* or "abundant style," published in 1508, was another highly influential early modern work that contributed to the popularity of commonplacing in the classroom and among humanists across Europe.[14]

Commonplacing also played an important role in the Protestant Reformation, which had an enormous impact on intellectual culture and pedagogical practices. Philip Melanchthon, whose ideas about educational reform were equally as important and influential as those of Agricola and Erasmus, was a Lutheran, and his Protestantism was central to his pedagogy. In his *Loci Communes* (1521), Melanchthon applied the theory and practice of commonplacing to scripture, using commonplacing as a central strategy toward theological understanding.[15] The Englishman John Foxe, well known for his

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12 Lisa Jardine, *Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 12.

13 Anthony Grafton, "The Humanist and the Commonplace Book: Education in Practice," in *Music Education in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Russell E. Murray Jr., et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 141–57 at 143.

14 Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 173.

15 Erika Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). See especially, "The Debate and the Reformation," 126–52.

martyrology of Protestants, also published an influential work on commonplacing. Foxe's *Locorum Communium Tituli* (1557) offered readers a formal structure for their notetaking to help with memory development. The book featured a preface followed by more than 600 blank pages pre-populated with 768 headings to allow the reader to develop their own commonplace notes within the structure that Foxe outlines.[16] Commonplacing thus serves as a tool for managing an overwhelming amount of information, but it could also play an important spiritual role.

The seventeenth century witnessed several shifts in the practice of commonplacing. Previously a central tool of the humanist classroom with a goal-oriented pedagogical focus, commonplacing increasingly found its way outside of the formal classroom. This shift, combined with rising literacy rates, opened up commonplacing to women, who were not typically educated in formal settings.[17] Scholars have struggled to define this type of commonplacing without downplaying it as merely "recreational."[18] Adam Smyth argues that commonplacing becomes so versatile and widespread as to merit the description of an entire "commonplace book culture" in which women were active participants.[19] Commonplacing offered more opportunities for women to engage in active reading and become authors in their own right. Recipe (or "receipt") books, often collected by women, engaged in textual gathering similar to the practice of commonplacing.[20] These recipe books were sometimes printed, and those that remained in manuscript form

16 Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, 194; Grafton, "The Humanist and the Commonplace Book," 147.

17 On women and literacy, see Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 145 ff. For further context on commonplacing and manuscript culture, see Steven W. May and Heather Wolfe, "Manuscripts in Tudor England," in *A Companion to Tudor Literature*, ed. Kent Cartwright (Hoboken: Wiley, 2010), 125–39; George L. Justice and Nathan Tinker, eds. *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England, 1550–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

18 Fred Schurink, "Manuscript Commonplace Books, Literature, and Reading in Early Modern England," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73(2010): 453–69 at 455–56.

19 Adam Smyth, "Commonplace Book Culture: A List of Sixteen Traits," in *Women and Writing, c. 1340–c. 1650: The Domestication of Print Culture*, ed. Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Phillipa Hardman (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2010), 90–110 at 91.

20 See, for example, chapters on Caterina Sforza and Isabella Cortese in Meredith K. Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy: Women and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

only were often treasured and passed down in the family.[21] Recipe books contributed to early scientific processes; and women's commonplace books were also spaces to practise religious devotion and even created space for women to process the emotion of mourning a child.[22]

Commonplacing did not end with the advent of the Enlightenment, though the older humanist pedagogical approaches were subject to critique. One of the most prominent examples of such critique is Swift's satirical *A Tale of a Tub*, which explicitly mocked "contemporary compiling manias."[23] Yet, as several critics have pointed out, it is unfair to assume that commonplacing was in decline merely because it was no longer restricted to elite practices.[24] No less a thinker than John Locke wrote *A New Method of a Common-place Book* (originally published in French in 1686), which outlined a strategy for commonplacing that he had been using in his own studies. Locke rejected the classical focus on memorization in favour of an organizational strategy that combined alphabetization with rigorous indexing. Locke's method proved quite popular in the eighteenth century, and critics have connected his emphasis on rigorous order with British political emphasis on "order and stability" as well as "new notions of individuality and self control."[25]

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21 For an overview of the relationship between recipe books and the practice of medicine, see Leigh Whaley, *Women and the Practice of Medical Care in Early Modern Europe, 1400–1800* (London: Palgrave, 2011), especially chapter 8, "Motherly Medicine: Domestic Healers and Apothecaries." See also Elizabeth Spiller, Betty S. Travitsky, and Anne Lake Prescott, eds. *Seventeenth-Century English Recipe Books: Cooking, Physics and Chirugery in the Works of W. M. Queen Henrietta Maria, and of Mary Tillinghast* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008).

22 Elaine Leong, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge: Medicine, Science and the Household in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), especially chapter 4, "Recipe Trials in the Early Modern Household," 99–123; and Siobhan Keenan, "'Embracing Submission'? Motherhood, Marriage and Mourning in Katherine Thomas's Seventeenth-Century 'Commonplace Book,'" *Women's Writing* 15 (2008): 69–85.

23 Lucia Dacome, "Noting the Mind: Commonplace Books and the Pursuit of the Self in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65 (2004): 603–25 at 624.

24 Both Ellen B. Brewster, "Locke, Stock and Booksellers: Commonplace Book Fashions in the Long Eighteenth Century," *Oxford Research in English* 6 (2018): 11–37; and Allan, *Commonplace Books*, 20, push against Ann Moss's argument that commonplace books were in "decline" by the seventeenth century. See Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, 266 ff.

25 Dacome, "Noting the Mind," 606.

Although the formal practice of commonplacing has largely been recorded and studied across Europe, it is worth keeping in mind that this tradition extended into colonialist occupation of the Americas. Commonplacing continued to be widely practised into the nineteenth century. Kenneth Lockridge has documented the disturbing misogyny of Virginia "founding fathers" William Byrd and Thomas Jefferson and argues that private commonplace books offered these men a place to vent a hatred of women that was becoming unfashionable in the context of Enlightenment thought. In these instances, commonplacing created a private persona that allowed patriarchal slave owners a way to maintain worldviews that allowed for "patriarchal rage" and support of slavery, which would seem to contradict with Enlightenment values.[26] Commonplacing continued to be an important feature of identity formation for residents of the United States up through the nineteenth century, and such textual self-fashioning included women.[27] Commonplacing was also a central aspect of colonial education in the Caribbean and elsewhere. Craig Dionne offers a fascinating discussion of how colonized cultures might have appropriated commonplacing by analysing the way that participants in a festival on Carriacou island, the Shakespeare Mas, rework the commonplacing of Shakespeare forced on islanders by a colonial education into a parodic critique of that pedagogic system.[28]

The term "commonplace" thus has a dizzying array of meanings in its long history. Is it a strategy of argumentation, a memory art, a theme, a saying that can be applied to multiple scenarios, an aphorism, a cliché? Whether we look at the concept's place in ancient rhetoric, its elaboration in medieval scholastic philosophy and *florilegia*, or its use as an early modern reading tool, the slipperiness of the term "commonplace" is useful for the modern teacher. The history of the commonplace's broad interpretation allows for a range of uses in the classroom and also gives students the latitude to engage with the concept in a variety of ways that result in creative and intel-

26 Lockridge connects these sentiments with anxieties about class as well. Kenneth A. Lockridge, *On the Sources of Patriarchal Rage: The Commonplace Books of William Byrd and Thomas Jefferson and the Gendering of Power in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 29, 94–95.

27 Susan Miller, *Assuming the Positions: Cultural Pedagogy and the Politics of Commonplace Writing* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998).

28 Craig Dionne, "Commonplace Literacy and the Colonial Scene: The Case of Carriacou's Shakespeare Mas," in *Native Shakespeares: Indigenous Appropriations on a Global Stage*, ed. Parmita Kapadia and Craig Dionne (New York: Routledge, 2016), 37–57.

lectually engaged assignments.[29] In each of its historical manifestations, commonplacing has provided readers with a strategy for staying active as they encounter, respond to, and even modify new work. By integrating the notetaking process into classroom assignments, instructors introduce students to elements of literary history while also encouraging deep critical engagement with the course's texts.

For all the reasons cited above, it is perhaps no surprise that adapting the commonplace book to the modern classroom has become a popular subject in pedagogy research. In the field of composition, Gayle B. Price argues for teaching students how to organize ideas by topic in the style of Tudor commonplacing,[30] and more recently Laura R. Micciche's "Making a Case for Rhetorical Grammar" touts the benefits of commonplacing as emancipatory pedagogy that invites students to question how meaning is created and participate in the construction of their learning.[31] In particular, digital spaces where students can collect and manage information are particularly useful for modern-day commonplacing. In "Pinvention: Updating Commonplace Books for the Digital Age," Cory Geraths and Michele Kennerly propose that Pinterest can help students visualize and organize their academic research, as well as expand what counts as a reliable source amid blog posts and op-eds.[32] More broadly, in *Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities: Concepts, Models, and Experiments* Rebecca Frost Davis and colleagues consider a range of techniques under the broader keyword, "Reading" that can be categorized as a form of commonplacing (including a link to an assignment by Vimala

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29 David Parker cites the work of Cameron Lewis, who laments that the term commonplace book "has been used with a great lack of inhibition in library catalogues and scholarly articles as a catch-all for any manuscript of a miscellaneous nature." What is frustrating for researchers and librarians seeking order and easy findability in the catalog is an opportunity for the classroom instructor. The commonplace book's loose definition and vast possibilities are precisely what make it a classroom tool filled with exciting potential. David Parker, "The Importance of the Commonplace Book: London 1450–1550." *Manuscripta* 40 (1996): 29–48 at 29.

30 Gayle B. Price, "A Case for a Modern Commonplace Book," *College Composition and Communication* 21 (1980): 175–82.

31 Laura R. Micciche, "Making a Case for Rhetorical Grammar," *College Composition and Communication* 55 (2004): 716–37. See also Linda Laidlaw, "Commonplace Books, Commonplace Practices: Uncovering the Bones of a Complex Pedagogy," *National Reading Conference Yearbook* 50 (2001): 356–66.

32 Cory Geraths and Michele Kennerly, "Pinvention: Updating Commonplace Books for the Digital Age," *Communication Teacher* 29 (2015): 166–72.

Pasupathi, one of the contributors in this volume).[33] Finally, "Assessing the Impact on Critical Reading and Critical Thinking: Using Commonplace Books and Social Reading Practices in a First-Year Writing Classroom" is worth noting as one of the few quantitative studies to explore the concrete benefits of commonplace book assignments. The authors compare two classrooms, one using traditional essays and another using the commonplace book, to explore "whether adopting commonplace book practices might assist students in developing the kind of critical reading and thinking skills necessary for a healthy civic society."[34] *Using Commonplace Books to Enrich Medieval and Renaissance Courses* contributes to a long and growing tradition of commonplacing pedagogy by focusing on approaches that may be especially relevant for teachers of medieval and early modern texts, but should also be of interest to instructors of history, global writing, and surveys of eighteenth and nineteenth century literature. We hope to provide a point of reference for best practices and models for teaching and learning with commonplace books, helping instructors to develop more student-centred, small-scale, and supportive curricula that are mindful of the needs of specific students and teachers.[35]

Centring students in the medieval and Renaissance classroom requires that all students, but especially minoritized students, feel invited to construct their own learning and to push back against the curriculum in ways that reject white supremacy and academic gatekeeping. This is particularly important in courses that are likely to feature a Eurocentric and largely white, male, Christian reading list. Our classroom praxis must not only acknowledge the recent history of white nationalists appropriating the medieval period for falsely constructed narratives of European superiority but find active ways to reject such narratives by ensuring our syllabi accurately represent a more diverse past.[36] Commonplace book assignments can

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33 Rebecca Frost Davis, Matthew K. Gold, Katherine D. Harris, and Jentery Sayers, eds., *Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities: Concepts, Models, and Experiments* (New York: Modern Language Association of America). See https://digitalpedagogy.mla.hcommons.org/.

34 Anna Maria Johnson and Nusrat Jahan, "Assessing the Impact on Critical Reading and Critical Thinking: Using Commonplace Books and Social Reading Practices in a First-Year Writing Classroom," *Pedagogy* 21 (2021): 277–94.

35 Of course, each classroom will require some modifications depending on the number of students, learning styles, access to resources, and time expenditures. By offering a range of methodologies and media, this volume attempts to showcase how flexible and customizable the commonplace book assignment can be.

36 See Dorothy Kim, "Teaching Medieval Studies in a Time of White Supremacy," *In*

help make space for students to write themselves into this seemingly far-away culture rather than experience it as perpetual outsiders. Yet, we recognize that there are often institutional constraints to syllabus design and textbook selection, and instructors are not always in control of what texts they teach, especially in survey courses designed to serve both majors and general education students. The essays in this volume offer alternatives that should be of use to instructors in a wide range of teaching contexts, proposing activities that teach students how to engage with material culture (Hagstrom-Schmidt), introduce them to digital skills like encoding (Estill) and critiquing databases (Harper), or that help students see commonplacing as an opportunity for play (Corrigan). Instructors may use the commonplace book to model diversity and inclusion through a sample commonplace book (Silva) or use it as a replacement for formal research papers or midterms. The work of commonplacing can show students productive ways to leverage their feelings of alienation in order to critically analyse medieval and Renaissance texts (Pasupathi), to propose what texts they would rather see in their syllabus (Eckhardt), or to rethink how to customize their reading and study practices (Schumacher-Schmidt). Coupled with lectures on the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality, these assignments can promote more inclusive environments and combat toxic narratives of white superiority, bringing to light the period's real and diverse readers and writers and making space for students' own voices and critiques.

The body of the collection is split into two parts. Part 1, "Why Teach Using Commonplace Books?" outlines the extent to which this assignment can change the dynamic and learning culture of survey courses, offering examples of hands-on activities and reflecting on the challenges inherent in semester-long projects. Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt tackles how to best prepare instructors and students for commonplacing work, sharing a short, student-focused introduction on the history of the commonplacing genre followed by prompts and resources that can be distributed in the classroom. Dana Schumacher-Schmidt and Joshua Eckhardt each present ways to replace traditional activities like exams, formal papers, and even the course's textbook with work centred around the commonplace book,

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the Middle, August 28, 2017, www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2017/08/teaching-medieval-studies-in-time-of.html. See also Carla María Thomas, "The Medieval Literature Survey Reimagined: Intersectional and Inclusive Praxis in a US College Classroom," in *Disturbing Times: Medieval Pasts, Reimagined Futures*, ed. Catherine E. Karkov, Anna Kłosowska, and Vincent W. J. van Gerven Oei (Santa Barbara: Punctum, 2020), 351–79.

in order to improve student engagement. Finally, Vimala Pasupathi reflects on her oft-cited essay in the *Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*, cautioning against using this project simply to help students identify with readings, rather than challenging them to uncover the uniquely historical and cultural elements of the period.

The authors in part 2, "Adapting the Commonplace Book Assignment," focus on customizing the project to achieve particular goals, such as expanding the range of readings and teaching digital humanities skills. Andie Silva posits that the commonplace book assignment can decolonize the curriculum and ensure a broader representation of texts and authors, while also giving minoritized students a stronger sense of voice and agency in the British literature survey course. Laura Estill and Alison Harper each propose unique strategies for using early modern commonplace manuscripts to teach students and instructors textual markup and digital repository skills, respectively, while Nora Corrigan employs game-based learning (GBL) to introduce students to the idea of poetic production and circulation as "play."

Our volume closes with a coda by Sarah Parker, in which she reflects on ways to manage the time and labour investment in assessing commonplace books as major assignments in a course while increasing student engagement with the assignment. Highlighting the connections between the essays in this volume, Parker offers practical solutions for instructors who teach multiple sections of a course or have a heavy teaching load. Changing how students are asked to showcase their learning can be a challenging task, especially in projects that can produce quite unique and idiosyncratic results. By closing this volume with a reflection on assessment and time management, we acknowledge the inherent hurdles of creative assignments, while encouraging instructors to see the approaches in the volume as productive ways to both save grading time and enrich students' learning.

Though the essays in this collection focus on British literature courses in English departments, the ideas and suggestions can be transferred to other content areas, particularly Italian, French, and other romance languages as well as courses focused on research, theory, and composition, as well as history courses that teach primary texts. Teachers will find fruitful ways to use and adapt the suggestions in this book to a variety of contexts based on critical reading and note taking practices that prevailed in other time periods. Many chapters end with appendices that provide readers with sample assign-

ments, examples of student work, and sample grading rubrics.[37] We encourage our readers to use and adapt these materials in their own teaching.

All contributors to this volume teach at the college/university level, but the suggestions in these essays will be useful at the high school level as well. The common core initiative has emphasized the importance of improving "students' ability to read complex texts independently."[38] Medieval and early modern texts are just such complex texts, and as college instructors we see even very good students struggle with their language, syntax, and thematic content. It is our hope that high school teachers will also find useful tools in this volume and be inspired to integrate more works from pre- and early modern literature into the high school curriculum. High school, community college, and college-level students all tend to find medieval and early modern literature intimidating, and adding a commonplace book assignment is one way to make these works more accessible to a range of students.

The commonplace book, both as a methodology and as a formal assignment, is endlessly iterative, offering teachers a way to make the past come alive while engaging students in active learning and critical thinking. Beyond its practical uses as a form of information management, the commonplace book assignment can promote knowledge retention and encourage originality, collaboration, and creativity. As instructors, we know that our classrooms are all unique; each new cohort of students productively challenges our expectations while changing technologies and approaches to hybrid teaching require a flexible approach to course design. Whether our readers are well versed in teaching new media or simply want a way to encourage more effective notetaking, we hope the strategies and insights drawn from our authors' experience designing and assessing commonplace book assignments will facilitate more productive, inclusive, and student-centred pedagogies.

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37 For examples of sample assignments, see the chapters by Eckhardt, Silva, Corrigan, Estill, and Hagstrom-Schmidt in this volume. Hagstrom-Schmidt also includes a reading that can be used to introduce students to the concept and history of commonplacing. For examples of student work, see the chapters by Eckhardt and Silva. For examples of grading rubrics, see the chapters by Silva and Parker.

38 "Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects," *Common Core State Standards Initiative*, www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf. Accessed July 1, 2022.

Part I

WHY TEACH USING COMMONPLACE BOOKS?

RESOURCES, MATERIALS, AND IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES FOR INTRODUCING UNDERGRADUATES TO COMMONPLACING AS PRAXIS

NICOLE HAGSTROM-SCHMIDT

THIS CHAPTER CONTAINS three separate elements. The first section is a brief introduction to the history and practice of commonplacing and is designed to be used as an assigned reading for undergraduate students. The second section includes models for four in-class activities, and the third section offers a selected annotated bibliography of digitally available manuscript commonplace books and miscellanies.

A Very Short Introduction to Commonplacing

The term "commonplace" is, well, commonplace. We usually use the word to refer to something ubiquitous and expected, often using the term interchangeably with "mundane," "everyday," or, indeed "common." For scholars focused on the history and literature preceding the eighteenth century, this term has a significantly different and more precise meaning. The challenge with defining "commonplace," whether as noun or verb is that the term has evolved considerably across centuries. Like the act it would eventually end up describing, commonplacing has been adapted and readapted for its context from classical Greece and Rome to medieval encyclopedists to Renaissance humanists to Romantic and modern literati to your Shakespeare professor. But where does it begin? And how did it become what it is now? In this short essay, I trace the origins of commonplaces, the development of commonplacing as a method of both scholastic and humanist knowledge organization in the medieval and early modern periods in Europe, and the importance of commonplaces and commonplacing for modern-day literary and historical study.

Generally, scholars (with varying degrees of specificity) concur that commonplace is the Anglicization of the Latin *locus communis* (locus = place or topic, communis = common or "in common"), which in turn was an adaptation of the Greek *koinoi topoi*. These terms are directly linked to the prac-

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tice of rhetorical *invention* or the creation of arguments. Ann Moss breaks down the etymology further, explaining that in classical rhetoric, *locus* or "place" refers not so much to physical locations but to conceptual parts of argumentation. The common place (singular) could be a particular passage that dealt with a general point that did not relate specifically to the topic at hand but could be applicable across arguments; or, commonplaces (plural, *loci communes*) could be an actual topic or subject that a speaker could draw on for their speeches or compositions.[1] In the first definition, we see the use of a commonplace as a well-known concrete example that can be deployed in multiple scenarios. This definition fits best with our modern understanding of commonplace as "common knowledge." The second definition is a bit further removed. Aristotle, in *De Rhetorica* (or, *On Rhetoric*), identifies five common topics: definition, comparison, circumstance, relation, and authority. These topics link to specific questions surrounding the focus of a speech and serve as prompts for rhetorical invention or generating content for a speech.

Aristotle's early definitions differ considerably both from how we use commonplaces and how medieval and Renaissance writers used them. As David Parker reminds us, "Few medieval works come to us as the sole inhabitants of their manuscripts."[2] That is, whereas we tend to read books or stories as stand-alone texts, medieval writers tended to compile and collect fragments for their own use. One of the most popular medieval compilations was called a *florilegium* (plural: *florilegia*), literally a collection of flowers. These manuscripts contained extracts from predominately religious sources, most notably from the Bible and its many commentaries, but other classical sources and sententiae make regular appearances. Examples of florilegia include early-fourteenth-century Thomas of Ireland's *Manipulus Florum* ("A Handful of Flowers"). The act of extracting and copying from an authoritative source helped commit the extract to memory.

Commonplacing in the early modern period differs somewhat from medieval commonplacing primarily in that who is doing the commonplacing starts to expand. Whereas medieval commonplacers are likely to be educated men focused on religious life, early modern commonplacers include larger economic swaths of both men and women who commonplace not only religious texts but also literary texts, recipes, and aphorisms, depending on the interest of the compiler. This shift is due to a variety of factors, but two

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1 Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 3.

2 David Parker, "The Importance of the Commonplace Book: London 1450–1550," *Manuscripta* 40 (1996): 29–48 at 29.

of the main ones worth noting in European thought are the development of Renaissance Humanism and the related rise of Protestantism.

This method was particularly popular among Renaissance humanists such as Erasmus, Juan Luis Vives, and Philip Melanchthon, and in turn it was passed down to schoolmasters. Though England was a latecomer to this intellectual movement, by the mid-1500s the majority of England's schools followed a humanist curriculum emphasizing careful, rigorous study of classical literature. Though individual humanists would have their preferred methods of commonplacing, which they explained in great detail, the general process of commonplacing is fairly straightforward, as historian Ann Blair explains:

> In this method of reading…one selects passages of interest for the rhetorical turns of phrase, the dialectical arguments, or the factual information they contain; one then copies them out in a notebook, the commonplace book, kept handy for the purpose, grouping them under appropriate headings to facilitate later retrieval and use, notably in composing prose of one's own.[3]

Commonplacing then serves as a notetaking practice, albeit one slightly more involved than what we usually do. You might recall suggestions for notetaking—such as the Cornell method—that involve having two columns of material, one for general notes and another for identifying specific themes or cross-references. This practice, along with many others, evolves from commonplacing. In the following paragraphs, I detail this process using examples from seventeenth-century commonplace books.

The first step in commonplacing is selecting the "thing" worth copying. You may notice parallels to this process when determining what to quote from a particular article or primary text when writing an essay. What counts as worthwhile is unique to the compiler, though we can note a few major trends. Most notably, compilers tend to focus on the final purpose of their commonplace book. Certain genres, usually more prestigious genres from classical literature or higher-brow English poetry, tend to appear far more frequently than lower-brow genres such as ballads or commercial drama, especially in pre-1700 commonplace books. One of the most common metaphors for the act of compiling large amounts of information and organizing it, the honeybee collecting nectar and storing it in honey combs, serves as a representative example. The metaphor endures at the beginning of many commonplace books, including Pastorius's large manuscript book which he

3 Ann Blair, "Humanist Methods in Natural Philosophy: The Commonplace Book," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992): 541–51 at 541.

appropriately titles the *Bee Hive* (begun 1696)[4] and in Anthony Munday's dedicatory epistle to John Bodenham in Bodenham's printed commonplace book, *The Muses Garden* (1610):

> Like to the Bee, thou every where dist rome,
> Spending thy spirits in laborious care:
> And nightly brought'st thy gathr'd hon[e]y home,
> As a true worke-man in so great affaire.[5]

After selecting what was worth quoting, the compiler would copy the quotation into a book and label the extract under a heading. There are a few options for this process that were available and encouraged in early English schools. Drawing from Erasmus's extensive instructions in *De Copia*, Charles Hoole instructs English schoolmasters to have their students "pick out the phrases, and more elegant words as they go along, and write them in a Paperbooke and transcribe what sentences they meet withal into their Common-place-book."[6] In these instructions, students perform at least two rounds of copying, with at least one transcription being in a book already prepared with listed and organized topic headings. Others, like Obadiah Walker in his treatise on education, tells his readers to write all quotations down "confusedly" and place organizing headings in the margins that cross-reference appropriate commonplace headings in an index:

> The best way that I know of ordering them is to write down confusedly what in reading you think observable…Leaving in your book a considerable margin, marking every observation upon the page, as well as the pages themselves, with 1, 2, 3, &c. Afterwards, at your leisure, set down in the margin the page of your index, where the head to which such sentence relates: and so enter into the index under such a head the page of your note-book, wherein such sentence is stored…Your index must be well furnished with

4 Francis Daniel Pastorious, *His Hive, Melliotrophium Alvear or, Rusca Apium, Begun Anno Do[mi]ni or, in the year of Christian Account 1696* ([Philadelphia], 1696–1865). Manuscript. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, MS Codex 726. Available digitally through Penn Libraries, *Penn in Hand: Selected Manuscripts*, http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/medren/detail.html?id=MEDREN_9924875473503681.

5 Anthony Munday, "To his louing and approoued good friend M. Iohn Bodenham," in *The Garden of the Muses. Quem referent Musa viuet dum robor a tellus, Dum cælum stellas, dum vehet amnis aquas*, compiled by John Bodenham, 2nd ed. (London by E. A. for John Tap, 1610), A2r. In the quotation above, I have normalized the long S and u/v, but have otherwise retained original spellings. Any insertions for clarity are indicated in brackets.

6 Charles Hoole, *A New Discovery of the Old Art of Teaching Schoole, in Four Small Treatises* (London: Printed by J. T. for Andrew Crook, 1661), 174, H4v.

> heads; yet, not too much multiplied, lest they cause confusion. Your own experience will continually be supplying what is defective.[7]

In both instances, Hoole and Walker instruct their students to cast a wide net when looking for quotations and to impose an organizational structure upon those quotations. Ultimately, the process of organizing the material, whether via marginal notes and an index or extracts under already-present headings, is what distinguishes the commonplace book from a miscellany or general compendium of notes and quotations. The quoted material itself does not impact whether or not the collection is a commonplace book. Rather, the commonplace book is defined by its use of organizational headings and categorization of material under those compiler-assigned headings. This act ends up being one of the more labour-intensive aspects of commonplacing, both physically and mentally. It is one thing to read and note useful information—it is quite another to categorize it in logical and useful ways.

While organization themes varied according to individual compilers, we can determine a few major trends. Later commonplace books, especially those from the eighteenth century, used an alphabetical scheme, though the individual entries under a category were not themselves alphabetically ordered as the extracts were continually added. Frequently, but not exclusively, in older manuscript commonplace books, the organization tends to be hierarchal, starting with God and moving down the Great Chain of Being, or oppositional, meaning that opposites were often placed next to each other. Bodenham's printed commonplace book follows this schema, beginning with God and moving through Heaven and several abstract, heavenly virtues before reaching "Love," which is immediately followed by "Hate." Once it finishes with these abstract virtues, the headings deal with concrete matters like "Of Kings and Princes" and things relevant to relationships among humans like honour, war, and patience. Interestingly, "Women" receive their own category, which is immediately followed by headings with more negative contexts like "ambition," "treason," and "sloth." The book concludes, appropriately enough, with "Death." Other books following this scheme might also include sections on angels and demons, placed near each other, but between God and Man. This organizational structure bespeaks not only of a desire to categorize, but also suggests a hierarchical structure for early modern thought.

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7 Obadiah Walker, *Of Education Especially of Young Gentlemen* (Oxford, 1683), 138. Quoted in Earle Havens, "'Of Common Places, or Memorial Books': An Anonymous Manuscript on Commonplace Books and the Art of Memory in Seventeenth-Century England," *Yale University Library Gazette* 76 (2002): 136–53 at 142.

Without even knowing about commonplacing, we continue this proud tradition of categorizing material with headings. Think, for instance, of Twitter hashtags and other methods of digital tagging that evoke the organizational component of commonplacing. On a smaller scale, providing tags in blogs allows writers to link seemingly disparate posts in their larger corpus, allowing readers the ability to (theoretically) more easily locate similar content. On the larger scale, hashtags in Twitter allow users to connect material across several authors—it's commonplacing on a global scale. We see these methods at play academically and professionally as well, especially in terms of information management. Libraries, for instance, have long been categorizing information according to predetermined lists like the Library of Congress System or the Dewey Decimal system. Taxonomies of different flora and fauna find their origins in Linnaeus's commonplacing. Furthermore, social science researchers use "coding"—identifying and marking important portions of usually qualitative information with categorical markers relevant to their research question—to analyse and compare their raw data.

The commonplacer's act of categorization and, in many instances, recopying materials into new books, provided another method of internalizing their reading. Thomas Fuller, a prolific doctor of divinity and later Chaplain Extraordinary to Charles II, uses a martial metaphor: "A Common-place book contains many Notions in garison [*sic*], whence the owner may draw out an army into the field on competent writing."[8] Fuller's description captures how physical technology (in his case, a handwritten notebook) may be deployed in the service of memory, which in turn relates to more physical conceptions of memory as a large house with many rooms.

Finally, the commonplace book and its creation was meant to facilitate retrieval, whether for creating new works of literature, developing natural philosophy, or forming arguments. At its core, commonplacing entails not only memorizing lines, but placing them in some sort of mental category for easy recovery. In his large, three-volume manuscript commonplace book begun in 1696 in Philadelphia, Pastorius writes in his *incipit* (Latin for "beginning") to the first volume:

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8 Thomas Fuller, *The Holy State and the Profane State*, (Cambridge: Printed by Roger Daniel for John Williams, 1642), 176, quoted in Peter Beal, "'Notions in Garrison': The Seventeenth-Century Commonplace Book," in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985–1991*, ed. W. Speed Hill (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies and Renaissance English Text Society, 1993), 131–47 at 131.

> For as much as our Memory is not Capable to retain all remarkable Words, Phrases, Sciences or Matters of Moment, which we do hear and read, it becomes every good Scholar to have a Common-Place Book, & therein to treasure up what ever deserves his Notice &c. And to the end that he may readily know, both whither to dispose and Insert each particular, as also when upon Occasion to find the same again, &c. he ought to make himself an Alphabetical Index, like that of this Bee-Hive.[9]

Pastorius goes on to directly will the large document to his sons, whom he hopes will use the commonplace book and add their own knowledge to it. He also repeats this incipit at the beginning of the third volume, which contains the index for the first two volumes of material. In these lines, Pastorius extolls the benefits of outsourcing memorization to physical technology and illustrates how the commonplace book is only truly useful to the compiler if he can actually locate the material within it and use that material in a new, creative context. For Pastorius, this organizational tool is the "Alphabetical Index," which takes up nearly thirty pages in the third volume of the commonplace book. For others, organization takes the form of multiple columns featuring pre-generated headings.

Once we understand that commonplacing was a major method of understanding various bits of knowledge, we can start to see the many ways it came to impact an early modern's understanding of different kinds of evidence. Indeed, as Lorraine Dastan emphasizes, "ways of reading, absorbed at a young age and constantly practiced, may supply the templates for other ways of making sense of objects quite distinct from the manuscript or printed page—the morphology of a plant, the trajectory of a comet, the slide under the microscope, the 'reading' of an instrument."[10] Simply put, commonplacing methods not only affect literary knowledge production but also scientific knowledge production. In his discussion of philosopher John Locke's "new" method of commonplacing, Michael Stolberg explains that by the end of the seventeenth century, the practice "was widely used also by physicians and natural philosophers as an important means to collect and organize excerpts as well as personal observations and empirical knowledge acquired from others."[11] As a method, commonplacing does not require literary examples or even specific quotations in order to be effective.

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9 Pastorious, *His Hive, Melliotrophium Alvear or, Rusca Apium*.

10 Lorraine Daston, "Taking Note(s)," *Isis* 95 (2004): 443–48 at 444.

11 Michael Stolberg, "John Locke's 'New Method of Making Common-Place Books': Tradition, Innovation, and Epistemic Effects," *Early Science and Medicine* 19 (2014): 448–70 at 451.

We still engage in this same kind of transformative practice today by taking popular quotes and updating their context. For instance, consider the adage "To thine own self be true." A good, twenty-first century reader could read this phrase and say, "Yes. Being authentic and honest with oneself is a good thing." A savvy reader who knows quotations would add, "Yes, that's Shakespeare! *Hamlet*, I believe." And both readers are correct; however, once we look at the context of this line, we learn that it comes from Polonius, the pompous old man character who is spilling forth several wise-sounding sayings without any real understanding of what they mean. Indeed, "To thine own self be true" is also a Renaissance commonplace. What do we make of this? We are operating at several removes, with each iteration adding a different and often unintended meaning from the writer who came before. When studying the dramatic and poetic works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, therefore, we should be attuned to the ways common ideas, phrases, images, and metaphors were widely available. Commonplacing throughout the centuries also informs us of different practices of reading that we can apply today. Specifically, when writers commonplace, they take a quotation or reference out of context and place it into their own work.

Related to this network of meanings, commonplacing makes clear that early moderns had significantly different understandings of what counted as copying and creativity. In our time and Western context, copying another person's ideas, let alone their exact words, and incorporating that information in our own texts without attribution would be considered plagiarism, an offense punishable by varying degrees of severity depending on the stakes and the disposition of the adjudicator. For early moderns (and for their classic and medieval predecessors), this was not an issue. Re-deploying common sayings in new contexts or playing off accrued meanings was a mark of creativity and cleverness.

At its core, commonplacing is a method of organizing information across several sources to make it easier for the organizer to deploy in whatever circumstances they find themselves to be in. Whether that be a Roman orator preparing for debate, a fifteenth-century schoolteacher designing lecture notes, a Renaissance playwright drawing inspiration from Ovid or English history, or a modern-day student compiling information for a research paper (or perhaps making dank memes for the lulz while they avoid writing a research paper), methods of commonplacing endure. As the information moves from person to person, it is transformed and absorbs new and complex meanings. Fundamentally, commonplacing changes not just *what* you know, but *how* you know it.

COMMONPLACING IN THE CLASSROOM

AN IN-CLASS ACTIVITY GUIDE FOR INSTRUCTORS

THE COMMONPLACE BOOK is a popular long-term assignment for many teachers in English Studies for good reason—commonplacing assignments are often deployed as a way to encourage students to keep up with assigned reading (similar to journaling, short reflection papers, discussion questions, or forum posts) as well as develop some long-term thoughts that synthesize the many readings.[12] However, for those of us partway through a semester or quarter, assigning another long-term project on top of a required final paper is challenging if not outright impossible if we do not want a full-fledged mutiny on our hands. Fortunately, there are ways to incorporate commonplacing methods on a smaller scale in day-to-day meetings. In this section, I offer multiple suggestions for in-class, hands-on assignments that utilize commonplace books and commonplacing methods that instructors may adapt into their classes at any point of the semester.

Before determining which in-class activities will work for your students, first decide what you want the students to gain from commonplacing.

- Do you want your students to understand commonplacing as a historical method of reading and writing?
- Do you want your students to see how adaptation works in the early modern period?
- Do you want them to develop literary or historical research methods?
- Do you want them to read their assigned texts more closely?

All of these options are valid and worth pursuing during class time, but there are distinct ways to approach them. Individual classes will also vary in their learning preferences just as the professor will vary in theirs. In the activities below, I have aimed to address several common learning outcomes using multiple modes of student engagement and instruction. As a rule, all activities require extended engagement with at least one text (whether a

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12 In addition to other chapters in this collection, see Kate Ozment, "Teaching Manuscript Circulation," *Sammelband, Women in Book History Bibliography*, August 1, 2018, www.womensbookhistory.org/sammelband/2018/8/1/teaching-manuscript-circulation, and Callan Davies, "Commonplace Books: A Classroom Introduction," *Tympan and Frisket*, August 29, 2013, https://tympanandfrisket.wordpress.com/2013/08/29/commonplace-books-a-classroom-introduction.

commonplace book or other instructor-assigned reading), manipulation of some physical object (even if it's just their pencil, a tablet, or laptop), and discussion in small and large group settings. In these activities, the role of the professor is the role of a guide who provides materials and coaching whereas the students take on the majority of intellectual labour once the activity has begun. For those of us whose courses are already stuffed to bursting with lectures or other activities, these activities may instead be used as individual or group homework assignments.

ACTIVITY ONE — Commonplacing for Themes I

In this activity, your students will practise a hands-on method of commonplacing by selecting quotations relating to the major themes of the text(s) you have assigned for that day's reading. This activity is suitable for students at all undergraduate levels.

Required Materials

- Access to assigned primary text (Student and Instructor)/
- Technology for sharing student-generated documents (Google Docs or chalk/white board)/

Directions

- Identify (either in collaboration with the class or on your own to give to students) major themes in the text. Reduce these themes into keywords like "Love, Revenge, Death, Parent, Justice," etc.
- Place students in pairs or small groups.
- Assign groups a thematic keyword OR have groups select their own keyword.
- You may also want to assign multiple groups the same word for ease of comparison.
- Task students to locate, copy, and cite examples of their keyword onto a notebook or electronic document.
- For longer class sessions, briefly model how to locate examples and how to cite material.
- Assign groups to compose a short, written analysis comparing the quotations and examining how the thematic keyword changes or

develops in meaning across their extracts. This write-up may be collected as a part of a participation grade or serve as a guide for final discussion.

– Discuss, in large class format, each group's analysis.

ACTIVITY TWO — Commonplacing for Themes II

In this activity, students practise developing their own thematic categories based on a series of quotations they have either selected for themselves or received from the instructor. While this activity can also be conducted digitally, students report that they like manipulating the physical notecards. This activity is particularly suitable for lower-level classes who are learning about quoting and synthesizing materials.

Required Materials

– Copy of Assigned Reading.

– Notecards or Slips of Scrap Paper.

Directions

– Optional: Prior to class, locate ten relevant quotations from the day's reading. These quotations should have some thematic overlap. These extracts may also come from a previous reading assignment.

– Introduce students to quotation and why one would want to quote as opposed to paraphrase.

– Task students to locate a number of useful quotations from the past reading assignments. They should copy these down on slips of paper or notecards.

– Review a sample of the quotations that the students gathered either in conversation with a small group or as a large class. Note particularly good or interesting extracts and ask students to explain why they selected what they did.

– Share, if available and if students are having difficulty generating content, the quotations you shared prior to class. Students should copy these onto their notecards or scrap paper.

– In small groups (3–4 works well for this activity), assign students to cluster their quotations according to a key word or idea.

- Optional: Offer students a sample category or two to get them started if they're having trouble.
- Have students take a photo of their clustered notecards and compose a short explanation of their categories, why they placed each quote where they did, what they did with "miscellaneous" quotations, and what interesting things they noticed. This written assignment may be used as a participation grade and/or serve as a script for a small-group share.
- Optional: Review the idea of commonplacing, highlighting popular categories from Renaissance humanists like Erasmus and how those commonplace headings compare with the headings the students generated. What is the difference when you are given categories versus creating them yourself?
- Optional: Discuss, at end of class or during a later class period, how this assignment prepares students to write essays by gathering and arranging textual evidence.

ACTIVITY THREE — Introduction to Paleography

Reading early hands, especially early modern secretary hand, is a challenge for scholars at any level. In this activity, students practise transcribing short extracts. This activity is intended for upper-level majors and graduate students, but it may be adapted for lower-levels by using shorter extracts and easier hands.

Required Materials

- Access to multiple digital or hard copy (if available) commonplace extracts.

Directions

- Prior to class, select extracts from a manuscript commonplace book or miscellany (see list below). These extracts should be of varying levels of difficulty.
- Share copies or links of the selected extracts to the class.
- Introduce students to paleography and early hands, noting common confusing letter forms like the long "s" and minims.
- Practise transcribing an extract as a large group.

- Task students, individually or in groups, to transcribe an extract. This can be an extract from the same writer as the practice transcription, or an extract of the same poem or variations of a poem or song across various books.[13]
- Optional: Assign students to create their own cheat-sheet of letter forms that their writer uses.
- Compare transcriptions, noting challenges and, if using different copies of the same poem, specific differences.

ACTIVITY FOUR — Cross-Referencing Literary Extracts

IN THIS ACTIVITY, your students will practise paleography and internet research as they compare dramatic and poetic extracts. For Shakespeare courses and early modern courses in general, I recommend Hesperides (for access information, see the Annotated Bibliography) as it contains extracts from his plays as well as Sidney's Arcadia. This activity is best suited for survey-style courses at upper levels.

Required Materials

- Access to a commonplace book or verse miscellany that contains extracts from or related to course content.
- Student web access via laptop computer, tablet, or phone.
- Technology for sharing student-generated documents.

Directions

- Identify a commonplace heading that contains several literary extracts prior to class.
- Share the link to the leaf featuring the desired commonplace heading to students via email, CMS, or printed handout.
- Assign individual students or groups a quoted extract.

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13 The Union First Line Index of English Verse, housed at the Folger Shakespeare Library, is an indispensable tool for locating manuscripts containing copies of poems. The Index is available at https://firstlines.folger.edu/search.php. Common poems that work well for this assignment include James Shirley's "The Glories of Our Blood [or Birth] and State," Ben Jonson's "On Shakespeare," and Walter Ralegh's "[What is our life?]"

- Task students to do the following:
  - Transcribe the quotation.
  - Locate, using Internet searching skills, where the quotation appears.
  - Compare the extract to its source. This may be done in writing, in discussion, or both.
  - Upload their transcription to a shared document such as Google Docs or shared Wiki.
  - Compare, as a class, the relationship among the extracts as well as any noticeable differences between the quotations.

ACTIVITY FIVE — Analysing [Digital] Commonplace Books

IN AN IDEAL world, all students would be able to examine a physical, extant commonplace book or miscellany; however, given the limited availability of such resources, we can turn to the next best thing: freely available digital versions. In this activity, students (either alone, in pairs, or groups, depending on the class and instructor's preference), locate and analyse a commonplace book or miscellany available on the web through various libraries. I have included a curated selection of ten appropriate manuscripts in the Annotated Bibliography. This activity encourages digital literacy, bibliography, and introductory archival methods.

Required Materials

- Access to digital (or physical) commonplace books or miscellanies.
- Activity Handout.
- Ruler with centimeters.
- Scrap paper.

Directions

- Introduce students to commonplace books and miscellanies, noting particularly organizing features like headings and indices as well as their purpose.
- Assign or have students select a commonplace book to explore.
- Provide students with handout below.

- Discuss findings and link to course topic.
- Analysing Commonplace Books Handout.
- Use your digital commonplace book to answer the following questions.
  - What is the provenance of your book? (Who were the compilers and/or owners?)
  - How large is your commonplace book?
  - What are the dimensions (in centimeters or inches)?
  - How many pages or leaves does the book have?
- Using scrap paper and a rule, measure and re-create the size of the book. Attach this to your handout.
- Browse your book. How many different "hands" (that is, scripts or handwriting styles) do you see? What are some differences between the hands?
- What organizational apparatus did the compiler(s) include?
- If your book has headings, what are some examples of headings?
- If your book has headings, what relationships can you identify between them?
- Attempt to transcribe one or two short entries below:
- Based on your analysis, how might this commonplace book have been used?

SELECTIVE ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF DIGITALLY AVAILABLE MANUSCRIPT COMMONPLACE BOOKS AND MISCELLANIES

BELOW IS A curated selection of manuscript commonplace books and miscellanies that are freely available on the web. While this list is hardly exhaustive, it seeks to provide instructors with a variety of options to choose from for their classes. For instructors looking for even more resources, I suggest examining the online repositories noted below. Three particularly useful locations for further digitized material include University of Pennsylvania's *Penn in Hand*, the Folger Shakespeare Library's *LUNA*, and Princeton University Library's *Digital PUL*; see also Laura Estill's Appendix A in this volume. I included books from across the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries that include aspects of pedagogical interest, including physical features; special topics like medicine, fishing, or magic; and/or compilers/owners of historical note. The entries are organized chronologically with the acknowledgment that such texts are difficult to date.

Compiler: Unknown
Title: [Commonplace book and recipe book]
Date: Post-1567
Physical Location: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania
Collection: Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts
Call Number: UPenn Ms. Codex 823
Online Location: *Penn in Hand: Selected Manuscripts*
Web Link: http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017/d/medren/9929766543503681
Description: This sixteenth-century English's manuscript's 43 leaves contain extracts from the Psalms, a deathbed statement of Lady Katherine Gray, recipes, and an alphabetized index on folios 9v to 12v. The handwriting, while consistent, uses a variation of secretary hand and will be challenging for novice students of paleography.

Compiler: Mrs. Carlyon
Title: *A book of such medicines as have been approved by the special practice of Mrs. Carlyon*
Date: ca. 1606

Physical Location: Folger Shakespeare Library
Call Number: V.a.388; formerly Folger MS Add 334
Online Location: LUNA
Web Link: https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/d5781o
Catalogue Description: Early seventeenth-century receipt (or recipe) book of medicines that is organized by subject and features a table of contents at the beginning of the text.

Compiler: Unknown
Title: Commonplace book of poetry
Date: Seventeenth Century
Physical Location: Princeton University Library
Collection: Robert H. Taylor collection of English and American literature, 1280s–1950
Call Number: RTC01 (no. 36)
Online Location: Digital PUL, dpul.princeton.edu
Web Link: https://dpul.princeton.edu/catalog/0z7090076
Catalogue Description: Verse miscellany that includes content from printed works by Rochester and Dryden. Several selections focus on English political turmoil as well as bawdy material. Physical features of note include multiple hands, the use of pre-made manuscript lines, and the use of red ink, primarily for titles of early entries. The handwriting is suitable for intermediate students of paleography, though instructors will want to watch for common manuscript elisions and abbreviations.

Compiler: John Evans
Title: *Hesperides, or, The Muses garden*
Date: ca. 1655–1659
Physical Location: Folger Shakespeare Library
Call Number: V.b.93
Online Location: LUNA
Web Link: http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/7n3p1d
Description: This massive 900-page manuscript folio is the largest known copy of John Evans's unpublished anthology, *Hesperides, or The Muses Garden*. Organized by alphabetized subject headings, this manuscript includes quotations from Elizabethan and Stuart drama as well as Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*. The hand can be slightly difficult to read, but the material tends to be very familiar to undergraduates studying early modern literature.

Compiler: Nathaniel Bridges (creator); George Weare Braikenridge and Daniel B. Fearing (former owners)
Title: *Commonplace book: on angling*
Date: 1694–1717
Physical Location: Houghton Library, Harvard University
Call Number: MS Eng 1490
Online Location: Open Collections Program at Harvard University
Web Link: http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL.HOUGH:3392037
Description: This delightful 250-page early eighteenth-century commonplace book compiles various treatises on fishing, organized alphabetically with categories including "Of the Carp" and other fish, and angling techniques and tools.

Compiler: Francis Daniel Pastorius
Title: *Francis Daniel Pastorius, His Hive, Melliotrophium Alvear or, Rusca Apium, Begun Anno Do[mi]ni or, in the year of Christian Account 1696*. Also known as "The Beehive Manuscript."
Date: 1696–1865
Physical Location: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania
Call Number: UPenn Ms. Codex 726
Online Location: *Penn in Hand: Selected Manuscripts*
Web Link: http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/medren/detail.html?id=MEDREN_9924875473503681
Description: This three-volume manuscript codex of 478 leaves contains the commonplace book and index of Francis Daniel Pastorius for his two sons. Composed in Philadelphia near the beginning of the eighteenth century, the handwriting, while small, is precise and readable. Contents, according to the catalogue description, include "inscriptions, epitaphs, proverbs, poetry, Biblical citations, theological citations, quotations, and a list of books he read or knew, copies of letters, and notes on science, useful herbs and other plants."

Compiler: Unknown
Title: Receipt book, ca. 1700.
Date: ca. 1700
Physical Location: Folger Shakespeare Library
Call Number: E.a.4

Online Location: LUNA
Web Link: http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/nv883l
Description: Miscellany with Latin commonplaces and medical recipes. The text contains several distinct hands of varying difficulty.

Compiler: Thomas Jefferson
Title: Literary Commonplace Book
Date: 1758–1772
Physical Location: Library of Congress
Collection: The Thomas Jefferson Papers at the Library of Congress
Call Number: Microfilm Reel: 059, Series 5: Commonplace Books
Online Location: Library of Congress
Web Link: www.loc.gov/resource/mtj5.059_0379_0487/
Description: Unlike the other manuscripts in this bibliography, Thomas Jefferson's commonplace books (both this one and his legal commonplace book, also available through the Library of Congress) are available as digitized microfilm. Jefferson's literary commonplace book does not contain noticeable categories, but it does contain considerable quotations in Greek, English, and Latin. His hand is fairly legible for twenty-first-century students, but the microfilm scans occasionally cut parts of words in the gutter.

Compiler: Charles Rainsford
Title: [Notes on cabala]
Date: ca. 1783
Physical Location: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania
Call Number: UPenn Ms. Codex 1702
Online Location: *Penn in Hand: Selected Manuscripts*
Web Link: http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017/d/medren/9962935863503681
Description: This eighteenth-century codex contains a pasted copy of a 1783 print edition of *A New Common-place Book in which the Plan Recommend and Practised by John Locke, Esq. is enlarged and improved*, a partially completed index template, and several entries dealing with magic and cabala. The hand is in a cursive script that should be legible to students familiar with modern cursive.

Compiler: Jonathan Bayard Smith, 1742–1812
Title: Commonplace book
Date: Eighteenth-Century
Physical Location: Princeton University Library
Collection: Treasures of the Manuscripts Division
Call Number: C0938 no. 481
Online Location: Digital PUL, dpul.princeton.edu
Web Link: https://dpul.princeton.edu/catalog/0r9676951
Description: Another American commonplace book, this manuscript belonged to an eighteenth-century student at Princeton University (then the College of New Jersey). Smith's hand is fairly readable throughout. The manuscript contains marbled paper wrappers, doodles and initials, and multiple cross-outs.

REBUILDING THE BRIT LIT I SURVEY AROUND THE COMMONPLACE BOOK

DANA SCHUMACHER-SCHMIDT

IN MY POSITION as an associate professor of English, I'm lucky enough to teach the first half of the British literature survey, or Brit Lit I, every other fall semester. The approach to Brit Lit I that I inherited as a graduate instructor featured an intense reading load and a handful of high-stakes assessments in the form of exams and papers. After teaching the course this way a few times, however, I saw that it left students overwhelmed and frustrated. This situation led me to reconsider my overall course design and specific assignments, in light of the needs of the actual students in my classroom and with an eye to current teaching scholarship. I realized that I had been using assignments primarily as means to assess students' learning, rather than tools to facilitate learning. To swap these priorities, I dropped the traditional exams and long papers and replaced them with a commonplace book and other frequent, lower stakes assignments. Early modern readers used commonplace books to process and store ideas for later use, either in their own writing or as a guide to daily life, and one's commonplace book could serve as a reflection of oneself. I thought I could adapt these practices to my pedagogical goals and incorporate commonplacing into my Brit Lit I course. Although there were a few struggles along the way, the commonplace book helped students read actively, retain and transfer what they learned throughout the course, and develop greater self-awareness of their own reading and writing processes. In this chapter, I explain how and why I initially rebuilt my survey course around a commonplace book assignment and offer guidance to readers who might want to adopt the same approach. While I made these changes to my course prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the assignment has proven effective in supporting students' learning and general well-being through these tumultuous times.

I teach at Siena Heights University (SHU), a small, private liberal arts college sponsored by the Adrian Dominican Sisters. Most of the people in my classes are first-generation college students and have significant responsibilities outside of coursework. They work hard. Given the competing demands on their time, I have to acknowledge that my class is not always their top priority and figure out how to support their education in ways that

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accommodate their lives as whole people. Students in Brit Lit I tend to major or minor in English or History, often with a double major in Secondary Education.[1] I feel responsible for getting these students through the texts that they'll need to know for certification tests and in their future work as educators. And truthfully, knowing that my students are training to become teachers gives me extra motivation to step up my pedagogy game. Lastly, students come to Brit Lit I not having read much early literature and not expecting to connect much with it. To better suit the course to the people in it, I proposed three goals. I wanted to take out the spikes in student workload and stick to a steady, manageable level from week to week. I wanted students to engage more meaningfully with more of the course material. Lastly, I wanted them to carry their learning forward across course units and beyond to other contexts. Based on my previous experiments with commonplace book assignments, I thought it had potential to meet these goals. I was inspired by other professors' use of this assignment, particularly after reading Vimala Pasupathi's "The Commonplace Book Assignment," and set about designing a version adapted for my course.[2]

In addition to what I learned from reflecting on my teaching experiences, I consulted current scholarship on teaching and learning to further identify gaps in the previous course design and figure out how to provide what had been missing. To begin with, I wanted students to retain more of what they read. Research by Peter C. Brown, Henry Roediger III, and Mark A. McDaniel, among others, has shown that regular retrieval practice—having to recall from memory what one has learned—helps students retain material through what is known as "the testing effect."[3] To activate this "testing effect," students need regular opportunities to reach back into course texts. Spacing out these opportunities over time can increase the effect. In his 2015 book *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where, and*

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1 This course covers British literature from roughly the eighth to the eighteenth century. Regularly assigned texts include *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, excerpts from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, excerpts from *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, excerpts from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, and Eliza Heywood's *Fantomina*, along with a selection of shorter works.

2 Vimala Pasupathi, "The Commonplace Book Assignment," *The Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*, March 11, 2014, http://jitp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/the-commonplace-book-assignment/.

3 Peter C. Brown, Henry Roediger III, and Mark A. McDaniel, *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 39,43.

Why It Happens, Benedict Carey extols the value of spaced learning: "People learn at least as much, and retain it much longer, when they distribute—or 'space'—their study time than when they concentrate it."[4] Though frequent quizzes could serve this purpose, I thought commonplace book entries could work as well, as they require students to retrieve and use what they've read. In addition to helping students build up knowledge, regular cumulative retrieval practice in place of exams can lessen performance anxiety because students see that their grades don't depend on a handful of major assignments. With this new approach, I would have even more opportunities to see how students were handling course material, which would allow me to adapt lesson plans to meet students' needs in a timely manner.

Students develop mastery over skills and content when they can identify meaningful relationships across the material they have learned. The authors of *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*, explain that as students learn, they form connections between new information and old information they already possess: "When those connections form knowledge structures that are accurately and meaningfully organized, students are better able to retrieve and apply their knowledge effectively and efficiently."[5] Students benefit from instructors showing them "the big picture," and providing them with the organizing principles behind a unit or a whole course. However, students benefit even more when asked to fit information into that "big picture" themselves, or to come up with their own organizing schemes that highlight different significant relationships among material.[6] In my previous course design, I had not given students enough opportunity to do this on their own. I hoped that a move toward more frequent, spaced-out assignments would prompt students to form these connections gradually, integrating new material into their existing knowledge structures and creating their own, new structures to accommodate new information and ways of thinking.

In addition to being able to make meaningful connections across course material, my students needed to be able to carry what they learn forward in the course, as well as into future courses and beyond to any exams they

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4 Benedict Carey, *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where, and Why It Happens* (New York: Random House, 2014), 65.

5 Susan Ambrose et al., *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 4.

6 James Lang, "Small Changes in Teaching: Making Connections," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 8, 2016, www.chronicle.com/article/Small-Changes-in-Teaching-/235230.

might take for teacher certification or graduate school admission, or even to their own classrooms. However, studies have shown that students do not automatically transfer what they learn in one context to other contexts. Fortunately, various means exist to encourage this kind of knowledge transfer. The authors of *How Learning Works* show that helping students develop the kinds of solid, meaningful knowledge structures discussed in the paragraph above can encourage knowledge transfer, because if students can see the deep connections between skills or concepts, they are better able to recognize when to apply them.[7] Prompts from instructors can help students bridge the gap between contexts, too ("Remember when we talked about heroism in relation to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*? How does that compare to what we see in these saints' lives?"). However, studies have shown that one of the most effective ways to support knowledge transfer is with reflective or metacognitive exercises. In other words, we need to ask students to think about how they learn and how they might apply what they've learned.

An added benefit is that reflection enables students to become more self-directed learners and develop good learning behaviors. In her studies of reflective learning, Jennifer A. Moon shows that "learners who achieve well are more often those who are aware of, and able to reflect on, their own learning processes, their weaknesses and strengths."[8] This claim echoes Susan Ambrose and her colleagues who found that "learners may engage in a variety of metacognitive processes to monitor and control their learning…When students develop the skills to engage these processes, they gain intellectual habits that not only improve their performance but also their effectiveness as learners."[9] We can help students improve in this way by giving them exercises to assess their own strengths and weaknesses, determine how to approach a task, keep track of their progress, and evaluate the extent to which their chosen approach is working to meet their goals. In looking back over my previous Brit Lit I course design, I realized that I gave almost no opportunities for this kind of metacognition.

As I redesigned my commonplace book assignment, and the course around it, I thought carefully about how each feature could best support student learning. In the section that follows, I'll discuss different elements of my assignment and the rationale behind them. To begin with, I knew that in order for the assignment to enable students' learning in the way I wanted it to, stu-

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7 Ambrose et al., *How Learning Works*, 118–19.

8 Jennifer A. Moon, *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 86.

9 Ambrose et al., *How Learning Works*, 7.

dents would need to commit a significant amount of time and effort to keeping their books. If I was going to ask them to invest so much in this one, long-term assignment, I would have to make room for it in the course by altering other assignments. Fortunately, the alterations that would give students more time for their commonplace books also supported my goals of getting students to engage with more of the assigned texts, encouraging knowledge transfer, and dispersing the workload of the course. I dropped the exams and papers I had used in the past, and replaced them with smaller, iterative assignments: quizzes at least once a week and short (two- to three-page) "study guide" essays on each unit (eight altogether). This schedule of assignments would allow room for regular work on the commonplace book as well. To further communicate the significance of the commonplace book, and therefore the anticipated labour that would be needed to complete it successfully, I decided to make it worth thirty percent of the course grade. This may seem contradictory to my low-stakes approach, but no single piece of the book can make or break a student's grade, and they complete it gradually over the course of the whole semester with ample opportunities to revise their approach. No grade is assigned on the book until the end of the course, and that grade is assigned holistically, taking into account how students developed their books over time.

In the assignment guidelines, I present the commonplace book as an opportunity for students to engage intellectually and creatively with our assigned texts and, in the process, to generate a new text that records their path through Brit Lit I. Everyone starts the semester with the same black and white composition notebook, purchased by me with department funds, and gradually transforms it into their own. To this end, I ask students to include at least fifteen entries in their commonplace books over the course of the semester. An entry consists of a quoted passage or passages from a text and the student's response to it. While I give some guidance on how they might select passages, for example choosing passages that they love, passages that seem to do something really interesting or weird, passages that challenge their thinking, or passages that remind them of something else, I leave the choice of texts up to them. Likewise, I ask students to choose the form their responses will take. They can respond in standard prose, but they can also try other forms, like drawing, poetry, collage, or rewriting the original passages. Regardless of the form they choose, I ask that responses comment on and interpret the quoted text beyond the superficial elements, and that, at least sometimes, they make connections with other texts. Instead of giving a length requirement, I focus on what an entry should accomplish. In order to meet the minimum requirement of fifteen entries, students need to engage with most of the texts assigned for class. Through the challenge of presenting their

response to each text, I hoped students could come to understand them better. The requirement to look for relationships across texts could also encourage students to apply what they learned from one reading or in one unit to a new context later on in the course. In this way, I could encourage students to synthesize ideas as a habit throughout the semester, rather than waiting until an exam or essay to give them the opportunity. Students would need to write in their commonplace books on a pretty regular schedule, which would give them frequent opportunities for retrieval practice, especially as they tried to recall elements of previous texts to connect to the current one.

I require students to create some system of thematic headings or keywords to help them keep track of the content in their book and identify relationships between entries. Students choose the themes based on patterns that emerge from the passages they've chosen to include in their books, and they choose how to present this information based on what seems most useful to them. Some students used their themes to create a table of contents. Others set up a table of contents based on the authors and titles of the works they excerpted and then created an index to organize their themes. One student used multicoloured tabs keyed to important themes in her book and stuck them on the top of relevant pages. This aspect of the assignment asks students to identify patterns they find significant and create the kind of variable, meaningful organizing structures that increase the likelihood of knowledge transfer.

The assignment requires students to share their books four times during the semester: twice with me and twice with classmates, prior to submitting the final version. This system created a monthly check-in schedule which helped keep students accountable for making steady progress in their books. In addition, it provided them with regular opportunities for feedback and reflection on their work at different stages in the process. Lastly, sharing the books helped remind students that they were public texts, not private diaries. For additional incentive, I made participation in all four of these check-ins part of the criteria for an "A" book on the rubric.

Sharing books with me and exchanging them with each other fulfilled related, but different purposes. When I met with students after reading their books for the first time, I intended to preview their work, ask questions to find out how they had approached the assignment so far and how they felt it was going, and answer any of their questions that might have arisen. I found that in the first round of meetings, most students were off to a fine start, but they didn't feel confident with their work, something I will discuss in more detail below. Thus, my purpose became to assure students and to remind them that the assignment left room for figuring things out. These initial meetings also helped me identify any students who had not quite gotten

into the assignment yet, figure out why they hadn't, and get them on track. For the most part, these students were engaging only superficially with the texts, so I would ask them questions to draw out more ideas, and then encourage them to include those kinds of ideas in their entries going forward. When I read students' books again later in the semester, I approached our conversations as a way to foster critical thinking in preparation for their final reflections. We used this time to revisit concerns they brought up at the first meeting and to discuss how the book had developed over time.

In between sharing their books with me, students exchanged their books twice with two different classmates. My intention was for students to build further connections among course texts and complicate their understanding of the literature by seeing how others responded to it. Sharing books this way also prompts students to reflect on how their commonplacing process compares to that of their classmates. On exchange days, I set aside a few minutes of class for students to trade books. Then on their own time, I asked students to read their partner's book, annotate it, and then choose a passage from it to include in their own books. Students copied both the passage and a part of their partner's response, then added their own thoughts about what they'd copied. Back in class we took a few minutes for students to return books and debrief with their partners. After both rounds, students said they liked this practice as a written parallel to class discussion. Regarding process, they said that their classmates' work encouraged them to try things with their books that they might not have on their own, but also made them feel more comfortable about their own choices.

In addition to the fifteen standard entries, I require students to include two special reflective entries in their commonplace books, one in the middle of the semester and one at the end. These entries ask students to return to material from earlier in the semester, reconsidered in light of what they had read and thought since. From this perspective, they could see changes in their interpretation and understanding of the literature and look across texts and periods to make broader observations. In this respect, the midterm and final entries correspond with one of Jennifer Moon's explanations of the place of reflection in learning: "When there is no new material of learning and the learner is attempting to develop her understanding on the basis of what she already knows, reflection occurs...in situations in which there is reconsideration of existing ideas that may be meaningful in order to seek additional or deeper meaning."[10] In previous versions of the course,

10 Moon, *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning*, 87.

I had intended to create such situations on midterms and final exams, but without giving students the opportunity to build up to this kind of thinking along the way, many struggled. I hoped that with regular commonplacing, students would be able to find deeper meanings in the reconsideration of ideas from earlier in the semester when they paused and looked back from the middle and end of the course. An additional, and equally important, goal for the midterm and final entries was for students to articulate and evaluate their commonplacing processes. As mentioned above, this sort of metacognitive exercise hadn't really had a place in my previous version of the course, but the commonplace book seemed like an ideal vehicle to foster it.

Although I had clear goals for the midterm and final reflections, and informed students of these components of the assignment from the beginning of the semester, I waited to develop specific prompts because at first I wasn't sure exactly what they should look like. In the end, this turned out to be a blessing because it left room for me to respond to what my students were doing, and, as the semester progressed, for them to take the lead shaping the requirements. I came up with a list of four midterm questions based on what I had seen emerging from my students' books and what I wanted them to accomplish with this component of the commonplace assignment. The questions were: Which of our readings have you responded to most strongly and why? What connections can you make between the passages you've chosen to include in your book? What general observations can you make about medieval English literature based on what you have in your commonplace book? How has compiling your commonplace book helped you engage with and process readings in the first half of the semester? Students had a standard seventy-five-minute class period to respond to the prompts in their books.

For the final reflection, we took a more collaborative approach to developing the prompts. The students and I came to the final class period with a list of potential questions, which we compiled on the board and then revised together. Then I typed up the final list we had devised and shared it with students. Having gone through the midterm, students were prepared to take on a bigger role designing this component of the book assignment. Additionally, this exercise gave them yet one more opportunity to generalize from the specific work they had been doing all semester long. It allowed them to work backwards and figure out what kinds of questions would best allow them to reflect on what they had learned, both in terms of course content and their own learning behaviors. Some questions were: As you look back across the book as a whole, what connections, patterns, or common themes can you see emerging? Did your commonplace process develop or change over the

course of the semester and if so, how? What difficulties did you run into as you were putting your book together? How did you resolve them? How has compiling your commonplace book changed how you engage with readings, for this class or in general? As a result of their involvement in the process, students were more invested in this final reflection than I've ever seen students be in a final exam.

By the end of the semester, I was thrilled with the work my students had done and delighted that the assignment seemed to support their learning in the ways I had intended. From what I could observe in their entries and from what students told me in their midterm and final reflections, I saw several specific outcomes that convinced me to continue using the commonplace book assignment. First, students read more actively and sought out connections between what they were reading. They successfully transferred knowledge from one part of the course to the next. As a result, they also engaged more fully and consistently with readings across the semester. Students told me that the commonplace books entries made it harder for them to fall behind or get lost in course material. Having a space for personal reflection also allowed students to find resonances between older literature and their daily lives, something many of them were not expecting. In addition, students figured out how to use their commonplace books to complement other aspects of coursework: study guide responses, quizzes, and discussion. Rather than the commonplace book becoming "extra work" on top of everything else they had to do for class, it became integral to their other assignments. They used it to test out ideas for study guide responses and discussions, dig into texts in ways that prepared them for quizzes, and respond to ideas that had been raised in class. In other words, keeping a commonplace book helped them become better learners. They let me know that the commonplace book required significant effort and time to complete, but overall, because students could see the relationship between the different kinds of work they were doing for class and because the workload was evenly dispersed throughout the semester, they seemed to feel less anxious and overwhelmed than in previous semesters. Having discerned the value of commonplacing in their learning, a few students even stated intentions to keep up the practice outside of our class.

My first experience with the commonplace book assignment convinced me to keep it at the core of my Brit Lit I course, and to encourage other instructors to adopt this approach. However, this new course design was not without its challenges. Although research suggests that students learn better when they have the freedom to make choices, my students needed some sup-

port to embrace this freedom.[11] Early on in the semester, I learned that students can panic when given this amount of authority to make choices about an assignment that makes up thirty percent of their course grade. On the day we first discussed commonplace books and went over the assignment guidelines, my students expressed excitement at the opportunity to write something other than the usual literary analysis essay and what I would call joyous disbelief at the prospect of no midterm or final exam. However, when it came to actually starting their books, students were hesitant. Even though we discussed various options, when it came down to it students expressed uncertainty about what to put in their commonplace book entries. Their fear of getting it wrong held up their progress.

I think there are a couple of reasons why students responded to the assignment in this way. First, by the time they get to Brit Lit I, they've written a lot of literary analysis essays and taken a lot of exams. Even if these kinds of assessments can be stress-inducing, they are familiar and students will have developed strategies to approach them, though with varying degrees of success. On the other hand, most students have not kept a commonplace book before, and so they have neither familiar strategies to fall back on nor a sense of how much time and effort the assignment will require of them. Even though my students knew how to think about literary texts in the way the commonplace book assignment required, they felt uncomfortable putting that into words in this new format. In particular, they seemed unsure about an assignment that didn't start with a thesis statement but instead led them on a semester-long process of discovery. This assignment confronted my students with the reality that every new writing task requires re-learning how to write. As Elizabeth Wardle writes, "every new situation, audience, and purpose requires writers to learn to do and understand new possibilities and constraints for their writing."[12] In addition to unfamiliarity with the genre, I think some students' trepidation came from previous experiences with professors who told them "you can do whatever you want for this assignment!" but didn't really mean it when grading time rolled around. Even when I told students that there is no one right way to keep a commonplace book, they hesitated to believe me. Their scepticism

11 James Lang, "Small Changes in Teaching: Giving Them a Say," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 3, 2016, www.chronicle.com/article/Small-Changes-in-Teaching-/235918.

12 Elizabeth Wardle, "You Can Learn to Write in General," in *Bad Ideas About Writing*, ed. Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe, (Morgantown: West Virginia University Libraries Digital Publishing Institute, 2017), 30–33 at 30.

was rooted in previous learning experiences where successfully completing an assignment depended on cracking a professor's secret code.

I found several strategies to help students overcome their initial hesitation and jump into commonplacing. First, I stressed that the book was always meant to be a work-in-progress. In her work on the transfer of writing skills, Elizabeth Wardle suggests that we can help students manage new writing situations by letting them know that "failing and struggling are a normal part of writing" and by creating assignments that leave room for these parts of the process.[13] I knew I had left room for some struggle in the assignment, but I had to convince my students that I really meant for them to do it. So, we sat down together and reviewed the guidelines and rubric to remind them that trial and error were built into the process. In their work on rubrics, Danelle Stevens and Antonia Levi articulate what many instructors know from experience: rubrics are valuable in part because they allow us to "make our implicit expectations explicit."[14] If we give rubrics to students in advance and discuss them together, we can help clear up some ambiguity and uncertainty from the writing process. In this case, I wanted students to recognize that certain ambiguities were built into the assignment for them to work through in whatever way seemed right to them. In particular, I pointed out sentences like "Take chances with ideas even if they aren't fully figured out" or "You may find that your first system of organization doesn't work and you need to adopt another one—some messiness is okay in this project. Work through the mess," and, finally, "Books will be assessed holistically and with an understanding that it may take time to get the hang of commonplacing and that some messiness is inevitable." Next time I might add "and even desirable" to that last statement, because I do believe that in struggling a little bit with how to represent their ideas in their commonplace books, students thought differently about the readings and practised problem solving.

Second, in conversations throughout the semester, we focused on the utility of the commonplace book over its aesthetic value. Students are used to the expectation that they turn in polished work, but in my version of the commonplace book assignment, I wanted students to preserve the evidence of the labour that went into its creation. It helped to look at some early modern books that featured scribbles, crossed out lines, and various inventive solutions to the problem of running out of room for entries under a certain letter

13 Wardle, "You Can Learn to Write in General," 32.

14 Dannelle D. Stevens and Antonia Levi, *Introduction to Rubrics: An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback, and Promote Student Learning*, 2nd ed. (Sterling: Stylus, 2012), 22.

in the table of contents or index. In addition, several students were concerned that if they tried to respond to a text with anything other than analytical prose (for instance a drawing, a collage, or a poem of their own) that I would grade their work on its artistic or literary merits rather than my stated criteria of thoughtful engagement with the readings. Although a student's book might end up being beautiful, it is more important that the book is useful for students and that the act of keeping the book helps them "do" the class. This focus on the purpose of the book as a guiding rule helped students feel that they could try new things in their books, especially as we moved further along in the semester, and they got more comfortable with the routine of the course as a whole. As mentioned above, seeing their classmates' commonplace books also helped them embrace the possibilities of the assignment.

I acknowledge that certain aspects of the commonplace book assignment that I implemented in my class may need revision for larger classes. Literature survey courses at SHU are small, usually six to ten students. On a practical level, the fact that I had so few commonplace books to read and respond to meant that I could take plenty of time with each one and reasonably meet individually with every student in just a couple of days. The relatively small number of students also meant that we could easily have a conversation about the books during class with enough time for everyone to ask questions and participate, and still get to that day's planned lesson. Additional changes could be necessary to adapt the assignment to different student populations.

Nevertheless, I found that the commonplace book could be both an effective learning tool and an effective means to measure student learning when I made it the central work of my course. Although the impetus for the course redesign and the revised commonplace book assignment came from a desire to deepen my students' experience of the course, an added bonus was that it enriched my experience as well. The commonplace books were so much more interesting to read than even the best exams or papers ever are, in large part because my students made them their own. As a result, I also learned a lot more about my students from their books than I had from any previous assignments. In turn, I felt comfortable sharing more of myself with them. Most rewarding have been conversations with my Education students who are eager to think through how they might adapt commonplacing in their future English Language Arts classrooms. This potential to foster community and cooperation, while also facilitating learning, has come to be especially valuable in these pandemic years, in ways that I could not have foreseen when I first designed the assignment, and has ensured that the commonplace book will continue to be at the core of my Brit Lit I course.

Appendix

COMMONPLACE BOOK GUIDELINES AND RUBRIC

ENG 343: Brit Lit I — Commonplace Book Project
100 points; 30 percent of course grade

As you have learned, reading and writing were linked activities in early modern England. Educational manuals urged readers to annotate their texts and to keep commonplace books as means of processing and storing ideas for later use. Passages quoted in a commonplace book could make their way into one's future writing or guide one through daily life. This assignment asks you to read and write like an early modern student by compiling your own commonplace book over the course of the semester. Your book provides a space to engage intellectually and creatively with our assigned texts and, in the process, to generate a new text that records your unique path through Brit Lit I.

How to approach this assignment: Before we get into the details, some advice from former students that I fully endorse: Use your book to help you do the other work of our class, rather than approaching it as a totally separate assignment. Your commonplace book entries are a great space for you to work through ideas for a Study Guide essay, to prepare for class discussion, or to reflect on what is said during discussion or right after. This assignment works best if you build your book little-by-little over time. **Bring your commonplace book to class every day.** I'll try to incorporate it in class as much as I can, and you should also make it a regular part of your weekly class prep.

Expect that it might take a few entries before you get into a flow. You may find that your first plan doesn't work, and you need to adopt another one. Some messiness is to be expected and is totally okay with this project. Work through the mess and just keep going.

What goes into an entry? The core elements of an entry are (1) a quoted passage or passages from a text and (2) your response to it/them. By the end of the semester, your book should include at least 15 entries of this type, plus a mid-semester and final reflection (more on these below).

How to find passages for your book: As you read in preparation for class, underline and annotate passages that speak to you in some way. Maybe you

love the language. Maybe it relates to a key theme of the text. Maybe the passage does something really interesting or weird. Maybe the ideas challenge you. Maybe the passage reminds you of something else you've read/seen/heard (either in this class or elsewhere). Choose the most important (to you) passages to quote in your book. When you quote a passage, you should copy it word for word, though you have some wiggle room for creativity/individuality in formatting if you want to use it. Give the author, title, and other info that might help you or your book's readers find the passage in the original text.

How to respond to passages in your book: Responses should be exploratory. Take chances with ideas even if they aren't fully figured out or use your response to figure them out.

Responses should:

- comment on and interpret the quoted text (e.g., why did you pick it? what does it mean? what does it do? what puzzles you about it? how does it make you feel? how does it relate to the text as whole?);
- demonstrate careful attention to the effects of language in the quoted text (e.g., why do the *words* in the passage matter, not just the general ideas);
- make connections with other texts (at least sometimes);
- raise questions that you want to discuss in class or investigate on your own as you go forward.

Responses can be in standard prose BUT they can also take other forms: drawings, poetry, collage (with pictures or other things pasted into your book), marginalia, rewriting, writing back—whatever you can think up, as long as, across your book, you meet the requirements bulleted above. You can also mix up any of these forms in a single entry.

A few other guidelines for the minimum 15 entries: At least twice during the semester, you should read a scholarly article or book chapter on one of our assigned texts and include an entry on that article/chapter in your commonplace book. Pick a passage or passages that speak to you from the article/chapter, then quote and engage with its claims in your book. For example, what's your take on the source's interpretation of the text? Or how does the new source enhance your own interpretation of the text? Use the library databases or Google Scholar to locate your scholarly sources; ask for help if you need it.

At least once during the semester, you should read something from our anthology that hasn't been assigned for class. Pick a passage or passages from this text that speak to you, and that relate to any text that has been assigned for class. Quote the passage(s) and deal with the relationship to an assigned text in your response. I'm happy to make recommendations based on your interests.

You may include multiple entries that quote from the same text, but across the book as a whole you should engage with a variety of texts.

Organizing your book: Come up with a system of thematic headings or keywords to help you 1) keep track of your content and 2) identify links between content. Above and beyond that basic expectation, how you approach organization is totally up to you. Expect that it might take a few entries before you see recurring topics start to emerge, which you can then use to help organize your entries. You may find that your first system doesn't work, and you need to adopt another one—some messiness is okay in this project. Work through the mess.

Sharing your book: You will share your book at least four times during the semester, twice with me and twice with classmates. When you share your book with me, you'll drop it off to my office and sign up for a time during the following week to talk about how your book is developing. When you share your book with classmates, you'll exchange books in class. After reviewing your partner's book, you'll have a chance to respond to it both in their book and your own.

Mid-semester and Final Reflections: Twice during the semester, you'll complete a special kind of reflective entry (not included in the 15-entry minimum requirement). These should be in standard prose, such as you would use in an essay, though you're free to embellish them with other elements. You will receive more detailed prompts for these reflections later in the semester.

Relevant dates:

October 1—CB Share 1: with me
October 11—CB Share 2: with classmates
October 13—trade back books, complete mid-semester reflection in class
November 12—CB Share 3: with me
November 29—CB Share 4: with classmates
December 15—present completed book and turn in for assessment

Commonplace Book Project Rubric

An "A" commonplace book will:	A "B" commonplace book will:	A "C" commonplace book will:
Reflect a significant investment of thought and time, sustained over the course of the semester.	Reflect some investment of thought and time, perhaps with highs and lows over the course of the semester.	Reflect little investment of thought and time and/or indicate obvious highs and lows over the course of semester.
Present a system of organization that would easily assist the writer to find entries at a later time.	Present a system of organization that would generally assist the writer to find entries, though with a few flaws.	Present a system of organization that is unclear, incomplete, or otherwise would get in the way of finding entries.
Meet the required minimum number of entries (15 + a mid-semester and a final reflection) and basic expectations for entries.	Meet the required minimum number of entries (15 + a mid-semester and final reflection) but be a little inconsistent in meeting basic expectations for entries.	Fall a few entries short of the required number or lacks a mid-semester or final reflection; be very inconsistent in meeting basic expectations for entries.
Reflect participation in all four book-sharing activities.	Lack participation in one book sharing activity.	Lack participation in one or more book sharing activity.
Include ample evidence of textual analysis, interpretation, and synthesis (connections among texts) that demonstrates deep engagement with readings.	Include some evidence of textual analysis, interpretation, and synthesis that demonstrates engagement with readings.	Include little evidence of textual analysis, interpretation, and synthesis and demonstrate superficial engagement with readings.
Take chances in exploring new ideas and posing questions for further investigation.	Infrequently take chances on new ideas or pose questions for further investigation.	Lack exploration of new ideas or questions for further investigation.

Commonplace books that fail to meet "C"-level expectations in multiple areas will receive a lower grade. Books will be assessed holistically and with an understanding that it may take time to get the hang of commonplacing and that some messiness is inevitable.

Commonplace Book Presentation
100 points; 10 percent of final grade

During our final exam period, you will give a 7–10-minute presentation on your completed book, explaining the process and results of your work. Your final reflection is a good starting point for presentation content, but we'll come up with additional guidelines in class.

STUDENT COMMONPLACE BOOKS AND VERSE MISCELLANIES, CA. 1516–2022

JOSHUA ECKHARDT

LIKE MANY OTHERS who attended university in the seventeenth century, Christopher Wase made a commonplace book that eventually turned into something else as well. Initially, he gave his book everything that it would need to satisfy even the strictest definitions of a commonplace book.[1] He made an alphabetical list of topics.[2] When he read a passage worth preserving on one of those topics, he skipped ahead several leaves and rewrote the topic along the top of a blank page, so that his headings would appear in roughly alphabetical order. He then placed the quotation immediately below. These are the same elements that make up a commonplace book in my courses: quotations, topical headings, and either an index or an approximately alphabetical arrangement in a hand-made book. I require students to add two more ingredients to their commonplaces as well: a very short citation and the date of the class meeting from which, or for which, they copied the commonplace. I inform students of these core requirements on the syllabus; in the written instructions that conclude this chapter; in video instructions publicly available online; and in periodic, graded responses to PDFs of their hand-made books.[3]

Wase's method of commonplacing left a lot of leaves either mostly or entirely blank. Like many owners of commonplace books, he eventually started filling in these empty spaces without regard for the volume's original organizational structure, often copying complete poems.[4] My students do something similar. More or less like Wase did at his college, they make books by hand (often with gatherings of irregular size), and they start organizing

1 For the exemplary definition of the "commonplace book" that we follow in my courses, see Peter Beal, *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology, 1450–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 82–83.

2 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl. poet. 117, fol. 15r–v.

3 Both the video and written instructions are available on the website for my university's student and alumni organization for paleography, the Superscripts: https://rampages.us/superscripts/how-to-make-a-commonplace-book/.

4 Bodleian MS Rawl. poet. 117, fols. 22r, 24r, 25r, for example.

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quotations from their reading under the topical commonplace headings that they devise. When the syllabus turns from prose to verse, they often follow Wase's next step, and start filling in the blank space with poems.

Although, like Wase did, my students now begin by commonplacing, and only then start copying complete poems, I began this assignment the other way round. In 2009, in an introduction to the English major, I started asking students to compile their own manuscript verse miscellanies. I had just finished writing a book about manuscript verse miscellanies. I enjoy reading them. And I imagined that seeing how my students produced and used their hand-written poetry books would help me better understand how their predecessors had done similar things. More importantly, I figured that copying poems by hand would improve students' preparation for, and participation in, class.

Although it did not work perfectly for all students, the initial version of the assignment worked well enough that I expanded it the following year by adding the commonplace component and trying it in early modern courses. Although many library cataloguers and scholars have defined the commonplace book broadly enough to include complete poems and much else, my students and I observe the distinction that Peter Beal has made between these two types of manuscript making: "Verse miscellanies are sometimes also described as 'poetical commonplace books', which is not a strictly accurate term unless they are systematically arranged under subject headings."[5] Accordingly in my courses, we consider copying poems to be a distinct activity from commonplacing, unless a student adds the equivalent of commonplace headings to small sections of a poem in the margins.

Adding the commonplace component to my verse miscellany allowed me to involve all of the course's reading—both verse and prose—in the manuscript book assignment. While it has remained under constant revision, the assignment has continued to grow. In fact, it has become the central project in my survey of early modern English literature and, indeed, of most of my introductory and intermediate-level surveys of literature, including British Literature I, Women's Writing in Early Modern English, and Shakespeare's Poems and Publishers. I teach these courses at a large, urban, state university. Each course typically has about 30 students, most but not all of whom are English majors. Occasionally my early modern survey has about 60 students, but only when the department can fund an exceptional graduate teaching assistant who is specializing in early modern literature.

5 Beal, *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology*, 429–30.

This chapter reports on what my students and I have done well, and not so well, with our commonplace books and verse miscellanies, and how I have modified the assignment in response. It tells a first-person account of how one instructor has devised, revised, and expanded an assignment, based on challenges that arise in the physical or virtual classroom. One set of challenges had to do with relating this relatively unusual assignment to subsequent writing assignments. I thought that copying poems and quoting prose by hand would improve students' ability to quote and discuss literature in their other assignments, in general. But I wanted to come up with new assignments that proceed more clearly from the work that students were doing in their hand-made books. Later in the chapter, I describe two of these assignments. One of them was successful right away: a dialogue composed of quotations from the writings of Sir Thomas More and William Tyndale. The other assignment took me over a decade to get right, even though it sounds pretty simple now: an essay that introduces the major theme or themes that students had identified in their commonplace books, illustrated with explications of some of the passages that they had already commonplaced.

Instigations

When I first asked students to make their own verse miscellanies, the goal was to help them to prepare for class in an introductory course: to help them choose a poem to discuss, and to slow down and prolong their engagement with that poem before each class. During that first semester, the assignment seemed to be helping some of my students prepare for class, but not all of them. When the due date for the manuscript books arrived, it became clear why. Some students turned in their books late; several submitted work that appeared to have been done hastily and quite recently. The obviously late books had not prepared students for the class discussions that had taken place weeks ago. On the contrary, the books demonstrated why their compilers had been so quiet in those discussions. These students had allowed their manuscript books to become another task to rush through at the end of term, like cramming for an exam or staying up all night to write an essay. I responded, the following year, by making the verse miscellany due halfway through the semester, and the commonplace book due at the end of the course. Instead of one hastily made manuscript, then, from some students I simply received two. While several students had used their manuscript books to prepare for class, others were still procrastinating until the due dates. The haste evident in some of these student productions by no means

disqualified them from being commonplace books and verse miscellanies. Hurried writing abounds in historical examples, including Wase's book. At the time, the problem seemed only to involve class discussion: with their hastily made commonplace books in hand, I could see more clearly why their makers had been reticent, or had sounded only so well informed, in class.

That was the first big problem, but the early version of the assignment posed a few minor problems too. Although I had encouraged students to make their own books, I also allowed them to purchase blank books, ready-made, as many early modern students had likely done. I suggested Moleskine products. I also told students that they could keep their books, rather than turn them in, if they scanned them and each submitted online a PDF showing the entire volume. No one scanned their books, though, and very few made them by hand. That first semester, I received a lifetime supply of partially used Moleskine notebooks. I responded by requiring students to make their books from then on. I wanted them all to experience first-hand the freedom involved in making a simple book from scratch, as opposed to filling in a mass-produced notebook: choosing whatever paper and format they wished, using as many sheets per gathering as they liked, adding a gathering when they were running out of room, flipping the book over and writing in reverse. I thought that this would accomplish two learning objectives. For one, it would allow students to learn from experience how the people whom we were studying selected, reproduced, and reused literature. For another, it would improve their understanding of and engagement with the readings. In other words, I would answer yes to two of the questions that Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt asks in her excellent chapter at the start of this book:

– Do you want your students to understand commonplacing as a historical method of reading and writing? and Do you want them to read their assigned texts more closely?

Yes, I do; this is exactly what I want out of this assignment. In retrospect, this requirement to make books by hand may seem to have taken encouragement from the rise of "maker culture" and "makification" in education.[6] Like the tinkering and building that the "maker movement" promotes, bookmaking allows people to learn by doing, rather than reading. Unlike most projects in maker culture, though, the goal of my assignment is still reading.

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6 Jonathan Cohen, W. Monty Jones, Shaunna Smith, and Brendan Calandra, "Makification: Towards a Framework for Leveraging the Maker Movement in Formal Education," *Journal of Education Multimedia and Hypermedia* 26 (2017): 217–29.

Furthermore, the maker movement tends to focus on the opposite of college courses in literary history. It concentrates, in other words, on "K-12 education" and on "engineering practices, specifically, and science, technology, engineering and mathematics...more generally."[7] Published scholarship on the maker movement regularly encourages teachers to allow elementary and secondary students to turn away from books and written words in order to make other things. While books do count as technologies, my students make them after completing their K-12 educations, and usually after deciding against a college education in a STEM field. Moreover, while folding and stitching paper may give my students temporary breaks from the reading and writing that occupies most college English courses, one main goal of the assignment is to get them to attend especially carefully and slowly to the alphabetic text that they are copying. A college student closely reading old literature hardly exemplifies the new sort of hands-on learner than the maker movement champions.

Nevertheless, scholars have addressed the value of various sorts of making for college students of early modern literature. Alyssa Arbuckle and Alex Christie define "critical making" as "producing theoretical insights by transforming digitized heritage materials." Although, in other courses and other assignments, my students and I engage in this sort of digital making, this definition excludes the analogue book making that I ask students to attempt in my commonplace book assignment.[8] Andrew Griffin has explained the value of making for students of early modern literature, specifically of printed ballads. The hand-printing project that he describes has some similarities to other projects that my students and I have undertaken in more advanced courses (in which we replicated manuscripts or a gathering of a particular printed book). But the ballad-making project at UC Santa Barbara is much more thorough and exacting than my commonplace book assignment.[9] Occa-

7 Lee Martin, "The Promise of the Maker Movement for Education," *Journal of Pre-College Engineering Education Research* 5 (2015): 30–39; quotation on p. 30. See also Erica Rosenfeld Halverson and Kimberly Sheridan, "The Maker Movement in Education," *Harvard Educational Review* 84 (2014): 495–504; Michael Schad and Kurt Stemhagen, "Combating the Commodification of Knowledge: the Maker Movement," *The Commodification of American Education: Persistent Threats and Paths Forward*, ed. T. Jameson Brewer and W. Gregory Harman (Gorham: Myers Education), 107–24.

8 Alyssa Arbuckle and Alex Christie, with the ETCL, INKE, & MVP Research Groups, "Intersections Between Social Knowledge Creation and Critical Making," *Scholarly and Research Communication* 6 (2015), https://doi.org/10.22230/src.2015v6n3a200.

9 Andrew Griffin, "Why Making?" *The Making of a Broadside Ballad*, http://press.emcimprint.english.ucsb.edu/the-making-of-a-broadside-ballad/why-making.

sionally, a student of mine makes a commonplace book using a goose quill and ink made from an early modern recipe, but even such an exceptional student exercises great freedom over her own production. And most of my students use more readily accessible tools and materials.

My version of the commonplace book assignment invites students to play a role that is more visible in historical scholarship than it is pedagogical scholarship. Experts on commonplace and other reference books, including Ann Moss and Ann Blair, have made clear that there's nothing unprecedented about the commonplacing that my students do. On the contrary, it's basically an anglicized, literary version of what the leading educational theorists of the early modern period prescribed. Erasmus and Melanchthon, for instance, both encouraged early modern educators to have students produce commonplace books, although principally in Latin and focused on ancient literature.[10] Peter Beal turned attention from what educators proposed in print to what commonplacers produced in manuscript.[11] Earle Havens followed the long history of commonplace books into modern times, in part by including in his exhibition on the subject several manuscript books made by Yale students.[12] (See Hagstrom-Schmidt's chapter in this volume for much more about this.) By making their own manuscript books, my students join this long tradition, not just reading but also actively reproducing early modern literature, more or less as our historical subjects did.

Requiring students to make books by hand took care of one small problem. Or, rather, it modified the problem: my office shelves were now filling up with unique hand-made books, virtually none of which had ever been scanned or photographed. And I still had the big problem to solve: each term, a significant portion of the hand-made books flooding my office still showed evidence of last-minute production. In an effort to correct both problems at once, I started requiring students to scan their books at various points in the semester, and to submit a PDF showing their progress at each

10 Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 101–91. Ann M. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 69–70, 131–32.

11 Peter Beal, "'Notions in Garrison': The Seventeenth-Century Commonplace Book," in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts*, ed. W. Speed Hill (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1993), 131–47.

12 Earle Havens, *Commonplace Books: A History of Manuscripts and Printed Books from Antiquity to the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 2001). For exhibition labels and records of the books made at Yale, see New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Library, MS Osborn pf1.

due date. At first, I tried three due dates a term. I should have known what would happen: while the more conscientious students would again produce their books piecemeal before class, as instructed, others would rush to catch up just before the due dates. Now, instead of two, I received the results of three last-minute book-making sessions from procrastinating students. I kept increasing the number of due dates each semester until, one term, in an unusually large section of the course, I went so far as to require a PDF every week. That made it difficult to keep up with the grading, but it helped students keep up with the assigned readings, and let me see who was falling behind, and when. It also helped students who accidentally destroyed or lost their books: they did not need to remake any part of their books that they had already scanned.

Frequent due dates also led me to stop insisting that students use their manuscript books to prepare for class. To be sure, I still encouraged them to copy their poems and commonplace their prose readings before class. But I also started welcoming them to continue, or even begin, the week's copying in class. Regardless of whether they were transcribing or discussing a text first, the two activities could easily support and reinforce one another. A student who copied a text before class would understand it better in class. Another who copied it in or after class would better understand what she was copying, having already seen and heard it in class.

I simply asked students to date any copying that they did in class, by adding the month and date beside it. If they had already completed all of the transcripts required for the week, they could copy something from each class, whether they read it on the screen or heard it spoken aloud. In either case, a dated entry in a student's book became a necessary part of full participation in class for that day. Students thus started using their manuscript books to show their engagement both with the readings and with class discussion—even if they did not speak in class. This was especially valuable (and, arguably, ethical) in a section of the course that had too many students for all of them to talk consistently. It helped quiet, shy, or uncertain students demonstrate their engagement in class and earn credit for it. It helped me recognize the wide range of thoughtful responses that my students were making without voicing them aloud. In my first few years of teaching, the more outgoing, talkative students received the higher participation grades, even when they were not the best prepared or most insightful. This assignment has changed that, and it has helped me grade much more fairly across the spectrum of extroverts and introverts. Instead of grading participation separately, I started grading it as part of the commonplace book/verse miscellany. A student who came to class and copied something from it, in addi-

tion to the assigned commonplaces or poems, earned a perfect score for the week. With the participation grade folded into the manuscript book assignment, I decided to increase its value to 60 percent of the course grade. By design, students could no longer pass the course without making a commonplace book by hand and using it to demonstrate consistent engagement with the readings and discussions. It was no longer enough for a student to sit through some or all of my classes and then write a good essay on only one of the texts that I had assigned. The commonplace book required much more consistent engagement with the readings and discussions.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I offered students a variety of ways to take my courses, and I revised the commonplace book assignment for each option. I told students that they could take the course as a tutorial student (which required visible and audible participation, whether in person or on Zoom), or as a lecture student (by attending during class time but not necessarily speaking or using their camera), or as a correspondence student (by watching Zoom videos of class later). Tutorial students would need to copy only one commonplace from each class in which they showed up and read aloud or spoke. Lecture students would have to copy three or four commonplaces from each class that they attended without participating audibly and visibly. Correspondence students would need to correspond by copying ten commonplaces from each class that they watched on video later. One goal of this range of options was to encourage students to show up and to speak in class. Another goal, though, was to offer students concrete steps for how thy could learn in the course when they could not or would not participate during class time. The labour constraints for the assignment therefore vary widely depending on a student's other work for the course. On a day when a student shows up and speaks up, copying down a single commonplace might take only a few minutes during class. But after missing a class, a student might need to be copying commonplaces for most of the time that a class video is playing in order to earn a top grade.

In response to the issues that Sarah E. Parker addresses in the coda to this book, I make it very easy for students to earn perfect grades on their commonplace books. Although English departments have developed high standards for essay writing, they have left standards low for making books by hand, and my students and I have taken advantage of these low standards. I see no problem in awarding high grades for poorly made books and sloppy handwriting, as long as a student's commonplace book demonstrates the intellectual labour of commonplacing. I find grading commonplace books to be more engaging and more efficient than engaging my students' more conventional writing assignments. As long as students have enough com-

monplaces, and those commonplaces contain the requisite elements, they have earned a good grade.

While my students have to produce a commonplace book in order to pass the course, they cannot earn a very high course grade by neglecting the other, more conventional assignments. They accrue most of the credit required to pass the course in their weekly work on their manuscript books. Their work on four other assignments, each worth another 10 percent, then determines their final letter grade for the class. I settled on this division of the course grade intentionally, but only after a long process of trial, error, partial success, and continuous revision.

Sources

Students made the first verse miscellanies and commonplace books that I assigned by copying from an assigned textbook, in addition to occasional readings that I made available in digital copies online. Some of my students were slow to acquire the textbook, though; others never did. Whenever anyone in class lacked a textbook, I projected it on screen, either from a document camera or from scans saved as a PDF. I quickly got used to projecting the reading in every class. I then tried to make a virtue out of necessity by assigning facsimiles and transcripts of original sources—better sources than I could possibly order for an entire class through a campus bookstore. As a result, our sources got much more original, the textbook became less and less important, and I eventually stopped requiring that students purchase one. Some of these sources come from EEBO. Increasingly, they come from library websites that offer high-resolution images of manuscripts and printed books. I rely heavily on *Luna*, the digital repository of the Folger Shakespeare Library.[13] I also direct students to high-resolution images of sources on the British Library's online collection of *Digitised Manuscripts*, the *Huntington Digital Library*, the *Digital Collections* of the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, *Harvard Digital Collections*, and others.[14] Where available, I share modern transcripts of the artifacts that we read in facsimile as well. For instance, we read the British Library's colour images of

13 Folger Shakespeare Library, *Luna*, https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet.

14 British Library, *Digitised Manuscripts*, www.bl.uk/manuscripts/; Huntington Library, *Huntington Digital Library*, https://hdl.huntington.org/; Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, *Digital Collections*, https://beinecke.library.yale.edu/digital-collections/digital-collections-beinecke-library; Harvard Library, *Harvard Digital Collections*, https://library.harvard.edu/digital-collections.

the Devonshire manuscript with the help of the transcripts and information on the Wiki edition of the same source.[15] We read the Folger manuscript of Lady Mary Wroth's poems with recourse to Paul Salzman's online transcript of the same.[16] Some websites offer both the images and the transcripts that we need; the Pulter Project is a supreme example.[17] Occasionally, I scan transcripts from printed scholarship for use in class, or provide my own transcripts. I assign virtually any early modern literature that students can easily access online, and link to all of the readings in the syllabus from the beginning of term.

While it was actually the facsimiles of original sources that were replacing the textbook, I told students that it was their hand-made books that were making it unnecessary for them to buy one. I advertised my early modern courses by telling them, "*Students do not have to buy any textbooks for this course*. Instead, they have to make their textbook by hand. This involves hand-copying extracts, and several complete texts, from online readings... Thus the course introduces both texts and textual technologies from early modern England." This part of the course description combines a practical, financial benefit with a theoretical, educational one. It suggests that students will learn not only by reading what authors have written but also by doing some of the things that manuscript compilers have done. It also points toward the original sources featured in the course.

When I was still requiring that students buy a textbook, the course would begin with rather few copies on hand and very few students prepared. Students would huddle together to share copies. Not uncommonly, one student would quickly borrow another student's copy to read aloud. But this sharing would happen only when I asked someone to read. The rest of the time, several students just looked ahead, or down at their usually empty notebooks, without immediate access to the literature that we were ostensibly studying. When I stopped requiring that students buy a textbook, though, and started providing all the readings online instead, everyone suddenly had the readings that they needed. Students did not have to wait until they could afford

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15 London, British Library, Add MS 17492, British Library, Digitised Manuscripts, www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_17492&index=0; *A Social Edition of the Devonshire Manuscript (BL Add. MS 17492)*, https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/The_Devonshire_Manuscript.

16 Washington, DC, Folger Shakespeare Library, Folger MS V.a.104, *Luna*; Paul Salzman, ed., *Mary Wroth's Poetry: An Electronic Edition*, https://wroth.latrobe.edu.au/all-poems.html.

17 *The Pulter Project*, https://pulterproject.northwestern.edu/.

to buy another book to start preparing for class. And we could start reading them together on the first day of class, with the words projected on screen.

My students seem to regard this as a benefit. Many of them work off-campus and have a rather full range of adult responsibilities: several struggle to afford textbooks. They seem glad that, instead of spending more at the bookstore, they can read online and make a book out of (free) found material or spend as little or as much as they wish at an art supply store. While they have not objected to digital readings *per se*, some of them have struggled to navigate the large numbers of digital sources that I assign, and especially the original spelling and manuscripts that I assign. While I try to simplify the steps required to access digital sources, I intentionally retain the relative difficulty of reading early modern printed books and manuscripts in facsimile.

Replacing the textbook also helped solve another, more common problem: students were using their computers and other devices in class, and not only for coursework. Assigning digital transcripts and facsimiles of original sources filled up some of their screens. The challenges posed by the spelling and the letterforms in some of the readings helped students to slow down and focus on what was on their screens. It also gave students a sense of satisfaction as they decoded another strange symbol or spelling. Once I started inviting them to resume working on their manuscripts in class, this assignment gave them something to do with their hands as well. You could see the difference right away, in their postures. Most of my students used to lean back in class, looking up at me and then back down at their screens, with their hands free to scroll or swipe on their devices. With this assignment, more of them lean forward in order to write in their books and to read an original source. As do most aspects of this assignment, this makes a physical difference that can also involve a conceptual one. Instead of just observing me and consuming the course, more of them are reading actively and reproducing texts by hand. They are thereby demonstrating to themselves how those texts were, and still can be, produced and manipulated. In fact, they're using modern digital technologies to distinguish them from the early modern technologies that led up to them.

Although it started as just a side project, worth only about 10 percent of the course grade, the commonplace book/verse miscellany has come to assume a major role in my survey of early modern literature—rather like it did in the educations of many early modern students and scholars. Both in class and in the assignment instructions, I show a few of the manuscript books that compare to the ones that my students make. Also in class, I assign poems from early modern manuscript miscellanies. For instance, in

my survey of early modern literature, we read psalm translations and sonnets by Surrey and Wyatt, and other poems by Sidney and Ralegh, from Ruth Hughey's transcript of the Arundel Harington manuscript.[18] As the semester progresses, we start reading manuscripts in facsimile, starting with the very legible italic hands visible in the Folger's online images of two manuscripts: Sir John Harington's copy of his epigrams, and Lady Mary Wroth's of *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*.[19] More challenging manuscripts follow, such as the Westmoreland manuscript of Donne's poems on *Digital Donne*, alongside the *Donne Variorum*'s transcript.[20] Students who want to take on greater paleographical challenges can try manuscripts in secretary hand, such as a copy of Spenser's *A Vewe of the Present State of Ireland*.[21] They can also attend the weekly transcription sessions of an official student group devoted to transcribing manuscripts, called the Superscripts. Occasionally, they have been able to participate in one of the transcribathons that the Superscripts host.

Before they read or copy text from any of these original sources, I show students a few early modern examples of the sort of manuscript books that I ask them to produce. One of these manuscripts provides an example of an early modern index of commonplace heads.[22] One shows commonplaces in both English and Latin.[23] Another shows a commonplace book giving way to a verse miscellany, distinguished by a second set of page numbers.[24] Typically, the last commonplace book that I show students comes from the last poet we read in the course, John Milton.[25] I encourage students to mimic

18 The Duke of Norfolk, Arundel Castle, MSS (Special Press), "Harrington MS. Temp. Eliz."; Ruth Hughey, ed. *The Arundel Harington Manuscript of Tudor Poetry* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1960); *Knowledge Bank*, http://hdl.handle.net/1811/28934.

19 Folger MS V.a.249; https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/se3b86. Folger MS V.a.104; https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/6ci6mt.

20 New York, New York Public Library, Berg Collection, Westmoreland MS; *Digital Donne: the Online Variorum*, http://digitaldonne.tamu.edu/NY3-biblio.html.

21 Folger MS V.b.114, fols. 136v–193r; *Luna*, https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/2de7v0.

22 Folger MS E.a.4, fols. 1v–2r; *Luna*, http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/485jfy.

23 Emmanuel College, Cambridge MS I.3.2, fols. 1r, 22r; *Scriptorium: Medieval and Early Modern Manuscripts Online*, www.repository.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/196897; www.repository.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/196903.

24 Folger MS V.a.160, p. 1 (both instances of this page number); *Luna*, https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/09niv0; https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/tt09dm.

25 British Library, Add. MS 36354, fol. 55v; Puck Fletcher, "Happy Birthday to John

these historical examples, adopting the same methods but also exercising the same freedom used to produce them.

I admit that, in my courses, the commonplace book/verse miscellany assignment has assumed a larger role than many of my colleagues in the field would desire for their own courses. It has effectively replaced the textbook and subsumed the participation grade. It has also made early modern literature something that students do not just read but use as well: something that they do not only write about, but something that they actually write, more or less as early modern students and scribes did. It has transformed and improved the sort of writing that my students are prepared to do about early modern literature. This is partly because I can assign much more demanding reading when the first step involves simply commonplacing or copying it, and students do not have to jump straight from reading to interpretation. This also has to do with how their commonplace books and verse miscellanies prepare them for other assignments in the course. In order to explain this, I need to introduce two of these related assignments briefly.

Related Assignments

These two assignments proceed logically from the manuscript books that my students make. They therefore help show the value of the commonplace book as a means to an end, and not just as an end in itself. After submitting the first facsimile of their commonplace books, the students in my early modern survey write, or rather compile, a dialogue made up of quotations from the works of Sir Thomas More and William Tyndale. Students may present this dialogue in any way they wish: some turn it into a screenplay or stage play, for instance. One student presented More and Tyndale in a political debate. Another invented an early modern social media app to make sense of the relative popularity of their views. But I insist that students can, and do, earn good grades on the assignment merely by selecting and arranging quotations, without any imaginative or narrative framing. In order to press this point, I even allow them to (digitally) copy and paste More's and Tyndale's words from the digital transcript of original sources that I assign.[26] The goal is to identify passages from both writers that relate to one another, and to demonstrate their relationship: to find where More and Tyndale

Milton!" *Untold lives blog*, https://blogs.bl.uk/untoldlives/2015/12/happy-birthday-to-john-milton.html.

26 Matthew DeCoursey, ed., "The Thomas More / William Tyndale Polemic." EMLS Text Series 3, 2010; https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/moretyndale.pdf.

were writing about, or to, one another, and to make it easy to see the substance of their disagreements. By the time that students start constructing their dialogues, they have already quoted several passages by More and Tyndale in their commonplace books. They have also given each passage a commonplace heading, identifying its topic. Ideally, they have even given the same heading to passages by each author. If they have, they can start by transferring to their dialogues the same passages that they have already placed together, as common, in their commonplace books. Neither of the individual steps required for this assignment is terribly difficult. In the first, when they're making their commonplace books, students merely fold and stitch paper, quote a few passages a week, and identify their topics. In the next, they type up and arrange some of the same passages. Taken one after the other, though, and repeated, these two steps can help students progress to a much better understanding of the reading than they would be able to accomplish otherwise.

At the end of term, I ask for a similar but wider-ranging assignment: an essay that introduces the major theme(s) of their commonplace book, with a paragraph explicating each commonplace that they select for the essay. Early versions of this assignment suffered from my failed attempts to communicate to students how many commonplaces they should explicate. I kept failing until I asked students to do two new, and closely related, things. First, I asked them to write a short paragraph about one of their commonplaces whenever they submitted a PDF of their hand-made book. Second, I asked them to include in their final essays one paragraph for every week of class. In previous semesters, I would routinely receive essays consisting of no more than six or eight quotations, some of them from the same readings, even from otherwise thoughtful and engaged students. Now students' essays include at least 14 or 15 body paragraphs, some of them revised from earlier submissions, that collectively demonstrate that a student has engaged and understood readings from throughout the term.

In a course without a commonplace book assignment, an essay that engages every week of term might not make much sense and could be daunting. In a course with a commonplace book assignment, however, students can get started on the assignment quite easily, as long as they have already indexed their commonplaces, or arranged them alphabetically (like Wase did). They can simply look in their manuscript books to see which themes they have already identified most frequently in the readings for the term. An index of their commonplace headings can show them, at a glance, which subjects they tended to find in the literature that I assigned. One former student, whose index I show to new students in the assignment instructions,

found in it that she had commonplaced several passages on "Women" and "Colonialism." That prepared her to select commonplaces on these subjects for the final assignment. An alphabetically arranged commonplace book, on the other hand, allows students just to flip to the pages that have the most writing. Their next steps are to type up related quotations and expand their headings into sentences that explain the quotes' common subject matter.

I offer these two additional assignments (the dialogue and the essay) simply to show how a commonplace book can lead directly into other writing assignments. Rather than just reading literature and writing essays about it, these assignments together give students several intermediate steps to take in between reading and writing, at least as these activities typically appear in an English classroom. Students who find the reading difficult or alienating have something easy to do first: just copy it down, or quote it and name the subject of the extract. Students who would not otherwise know how to begin writing a dialogue between sixteenth-century scholars, or identifying a major theme in early modern literature, can open up their hand-made books to see what themes they have already recognized. Their own academic writing can thus begin just by presenting and explaining what they have already noticed and recorded in their hand-made books.

Conclusion

The commonplace book/verse miscellany assignment has two concurrent purposes—one retrospective, the other prospective. Looking back, it helps students understand—not only intellectually but also experientially—how early modern literature was made and preserved. It lets them try their hands at reading not only what, but also how, our historical subjects read, by reproducing texts more or less as they did. Our students can thus study early modern writing not only in the usual, broad sense of an author's writing or *oeuvre*, but also in the narrow sense of a scribe's or a student's writing or transcription, unoriginal and unique as that may be. The process of making a manuscript book, while reading original texts and documents in transcripts and facsimiles, conveys a great deal which one simply cannot learn as well from reading modern editions and essays: about orthography, the development of the language, authorship, other literary agents, book history, and much more. Looking forward, the commonplace book leads directly to their other assignments in the course. Together, these assignments offer students several valuable steps toward not only essay writing but potentially other sorts of writing as well—steps such as collecting quotations, organizing them by topic, and ordering them in a sequence.

In between the assignment's retrospective and prospective functions, though, is its present purpose. In other words, in between the long history of making books and the future writing that a student will go on to do sits the student in class, deciding how (and sometimes whether) to do the work that the class requires. And in virtually every day of class, the manuscript book assignment is there to tell the student: you can do this. You've got this. You may not yet understand the entire work of literature that we're reading, much less be able to write a work of literary criticism about it. But you can quote it. You can decide what your quotation is about and identify the topic in a heading. You may find a poem confusing at first, but you can copy it down. And you will be at least one step closer to understanding it once you have copied it—even as you copy it. This is the main message of the commonplace book assignment. Its main purpose is to offer practical steps forward, steps that benefit the most uncertain and the most enthusiastic students at once.

Appendix

ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS

So, you're going to college. You'll leave it behind one day. When you do, do you expect to take anything tangible with you that you will continue to use, maybe something that you make here? Artists will take their portfolios. The good engineers will take the robots they make. In the period of literary history that we're studying in this course, college students made books full of quotes and notes from their reading, organized under subject headings that identify their topics. Imagine filling a multi-subject notebook, divided by tabs, or a Trapper Keeper with the best passages you've ever read, organized according to subject, so that you could easily find and quote them again.[27] They also copied their favourite poems and song lyrics, producing the early modern equivalent of mixed tapes and iPods.[28] Many of them kept adding to their manuscript books, and making new ones like them, after leaving college.

This course requires you to make the same sort of book. In addition to reading what early modern English people wrote, it requires you to read, and use what you read, rather like they did. Students should start making their books right away, even if only by folding a small stack of standard copier paper.[29] Students who would prefer to make a finer book might start with more ambitious instructions and a trip to an art supply store.[30] In any case, students will earn their grades based on the contents, not the appearance, of their books. Awards typically go to the students who make both the finest and the most economical books in the class. Regardless of what materials they decide to use, students should **bring those materials to every class, and copy something in every class meeting** that they attend, clearly dating anything they copy or write in the classroom.

When we're reading prose or a very long narrative poem, students copy at least one passage from every class period that they attend. They give each

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27 Erin McCarthy, "The History of the Trapper Keeper," *Mental Floss*, http://mentalfloss.com/article/52726/history-trapper-keeper.

28 Thurston Moore, *Mix Tape: The Art of Cassette Culture* (New York: Universe, 2004); "*Mix Tape: The Art of Cassette Culture*," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mix_Tape:_The_Art_of_Cassette_Culture.

29 jtgualtieri, "How to Make a Book," *YouTube*, https://youtu.be/c-vNiyexqeU.

30 Yuchen Chang and Myungah Hyon, *Book Book* [English Version] (Beijing: Dreamer Fty, 2017). De Dominicis, Raffaele, "Bookbinding hand sewn: Lesson 1 step 1," *YouTube*, https://youtu.be/fCVq6StJ9o4. London Centre for Book Arts, *Making Books: A Guide to Creating Handcrafted Books* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural, 2017).

passage a heading or title, describing its topic or subject matter, along with a short citation. These extracts with headings are called *topoi* or "commonplaces." So the students' individual books of quotes, labeled by topic, are called "commonplace books." Students should alphabetize their headings in one of two ways. They can designate a different page for each letter in the alphabet, like a blank address book, and copy each commonplace under the first letter of its heading. Or they can write an index for their book near the end of term.

When the assigned reading features short poems, students flip their books over and copy a complete poem in every class that they attend. By doing this, they turn the back ends of their commonplace books into "verse miscellanies" or poetry anthologies. One cover of the book begins the verse miscellany. The other cover leads to the commonplace book, in reverse. Bound together, the two constitute a *tête-bêche* volume: a book with two front covers and no back cover.

Whenever the syllabus requires students to submit a facsimile of their manuscript books, they take very clear scans of any pages with new writing. While students may use their own equipment, I recommend the scanners and the BookEye machine in the library. Students each combine their new images for the week into a single PDF.

It might help to consider some examples, some made by the sort of people we're studying, and some made by your fellow students. Let's start with a recent one. Here are two commonplaces that one student selected from the writings of Tyndale and More, as edited by Matthew DeCoursey.[31]

> God's Law~~~
>
> And because the love of God and of his neighbor, which is the spirit and the life of all laws and wherefore all laws are made, is not written in his heart, therefore in all inferior laws and in all worldly ordinances is his beetle blind" Tyndale (119)
>
> God's Voice~~~
>
> And therefore, though our saviour say, that such as are his do hear his voice and not the voice of strangers: seemeth to mean therein to give us warning to do so, that is to wit, that we should hear and obey him, and not other against him.

31 Matthew DeCoursey, ed., "The Thomas More / William Tyndale Polemic: A Selection." *Early Modern Literary Studies*, Text Series 3 (2010), https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/moretyndale.pdf.

The student who copied these commonplaces gave them the headings "God's Law" and "God's Voice." Both could fit on a page reserved for commonplaces that begin with the letter *G*. In addition to some impressive calligraphy elsewhere, this student also made an embroidered cover for her book and won the Esther Inglis award, named for one of the most ambitious calligraphers of early modern Scotland and England. You can see the covers of some of Inglis's manuscript books, made roughly 400 years ago, online.[32]

Another student, who made another finely bound book, copied commonplaces in the order in which she read them. When the syllabus reached More, she used his name as a major heading, with individual headings for each quote from his writings beneath, like so:

> The Fault of Common Translations
> or The Faulty Apple
>
> For undoubtedly as ye spake of our mother Eve, inordinate appetite of knowledge is a means to drive any man out of a paradise. More, ed. DeCoursey 79–80

This method of filling up a book as you go requires you to make an index of individual headings at the end of term. Another student started her index with the following commonplace heads:

Topics	Page numbers
Babel	22
Blasphemies	17, 36
Colonization	24, 27, 28–29, 30, 31, 32

Each individual heading appears in the index, in alphabetical order, with corresponding page numbers. This makes it easy to see, at a glance, which headings recur and, therefore, which topics interested the student in the readings. The index shows at least six passages on "Colonialism" and (later down the list) at least five on "Women." One of the passages turns out to involve both topics. So this commonplace book ended up preparing a student to do a final project on one or both of these subjects. It preserves valuable passages for the student to present in more formal writing. And it directs her right to where she can find more like them in the assigned readings.

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32 Folger Shakespeare Library MS V.a.94; *Luna*, https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/8ux03e. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University, Houghton Library MS Ty 49; *Harvard Digital Collections*, http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL.Hough:17615365?n=5.

That modern index works more or less like the early modern one that begins Washington, DC, Folger Shakespeare Library, MS E.a.4.[33] If you use the web address in the footnote and look closely, you can see that its original compiler did not get very far on this commonplace book. The index includes lots of entries for which there are no page numbers. And the commonplace on "Constantia" or Constancy, on the facing page, consists of just two lines. The rest of the page remained blank until someone else filled it in with recipes. The same thing happened throughout the volume.

It happened to others as well. Another commonplace book at the Folger began with notes or quotes organized under Latin heads.[34] But, after filling eight pages with writing about the five senses, the compiler left the rest of the book blank. The blank pages eventually got filled with English poems.[35] Our commonplace books turn into poetry collections as well.

Our manuscript books certainly differ from those made by our historical subjects. They feature several of the same key ingredients: quotes, notes, headings, and poems. But, while we're commonplacing English texts, they tended to commonplace Latin ones. Some of them did some commonplacing in English, though. The main compiler of a book now held at Emmanuel College, Cambridge worked mostly with Latin heads, such as "Oeconomica": economics.[36] But in the preceding pages, someone added some English headings. One reads "Inexcusablenesse."

Under this head, the compiler wrote, "The people of Rome did iudge it a crime most wicked, strange / & intollerable, worthy also of seuere [severe] punishment, when Tar- / quinius rauished [ravished] Lucrece of her chastitye."[37] What was this commonplacer's leading example of "Inexcusablenesse"? Tarquin's ravishment, or sexual assault (to put it mildly), of Lucrece. This English commonplacer was recording that the ancient Romans regarded at least this sexual assault as inexcusable, wicked, strange, and worthy of punishment. On the next leaf, this compiler added a second English heading, "Princes subiection": "Euery [every] man confesseth this to bee true. That by how much / the more benefitt hee hath reseaued [received]

33 Folger MS E.a.4, fols. 1v–2r; *Luna*, http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/485jfy.

34 Folger MS V.a.160, p. 1; *Luna*, https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/09niv0.

35 Folger MS V.a.160, p. 1 (second pagination); *Luna*, https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/tt09dm.

36 Cambridge, Emmanuel College, MS I.3.2, fol. 22r; *Scriptorium: Medieval and Early Modern Manuscripts Online*, www.dspace.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/196903.

37 Cambridge MS I.3.2, fol. 1r; *Scriptorium: Medieval and Early Modern Manuscripts Online*, www.dspace.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/196897.

fro[m] another by soe much / hee is the more bound to him." Everybody agrees: the more benefit you receive from someone else, the more bound you are to that person—"but kinges & princes haue resea / ued [received] more at gods handes then others, seing that they / are made the Leiftennantes [lieutenants] of the world."[38] Everybody knows it: the more you get, the more bound you are to the one who gave it to you. But kings and princes have received more than anyone. It stands to reason then that they should be more bound, and more subject, to the one who gave them what they have.

One of our greatest innovations to the commonplace book genre is to add citations. Not many early modern compilers kept track of where they found their quotes. But some did. One of the last authors we read in our course is John Milton. He made a commonplace book as well. On the leaf shown on the British Library's website, he identified one topic as "De Divortio": of divorce, which Milton provocatively supported. Immediately under the Latin heading, Milton added not only Latin passages on the subject but also very helpful citations. Milton's first citation directed him, and anyone else who might use his commonplace book, back to "Hist. Concil. Trident."[39] Perhaps this citation refers to a 1619 edition of *Historia del Concilio Tridentino* by Pietro Sarpi.[40] Milton's first citation refers to "67.p." And p. 67 of this book addresses "le dispense matrimoniali" and "le sentenze di diuortio." The next citation includes the reference "l.8" for *libro* or book number 8, where Sarpi does indeed again discuss divorce. The next part of the citation identifies "p. 729 &c. et 737 &c." These pages too concern the "contratto matrimonio" and the "decreti del matrimonio."

Our own commonplace books ought to do the same thing that Milton's does: direct us right back to where the compiler found a passage or topic. This could help your instructor recognize the value of your work. It's even more likely to help you find the passages that you need for the course's later writing assignments.

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38 Cambridge MS I.3.2, fol. 2r; *Scriptorium: Medieval and Early Modern Manuscripts Online*, www.dspace.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/196919.

39 British Library, Add. MS 36354, fol. 55v; Puck Fletcher, "Happy Birthday to John Milton!" *Untold lives blog*, https://blogs.bl.uk/untoldlives/2015/12/happy-birthday-to-john-milton.html.

40 Pietro Sarpi, *Historia del Concilio Tridentino* (London, 1619; Austrian National Library 254804-C); available at https://books.google.com/books?id=TOxKAAAAcAAJ.

TEACHING WITH COMMONPLACE BOOKS IN THE AGE OF #RELATABLECONTENT

VIMALA C. PASUPATHI

I WROTE AND classroom-tested my first commonplace book assignment in the spring of 2012. At this point in my career as a professor, I had taught a course called "Shakespeare's Early Plays" every semester for six years, and I was ready for a change in how I approached close reading in my class. The commonplace book assignment I wrote to replace the traditional literary analysis proved to be one of my most generative and successful experiments in twenty years of college teaching, though I didn't know it when I initially described the assignment in a short essay, published in 2014 in the *Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*.[1] The present essay is a follow-up to that piece that provides an account of the goals and concerns that motivated my particular approach to developing a commonplace book assignment within my specific institutional context. In it, I aim to complement the other essays in this volume with a retrospective analysis that ultimately affirms the pedagogical benefits and challenges of teaching with commonplace books in future semesters

Like many of authors of these essays, especially Joshua Eckhardt, Andie Silva, and Dana Schumacher-Schmidt, I appraise the commonplace book as a refreshing, student-centred alternative to the close-reading papers I had written myself as a college student, and continue to advocate for assigning them as a way to pay homage, but also productively unsettle, the relationship between college-level readers and the elite writers of an early modern canon. Unlike many of the assignments discussed in these other essays, however, my own was focused primarily on the ability to recognize common literary forms rather than recurring themes or sentiments that comment upon the world outside the text. Accordingly, my reflections not only entail specific arguments for the value of maintaining this narrow textual focus, but also culminate in a revelation that runs counter to it: that such a focus is never really narrow after all.

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1 Vimala Pasupathi, "The Commonplace Book Assignment," *The Journal of Interactive Technology & Pedagogy*, March 11, 2014. https://jitp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/the-commonplace-book-assignment/.

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The 2014 essay I revisit here was itself a post-semester reflection, offering a short description of the results of my first attempt to teach with commonplace books. It was prefaced by the full text of the original assignment, whose basic requirements I described as follows:

> In its final form, your Commonplace Book will consist of at least one passage for eleven weeks' worth of assigned primary texts from your textbook. You may wish to annotate or mark up specific words in the passages you choose to show what those various elements within them are doing to construct the overall meaning within. Whether or not you opt to include your own "margents" or marginalia in the book you submit, you will write at least one paragraph (but no more than two) of analytical commentary for each passage, discussing what we will think of in this class as its "moving parts." Your commentary will explain how those parts make meaning in the passage and why they warrant our attention. In addition to the book and commentary, you will write a short analysis of the book as a whole (2.5–3 pages, roughly 600–750 words), that describes its contents, offers observations about what your passages have taught you about Shakespeare's use of language in his early career, and reflects upon your reading practices and how they have changed as the semester progressed.

These details gesture at some of the examples of commonplace books kept by early modern readers, encouraging students to think about the act of commonplacing as a material practice as well as an intellectual and highly personalized one. But if the assignment aimed at reproducing a historical practice, it also betrayed my discomfort with some aspects of that practice. Further down in my instructions, students were presented with an important caveat: "Whereas early compilers tended to copy down what they believed contained exemplary wisdom or beauty, you will be looking for passages that are compelling for the way their diction, form, structure, and other aesthetic features shape a work's content. Thus, your choices need to be guided by more substantive (and more selective) reasoning than simply trying to paste together quotations that sound pretty or seem 'true.'" At the time I drafted the original version of this assignment, I was deeply concerned that students would be encouraged to find the most familiar and most quoted examples from Shakespeare; I did not want to see "to thine own self be true" in their submissions any more than I'd want to see that quotation described in earnest as wisdom in a close-reading paper.

Nearly a decade after drafting this assignment and using it in a class for the first time, I believe firmly in its aims and in its appropriateness for the study of Shakespeare––and even literature broadly. But I have to confess that I still feel a great deal of discomfort with the concept of *sententiae* that is admittedly integral to these texts' name and production in the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries. In what follows, I want to think more deeply about what I think of as the Scylla and Charybdis of teaching with a commonplace book assignment: the readily available but fraught links between early modern commonplace culture and what continues to develop as late-capitalist internet culture. In their intersections, we may encourage students' reduction of literary texts to highly subjective notions of "relatability." Reflecting on the factors that conditioned my original sense of the potential pitfalls of these assignments, I will describe my efforts at developing an assignment that would empower individual readers across time and cultures to identify recurring features within early modern texts, while also discouraging their identification with characters' experiences and aphoristic content. I conclude with a meditation on whether the latter is possible in an age in which the social and actual capital of "relatable content" exceeds the cultural and academic capital afforded by studying Shakespeare.

Institutional Contexts, Pedagogical Aims, and Practical Scaffolding

My original investment in creating the assignment stemmed from two main pedagogical goals that are, of course, linked closely to the role of the class within the English department's curriculum and the broader institutional contexts in which I teach it. First, and most fundamentally, my Commonplace Book assignment was driven by a desire to change the kind of student work I'd be reviewing and assessing. To put things bluntly: I wanted to avoid having to read a set of papers that made the same claims using the same often-cited passages. At the same time, I was also compelled by my own growing interests in book history—something that had not been a formal part of my own training in college or in graduate school––to incorporate what I was learning about print culture from colleagues at other institutions.

I teach at a mid-sized private institution that built its reputation around the Liberal Arts and Sciences. Over the last decade, it has taken steps to compete with larger research universities through the inception of professional schools and programs, adding a Medical School, a School of Health Professions and Human Services, and a School of Engineering and Applied Science to existing Schools of Business and Law. This direction is reflected in a changing student body with respect to the prospective majors and minors of each incoming class; although we still have a significant number of students who declare majors in English compared to other departments in the Humanities and Social Sciences, that number has declined from previous decades.

"Shakespeare's Early plays," one of two Shakespeare courses offered by the English Department at Hofstra University, is described in the bulletin copy as both requiring and ending with the study of *Hamlet*. Because it carried "Distribution," or general education, credit, it was capped at thirty-seven students, and students in any major might enroll in it to satisfy General Education credits in the Liberal Arts required for graduation. I could rely on having a few English majors register for it, but fewer than you might think. My department required Creative Writing students to take at least one author-centred course, but we had voted to remove a similar requirement in the Literature and Publishing concentrations. As a specialist who likes Shakespeare but publishes primarily on non-Shakespearean drama, I generally found this lack of requirement in these tracks a positive feature. In practical terms, however, it meant that my courses often enrolled more non-majors than majors, including some who majored in Biology and Computer Science and other STEM fields, and that I could typically expect a higher concentration of students studying theater than English or English and Education students whose primary interest was literature. The Department of Drama and Dance maintained a requirement for its majors to take two of the English Department's Shakespeare offerings throughout the first six years I taught the course; these students were more likely to refer to the plays I was teaching as "shows," and they were more invested in reading for emotion than for aesthetics.

Given this typical population, my writing assignments in iterations of my course prior to 2012 were aimed at conditioning responses to reading his plays that would be somewhat focused on literary craft, and thereby distinct from what students might be asked to consider in courses focusing on performance theater history. Rather than focus the course predominantly on matters of performance—which, of course, the Department of Drama and Dance at my institution does quite admirably––I felt that I could better contribute to these students' education by privileging language and the contextual knowledge that individual readers brought (and bring) to the Shakespearean text. Doing so meant emphasizing matters of style and aesthetic features a bit more than I did in my own scholarship; however, because of my training and proclivities as a historicist, I also wanted to provide students with tools to understand those features' effects and meaning in light of early modern political history and culture. I emphasized language as a vehicle for relaying plot as well as foregrounding larger thematic questions in response to the political contexts that underpinned dramatic representation.

My assignments were, as these descriptions no doubt make clear, literary analysis papers that asked students to connect formal features in dramatic texts to political and social concerns contemporary with these texts' dates of composition or staging. In editions of Shakespeare's plays published by Bedford St. Martin's and Longman, I found excellent resources for preparing students to write these papers; with these editions' thematic chapters and excerpts of early modern works contemporary with Shakespeare's, my classes had everything they needed to bring together form, content, and context. Although I felt increasingly disillusioned with how much my students could really learn about historical contexts in the time we had (and the time they expended), I nonetheless felt pleased that they were reading the text for something other than the plot, actor cues, and character motivations.

Of course, not all of them were actually reading the texts I assigned in the editions I adopted for class. The mixed interests of this general population typically meant at least one or two students enrolled who would be reading the internet equivalents of an earlier generation of teachers' bugbear, Cliff's Notes—that is, Sparks Notes or Wikipedia entries rather than the hard copy editions I was assigning. Even if such sites don't lead students astray, they tend to lead them in the same direction, all but ensuring that multiple students will focus on the same key passages when it comes time to write a paper. In fact, even students who had diligently read the actual assigned edition of the text focused on those passages, and to be fair to all of them, the quotations in question are well known and typical choices because they are indeed crucial to a play's inner-world culture in addition to its place in our own culture today. For a professor reading papers in two fully enrolled sections of Shakespeare, it could mean a significant portion of over seventy papers that highlighted textual evidence that enabled, if not encouraged, the most simple or general assessments of the play from students of any major.

I imagine that experienced teachers of Shakespeare's plays will be able to offer up their own examples of passages they know are significant but that they have also come to despise. For me, there is no better an example than an example I will return to throughout this essay, Petruchio's pronouncement in reference to Katherina in 3.2 of *The Taming of the Shrew*:

> I will be master of what is mine own.
> She is my goods, my chattels, she is my house,
> My household stuff, my field, my barn,
> My horse, my ox, my ass, my any thing…

Over time, I noticed that students routinely cited these lines in their comments in class discussion and in their close reading papers when my syllabus

included the play, usually in service of claims that Petruchio had objectified his wife. Despite prompts that encouraged students to write about topics other than the play's representations of marriage or gender, students seemed especially inclined to discuss them, no doubt because they are so clear in laying out what look to them like cultural values. They would sometimes link these lines to lines spoken by Lucentio about Bianca, and, as anyone who has taught this play before might predict, used to draw a contrast between these "good" or "bad" matches or to confirm that both matches are bad.

After a few semesters of reading these papers, I was bored and even resentful of them, even as I could see that some of the students writing them were indeed trying to say something important about the play's representations of gender and marriage. The problem with these papers wasn't that they were poorly executed or unpersuasive, but that their attention to this particular passage (or others of similar status) had foreclosed on the possibility of engagement with other parts of the play. Moreover, I began to suspect students were not writing about marriage because it interested them so much as writing about it because they felt they could. The apparent transparency of Petruchio's logic in various parts of the play made the argument low-hanging fruit. Why consider other lines in the play when these showed such a clear path to a claim?

I knew that discouraging students from this or any other topic was not in itself a constructive solution, and though I temporarily alleviated the problem of my own boredom by assigning different (and less frequently assigned) plays throughout my first twelve semesters of teaching, I found that doing so involved additional preparation time that, given other projects outside of my teaching, I didn't always have to spare. And so, I decided to construct a new kind of assignment as a way to give students both the obligation and the freedom to look beyond those typically cited passages in any assigned work––and of course, to increase the likelihood that the student work I received would be fresh and interesting regardless of which Shakespearean texts I included on the syllabus.

Leading up to this moment, I recognized that I myself had been increasingly focused on parts of my assigned reading that I hadn't been drawn to initially—most particularly the Textual Notes, which, as a student and even as a young professor, I had rarely bothered to read. This shift in my own focus had much to do with what I was learning about the relationships between the printing house and playhouse. I certainly didn't intend to redirect the entire focus on my courses' historical lens from political culture to book history. But I nonetheless decided to make strategic changes to the first few weeks of the course syllabus that would not only address my impatience

with over-familiar passages, but also teach my students about the production and circulation of Shakespeare's works in an emergent literary market. From 2006 to 2011, I had started my course with *Venus and Adonis*, pitching it as an action-packed poem that allowed us to prepare for the complex mergers of poetry, people, and plot that we find in the comedies, histories, and tragedies of the 1590s. I planned to start my 2012 classes with a unit on the history of the sonnets in print as well as the publication history of "A Lover's Complaint." This change in the introduction to the course would enable discussions of authorship, the forms in which people consumed literature, and the various ways that the enterprise of print transformed literary culture in Shakespeare's lifetime. Subsequent units on comedies and history plays would be informed by these discussions even as I intended to take my usual approach of emphasizing these plays' engagement with topical concerns. *Hamlet* would still be the final text assigned in the course, but instead of my previous approach to the play, which featured the Peabody-winning episode of *This American Life* titled "Act V," on performances of the play in a high security prison, I would focus on Hamlet as a reader, master of textual recall, and keeper of letters and a "table book." I also would teach not just one *Hamlet*, but textual variants in three editions, using the "to be or not to be" speech in EEBO's Q1, Q2, and F, as a case study for the mysteries and rewards of reading texts in the forms that were available to sixteenth and seventeenth century readers.

It was when I was setting up topics and readings for the *Hamlet* unit that I started to imagine a basic plan for a commonplacing project, with an aim of cultivating in my classroom the first two of the sixteen traits Adam Smyth ascribes to commonplace culture: the understanding of reading as "an active, interventionist practice with connotations––as the Latin verb *legere* suggests—of collecting, gathering, picking out," and the conviction that it "generates writing."[2] Of course, in this respect, the students in my class would depart from the practices of some readers from the period, particularly those who merely transcribed material without commentary, explanation, and attribution. My prompt would necessarily foreground the modern, academic principles of citation and documentation. Students could copy freely from texts just as their early modern counterparts did, but they would also need to acknowledge the sources of their copied (and now copyrighted) material and the labour of the twentieth-century editors.

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2 Adam Smyth, "Commonplace Book Culture: A List of Sixteen Traits," in *Women and Writing, c. 1340–c. 1650: The Domestication of Print Culture*, ed. Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Phillipa Hardman (Woodbridge: York Medieval, 2010), 90–110.

Moreover, I knew my students would need to do more than just "read with a pen in hand," like the early modern readers Smyth describes; they would also need to produce formal, analytical prose in order to comply with my university's standards for courses that counted towards General Education graduation requirements in the Liberal Arts. And so, in addition to the analytical paragraphs they would write about individual entries in their books, they would also submit a separate holistic analysis. This document would describe the contents of the finished project; offer observations about what chosen passages taught them about Shakespeare's use of language; and reflect upon their reading practices, including how they had changed as the semester progressed. Of course, even this departure represented a return to the practices of early modern readers, whose books, as Smyth notes, could exhibit "a self-reflexivity, an interest in method, [and] a foregrounding of the process employed to produce the manuscript."[3]

At this point, I was not entirely certain how best to guide students' selection of passages, and I put off the task of drafting assignment criteria by making additional changes to the syllabus that better supported the work I imagined my students doing. I began to assemble links to digital images of these books from a variety of rare book libraries, and I added a blog post to the syllabus, Adam Hooks's "How to Read like a Renaissance Reader," to provide some more overt scaffolding. I switched from the single context-focused editions of plays to anthologies that devoted significant portions of their introductions to matters of print history, and these additional readings would be supplemented by in-class lectures that distilled the basic insights afforded by textual and bibliographic scholarship, including many of the studies cited in other essays in this volume.[4] Finally, my syllabus that semester included a last-minute addition, Alan Jacobs' "'Commonplace Books': The Tumblrs of an Earlier Era," a short post that appeared on *The Atlantic Monthly*'s online site about a week before my semester was to begin.[5] In every respect, the

3 This is trait fourteen in Smyth, "Commonplace Book Culture," 108.

4 Specifically, I drew on Smyth, "Commonplace Book Culture"; Peter Stallybrass, Roger Chartier, J. Franklin Mowery, and Heather Wolfe, "Hamlet's Tables and the Technologies of Writing in Renaissance England" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55 (2004): 379–419; and Peter Stallybrass and Zachary Lesser, "The First Literary *Hamlet* and the Commonplacing of Professional Plays," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59 (2008): 371–420.

5 Alan Jacobs, "'Commonplace Books': The Tumblrs of an Earlier Era," *The Atlantic*, January 23, 2012, www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/01/commonplace-books-the-tumblrs-of-an-earlier-era/251811/. Although I did not know it at the time, Jacobs's piece in the Atlantic is a revisiting of the practices he described in an

publication of Jacobs's post just before the start of the term seemed both fortunate and affirming; in the couple of weeks between the start of the semester and my distribution of the assignment prompt, I had every intention of exploiting the explicit connections Jacobs had made between early modern practices and newer modes of reading and writing that had emerged with the widespread use of the internet and electronic media.

The Meme-ing of Life (and Literature)

At the time, seeing Jacobs' post was more than just affirming: it made me think that something was "in the water," for *everybody* seemed to have book culture on the brain. Now, of course, I know it was not something in the water so much as many things on Twitter. And the "everybody" I had in mind consisted primarily of the people in my Twitter timeline. Much of what I had been learning and thinking about in the months leading up to these changes had originated from that platform. The MLA-produced volume, *Teaching Early Modern English Literature from the Archives* was still a few years from publication, but many of its authors had already drafted the essays that would appear within it; I had gotten to know them as well as several other scholars and librarians on that platform who shared and commented on various online resources on a daily basis.[6] A sub-group from within the sub-group known as "Academic Twitter" offered a steady stream of images from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century books and manuscripts; I was eager to share what I saw with my students so that they could see evidence of early modern reading practices, and I knew I was not alone in that desire; there were many other scholars of this period on Twitter who became my friends as we strategized online how to incorporate medieval and early modern book history and culture successfully in our "IRL" and "F2F" classrooms.

I felt especially happy to have my students read Jacobs's post, which highlighted the highly personal and creative nature of commonplacing. His comments resonated with Smyth's description of the practice as the "creation of a private (or semi-public) text through the appropriation of public texts," one of the sixteen traits that Smyth ascribed to early modern commonplace culture.[7] I loved the idea that readers could be moved, literally,

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earlier piece: "A Commonplacebook," *First Things*, May 2008, www.firstthings.com/article/2008/05/a-commonplace-book.

6 See Heidi Brayman Hackel and Ian Frederick Moulton, eds., *Teaching Early Modern English Literature from the Archives* (New York: Modern Language Association, 2015).

7 Smyth, "Commonplace Book Culture," 99.

to re-produce some part of their reading in another location, that they could be prompted, by some mix of obligation, desire, and habit, to transform their responses to their reading into *another text*. I imagined collecting from each student an amalgamation of their spiritual, educational, and recreational reading, not just a repository for another's expressions, but a place to record their own. Though enabled by the enterprise of print and the mass production of texts, my students' books would be uniquely their own; they would draw on old texts and an even older practice to make new objects that were irreplicable and irreplaceable. My thinking in this regard was reinforced by Smyth's description of the "subtle, double-edged sentence of ownership of the transcribed materials by the compiler: a sense of ownership which strikes a balance between the appropriation of materials as the compiler's own, and a recognition that excised aphorisms can always be passed on, can always be taken up, by later readers." I was also influenced by book arts (including amateur scrapbooking as well as professional papercrafts) and other on- and off-line forms of "maker culture." In the "maker-spaces" that were increasingly popping up within computer labs and Digital-related centres on college campuses, manual and digital work was combined in creative enterprise.[8] I wanted my students to take part in these kinds of movements, and was excited to encourage them to make their books (or "books") in whatever modes or forms they found compelling.

The prospect that they might, like Jacobs, use an online repository and social media platform like Tumblr seemed inevitable, and, in my initial mindset, this combination of early modern text and "new new media" made perfect sense. I felt certain that many of the practices we can observe in early modern commonplace culture seemed to me to be alive and thriving in platforms of that sort, most obviously in the form of memes, a term originally coined by Richard Dawkins "to describe small units of culture that spread from person to person by copying or imitation."[9] As Limor Shifman notes, Dawkins's original conception of memes is "highly compatible to the way culture is formed in the Web 2.0 era, which is marked by platforms for creating and exchanging user-generated content."[10]

Of course, the public circulation of memes online was a fundamentally public and collective practice rather than the mostly private acts that we

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8 See, for instance, Anne Wong and Helen Partridge, "Making as Learning: Makerspaces in Universities," *Australian Academic & Research Libraries* 47 (2016): 143–59, and Addie Matteson, "Invention U.," *School Library Journal* 63 (2017): 38–42.

9 Quoted in Limor Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 2.

10 Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture*, 18.

assume to be at work in extant commonplace books; yet in the production and consumption of memes, I nonetheless could point to a clear intertextuality that demanded all of the hallmarks of active reading. Memes require and give pleasure by way of the reader's ability to recognize features of form and interpret their meaning; their circulation hinges on both repetition and the readers' capacity to understand it, as well as repetition with a difference—elements that are also readily apparent in many literary constructions. When readers demonstrate that recognition and their pleasure in it by "Liking," "favouriting," and sharing by a virtual button, they used a different way to copy a particularly meaningful construction, but one that is arguably just as tactile; with the life of web content simultaneously assumed to be unstable and "there forever," such acts are no more or less transitory than the marks left in book or their reproduction and relocation into others.

With Jacobs's analogy linking commonplacing to Tumblr in mind, I could not help making the connection that memes circulated online in forms that often make "original" authorship elusive or unknowable, not unlike content reproduced in the commonplace books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a time when the concepts of authorship and copyright were still forming and undergoing significant change. Despite the fact that time stamps and IP addresses might identify a post as "original," verbatim posts passed off as original thought and "stolen" jokes abound.[11] There are also posts with memes that do seem concerned with recognizing the genius behind a single creative act: the query "Who made this" (often without the mechanically correct question mark, and often demanded in all capital letters) frequently appears in re-iterative posts––and the effect is such that the poster who asks for the source becomes the de facto source, or at least the one that gets the most credit in the form of re-circulation and approval.[12]

Finally, the circulation of memes is further akin to the commonplacing of early modern passages in the relationship that both enterprises have to the industries in which they are a form of symbolic bartering currency:

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11 Articles about stolen jokes abound; see, among them, Mihir Patkar, "The Ongoing War Against Stolen Tweets, And How You Can Help," *MakeUseOf*, May 22, 2015, www.makeuseof.com/tag/stealing-tweets.

12 On the topic of evolving copyright law, see Steve Collins, "Digital Fair: Prosumption and the Fair Use Defence," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 10 (2010): 37–55, and Laura Levinson, "Adapting Fair Use to Reflect Social Media Norms: A Joint Proposal," *UCLA Law Review* 64 (2017): 1038–79.

both are "of" an economy that is both within and outside of *the* economy. A meme that goes viral on social media sites can certainly be monetized by advertising (and they *are* necessarily "paid for" by ads and "promoted content" in the majority of "free" platforms where they are shared), but much of the machinery's economic underpinnings are beyond most users' immediate interests, if not always outside of those users' awareness. Likewise, the "verbal symbolic goods"[13] that Jonathan Lamb describes as Shakespeare's "wares of wit," transmittable as "interactive assemblies" of structured imagery and diction, circulated within a physical marketplace of material goods that included printed books; yet their consumption in these books transpired in forms that were external to and irrespective of that marketplace. Readers who were copying material into their own commonplace books may have been motivated to do so by a sense that such acts could elevate their own status, but, like the twenty-first-century users who shared memes purely for entertainment, many readers did so without financial profit as an immediate or primary motive.[14]

The interconnectedness of my pedagogical interests and what I witnessed in my own online social activity certainly fueled my enthusiasm for the changes I was making in my course. It also caused considerable anxiety. There is, of course, a long tradition of exploring and validating the use of new––and now "new new" and post-"new new"––media in college classrooms.[15] Although Olivia G. Stewart found "no strong consensus on social media, their affordances, or how they should be taken up in the classroom" in a 2016 review of this literature, there is no shortage of advocacy for incorporating it into more "traditional" pedagogy.[16] For instance, in an article from 2010, Mia Moody argued that social media can be useful for "foster-

13 Jonathan P. Lamb, *Shakespeare in the Marketplace of Words* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 3.

14 In Trait 13, Smyth identifies "a connection between common-placing and improvement," listing financial gains as merely one potential form that improvement could take among many other types of advancement, "linguistic, moral, social," and "spiritual" ("Commonplace Book Culture," 108).

15 On the term "new new media" in reference to interactive media platforms, see Paul Levinson, *New New Media* (Pearson, 2009), 2nd ed, 2012. One of the earliest attempts to grapple with the effects of new media is John Seely Brown's "Growing Up Digital: How the Web Changes Work, Education, and the Ways People Learn," *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 32 (2000): 11–20. Neither of these encapsulates the "newest" media trends, which will no doubt be old news quickly.

16 Olivia G. Stewart, "A Critical Review of the Literature of Social Media's Affordances in the Classroom," *E-Learning and Digital Media* 12 (2016): 481–501 at 482.

ing rich dialogue" and "encourag[ing] critical discussions on topics such as media stereotypes" in traditional communication courses.[17] Writing in 2018 as a part of an International educational symposium, Marta Sánchez-Saus Laserna and Mario Crespo Miguel proclaimed that "social media have been revealed as one of the most powerful communication tools that exist today, and, specifically, can be very useful in pedagogical innovation in higher education."[18]

With respect to the memes that circulated on those sites, the work of Shifman has already ensured they are studied as culturally significant objects in a variety of academic fields. For instance, in an essay from 2018, Lynn McNeil identified in them some of "the traditional and informal qualities of folk communication" and therein characterized memes as "modern folklore."[19] Still others have emphasized their utility for facilitating what and how students learn. Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear, for instance, have argued that early forms of memes such as LOLCats "could be highlighted by teachers in educationally productive ways to help learners relate what they already know and do as remixers to aspects of their classroom learning."[20] In what is perhaps the most confident of essays along these lines, the librarian Ciro Scardina describes memes as "a beautiful tool to explain a concept and for students to express their knowledge on a topic and flex their critical-thinking skills."[21]

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17 Mia Moody, "Teaching Twitter and Beyond: Tips for Incorporating Social Media in Traditional Courses," *Journal of Magazine & New Media Research* 11 (2010): 1–9 at 2.

18 Marta Sánchez-Saus Laserna and Mario Crespo Miguel, "Social Media as a Teaching Innovation Tool for the Promotion of Interest and Motivation in Higher Education," paper presented at the *2018 International Symposium on Computers in Education (SIIE) Computers in Education (SIIE)*: 1–5 at 5. Available at www.researchgate.net/publication/329901028_Social_media_as_a_teaching_innovation_tool_for_the_promotion_of_interest_and_motivation_in_higher_education.

19 Lynne McNeill, "LOL and the World LOLS with You: Memes as Modern Folklore," *Phi Kappa Phi Forum* 97 (2017): 18–21.

20 Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear, "Remix: The Art and Craft of Endless Hybridization," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 52 (2008): 22–33. They argue, "While educationally satisfying and productive integration of remix theory and practices into classroom learning is no simple matter, we would argue that time and effort expended in pursuing principled appropriations and leverage of the qualities they have that incline young people to invest so much of themselves in creative remix will prove educationally beneficial for learners and teachers alike" (32).

21 Ciro Scardina, "Through the Lens of Popular Culture: Why Memes and Teaching Are Well Suited," *Teacher Librarian* 45 (2017): 13–16 at 13.

But social media and Literary studies have "a troublesome relationship," as Camelia Grădinaru's titular phrasing describes it.[22] Perhaps it is fine for an inter-disciplinary group of scholars to posit that "Shakespeare has a lot to say about Social Media and Social Networks," but I was (and continue to be) wary of over-selling such connections.[23] I truly loved my own social network and thinking about memes, especially those which demonstrated sophisticated political commentary and wit in their combinations of allusion, word, and image. Yet the more I reckoned with the scope and scale of discourse on the internet, the more inclined I was to separate the pleasures of intellectual work in commonplace books from the leisure and labour of posting online. This inclination, as I will discuss further in the final section of this essay, had much to do with noticeable shifts in the language used to describe the latter activity, if not also a change in the nature of the activity itself.

In July of 2010, for example, Susan Gunelius, a "contributor" to Forbes.com, described "The Shift from CONsumers to PROsumers," noting that the latter term was a term that had "been around for years in the marketing world," and had recently "transformed from meaning "professional consumer" to meaning "product and brand advocate." "The leaders of this shift," she explained further, "are the members of the social web—bloggers, microbloggers, forum posters, social networking participants, and so on, who spread messages, influence people around the world, and drive demand."[24] Changes like this one help lay bare the internet's ever-expanding relationship to capitalist enterprise, and though my small circle of academics on Twitter did our best to ignore this fact, the users who shared memes on

22 Camelia Grădinaru, "Social Media and Literature: A Troublesome Relationship," *Argumentum: Journal the Seminara of Discursive Logic, Argumentation Theory & Rhetoric* 16 (2018): 35–50. Versions of the uneasy relationship between the two can be found at the start of the twenty-first century in articles such as Mae Miller Claxton and C. Camille Cooper, "American Literature and the World Wide Web," *The English Journal* 90 (2000): 97–103, in which the authors describe the internet as "a cross between satellite television and a flea market" but nonetheless go about exploring "how this important resource can help students relate to American literature in exciting new ways" (97).

23 Víctor Hugo Masías, Paula Baldwin Lind, Sigifredo Laengle, and Fernando A., Crespo, "Shakespeare, Social Media and Social Networks [Viewpoint]," *IEEE Technology and Society Magazine* 34 (2015): 17–30 at 17. (I suppose I should admit here that, in my view, it is not really fine.)

24 Susan Gunelius, "The Shift from CONsumers to PROsumers," *Forbes*, July 3, 2010, www.forbes.com/sites/work-in-progress/2010/07/03/the-shift-from-consumers-to-prosumers/#5ba8509433df.

social media platforms for fun also experience constant exposure to marketing and the promotion of "brands."

I had not yet read scholarship or other writing on the subject that allowed me to process these developments, for, as David Beer and Roger Burrows note, we live in a world "where 'internet time' now runs at a clock speed several orders of magnitude faster than that of academic research."[25] Still, it was clear to me even then that I was witnessing what these authors describe as "the transformation in the nature of the relations between production and consumption as they become simultaneous and even ambient in the routine activities that generate the content of Web 2.0."[26] What had once been referred to as an "information superhighway" was also a garage for "content gurus," agents who could advise advertisers and other "influencers" on "The 3 R's" of Content Marketing: Relatable, Readable, Reusable."[27]

When I was designing my new assignment, sites like Twitter and Tumbler contained what Rebecca Onion would describe a couple years later as "whole cottage industries built on 'relatable' content," pockets of the internet I knew existed but rarely inhabited, in which "Twitter accounts like @JustRelatable (1.8 m followers) and @relatable (2.3 m followers) tweet out meme-ified photos that rely on shared experiences for their humor."[28] Although I had only a vague understanding of the status and purpose of accounts like those, it was more than enough to temper my original excitement. I did not like to think of the early modern production of commonplace books as akin to the "delivery" of "relatable content," and yet I feared that the comparison might have traction with my students all the same. After all, if proverbs and maxims were cultural "commonplaces" or touchstones in the sixteenth century, weren't they then simply the "relatable" content of another time?

Instead of working through a clear answer in either the affirmative or negative, I pushed the question out of my mind and revisited the basic guidelines I had drafted for my students' commonplace books with the

25 David Beer and Roger Burrows, "Sociology and, of and in Web 2.0: Some Initial Considerations," *Sociological Research Online* 12 (2007): 67–79 at 67.

26 Beer and Burrows, "Sociology and, of and in Web 2.0," 73.

27 TGP Direct, "The 3 R's of Content Marketing: Relatable, Readable, Reusable," August 23 2016; Modified September 1, 2016. Accessed January 17, 2019, www.tpgdirect.com/the-3-rs-of-content-marketing-relatable-readable-reusable/.

28 Rebecca Onion, "The Awful Emptiness of 'Relatable,'" Slate.com, April 4, 2011. The Twitter accounts mentioned by Onion in this article are no longer active or are now claimed by different users.

intention of keeping it out of my students' as well. In direct contradiction of Smyth's reminder that "extant commonplace books rarely conform to… neat templates," I ended up constructing an assignment that was highly prescriptive.[29] Moreover, I ended up drafting something that made clear that the kinds of lines that Lesser and Stallybrass described as "sententious passages suitable for transcription into a commonplace book" *would not be suitable at all*.[30] Under its auspices, students would learn to privilege what Smyth described as "the sentence" and "little block of text," while rather paradoxically rejecting the element he describes alongside those units, the "portions" that "might easily yield aphorisms."

Although I would keep in language that allowed them to choose the format that suited them best, I would direct them to make a book whose contents would illuminate, above all, common figures, images, and grammatical structures and their effects in Shakespeare's works. I would supplement the assignment prompt with lessons on rhetorical figures from early modern books on prosody, including a handout in which I modeled the kinds and combinations of passages they might choose to put in their books. In this handout, I would include (and recontextualize) the passage I had found so tiresome in papers in prior semesters, Petruchio's pronouncement, "she is my house, my household stuff, my field," as well as other entries, two instances in which characters take leave of loved ones (Julia's instructions "All that is mine I leave at thy dispose, / My goods, my lands, my reputation" in *Two Gentleman of Verona* [2.7.86–7] and Pistol's request to Nell in Henry V, "My love, give me thy lips. / Look to my chattels and my movables" [2.3.45–46]); as well as Solinus's comment in *Comedy of Errors* that "…were it not against our laws, / Against my crown, my oath, my dignity,… / …My soul would sue as advocate for thee" (1.1.143–45), and Antipholus of Syracuse in the same play telling his twin, "It is thyself, mine own self's better part…My food, my fortune and my sweet hope's aim" (3.2.59, 61).

Placing Petruchio's list alongside other passages with constructions characterized by similarly possessive phrasing would not change its basic sense; in fact, other uses of similar constructions actually amplify its sense of Katherina's objectification. Still, it would allow me to promote analyses that were less exclusively focused on the general assessment of his misogyny and more attentive to force that specific forms of language could exert in aggregate in addition to each respective text. Whereas a quotation

29 Smyth, "Commonplace Book Culture," 90.

30 Stallybrass and Lesser, "The First Literary *Hamlet*," 378.

featuring Petruchio's listing of "my ox, my ass, my anything" can look like "low-hanging fruit" in papers focused on Katherine's status in her marriage, I hoped that in a commonplace book, its placement alongside other passages using similar grammatical structures would register instead as the result of careful reading. As a scholar, I was most invested in early modern politics and history; as a teacher, I found myself valuing students' identification of devices and their detection of linguistic patterns. Somehow, my attempt to incorporate more book history into my course resulted concomitantly in what looks to me now like a retrenchment into form.

Form and "Relatable" Content

To be sure, there is nothing wrong with teaching formalism or focusing on aesthetic features in literary texts. And to be fair to the internet, the surprisingly formalist turn my assignment took was not solely the product of my being "extremely online" in 2012. At least part of my prohibition on the assembly of *sententiae* came from a longstanding and fundamental lack of faith in the very *idea* of "the common." The internet had merely provided me with some additional reminders that I harbored this distrust. Here I do not mean to say that I had bought into assumptions about Literature (with a capital "L") as an elite cultural form. Rather, I mean that I was sometimes deeply sceptical of the prospect that my students and I could inhabit common ground––not just with our early modern author and his characters, but even with one another. I had grown up in a dual-cultural household and had learned throughout my childhood and teenage years that I could be both an average American kid and a girl who turned out, in a given context, to have little in common with her white friends.

I was also reaching the point where I was not at all confident that my cultural references and jokes would land in a room full of students who were mostly of "traditional" age, even if they were relatively diverse in their ethnicities and backgrounds. Drafting the assignment, then, brought to the surface a basic tension between a desire for students to understand the practices of early modern readers but also avoid a basic assumption that characterized their practices of commonplacing: that literate people could, by virtue of that literacy, recognize universal truths about humanity. I wanted them to see the value in literary craft––something I was willing to locate in prosody and diction, but not in words "to live by."

Certainly, being able to point to precepts that were "common" some five centuries ago, could be a useful step in exposing those so-called "truths" as something other than universal. But even if a college class could impress

upon students the distance between early modern values and their own, I also feared that discussing commonplaces in a Shakespeare class would necessarily lead them to the too-narrow conclusion that sentiments that recurred in Shakespeare's works were necessarily indicative of values that were widespread in early modern English culture. At least where I teach, his works might be the only ones composed before the twentieth century that students read with any regularity; it is highly possible that what seems to be "common" in his plays, for instance, could stand, in a student's mind, for all of the period and region. As popular and influential as Shakespeare might have been in his own time or subsequently, scholarship on early modern drama and literature more broadly often teaches us the multiple ways he and his work were exceptional.

Along these lines, the act of deeming something "common," even if one frames it or locates it historically, can put much greater pressure on the text and in some ways gives the sentiment a weight that might not be warranted. Take, for instance, the passage I mentioned before, the proclamation that Kate is her husband's "goods, [his] chattle, [his] house." Should these lines be understood to be a common sentiment about women's status after they are married? Without proper historical contextualization, a student might not be in a position to evaluate the degree to which Petruchio's sentiments are commonly held, particularly since it's difficult to determine the degree to which others *in the play* share them and since the play does not provide a definitive answer as to whether he himself sincerely believes them. It is one thing to discuss this slippery aspect of the play's plot and character. But the stakes feel higher when such things are entered into a book as a "commonplace." Freeing passages from their immediate context in a specific work's plot can constrain them in another sense.

Bound up in these worries was a related concern that reductive assessments of early modern culture would put a student on a fast-track to equally reductive (and more troubling) claims about the "truth" of such maxims in the twenty-first century. Sometimes, I do think modern analogies can be genuinely productive and even the most effective way to engage students with the social worlds depicted in the Shakespearean text.[31] But I did not want to see facile arguments about the present in my students' formal academic writing, and such comparisons would be invited and fraught in some-

31 See, for instance, my posted lectures on Medium.com (https://medium.com/@engvcp/) on *The Merchant of Venice* and Joan of Arc's trial documents, which link historical texts to contemporary movements (with hashtags), respectively #Black Lives Matter and #MeToo.

thing called a "a commonplace book." It was in this particular regard that my concerns about "the common" as a concept and my anxiety about "relatable" memes in social media converged; I imagined a book with the title "Ten times characters in Shakespeare's works were 'relatable'"—an amusing and even smart heading in some ways, but one I saw as more appropriate for a Buzzfeed "listicle" than work for a college course.

I realize that the thought process I have just outlined might sound idiosyncratic and even a bit neurotic. But there is some evidence that my concerns were not unfounded, though I wouldn't see them affirmed explicitly until a little over a year later. The first sign I was on to something was the article on Slate.com by Rebecca Onion that I have already cited in this essay. In "The Awful Emptiness of "Relatable,'" Onion described "the persistent abuse of the word" that she noticed "while teaching college classes in 2011 and 2012"—not coincidentally, the same period in which I was reorganizing my course on Shakespeare's early plays and drafting my new assignment. Initially, Onion admitted, she found her students' use of the adjective in class discussions gratifying, if only because it seemed to affirm that she had "picked the resonant thing to assign." However, the initial feeling quickly gave way to aversion, leading to her express reservations that in many ways mirrored my own. "I soon noticed," she wrote,

> that the comment, when made in discussion, cut conversation short. Students would nod at each other across the classroom, clearly feeling like they'd cracked that nut. Yeah! Relatable. That's when the word began to irk me. No teacher likes a critique-killer. The word bothers me most, I've since decided, because it presumes that the speaker's experiences and tastes are common and normative. "Relatable" is in the eye of the beholder, but its very nature is to represent itself as universal. It's shorthand that masquerades as description.[32]

In further support of the adjective's "awful emptiness," Onion cites an email conversation with Adam Hooks, the author of "How to Read like a Renaissance Reader." In his email, Hooks commiserated with Onion, identifying the use of "relatable" in a student's paper or in-class comments as an indicator of their "failure to get beyond one's own concerns to confront the unfamiliar and the uncomfortable." Doing the latter was, after all, essential for understanding literature from earlier periods; how could I compel students to "confront the unfamiliar" with an assignment that privileged "common" sentiments?

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32 Onion, "The Awful Emptiness of 'Relatable.'"

The second sign my concerns were legitimate—I won't dare say "relatable"––to others came a few months after the publication of Onion's article, when I witnessed a version of the very phenomenon I had been so eager to foreclose upon in my assignment.. The offending actor was not a student in my class, but rather, the public radio personality and editor Ira Glass, whose Tweet about a production of *King Lear* would spark a national conversation. He wrote, "@JohnLithgow as Lear tonight: amazing. Shakespeare: not good. No stakes, not relatable. I think I'm realizing: Shakespeare sucks."[33] Glass later went on to qualify and even retract his comment, but his brief under-140-character statement elicited a number of long-form responses in prestigious publications, eliciting condemnations of the "Scourge of Relatability" from Rebecca Mead at *The New Yorker*, and an earnest consideration of the question, "Should Literature Be 'Relatable'?" from Anna North in *The New York Times.*[34]

The awfully empty Shakespeare critique and abundant responses to it appeared well after I had drafted and taught my assignment, but the Glass dust-up further bolstered my confidence in the decisions I had made. At the time, I *did* think "relatability" had become, as Mead claimed, "widely and unthinkingly accepted as a criterion of value, even by people who might be expected to have more sophisticated critical tools at their disposal." And, like Mead, I thought it was a problem. Was it not my duty as a professor to provide students with "more sophisticated critical tools" and design assignments that would encourage their use?

Looking back on how I developed my commonplace assignment more than five years later, I am not entirely sure that words like "sophisticated" are apt for describing the approach I ultimately took. In the present moment,

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33 Ira Glass, Tweet. July 28, 2014, 12:12 A.M., http://twitter.com/iraglass.

34 Rebecca Mead, "The Scourge of 'Relatability,'" *The New Yorker*, August 1, 2014; Anna North, "Should Literature Be 'Relatable'?" *The New York Times*, August 5, 2014. Mead critiques the "expectation…that the work itself be somehow accommodating to, or reflective of, the experience of the reader or viewer. The reader or viewer remains passive in the face of the book or movie or play: she expects the work to be done for her." For North, distaste for the word "relatable" really comes down to a "bigger question of what it means to read about lives like one's own, and who gets to have that opportunity." Because "for some readers, relatability, whatever its status, may be hard to come by," the word we use to describe "the feeling of being represented" is less important than the fact that it signifies "an experience more readers deserve to have." Although the debate North invokes here is longstanding and beyond the scope of this essay, I will note here that I am sympathetic to this position, and sensitive to the fact that Shakespeare simply cannot resonate for everyone.

at least, I don't see sophistication so much as the mix of fervor, cautiousness, and fear. Certainly, it is easy to see now that there are many responsible and generative ways to deal with the concerns I had about "the common" in the classroom, and I am not especially proud that I did not attempt them. For instance, Jenna Lay's excellent assignment for her seventeenth-century poetry course in 2014 takes overt recourse to it, citing the beginnings of early modern reading practices in the "*loci communes*," of antiquity, or the "common places," where ideas could be located if they were needed for certain situations."[35]

Still, given the high and diverse enrollments of my own classes, I think my commonplace book assignment was successful. I never knew what to expect when I received my students' submissions, and their choices were always aesthetically rich and often surprising. Although I was and am still an avowed historicist, I built the assignment around the convictions that all language in literature is worth reading closely, and that being attuned to the grammar, syntax, and diction that make up speech in Shakespeare is a skill that would be transferable to their confrontations with language in contexts outside of the literature classroom. In intent and effect, it was a call for students to think more deeply about the aesthetic and formal features of not-famous, but nonetheless compelling lines in Shakespeare. It also was a challenge to find meaning in a simultaneously less predictable and more habitual fashion.

I have not taught "Shakespeare's Early Plays" since the spring of 2015, but I have since reused my commonplace book assignment with minimal changes in other courses in subsequent semesters. I found that with adequate contextualizing of early modern reading practices, it worked equally well in theme-based literature courses with a more diverse reading list. In the subsequent iterations, I removed the language suggesting that students consider constructing their books on social media platforms, something that I had proposed originally, but that only a single student tried in that first semester. From that small statistic, I surmised that my students were perhaps more like me than I had thought, hoping to keep some parts of their lives online separate from their study of literature in college.

As I consider how I might continue to use the assignment in future semesters, I can't help but recall the humorous concluding gesture that Onion made in her essay on relatability: "Let's just erect a 700-foot, solid-ice

35 Jenna Lay, "A Digital Commonplace Book," https://eng364.cas2.lehigh.edu. Accessed January 17, 2019.

wall between social media and the classroom." The joke in this construction hinged on a reference to the television show *Game of Thrones*, now itself long-gone but still a source of ubiquitous memes. The show's invocation of the ice-wall here neatly encapsulates the earnest desire to separate the internet from one's teaching as well as the obvious impossibility of doing so. In its original published version Onion's exhortation was hyperlinked, directing readers to a wiki that explains the reference by taking recourse to the urtext for it, the books on which the show is based. The explanatory webpage to which it linked not only confirmed the relationships between multiple texts, but also made clear that the expressed desire to keep these worlds separate was not so strong after all. In this way, Onion playfully undermined the sense of finality conjured by her own pronouncement, emphasizing the futility of the effort further with a winking, smug concluding sentence consisting of a single word—"There."—indicating feigned satisfaction with a mission accomplished.

I found Onion's final word and the accompanying image both amusing and timely as I began writing these reflections so many years after the publication of my 2014 essay. In early 2019 memes about walls were proliferating online, with and without references to the now-completed show. At that time, then-current President of the United States, Donald J. Trump, reportedly "brought a Game of Thrones Meme to His First Cabinet Meeting of 2019," eliciting derision from both the cast of the show and Chuck Schumer, the Senate Minority Leader.[36] I was struck then by the relative longevity and broad applicability of common tropes. I continue to be impressed by their capacity to find purchase in the most formal of settings. Even when they are unwelcome, they mean something and, through constant reuse, continue to structure how we make meaning.

Obviously (to use another typically remixed meme from another fantasy franchise), one does not just walk into the classroom and say, as Senator Chuck Schumer said in response to the President, "Enough with the memes." Teaching with an assignment that is premised on identifying recurring patterns means teaching students how to identify without necessarily identifying with parts of a literary text; it also means acknowledging that words

36 Megan McCluskey, "Trump Brought a Game of Thrones Meme to His First Cabinet Meeting of 2019," Time.com, January 3, 2019; Ashley Hoffman, "The President Used a Game of Thrones Meme: The Cast Wasn't Having It," Time.com, January 3, 2019; Alejandro de la Garza, "'Enough With the Memes': Schumer Slams President Trump After Another 'Game of Thrones' Reference," Time.com, January 6, 2019. All articles listed here accessed January 17, 2019.

and word structures take on value in social networks and are therefore also inevitably bound up in commercial transactions and personal brands. By encouraging students to locate the value of literary properties in something other than what is readily reproducible for sales or "likes" online, we can foster both recognition of, and a sense joy of in, the capaciousness of language. This broad goal may be all that is possible if we continue to live more of our lives and do more of our reading and teaching online. Even if we don't, the structures of commercial enterprise and popular media will still be capable of permeating any wall of ice that we might wish to erect to safeguard the integrity of our intellectual projects.

Of course, nothing I suggest here is new, and to prove it (and to conclude), I will share the results of the post-semester exercise I conducted at the end of the term when I first taught my commonplace book. At that time, I was pleased with my relative success in charting the narrow course away from "the common" and beyond the reach of brands and "relatable" content and to celebrate, I asked my colleagues on Twitter to supply me with examples of their favourite literary constructions that, like Petruchio's, made significant use of repeated possessive pronouns. Within minutes they assembled a number of fantastic examples, including (but not limited to) the lines from the Declaration of Independence, "we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor," and Emma Lazarus' poem "The Colossus" invoking "your tired, your poor, / your huddled masses." In the same spirit that animates Onion's conclusion, I imagined adding these examples to the table-book in my head, writing them down next to the line "My first, my last, my everything," from the Barry White song of the same name, and the commercial refrain "My Doctor said Mylanta," already recorded and living there for more than a decade, rent-free. *There*.

Part 2

ADAPTING THE COMMONPLACE BOOK ASSIGNMENT

PRODUCTIVE DISRUPTIONS

USING COMMONPLACE BOOKS TO RESIST EUROCENTRISM

ANDIE SILVA

TEACHING A SURVEY of early British Literature can be tricky if your goal is to diversify the voices and perspectives students will read. While it should be relatively simple to engage students in discussions of gender, class, and race within medieval and early modern literature, instructors are still faced with difficult decisions when it comes to selecting a number and range of texts that provide an accurate representation of the period while avoiding the narrative that England was a unique or particularly groundbreaking locus of literary invention.[1] In this essay I discuss how I use the commonplace book assignment to push back against Eurocentric narratives and expose students to global medieval and Renaissance contexts as they read and interrogate British writing. I also keep my own commonplace book in order to offer students a model of what to aim for in their own project and supplement our class with diverse perspectives and potential questions for class discussion. By keeping my book as a form of real-time course prep and embedding it into our course site, I aim to show students that I am undertaking the project with them rather than offering a completed, polished model they have to follow. This approach aims to decolonize the curriculum not simply by resisting notions of an all-male, all-white canon but by prioritiz-

***** I am grateful to Matthew K. Gold, Kelly Baker Josephs, and Jeff Allred for their thoughtful feedback on earlier versions of this essay. Thank you also to the students in ENG 328 at York, whose contributions challenged me to see new facets of texts I have read and re-read so many times and encouraged me to find more ways to showcase representation in the medieval and Renaissance syllabus.

1 This project is particularly critical to the pre-modern and medieval periods, as white supremacists have attempted to erroneously claim Anglo-Saxon literature and culture as sites of white purity. For more on the ways in which race can and should be discussed historically within the pre-modern period, a good starting point is the *RaceB4Race* conference series, https://acmrs.asu.edu/RaceB4Race/past.

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ing individual experiences and expanding, rather than cutting, our range of available readings.

Although the word "decolonizing" sometimes risks becoming a buzz word in pedagogical conversations, at its heart a decolonizing approach is synonymous with responsible, ethical teaching: it requires that we centre the human in the classroom, paying attention to the individuals who might be least likely to see themselves represented in our literature, and encouraging a process of self-guided discovery. In order to accomplish this, we must take into consideration the wide intersectionality of our students (as well as our own), interrogating why and how we teach the texts in our syllabus. As Priyamvada Gopal argues, in order to promote a culture of "self-understanding" in the classroom, it is important that we facilitate a process in which minoritized learners "understand what their own role has been in forging artistic and intellectual achievements."[2] The commonplace book assignment lends itself nicely to this aim, since the genre has a long tradition of pedagogical and reflective practice, through which readers become not simply consumers of materials but active participants in the production and dissemination of knowledge.[3]

As Dana Schumacher-Schmidt and Nora L. Corrigan demonstrate elsewhere in this volume, commonplace books are especially useful in survey courses because they help students manage large amounts of information and draw complex connections across texts. Since creating a "storehouse of knowledge" (to borrow Earle Havens's phrasing) was also one of the primary applications of commonplacing in the medieval and early modern periods, the commonplace book assignment can show students that journaling and information management are long-held practices, and that "many habits that we take for granted are indebted to the transmission of practices developed centuries ago in medieval and early modern Europe."[4] Further-

2 Priyamvada Gopal, "Yes, We must Decolonise: Our Teaching Has to Go Beyond Elite White Men," *The Guardian*, October 27, 2017, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/27/decolonise-elite-white-men-decolonising-cambridge-university-english-curriculum-literature. It bears keeping in mind that decolonizing is only the first step in a grounded, ethical classroom, as Roopika Risam argues in her talk, "Abolitionist Digital Pedagogies: Beyond 'Decolonizing' the Classroom," *McGill Digital Humanities, "Spectrums of DH."* Accessed July 2022, www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1347337532264583.

3 See this volume's introduction and the essay by Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt for further context on the history of commonplacing.

4 Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 10.

more, the practice of commonplacing opens up spaces for making texts our own—by copying a quote into our journals, we take literal ownership of the words being reproduced, reinforcing the notion that what adds value to a text is not simply its historical position in the (artificial, arbitrary) literary canon, but its contribution to our own lives and values.

Overview of Course and Objectives

The survey course, "Medieval and Renaissance Literature" is one of several options available to English majors at York College (CUNY) for completing their pre-twentieth century literature requirement. In terms of preparation, the class composition can vary widely, as students may take this course at several points in their academic career, including in their first semester at York after transferring from other schools. What most of my students will have in common is that they likely have never encountered any early English literature other than Shakespeare. Typically, as I've discussed elsewhere, they also enter my classroom with a great deal of trepidation and disinterest when it comes to pre-modern literature.[5] That being the case, while I want students in my class to gain a sense of the breadth of styles, authors, and genres available in the medieval and early modern periods, I also want their reading experience to be unique to each student rather than simply instructor-mediated. This is especially crucial within the goal of decolonization and liberatory pedagogy, which aims to maximize representation and the range of voices and perspectives available in the classroom.[6] In particular, I try to make the syllabus design process as transparent as possible, instilling in students the habit of questioning and evaluating their reading assignments as but a small piece of a literary history that is much larger than we could possibly cover in one semester. I also want students to notice the place of distinction British literature earns in our major: why are they required to

5 Andie Silva, "Remixing the Canon: Shakespeare, Popular Culture, and the Undergraduate Editor," in *New Technologies and Renaissance Studies III*, ed. Matthew Evan Davis and Colin Wilder (New York: Iter, 2022), 257–78.

6 In embracing liberatory pedagogy I follow Paulo Freire's concept of co-liberation, in which the instructor and students must work together to undo oppressive systems and center learning around subjectivity and knowledge construction (though never at the expense of socio-political awareness of the colonizing forces that guide our society). See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970). For a thorough review and critique of how to humanize pedagogy, see María del Carmen Salazar, "A Humanizing Pedagogy: Reinventing the Principles and Practice of Education as a Journey Toward Liberation," *Review of Research in Education* 37 (2013): 121–48.

study these texts? What kinds of ideas and voices are we privileging over others? And how can we ensure our own voices and ideas in the classroom take authors to task when they fail to represent us (accurately or at all)? As Nedda Mehdizadeh emphasizes, when teaching any texts, but especially pre-modern texts, instructors should help students unlearn the practice of "look[ing] outside themselves and toward an imagined ideal for answers."[7] Minoritized students in particular may arrive at college classes unsure about their role as critics and all too ready to accept anthologies as the final source of what texts and authors "matter" in their education. Engaging students in constructive resistance of textbooks and syllabi encourages critical thinking and can challenge us, instructors, to regularly re-evaluate our choices when it comes to representation and inclusion.

In order to ensure students make a habit of prioritizing their own reactions to the readings, I introduced the Commonplace Book Assignment in the second week of our semester (see Appendix), asking them to begin documenting their encounters with each reading throughout the term in whichever ways they found productive—e.g. quotations, collages, poetry, memes, and so on. Because our goal was in part to see each student's approach as unique and worthy of study, students could choose whether they would work with digital or analogue methods. I had anticipated that those students who were more creatively inclined would prefer working on paper, while students who engaged heavily in social media might enjoy the ease of blogs. As I discuss below, this approach was not entirely successful. Unless the student is skilled in coding or design, digital spaces arguably do not allow for as much originality or visual variation as blank pages, and so digital commonplace books may require more careful instructor guidance in order to achieve a final product that reflects students' creativity. Nonetheless, there is a lot to be gained from digital commonplacing, such as the ability to share work more publicly and encourage students to think about the afterlives of the work they do in the class. Instructors may want to weigh whether the flexibility of options may make assessment challenging: since the range of end products will vary considerably, rubrics need to take format and (hyper) materiality into consideration in order to support and reward students' choices of record-keeping.[8]

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7 Nedda Mehdizadeh, "Teaching the Travail of Writing: Authority, Empire, and Racial Formation in the (Pre)modern," *Race B4 Race: Education Symposium*, January 20–21, 2021. www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGgRgHJ9AhE&ab_channel=ACMRS.

8 As I revise this essay in the middle of yet another pandemic-imposed virtual semester in 2021, I must acknowledge there are many reasons why digital commonplacing may

As Joshua Eckhardt similarly discusses in this volume, it is important to scaffold the work of commonplacing so that students are motivated to work early and often, as the strongest commonplace books benefit from iteration and reflection. Our project required four "checkpoints," during which students had to bring their commonplace book to class or to office hours and report on their progress. While the first two checkpoints were intentionally informal affairs (a student could catch me before or after class or email me a link to their work in progress, for instance), the third checkpoint asked students to exchange books and add contributions to each other's project and the last checkpoint had to be completed during a scheduled one-on-one meeting so the student and I had the chance to discuss how to revise and finesse their final submitted project. Prior to this last checkpoint, I also asked students to draft a reflection essay evaluating their progress and analysing four standout entries.

It is important to carefully consider what the goal of the commonplace book assignment is: in my case, I was less interested in using this project as a way for students to practice literary analysis than as an opportunity for them to find their own reasons for reading the assigned texts.[9] I therefore constructed my prompt to leave plenty of room for what counted as an "entry" in their commonplace book. Adam Smyth points out that commonplacing typically involves "a willingness to rework material," and thus commonplace books often showcase a "resistance to ideas of coherent, completed wholes."[10] In my assignment rubric, I expanded on these definitions to consider "resistance" as an opportunity for pushing back either critically or playfully. The assignment rubric (see Appendix) therefore reinforced that students would be rewarded for bringing their unique perspective to the

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be a more practical choice for both students and the instructor. Yet even this term I ended up asking students to make analogue commonplace books, both as a way to encourage off-screen time and to give students a memento of their experience in the course. This approach, however, requires additional work on both the student and the instructor's ends: the student must not only produce formal papers describing and analyzing their work, but must find a way to document their material object, and the instructor must carefully consider how to grade the process, product, and subsequent critical analysis.

9 Those wishing to engage students in complex close-reading and cross-textual analysis may want to turn to Pasupathi's essay in this volume.

10 Adam Smyth, "Commonplace Book Culture: A List of Sixteen Traits" in *Women and Writing, c. 1340–c. 1650: The Domestication of Print Culture*, ed. Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Phillipa Hardman (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2010), 90–110 at 99 and 103.

process of textual analysis, even and especially when those perspectives rejected what our readings might be presenting as objective truth.

Projects aimed at centring students' voices must include active plans for how the instructor will support students in disrupting the presumed textual authority of the canon. As Cassie Miura argues of Shakespeare courses, teaching the pre-modern period with care and inclusivity means making space for students to question canonicity and find ways to "situate their own attitudes and critical perspectives as part of an ever-changing historical narrative" so that they may find themselves "actively shaping a work whose meaning is always indeterminate."[11] For many students, making this move from acknowledging that meaning and value are culturally assigned signifiers to seeing themselves as producers of knowledge can be difficult. I was not entirely surprised, for instance, to find out that many of my students felt a considerable amount of anxiety about the commonplace book project, because they did not grasp how their informal, unmediated responses to the texts could be evaluated for a grade. They worried that there would be a wrong way to engage—for instance, by disliking or rejecting the ideas presented in the text, or by "misreading" important themes or symbolism. While this concern is likely to crop up for a diverse range of students, those students who belong to minoritized groups might feel especially reticent about seeing themselves as a source of authority when it comes to literary analysis.[12] In-class, student-led discussions can assuage these anxieties, but instructors should also consider reserving some class time for students to explore historical examples of the commonplace book as a way to expand what counts as knowledge, and who gets to make intellectual interven-

11 Cassie M. Miura, "Empowering First-Generation Students: Bardolatry and the Shakespeare Survey," *Early Modern Culture* 14 (2019): 44–56 at 50. This whole special issue on "First Generation Shakespeare" is worth a closer look for those interested in making early modern literature in general and Shakespeare in particular more relevant and productive to first-generation students.

12 For studies on how to center students' prior knowledge as a form of scholarly expertise, see Milagros Castillo-Montoya and Jillian Ives, "Instructors' Conceptions of Minoritized College Students' Prior Knowledge and Their Related Teaching Practices," *Journal of Higher Education* 92 (2021): 735–59. A recent study on first-year doctoral students also showed that students who identified as female or as an under-represented/minority "had significantly lower levels of perceived disciplinary knowledge" compared to their male, non-minoritized peers. If that is the case for upper-level studies, we should consider addressing the problem in our approach to undergraduate education. See Allyson Flaster, K. M. Glasener, and John A. Gonzalez, "Disparities in Perceived Disciplinary Knowledge Among New Doctoral Students," *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education* 11 (2020): 215–30.

tions in the circulation and production of literature. I had the opportunity to take my class to the New York Public Library so we could explore some of the books in their Special Collections. Although the NYPL did not have any medieval or early modern examples in their catalogue, seeing the records of anonymous or little-known readers in the library and being able to access that reader's inner thoughts nonetheless energized the students. The library visit encouraged them to think more concretely about why they might record their own thoughts for posterity and even analyse their own practices as valuable subjects of study. Luckily, we now have digital projects like *Book Traces*, which stores high-quality images of marked and annotated rare books and even invites students to contribute by submitting transcriptions.[13] As Heidi Brayman Hackel observes, the study of annotated books and commonplace books helps refocus our understanding of early modern culture to include "less extraordinary readers, who often remain invisible in the historical record only because of their occasional traces in books."[14] Seeing such readers made extraordinary through archival preservation encourages students to likewise envision their own voices as worth memorializing.

Intentional Disruptions

Throughout the semester, I promised students I would keep my own commonplace book, maintained through our course site. I had anticipated that the students who decided to keep digital commonplace books might have a hard time figuring out what made their work different from a traditional blog, and I wanted to showcase a variety of formal and informal ways to create and customize their entries. For instance, through my commonplace book I could demonstrate how tagging and categorizing entries would be an easy way to offer multiple avenues for user interaction, which would also help students think through what themes had surfaced throughout the project as a whole. Although I did not prescribe what platform students should use for their work if they chose a digital format, I also hoped that my sample book would encourage them to make a WordPress site hosted on our insti-

13 My experience with our visit to the NYPL helped me see that any interaction with primary sources can be extremely productive for students, so even though *Book Traces* focuses on nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts this resource should be valuable for instructors without access to rare books libraries. See https://booktraces-public.lib.virginia.edu/.

14 Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8.

tution's domain, the CUNY Academic Commons (CAC). Our entire course was already running on this platform, and students needed to register a Commons account to submit other assignments, so choosing the CAC would make life easier for both them and me (since I was familiar-enough with it to troubleshoot any potential tech problems). Finally, as I discuss below, this format allowed me to more or less combine my lecture notes with my practice of commonplacing, which meant that I was not doubling the amount of labour involved in prepping the course.

From the beginning, I planned to use my commonplace book as a space where I could offer the class productive intersectional and global perspectives to supplement and contextualize the British literature texts assigned from week to week. Although I strive to include at least a few texts from outside of Britain and occasionally outside of Europe in my syllabus, it never feels like there is enough space in the term to successfully teach a Global Englishes *and* a British Literature class without doing a disservice to both. This is especially true for my course, which is designed to be a survey of both the medieval and the early modern periods together. By infusing my digital commonplace book with non-white, non-male textual and visual references, I hoped to bridge some of the gaps left by the course schedule and to consistently remind students that the pre-modern period was as diverse and complex as our world is now. Rather than assign students to read or comment on my book (which would be counter to my goal of not overloading the syllabus), I instead projected pages from my commonplace book on the screen in class as part of my short introductory lectures for the week. For instance, the week the students were to read Marie de France's *Lanval* and *Chevrefoil* I used my commonplace book to offer supplementary information about how knight and chivalric codes operated in other parts of the world, such as the Samurai in Japan, or the Furusiyya in the Middle East. Before starting class discussion, I showed students some of the illustrations I had found online of knighthood cultures from around the world and went over how I had framed them in my digital commonplace book. As we went over these choices together, we had a broader conversation about masculinity and the illusion of social order. In addition to helping disrupt the notion that England was unique in its cultural practices, I also hoped that my commonplace book entries would encourage students to research additional contexts on their own and to see their commonplace books as a place to document their research practices.

Our periodic "checkpoint" dates served as soft deadlines for students to remember to update their notes in case they were not working on their

commonplace books at least once a week. These checkpoints also gave me another opportunity to remind students that I was keeping my own book and show them how I processed my own reading and study notes for class. In keeping with requirements established in the assignment's rubric, I used my commonplace entries to highlight subversive interpretations and help the class find parallels between the pre- and early modern world and our own. For example, when we read *The Dream of the Rood* my weekly post linked to a blog on gender fluidity in medieval manuscript illustration and paired it with quotes from our text. I hoped that students who visited my commonplace book to find inspiration for their own work might see this as an opportunity to consider the complex intersection of devotional writing and sexuality in the period.[15] Indeed, one of my students felt inspired to find contemporary yonic illustrations to compare against medieval illuminations, leading to some fascinating blog entries on the ways devotion can be a surprising outlet for women to openly envision and discuss their sexuality. I balanced some of these historical research entries with more informal posts that included memes, excerpts, and links to fanfiction adaptations (such as excellent pieces that centre Grendel and his mother as the protagonists in *Beowulf*).[16] These entries therefore served as lecture notes and as a simple way to show that I too am a learner of medieval and early modern literature—constantly thinking about my own place as a reader and interpreter.

One might argue that there is something inauthentic in using a commonplace book as a formalized teaching supplement, since by definition commonplace books are typically designed to showcase one's personal reactions and engagements with the texts they read. But if we look to the tradition of printed commonplace books, we may see that even in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries editors and compilers often conceived of ways to use a publicly disseminated commonplace book as a way to model critical thinking and "encourage new, better ideas within [their] readers."[17] Indeed, I would argue that it is actually not possible to have an "authentic" reaction to read-

15 Sophie Sexon, "Queering Christ's Wounds and Gender Fluidity in Medieval Manuscripts," *History Matters* (blog), August 8, 2017, www.historymatters.group.shef.ac.uk/queering-christs-wounds-gender-fluidity-medieval-manuscripts/ Accessed February 24, 2022.

16 See John Gardner, *Grendel* (New York: Vintage, 1989), and Susan Signe Morrison, *Grendel's Mother: The Saga of the Wyrd-Wife* (Alresford: Top Hat, 2015).

17 Jillian M. Hess, *How Romantics and Victorians Organized Information: Commonplace Books, Scrapbooks, and Albums* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 35.

ings one has read and studied many times before as part of their academic training. Whatever an instructor decides to include in a commonplace book designed to serve as a model for students will be impacted by their expectations of an A-level project. Rather than attempt the impossible (and somewhat insincere) task of creating a truly unmediated record of my experiences as a reader, I aimed to record and make transparent my experience as an instructor. The materials in my commonplace book documented the earnest and real-time process of teaching myself how to make the course more inclusive of a wider range of literatures and contexts. Instructors employing such a tactic might additionally consider it as an opportunity to discuss printed commonplace books and the role of pre-culled materials marketed towards middle-class readers in the seventeenth- and eighteenth centuries.[18]

Keeping your own commonplace book may sound like extra labour in an already prep-heavy course such as this British Literature survey, but instructors who prepare lecture notes or slideshow presentations may find that a lot of the normal prep for the week would easily lend itself to formal and informal commonplace entries. In the spirit of commonplacing, I intentionally left many of my entries without any context; some pages would include nothing but images, while others had notes and screenshots. By design, none of my posts included the kind of writing that would have required formal drafting. In class, I would open up our discussion by calling students' attention to my entries as a way to share what was in my head as a reader that week, and I used these moments as an opportunity to encourage questions about global contexts or different ways of close-reading our texts. In future versions of the course, I would like to try short free-writing assignments where the students analyse my own and each other's books to think about how we can use primary sources to glimpse into the inner lives of real-life readers and consumers of texts. Working on my sample commonplace book also helped me bring more care and empathy to my assessment of students' projects. Like some of my students, I also ran into challenges keeping up with the entries from week-to-week. Although I required students to produce at least ten total entries, my own book ended up with only eight. As a result of my own struggles with time keeping, at the end of the semester I decided to ask students with missing entries to think of ways to remix or

18 See Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) and Earl Havens, *Commonplace Books: A History of Manuscripts and Printed Books from Antiquity to the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Beinecke University Library, 2001).

reorganize the work they managed to complete (e.g., with an index or list of keywords) as a way to make up for missing assignments.

Commonplace books can be places for students to detail and memorialize their own culture and explore similar practices and histories outside of Europe. Instructors should consider their goals for this assignment and craft learning outcomes that support authentic reactions to the text, such as incorporating textual push-back as part of the official goals for the course. While my own assignment did not focus on the commonplace book as a place for students to practise the academic writing process, it is possible to incorporate critical-thinking work into the act of commonplacing. Throughout my course, I used short writing assignments and formal papers where I asked students to consider thematic parallels between our readings and modern culture. One response paper for instance invited students to research cultural differences across popular genres such as utopias and chivalric romance. Students were also asked to write reflection papers analysing how their commonplacing skills changed over the course of the semester. This work could easily be accomplished through students' commonplace books instead of papers, either as in-class exercises or by reserving a portion of the commonplace assignment rubric for assessing students' research and analytical skills.

By and large most students really embraced the project, though I noticed that the analogue books had a tendency to be more complex in terms of design and creativity. In particular, students who kept digital books were more likely to reproduce existing material than to create their own original illustrations or creative writing. I was happy to see, nonetheless, that my intersectional approach to my own sample commonplace book helped inspire students to adapt and revisit texts from a broader range of perspectives and to take ownership of the ideas presented in our reading assignments. Marc Torres, for example, used his commonplace book to insert himself as the protagonist in a number of our texts.[19] For instance, one of his entries built on our discussion of Margery Kempe's motives for writing her memoir, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, questioning the convenience of a divine-appointed mandate that allowed one to forgo their responsibilities. In a short, two-panel cartoon, Torres drew himself having visions of a crucifix on his wall telling him that "we shouldn't do academic papers! They're a waste of time! Time I could be using to write a short story!" Similarly, in his entry about Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* Torres offered a list of the conditions

19 All students are named and cited with permission.

for his own ideal society, which included a demand that every citizen abide by his passion for skateboarding, which should be "always appreciated, and people must take pictures of any skateboarding they come across." In both cases, Torres used his commonplace book to critique arbitrary social norms and reflect on how artists were able to bend those norms, using literature to create worlds that better reflected their own needs and desires. By personalizing Margery Kempe's subversive assertions of her agency and More's rhetorical musings on what makes an ideal society, Torres found himself more interested in medieval and early modern literature:

> Whenever I read something now, I try to understand it immediately and then I try to think about how I can make it my own. I'm an artist first before anything else, and because of my commonplace book, I have found a way to make the readings important to me; I've made them meaningful in ways that I can enjoy over and over again. I will definitely be making a new commonplace book, but it will be for my personal readings. (Marc Torres, Commonplace Book Reflection)

Another student in the class, Isamar Perez, similarly used her commonplace book as a way to insert herself in our readings. Finding that she often had to study while taking care of her young son, Perez decided to frame a large portion of her commonplace book as a reflection on the role of family and motherhood. In her entry for *Beowulf*, she identified with Grendel's mother and her fierce drive to protect her child, excerpting quotes from the text that highlighted the positive qualities she saw in Grendel's mother (Figure 1).

In another entry, Perez designed a family crest (an activity I had suggested in class) and gave the page to her son for colouring. In the next page, she and her son practised their handwriting and signatures, modeling historical commonplace books that included similar practices. Perez's book therefore became more than a class assignment: it encouraged her to consider bringing together her home and school lives, and to use her perspectives as a woman and a mother to subvert the sexism inherent in texts like *Beowulf*. While such critiques are available in the scholarship about pre- and early modern texts, by arriving at these conclusions through their lived experience students learn to trust their own interpretations before seeking outside "authoritative" readings—a valuable and crucial step in the process of becoming a budding scholar.

As these examples show, decolonizing the curriculum must continuously move beyond adding BIPOC authors and history to one's syllabus: we must also decolonize our teaching by asking ourselves what kinds of knowledge we privilege and how we employ or question authority in the classroom. As Dennis Sumara argues, commonplace books can offer "generous space for interpretation" and invite an active participation in the creation of mean-

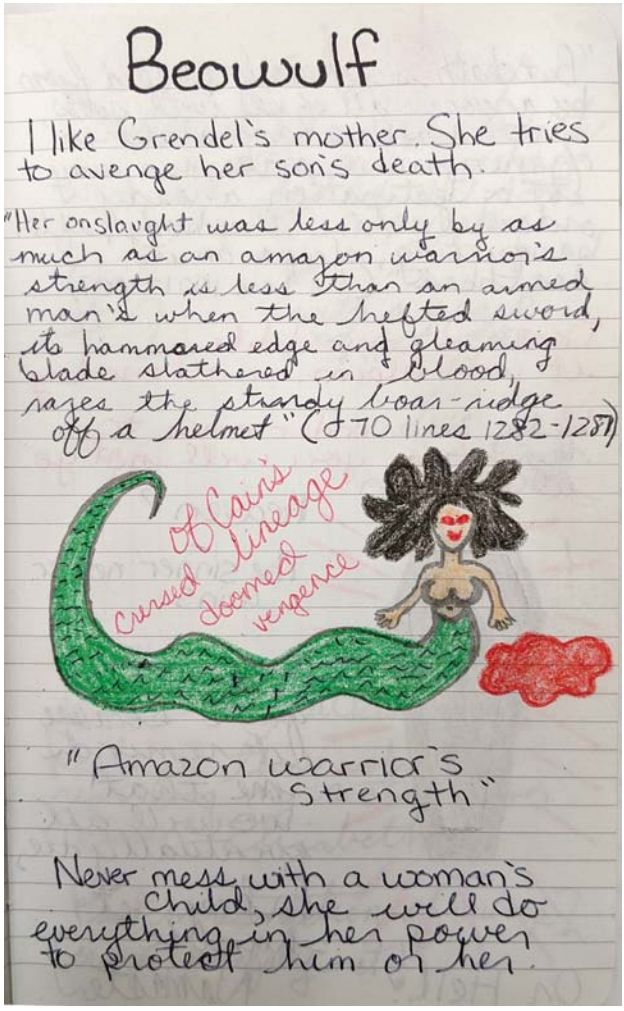

Figure 1. Isamar Perez, Commonplace Book, entry for *Beowulf*.

ing, serving "as archival sites for creative and critical interpretation."[20] By creating my own sample book alongside the class, I made my research process public and invited students to think about the wide range of texts that should belong in a conversation about the medieval and early modern periods in England and beyond. Documenting these curricular choices can give instructors an opportunity to discuss canon formation, periodization, and Eurocentrism in an honest, low-stakes way. Both students and instructors may thus be invited to consider their own role in the reception history of texts and demand more representative curricula not just in the texts they read but also in the valuing of social knowledge creation.

20 Dennis J. Sumara, "Learning to Create Insight: Literary Engagements as Purposeful Pedagogy," *Changing English* 8 (2001): 165–75 at 165, 167.

Appendix

THE COMMONPLACE BOOK ASSIGNMENT

As you will learn this semester, readers often copied and altered quotes from their reading and put them into commonplace books for easy access and remembrance. Alongside quotes, these readers would write poetry, ideas, and even recipes. We might see these as an early form of social media: they offer a place to keep ideas, to shape one's own (sometimes) public persona, and to share our experiences with our friends and peers.

Your final project for the class will gather creative and analytical reactions to our readings over the course of the entire semester. Your completed commonplace book will include **at least one entry for ten weeks' worth of readings**. How you engage with our readings will be entirely up to you, but you can find inspiration in the links shared on our course site. Your goals are to create a final project that ticks off most of Adam Smyth's list of Sixteen Traits for Commonplace Books[21] (see below) and, most importantly, shows off your critical growth throughout the term.

But what do I actually write in it?

You can and are encouraged to use this book as a journal to keep track of your readings, interests, and questions. You can copy direct **quotes** that stick out to you, **illustrate** a passage that stuck in your head, or even write original riffs or **adaptations** inspired by our readings. Maybe you want to find a **recipe** for a food from the period, or look up **places** our texts mention? You can also use your entries as a journal about your **reading habits**, e.g.: when, where, and how often did you sit down to read? How were you sitting? How was the lighting? The noise level? Did you fall asleep? Get excited? Bored?

Invention

First, you will want to decide on the **format** of your book. You need to decide whether you're going analogue (i.e. using pen and paper) or digital (using an online tool like a blog, tumblr, twitter, etc). It will be difficult to switch formats down the line, so choose wisely in regards to your comfort and creativity level.

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21 The class and I read Smyth's article in preparation for this assignment. See note 10, above.

Form a **habit**. It will be hard at first to remember to commonplace regularly. The best way to get used to this is to a) choose a format you already use and enjoy and b) always read our assignments with your commonplace book at hand. You will find that "playing catch up" and trying to create too many entries at once will not only hurt your grade but make your book look lazy and haphazard.

Copy and **analyse**. Early modern readers used their commonplace books for organization, learning, and memory. You can and are encouraged to use this book as a journal to keep track of your readings, interests, and questions. Because this book will be somewhat public, however, keep in mind that writing is often a type of **rhetorical performance**: you're trying to showcase your thoughtfulness, wit, and creativity.

Keep track of **checkpoints**. Check the schedule to see when you will be required to showcase your work and discuss it with me. Your goals for each checkpoint are:

- CP #1: Your book should exist and have at least a couple of entries.
- CP #2: You should have started thinking about recurring themes, motifs, or points of analysis.
- CP #3: You will be asked to contribute to a peer's commonplace book (what you add is up to you, but this should be a substantial contribution, not just a "great job" comment).
- CP #4: In-person office hours appointment to discuss how your project is wrapping up, plans for completion/revision, and reflection drafts.

Composition

You will be asked to turn in a short reflection draft (3 pages, roughly 700 words) upon your final checkpoint outlining and analysing the three most productive/creative/analytical entries in your commonplace book. Regardless of how many direct quotes you used throughout the book (I expect you'll have a few if you use your book to take reading notes), **your reflection must make direct reference to our readings**.

Upon submission of your completed commonplace book, you will be asked to turn in a revised and expanded version of this reflection, which will introduce your book, explain your goals (at the start, and how they evolved over time), analyse three entries in detail, and offer a conclusion. Your conclusion should offer observations about what your passages have taught you

about medieval and early modern literature and should reflect upon your reading practices and how they have changed as the semester progressed.

You're encouraged to be flexible, playful, and even (on occasion) mindless about what you include in your book. But there are a few guiding rules:

- your book should contain passages from or critical notes/questions about at least one reading from every remaining week of the term;
- at least 2 of your entries should be annotated close-readings (you can take a picture of your notes or print a fresh copy of the text to annotate and include in your book) which demonstrate that you are able to engage critically with our readings and make note of relevant literary devices, themes, and cultural issues;
- your book should show an effort to draw connections across texts and ideas, as well as trying to make sense of the values and concerns of the medieval and early modern periods as a whole;
- be creative! Showcase your originality. Don't just have written text in your book. Think about images, sounds, colours, and typography.

You can, and are encouraged to, keep adding to and revising old entries as you go and try to create "paths" across your entries (e.g. through an index, colour coding, or table of contents).

Holistic Grading Rubric

Your commonplace book will be evaluated according to Smyth's Sixteen Traits of Commonplace Books. An A-level final commonplace book will attend to:

- Critical interventions (trait #2), or your ability to interact with the texts, showcase your own voice, and demonstrate your capacity for critical thinking.
- (Dis)Order (traits #5, 6, 9), or your ability to find common threads, themes, and issues among your notes and observations, and to restructure or organize your book accordingly (this may be accomplished digitally through categories on a website, adding separate notebooks on Evernote, reordering, tagging your notebook with post-its, moving pages around in a binder, creating new boards on Pinterest, etc).
- Creative interventions/resistance (traits #7, 8, 11), or your ability to rework the texts we read to make them your own (examples include

cutting and pasting, writing poetry/text that responds to the reading; curating photos/images related to the text; illustrating narratives; making soundtracks; etc.).

- Collaboration (trait #12), or your ability to intervene in each other's work and challenge your peers. This will be done at least once this term (see our schedule) but you may do it as often as you and your classmates wish (just make sure you tag/sign your interventions).
- Materiality (trait #15), or your attention to detail in making and keeping your commonplace book. This includes thinking through design elements like the theme of your site, the balance of image, text, and original work in your Pinterest/Evernote, using colourful pens, stickies, stickers in your notebook, etc.
- Reflection (trait #14), or your ability to critically evaluate your own work. You will be asked to perform a few check-ins throughout the term and to write a longer reflection at the end of the semester to accompany your book.

ENCODING EARLY MODERN COMMONPLACE BOOKS IN THE CLASSROOM

LAURA ESTILL

EARLY MODERN COMMONPLACE books and miscellanies, those important artifacts of literary and textual culture, reflect historical tastes, attitudes, and learning practices.[1] This chapter uses the broad definition of commonplace book as a volume consisting primarily of commonplaces, that is, "well-phrased sayings that express a pearl of wisdom."[2] For centuries, readers copied passages into their notebooks: some, commonplace books, filled primarily with textual excerpts and commonplaces; others, miscellanies, filled with receipts (recipes), poems, and other textual bits and bobs. As Eric Rasmussen and Ian H. De Jong explain, "Commonplace books are rich with historical evidence, shedding light on individual readers' habits

* I'd like to thank Tara Lyons and Constance Crompton for their thoughtful suggestions on this chapter. Thanks also to John Heggelund, Bethany Radcliff, and the students in Texas A&M ENGL303 (Spring 2017) and ENGL617 (Spring 2017) for engaging pedagogical experiences.

1 For more on the importance of commonplace books and their role in understanding literary history, see Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Peter Beal, "'Notions in Garrison': The Seventeenth-Century Commonplace Book," in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Texts Society, 1993*, ed. W. Speed Hill (Binghamton: Renaissance English Texts Society, 1993), 131–47. On commonplaces and the history of thought, see Joan Marie Lechner, *Renaissance Concept of the Commonplaces* (New York: Pageant, 1962) and Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

2 Laura Estill, "Commonplacing Readers," in *Shakespeare and Textual Studies*, ed. Margaret Jane Kidnie and Sonia Massai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 149–62 at 149. Not all manuscripts described in this chapter are organized by commonplace headings, which, by Beal's definition, are an important component of commonplace books. See Peter Beal, *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology 1450–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

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of mind, the cultural permeation of different types of literature and dates of composition"; they note that "Some commonplace books were printed, but this was primarily a manuscript tradition."[3] As manuscripts, that is, handwritten documents, many commonplace books and miscellanies exist only in one copy, which can make finding and accessing these important textual objects challenging. Ongoing digitization and transcription efforts have opened new avenues for researching early modern manuscript miscellanies and commonplace books and offered an expanded corpus for our studies. This chapter explores how university students can contribute to making commonplace books and other manuscripts accessible to a public audience by transcribing and encoding their contents.

As the other chapters in this collection detail, commonplacing is a long-standing pedagogical practice;[4] indeed, many of the works collected here show the benefits of having students create their own commonplace books.[5] Reading and analysing historic commonplace books can offer a productive learning experience.[6] This chapter demonstrates how the rigorous reading practices encouraged by transcribing and encoding these manuscripts can lead to original student research on commonplace books as well as a better understanding of early modern literature and culture.

Literature students might be surprised to be asked to encode selections from a manuscript, which is why this assignment focuses on exigence: why manuscripts? why digital? why us? This scaffolded assignment encourages students to build the appropriate skillsets, from paleography to text encoding using the TEI (Text Encoding Initiative), while also fostering the criti-

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3 Eric Rasmussen and Ian H. De Jong, "A–Z of Key Terms and Concepts," in *The Arden Research Handbook of Shakespeare and Textual Studies*, ed. Lukas Erne (London: Arden, 2021), 286–319 at 293.

4 See, for instance, this volume's Introduction and the chapter by Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt.

5 Beyond the essays in this volume, see also Joanne Nystrom Janssen, "Teaching Students to Imagine Nineteenth-Century British Readers," *CEA Critic* 77 (2015): 306–12; Paula Carbone, "Using Commonplace Books to Help Students Develop Multiple Perspectives," *English Journal* 99 (2010): 63–69, which focuses on high school classes but is equally appropriate for post-secondary instruction; and Vimala Pasupathi, "The Commonplace Assignment," *The Journal of Interactive Technology & Pedagogy*, March 11, 2014, https://jitp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/the-commonplace-book-assignment/, and her reflection in this volume. See also Colleen Kennedy's detailed "Creating a Commonplace Book" assignment, available at https://docdrop.org/download_annotation_doc/Creating-a-Commonplace-Book---Kennedy-Colleen-E_-0r3r1.pdf.

6 See, for instance, Alison Harper's chapter in this volume.

cal thinking required to explicate an early modern commonplace book or to understand a digital resource. At the end of this assignment, students reflected on how digital scholarly resources are created, what kinds of questions they can ask of scholarly resources, why we transcribe and encode manuscripts, and which manuscripts should be encoded in the future. This chapter concludes by considering the stakes and ethics of publishing student encoding projects as part of a larger digital project (in this case, *DEx: A Database of Dramatic Extracts*).[7]

Transcribing, encoding, and analysing early modern commonplace books and miscellanies is, ultimately, a lot of work—but it is one kind of work we do as literary scholars. As this chapter outlines, adopting this assignment, like many new assignments, requires a great deal of instructor outlay, such as a course redesign to fit into an existing course, or, at the very least, extra preparation. The benefits are that this assignment equips students to undertake original research and make a genuine contribution to scholarship, and it helps them ask questions of the digital projects they use.

I have taught variations on this assignment in multiple formats: as a three-hour workshop for English graduate students, as final project for an undergraduate independent study, and as a midterm assignment in an undergraduate class of English majors.[8] I will briefly describe the first two classroom contexts before spending the bulk of this chapter on the undergraduate class. These three contexts demonstrate that this assignment can be used with different levels of students and within different time constraints, which, of course, will lead to different learning outcomes. To draw on Bloom's taxonomy of learning outcomes: this assignment can be used to help students achieve knowledge of new fields, to apply that knowledge (with transcription and encoding), and to evaluate and analyse texts and resources using a previously unfamiliar critical lens.

7 Laura Estill and Beatrice Montedoro, eds., *DEx: A Database of Dramatic Extracts*, Iter, dex.digitalearlymodern.com.

8 At the time I was teaching these classes, I was at a large research-intensive state school, Texas A&M University. I look forward to teaching a version of this assignment at my current school, St. Francis Xavier University (Nova Scotia, Canada), a small undergraduate-focused institution.

Encoding Manuscripts in a Range of Classes: From a Single Workshop to a Special Topics Course

The graduate workshop on encoding manuscripts was part of a class on early modern literature and culture with a focus on drama. This three-hour workshop introduced some students to encoding, and for others it built on their existing digital humanities expertise. For some students, it was a paleographical trial-by-ordeal, whereas others were confident reading early modern handwriting. In class, we began by transcribing, as a group, two commonplaces from a facsimile of London, British Library, Add MS 18044. The two couplets we transcribed were copied from Samuel Daniel's play *Philotas*. As co-editor of *DEx: A Database of Dramatic Extracts*, I am particularly interested in what parts of plays early readers and playgoers copied into their manuscripts. These two selections are of note because they are copied under the heading "Out of Daniels Phylotas" (fol. 142r); the manuscript compiler signaled them as important because of their dramatic source, unlike the other short verses he copied, which appear below more traditional headings, such as "Of Cowardize," "Of Kinges Court," and "Of vnlawfull pleasures" (all also found on fol. 142r, which students had in facsimile). For this workshop, students had not read *Philotas* beforehand, but had read other early modern plays. This was, in some cases, their first exposure to commonplace books and commonplacing, which led to some fruitful discussion about historical textual transmission, changing or contingent textual meaning, and reception studies.

After transcribing the couplets and their heading, as a class, we encoded the extracts in TEI: following the direction from students, I typed and projected our work so the whole class could see and, if they chose, follow along on their computers. After class, I was able to upload the encoding and transcription to *DEx*,[9] where it has since been searched, seen, and considered by scholars interested in the early reception of drama. For the second half of the workshop, students had the option of working on either transcribing other manuscript pages or encoding existing manuscript transcriptions, with the option of sending me their work later in the week. Most of the students continued to work on their manuscript passage after our workshop ended, and most sent me their work later that week, asking for it to be put to

9 *DEx*, https://daikatana.digitalearlymodern.com/manuscripts/?query=BLMSAdd18044.xml. Students unanimously agreed to share this in-class work and be credited as a group (and not by name) in the freely available XML on the site. When these classes took place, *DEx* was published by Iter Community, itercommunity.org.

use on *DEx* or by other students. Graduate students were not graded on their participation in this workshop; rather, the learning outcome was to introduce students to paleography and encoding, both of which could open up new potential areas of research for people about to embark on their biggest research project to date.

At the far end of the continuum from an ungraded graduate workshop were two undergraduate independent study courses, each of which was structured entirely around a given theme: "Early Modern Plays and Manuscripts" and "Encoding Early Modern English Manuscripts." Both independent studies were undertaken as a complement to paid student internships.[10] In the first independent study course on plays and manuscripts, John Heggelund read plays by Shakespeare and lesser-known playwrights as well as turning to commonplace books and miscellanies where early readers had copied selections from plays. Heggelund's final project, which included a transcription from Sancroft's miscellany, argued, "By analyzing what [Archbishop] Sancroft chose to extract from *Coriolanus*, we can infer how the historical context in which he read it affected how he interpreted it."[11] The second independent study, with Bethany Radcliff, focused less on reading drama and more on reading about text encoding and the editorial decisions made in archivally oriented digital humanities projects. Based on Radcliff's enthusiasm for manuscript encoding, we hired her to continue as a research assistant for *DEx* beyond her initial one-semester internship. In both cases, these students expressed the genuine and sustained intellectual curiosity that arises from archival research—albeit, in this case, performed with digital facsimiles. The primary learning outcomes of the graduate workshop were exposure to manuscript studies and encoding, discussing different ways of understanding early modern texts, and, as a group, starting to apply these concepts; whereas by the end of an in-depth semester of work, undergraduate independent study students applied their skills to solve problems and generated original research.

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10 I would like to thank the Texas A&M English department for the University Professional Research Experience Program (UPREP) paid internship and the opportunities it affords. I met with UPREP students weekly to discuss the internship and independent study; they were paid for their internship work (checking transcriptions from early modern print sources or encoding manuscripts) and received course credit with the independent study for gaining new skills, writing reflections, and undertaking critical analyses beyond the paid internship.

11 All student work is cited with permission of the student; all students are named by permission.

Encoding Manuscripts as an Assignment in the Undergraduate Class: Transcription, Encoding, Reflection

It seems natural that graduate students will be enthusiastic learners, as will independent study students who help co-design their course and syllabus. But how and why should we introduce concepts like transcription and encoding to the broader audience of undergraduate students, some of whom might have signed up for the class because it is the only one that fits in their schedule? I debuted the "Transcribing and Encoding Commonplace Books" assignment in an undergraduate class called "Approaches to English Studies" that was required of all English majors. For our class, the theme was "How to Judge a Book By Its Cover," that is, a consideration of how the meanings of a given work change depending on paratexts and contexts. The catalogue description simply ran, "A writing intensive exploration of the methodologies and major topics of English studies."[12] With a broad mandate and centuries of literary approaches to explore, the conjunction of old (commonplace books and miscellanies) and new (encoding) seemed particularly appropriate.

There were three major components to this assignment: transcription (initial and final); encoding and metadata; and reflection. The course was designed around a series of small assignments. Leading up to this larger midterm assignment of transcription-encoding-reflection, students read a cluster of essays on why manuscript studies are important,[13] spent two hours outside of class learning paleography from online resources, and wrote a brief response about their thoughts on being introduced to manuscript studies and paleography (see Appendix B for an overview of the work leading up to the assignment and Appendix C for the paleography response prompt). In class, we brainstormed the possibilities afforded by manuscript research across all historical periods and turned to two of Emily Dickinson's poems written on envelopes for an example of how medium (manuscript) affects meaning. After this training and discussion, students undertook the first component of the commonplace book assignment, the initial transcription: each transcribed a single page of manuscript on their own.

While I have, in the past, had honours students successfully transcribe manuscript materials from Texas A&M's Cushing Memorial Library and Archives, for this project, I wanted students to be able to contribute to *DEx:*

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12 Texas A&M University Undergraduate Course Catalog, "ENGL 303," catalog.tamu.edu/undergraduate/course-descriptions/engl/.

13 Peter Beal, Margaret J. M. Ezell, Grace Ioppolo, Harold Love, and Steven W. May, "The Future of Renaissance Manuscript Studies," *Shakespeare Studies* 32 (2004): 49–80.

A Database of Dramatic Extracts, which limited my selection to seventeenth-century manuscripts wherein someone had copied a line from a play. Versions of this "Transcribing and Encoding Commonplace Books" assignment can be done at any institution, regardless of the proximity to special collections, precisely because of the ongoing digitization efforts that create publicly-accessible facsimiles. These projects are often driven by libraries and archives themselves; and while they will do not proclaim themselves as "commonplace book" digitization projects, they often include commonplace books as some of manuscripts they have digitized (see Appendix A for a list of sites with open access facsimiles). While some online projects already offer transcriptions of their digitized manuscripts, the majority, as yet, do not. Transcribing parts of an early modern manuscript is one way students can make a genuine contribution to current scholarship, as evidenced by the current vogue for transcribathons, for instance, by EMPOP, Early Modern Poetry Online Project, discussed by Joshua Eckhardt in this volume.

Working with digitized manuscripts rather than originals offers both opportunities and challenges. Some digitization projects, such as *British Literary Manuscripts Online* (*BLMO*) can provide hard-to-read facsimiles.[14] Other projects, such as the *Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project*, take particular care in digitizing the original manuscript object with high-quality images.[15] Still other projects, such as *Early Modern Manuscripts Online* and *Bess of Hardwick's Letters*, offer both facsimiles and transcriptions, to make the text machine-readable, searchable, and legible to readers without paleographic training.[16] While digitized manuscripts with transcriptions are useful for paleographic training and pivotal for scholarly searches, they also make student transcription projects redundant. In this case, I wanted students to have a true exigence for their transcriptions.

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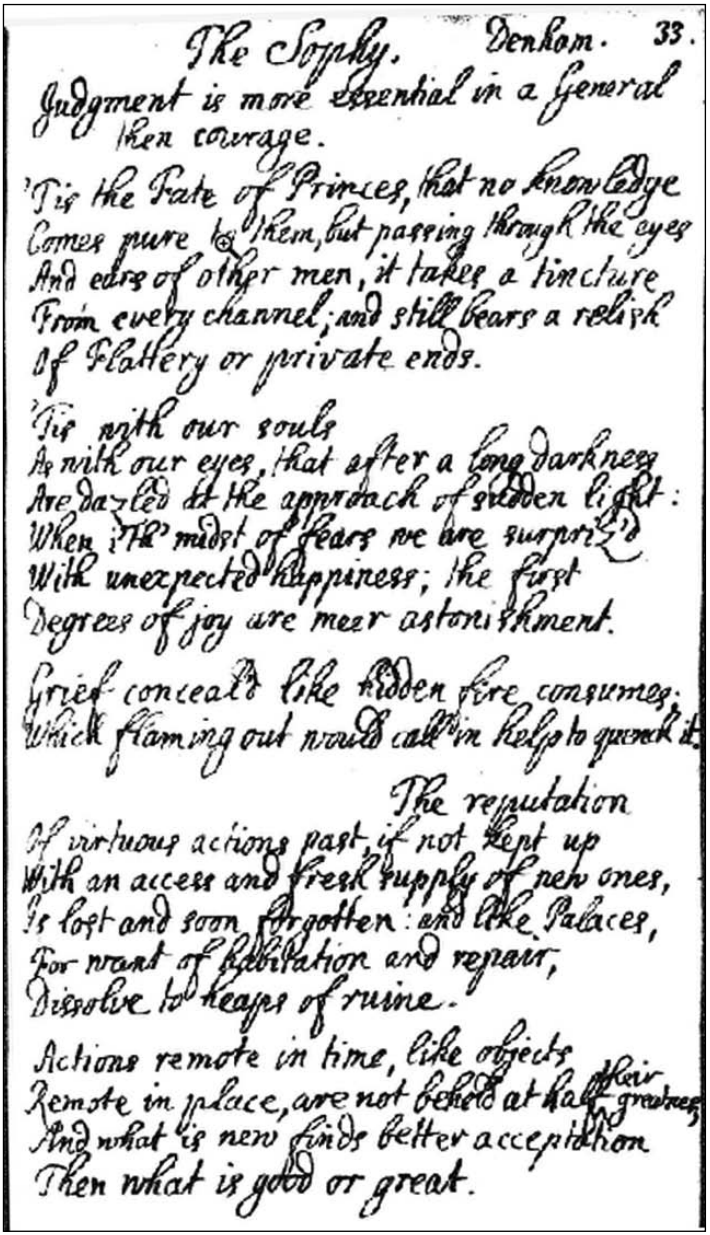
14 In this case, *BLMO* digitizes existing low-quality microfilm images. For an extended discussion of the advantages and drawbacks of *British Literary Manuscripts Online*, see Laura Estill and Andie Silva, "Storing and Accessing Knowledge: Digital Tools for the Study of Early Modern Drama," in *Shakespeare's Language in Digital Media: Old Words, New Tools*, ed. Janelle Jenstad, Mark Kaethler, and Jennifer Roberts-Smith (London: Routledge, 2018), 131–43, esp. 135–37. *British Literary Manuscripts Online*, Gale-Cengage, paywalled. Information here: gale.com/primary-sources/british-literary-manuscripts-online.

15 See Grace Ioppolo, Introduction to the *Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project* catalogue, for a description of their photography practices: henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/catalogue/catalogue/.

16 *Early Modern Manuscripts Online*, Folger Shakespeare Library, emmo.folger.edu; *Bess of Hardwick's Letters*, Alison Wiggins, project leader, bessofhardwick.org.


The Sophy. Denham. 33.

Judgment is more essential in a General
then courage.

'Tis the Fate of Princes, that no knowledge
Comes pure to them, but passing through the eyes
And ears of other men, it takes a tincture
From every channel; and still bears a relish
Of Flattery or private ends.

'Tis with our souls
As with our eyes, that after a long darkness
Are dazled at the approach of sudden light:
When in the midst of fears we are surpriz'd
With unexpected happiness; the first
Degrees of joy are meer astonishment.

Grief conceal'd like hidden fire consumes;
Which flaming out would call in help to quench it.

The reputation
Of virtuous actions past, if not kept up
With an access and fresh supply of new ones,
Is lost and soon forgotten: and like Palaces,
For want of habitation and repair,
Dissolve to heaps of ruine.

Actions remote in time, like objects
Remote in place, are not beheld at half their greatness;
And what is new finds better acception
Then what is good or great.

Figure 2. Folger MS V.a.226, vol. 1, fol. 33r; facsimile from *British Literary Manuscripts Online*, which was used by my students. Note that this is not an image of the original, but rather, an image of the facsimile my students used, which was itself digitized from microfilm.

Original manuscript in the Folger Shakespeare Library. Microfilmed by Harvester Microform by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library; microfilm digitized by British Literary Manuscripts Online by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library. With grateful thanks to the Folger Shakespeare Library for their permission to share this image again in this volume. Some additional page images from this volume can be found on luna.folger.edu.

Few lower-division or introductory undergraduate courses will have vast amounts of time to devote to paleography training and transcription practices. For the purpose of this assignment, then, I was bound not only by the scope of the project (seventeenth-century English manuscripts containing dramatic extracts), but also by newly acquired abilities of my students to read and decipher handwritten documents. In the end, I chose a manuscript written in mid-seventeenth century italic script, with letterforms familiar to undergraduates from modern cursive, Washington, DC, Folger Shakespeare, Library, MS V.a.226 (see Figure 2).[17] This simple sentence belies the amount of groundwork that it took to find the ideal manuscript for this exercise: in the future, I can imagine assigning students sections from multiple manuscripts or transcribing manuscripts that relate to another digital project. Indeed, this assignment would work well with manuscripts from different time periods or by different writers. Students worked with a facsimile, a page of which is reproduced here (Figure 2).[18] After their brief experiments with paleographical training that included secretary hand and scribal abbreviations, students expressed their pleasure at working with a manuscript as relatively straightforward as Folger MS V.a.226.

The genre of commonplace books themselves can also help students with transcription: commonplaces are, by their nature, taken from other sources, although they are often changed as they are copied or recopied. The pages my students transcribed from Folger MS V.a.226 were all taken from John Denham's play, *The Sophy* (1642). I provided my students with a facsimile of the first printing of Denham's play, taken from *Early English Books Online*, another site comprising digitized microfilm facsimiles. Since my institution does not subscribe to *Early English Books Online*, in the future, I will turn to the EEBO–Text Creation Partnership in order to give my students access to transcriptions of printed versions of texts that were often used in manuscript compilation.[19] And though, of course, manuscripts were often copied from other manuscripts or from oral or memorized text, they were also at

17 Catalogue description from the Folger Shakespeare Library: hamnet.folger.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?BBID=230941; in the new Miranda catalogue, miranda.folger.edu/detail/dramatic-miscellany-with-extracts-from-verse-plays-by-dryden-orrery-and-others/cb1a4ce3-5969-4bc7-9cab-e8d3d36a812d.

18 An untranscribed facsimile of this manuscript is available through the *British Literary Manuscripts Online* database, a subscription database. See Appendix A for open access options for other manuscript commonplace books.

19 Denham's *The Sophy* is available through Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership (EEBO-TCP), name.umdl.umich.edu/A35657.0001.001.

times copied from print, which can give students a baseline for comparing their transcription. In the case of Folger MS V.a.226, the compiler (William Deedes) was relatively faithful to his source-text, which was clearly identifiable as a full-text version of the play—likely the printed 1642 version. Other manuscript compilers made broader changes to what they copied, tweaking words and phrases to craft their source into a self-contained couplet or sentence, or for reasons of personal taste.[20]

I was first introduced to the pedagogical technique of fill-in-the-blank paleography in graduate school: in Alexandra Gillespie's "Medieval Vernacular Book" course (University of Toronto), we were asked to transcribe a poem from a photocopy of a medieval manuscript that was almost too faint to read. I puzzled my way through as much as I could before turning to Google and finding a digital copy. In class, when Professor Gillespie asked us who had "cheated" by looking online, I was ashamed of myself—that is, until she pointed out that the best way to learn was to use all possible sources of information available. While it is true that giving students a facsimile of a printed text for comparison can lead them to jump to paleographical conclusions, it is exactly those moments that can lead to valuable moments of discussion and interpretation.

Even though Folger MS V.a.226 was, by reason of its handwriting and content, an easier transcription than many, for this class, we followed the best practice of having students create duplicate transcriptions and then compare them. Two students transcribed each page (in one case, three students), and then brought their transcriptions to class and compared them in order to create the second component of the assignment, the final transcription. Double-keying, that is, having two people transcribe the same text, can greatly reduce transcription errors.[21] Having students double-key is valu-

20 For more on this, see Laura Estill, *Dramatic Extracts in Seventeenth-Century English Manuscripts: Watching, Reading, Changing Plays* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2015). For instance, in BL Add MS 18044 (mentioned above), the compiler changed "Now good my Lord, conform you to the rest" to "Lett all wise men conforme them to thir rest" (fol. 142v) making a moment of direct address in Daniel's *Philotas* more universally applicable.

21 For more on this practice, see Susanne Haaf, Frank Wiegand, and Alexander Geyken, "Measuring the Correctness of Double Keying: Error Classification and Quality Control in a Large Corpus of TEI-annotated Historical Text," *JTEI: Journal of the Text Encoding Initiative* 4 (2013), https://journals.openedition.org/jtei/739. Notably, the EEBO-TCP texts are double-keyed (as described here: https://search.lib.umich.edu/databases/record/8975); the English Broadside Ballad Archive also uses double-keying; see ebba.english.ucsb.edu/page/facsimile-transcriptions.

able because it makes the work they create publishable and also gives them the opportunity to learn from each other as they compare their work. For projects that use double-keyed (or even triple-keyed) transcriptions, usually a computer compares the transcribed texts, finds any variants, and then has an expert assess any discrepancies and correct the transcription. For our scaled down version of this practice, students compared their transcription with a peer using Microsoft Word's "Compare Documents" function, I consulted on any challenging interpretations, and I checked the transcriptions once finalized by the students.[22] Most students achieved consensus about their transcriptions, and I was asked to consult on the familiar "is that a comma or an inkblot?" questions.

The second part of the assignment was for students to encode their finalized transcriptions using TEI (the Text Encoding Initiative) and to provide the correct metadata.[23] Having taught TEI previously as an instructor at the Digital Humanities Summer Institute and in programming4humanists, I cautiously devoted three 75-minute classes to installing software, learning basic encoding, and ensuring students understood how to interpret the encoding guidelines.[24] This proved ample time; most students completed their encoding entirely within class time and some used this time to work on their reflection. Rather than having students encode the entire page they transcribed, each student encoded half of their final transcription, that is,

22 I also gave my students the options of using Juxta to compare their texts (juxtasoftware.org). The online Juxta Commons is now down permanently and as of 2023 the website is no longer up. An archived version of the page can be found at the Internet Archive, https://web.archive.org/web/20201127061212/https://juxtasoftware.org/download/.

23 For more on teaching with TEI in humanities classes, see Mackenzie Brooks, "Teaching TEI to Undergraduates: A Case Study in Digital Humanities Curriculum," *College and Undergraduate Libraries* 24 (2017): 467–81; Kate Singer, "Digital Close Reading: TEI for Teaching Poetic Vocabularies," *The Journal of Interactive Technology & Pedagogy* May 15, 2013. https://jitp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/digital-close-reading-tei-for-teaching-poetic-vocabularies/; and Maura Ives, Victor Del Hierro, Bailey Kelsey, Laura Catherine Smith, and Christina Sumners, "Encoding the Discipline: English Graduate Student Reflections on Working with TEI," *JTEI: Journal of the Text Encoding Initiative* 6 (2013), https://journals.openedition.org/jtei/882. See also Stella Dee's overview, "Learning the TEI in a Digital Environment," *JTEI: Journal of the Text Encoding Initiative* 7 (2014), https://journals.openedition.org/jtei/968, and Heather McAlpine, "Digital Meters: Using Text Encoding to Teach Literature in the Undergraduate Classroom," conference presentation, Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations—Pedagogy Special Interest Group conference, University of Victoria, June 8, 2019.

24 Digital Humanities Summer Institute (DHSI), dhsi.org; Programming4Humanists, http://programming4humanists.tamu.edu.

between 12–20 lines of text. The goal of this assignment wasn't to create vast amounts of transcribed and encoded texts: it was to learn how to transcribe and encode. Although there has been a push for archivists to have "More Product, Less Process" (MPLP),[25] for students, the reverse is true. Applying new skills (transcription, encoding) and experimenting with new heuristics (commonplacing, textual studies, reader response) requires an emphasis on process.

Our first encoding class went as I expected: I offered a brief introduction to XML (eXtensible Markup Language, of which TEI is a subset) and then we undertook any troubleshooting necessary. Before class, students read two primers about why scholars produce online texts using TEI and introducing them to how TEI works.[26] Some students in the class were already familiar with pointy brackets from HTML (HyperText Markup Language), a different subset of XML used to create webpages; for others, it was a new experience. Although students had been asked to install oXygen (an XML editor, among other things) on their computers before class,[27] we spent necessary class-time troubleshooting to get everyone up and running. After the initial class period that introduced basic concepts of TEI and got everyone up to speed on oXygen, the second class period was spent focusing on the specifics of encoding in TEI and the encoding principles used for *DEx: A Database of Dramatic Extracts*. The third class was for hands-on work with instructor guidance, which is when most folks completed encoding their section of the commonplace book and many started working on the reflection.

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25 Mark A Greene and Dennis Meissner, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing" *The American Archivist* 68 (2005): 208–63.

26 Women Writers Project, "What is the TEI?" wwp.northeastern.edu/outreach/seminars/tei.html; TEI@Oxford, "Getting Started Using TEI," Chapters 1 and 2, which is no longer live but available through the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine: https://web.archive.org/web/20180706115042/tei.oucs.ox.ac.uk/GettingStarted/html/index.html.

27 I would like to thank Texas A&M's IDHMC, the Initiative for Digital Humanities, Media, and Culture (now CoDHR, the Center of Digital Humanities Research, pronounced coder) for providing oXygen licenses for my class. Another freely available XML editor that could be used in the classroom is Atom. Thanks also to Texas A&M's Department of English for having laptops available for students. These class sessions could also be taught in a computer lab, ideally with oXygen or another XML editor preinstalled. oXygen also has a trial academic license that could be used for an assignment like this.

Encoding is editing; it requires analysis and decision making.[28] Because this assignment was introductory, students were not asked to create their own editorial models and frameworks, but they were asked to understand existing choices. In the particular course I'm describing, this consideration of existing encoding decisions related directly to previous assignments where they had been asked to evaluate the paratexts of print scholarly edition and an online scholarly edition.[29] For students in an introductory undergraduate class, learning about the decisions that had been made in order for a text to be presented—from spelling normalization to copytexts to editorial apparatus—can be a valuable foundational skill. Indeed, asking students to reflect on existing digital projects, and, in this case, an in-progress digital project, raises larger questions of what is edited and/or encoded in the first place, which, in turn, leads to discussions about canon and access.

In the end, students handed in their transcription (initial and final), encoding, and a brief reflection on the process of transcribing and encoding a manuscript commonplace book. Their reflections reveal what they learned from this assignment (see Appendix D for the reflection prompt). Some students pronounced platitudes that might seem like old hat, such as "Different scholars have different goals for texts"—yet, this realization is actually quite important, and one that is appropriate for an undergraduate student.

Some students reflected on the value of manuscript studies and how digitization affects access: "The field of manuscript studies is an incredibly important branch of literary studies, and the work done by manuscript scholars is constantly adding to and changing the vast bank of information that can be accessed by the internet. Today, students and teachers from all

28 For more on encoding as editing, see Rebecca Niles and Mike Poston, "Re-modeling the Edition: Creating the Corpus of Folger Digital Texts," in *Early Modern Studies after the Digital Turn*, ed. Laura Estill, Diane Jakacki, and Michael Ullyot (Toronto: Iter Press and Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2016), 117–44; and Julia Flanders, "Data and Wisdom: Electronic Editing and the Quantification of Knowledge," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 24 (April 2009): 53–62. Editing is, indeed, a formal data model with pre-digital roots: see Julia Flanders and Fotis Jannidis, eds, *The Shape of Data in Digital Humanities: Modeling Texts and Text-based Resources* (New York: Routledge, 2019), esp. their introduction, "Data Modeling in a Digital Humanities Context" (3–25) and C. M. Sperberg-McQueen, "Playing for Keeps: The Role of Modeling in the Humanities" (285–310).

29 In this case, they each had to bring in a different edition of Shakespeare's *Henry V* for discussion; they all had to read James Mardock's print edition (Toronto: Broadview-Internet Shakespeare Editions, 2014); and everyone also read Mardock's digital edition and explored the paratexts available online (Internet Shakespeare Editions, internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/Texts/H5/)

over the world can look at archaic documents never before available for casual access." Another student noted the importance of contributing to a project that encoded manuscripts: "Furthering this digitization of literature and manuscripts ensures that the research done on them stays relevant meaning the texts themselves stay relevant." In short, the students caught "Archive Fever." This adaptation of the Derridean term is particularly apt to describe the excitement students express at understanding and contributing to digital archives, as it relates to the themes in Derrida's essay, such as the importance of electronic media to storing, accessing, and understanding data and knowledge.[30] It seems overdramatic when a student suggests that "text encoding allows the invaluable work done by scholars to be distributed across the internet, forever changing the way we as humans examine the world around us"—yet it parallels Derrida's claim that email "is on the way to transforming the entire public and private sphere of humanity."[31]

As well as the grandiose, and dare I say, unconsciously Derridean claims made by some students, other students reflected on the process of learning to encode: the time and effort needed, the attention to detail required, the challenges for humanities students. Every student who commented on the amount and type of work, however, also commented on its value: "While it may take some practice to learn how to use the system, the work is certainly worth the rewards that will inevitably follow." One student echoed one of our earlier readings by Matthew Kirschenbaum about the role of digital humanities in English Departments[32]: "It [TEI] can be difficult until one finally gets used to the code, but I found it interesting and a useful tool in English." And one student even expressed the desire to learn more about encoding in order to transcribe additional texts.

Students as Collaborators

Student enthusiasm about manuscript transcription and encoding is gratifying, but also raises ethical concerns: what should you do when a student volunteers to undertake unpaid labour for a faculty project? Or, to ask an even more germane question: what are the stakes and ethics of asking students to work on published (or "published," as the case may be) digital humanities

30 Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever," translated by Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics* 25 (1995): 9–63.

31 Derrida, "Archive Fever," 17.

32 Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, "What is Digital Humanities and What's It Doing in English Departments?" *ADE Bulletin* 150 (2010): 1–7.

projects? Spencer D. C. Keralis forcefully contends that "Under the rationale of promoting skills building and in-class collaboration, the faculty essentially get the benefit of free labour on their projects."[33] Keralis excoriates faculty who "provide just enough training in code, content management, and style sheets for students to contribute some basic programming, write content for blogs and wikis, transcribe manuscripts and primary source documents, or develop visualizations and design for faculty projects."[34] To move towards solving these quandaries, Keralis recommends adhering to the Student Collaborators' Bill of Rights, which addresses key concerns like ensuring students are credited fairly.[35] Perhaps most importantly, the Student Collaborators' Bill of Rights declares that "course credit is generally not sufficient 'payment' for students' time, since courses are designed to provide students with learning experiences." When designing an assignment, particularly one related to transcription and encoding, it is important to design an assignment where students are, indeed, learning, and not simply undertaking unpaid labour (or, as Keralis insightfully notes, labour for which they are often accruing debt as they pay their tuition[36]). And while these criticisms are often voiced in relation to digital humanities projects, the ethical concerns certainly apply every time a student contributes to a faculty project.

In the assignment outlined here, students learned how to undertake primary research and get a taste for advanced research in the humanities. This assignment also introduced them to questions of online access, textual studies and representation, and canonicity. The final products the students created as a class were small, but credited to their name if desired as well as to the entire class.[37] I encouraged students to put this experience on their

33 Spencer D. C. Keralis, "Disrupting Labour in the Digital Humanities; or The Classroom is Not Your Crowd," in *Disrupting the Digital Humanities*, ed. Dorothy Kim and Jesse Stommel (New York: Punctum, 2018), 273–94 at 278.

34 Keralis, "Disrupting Labour," 277.

35 Haley Di Pressi, Stephanie Gorman, Miriam Posner, Raphael Sasayama, and Tori Schmitt, "A Student Collaborator's Bill of Rights," UCLA Digital Humanities Program, humtech.ucla.edu/news/a-student-collaborators-bill-of-rights/. See also Katrina Anderson, Lindsey Bannister, Janey Dodd, Deanna Fong, Michelle Levy, and Lindsey Seatter, "Student Labour and Training in the Digital Humanities," *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 10 (2016): digitalhumanities.org:8081/dhq/vol/10/1/000233/000233.html.

36 Keralis, "Disrupting Labour," 278.

37 See Appendix D for the assignment prompt, where students were asked if they wanted their names shared. Their names appear in the TEI-XML files they

résumés. The Student Collaborators' Bill of Rights envisions students undertaking internships for which they are offered course credit, but it does not directly address the practice of having students undertake small in-class projects such as the one described in this chapter. The Student Collaborators' Bill of Rights suggests that if students are offered course credit for work on a project, they should receive "a high level of mentorship." I would add to this that one way to gauge if an in-class transcription or encoding assignment is ethical is to consider the amount of time spent on process versus product. For instance, in this assignment there was much more emphasis on process (including the written reflection) than product: in the end, students submitted encoding for just half a manuscript page, whereas paid student research assistants who have worked on this project contribute significantly more based on an afternoon's work.

In the end, it certainly would have been faster for me to transcribe and encode these lines of text myself and have students write a traditional midterm exam or midterm essay. I could, similarly, have asked students to undertake reduplicative and not publishable work by asking them to produce transcriptions of already-transcribed manuscripts or by encoding already-encoded manuscripts, both of which could be graded by a computer. Although this is hardly a revelatory statement, it bears repeating: it is far more work for an instructor to support students as they create entirely new materials for dissemination to an academic audience. In this case, students were excited that they were not simply producing busy-work and were making a genuine contribution: they wanted to contribute to pushing the boundaries of knowledge forward even if just by providing one half-page manuscript transcription. I contend that by excluding students from our research projects altogether, we do both them and the field a disservice: we undervalue their potential and deny the expertise they would gain through apprenticeship. Undoubtedly, however, we must ensure fair practices that prioritize student learning when we engage them in faculty research projects.

In future courses, I will teach variations of this assignment because I will customize it based on the different commonplace books and miscellanies for each class. For instance, I would have loved to have students read all of Denham's *The Sophy* and analyse why William Deedes copied the parts of

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created, which are available at the "Download TEI" button: https://daikatana.digitalearlymodern.com/manuscripts/?query=FolgerMSVa226_vol2.xml. Students who worked on the project as paid research assistants contributed far more and are credited on the Project's "About" page.

the play he did, but that seemed beyond the scope of this class. In a course based on many short assignments, I would like to experiment with having students create their own commonplace books while also analysing existing historical commonplace books, as described by Gabrielle Dean.[38] Furthermore, I will also undertake versions of this assignment when students do not directly encode texts, but rather use online tools like 18thConnect's TypeWright or TAPAS: The TEI Archiving, Publishing, and Access Service.[39]

I look forward to continuing to incorporate both manuscript studies and text encoding into my classes. Although they might seem to be disparate scholarly fields (except in the very small subset of manuscript encoding described here), both manuscript studies and encoding highlight the importance of how texts are created, disseminated, and interpreted, which is foundational to humanities research. Ultimately, encoding selections from a commonplace book can introduce students to archival research, foster awareness of editorial choices and how texts are (re-)mediated, encourage thinking beyond canonical authors, and raise questions of digital access and how to undertake literary studies in the twenty-first century.

38 Gabrielle Dean, "Teaching by the Book: The Culture of Reading in the George Peabody Library," in *Past or Portal?: Enhancing Undergraduate Learning Through Special Collections and Archives*, ed. Eleanor Mitchell, Peggy Seiden, and Suzy Taraba (Chicago: Association of College & Research Libraries, 2012), 12–23.

39 TypeWright, 18thconnect.org/typewright/documents; TAPAS, tapasproject.org.

Appendix A

SELECTED OPEN-ACCESS ONLINE FACSIMILES OF EARLY MODERN ENGLISH COMMONPLACE BOOKS

ACCORDING TO PETER Beal's *Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology*, commonplace books are, by strictest definition, organized according to subject headings;[40] commonplaces, however, can also be found in other manuscripts such as florilegia and miscellanies. Not all of the projects listed below use the strict definition of commonplace book, which can be useful because manuscript miscellanies are also ideal for many of the projects described in this volume.

You can find additional manuscript commonplace books by searching the sites described in Estill and Levy, "Evaluating Digital Remediations of Women's Manuscripts," *Digital Studies/Champ numérique* 6 (2015): www.digitalstudies.org/articles/10.16995/dscn.12/. See also Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt's annotated bibliography in this volume. The list below is not meant to be exhaustive. For some of the digital archives below, the quickest way to narrow results is to search "commonplace(s)." You can often narrow by date or language.

British Library Digitized Manuscripts, www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Default.aspx

Cambridge Digital Library, https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/
This includes the manuscripts previously published online in Cambridge's now-defunct *Scriptorium*

Digital Scriptorium, www.digital-scriptorium.org

Folger Luna, https://luna.folger.edu
This includes manuscripts that have not yet been transcribed for *Early Modern Manuscripts Online*

National Library of Wales Digital Gallery, www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/early-modern-period/

Penn in Hand: Selected Manuscripts, http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/medren/index.html

Wellcome Library Digital Collections, https://wellcomelibrary.org/collections/browse/

Yale Digital Content, http://discover.odai.yale.edu/ydc/

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40 Beal, *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology*.

Appendix B

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE AND DESIGN

THE SCHEDULE OUTLINED below was implemented in a class with 75-minute periods. All readings are cited in footnotes above. "Short Assignments" were evaluated separately from the "Transcribing and Encoding Commonplace Books" assignment.

Preliminary Classes

These classes weren't directly devoted to the assignment but offered foundational concepts for the assignment.

Scholarly Editions

Short assignment: evaluation of scholarly edition one-page chart

Reading: any edition of *Henry V* beyond our required textbook

Digital Editions

Short assignment: evaluation of scholarly edition one-page chart

Reading: *Internet Shakespeare Editions Henry V* ed. Mardock

Introduction to Digital Humanities

Reading: Kirschenbaum, "What is Digital Humanities and What's It Doing in English Departments?"

Masterclass: Distant Reading and the Digital Humanities

Guest class by Rebecca Kempe offered in Texas A&M's Humanities Visualization Space (CoDHR: Center of Digital Humanities Research)

Paratexts and Literary Publications

Short assignment: description of paratexts in a non-scholarly literary book

Class Periods devoted to Transcribing and Encoding

Manuscripts and Paleography

Short assignment: Paleography Exercise and Reflection (see Appendix C)

Reading: Beal et al, "The Future of Renaissance Manuscript Studies"

In class: Emily Dickinson's poetry[41]

Introduction to oXygen and Text Encoding

Before class: install oXygen and explore *DEx*

Reading: Women Writers Project, "What is the TEI?"

Reading: TEI@Oxford, "Getting Started"

Text Encoding

(half class period): Encoding a sample poem together

Hands-On Workshop

41 This class relied heavily on materials from the Dickinson Electronic Archives (emilydickinson.org) and the Emily Dickinson Archive (edickinson.org).

Appendix C[42]

PALEOGRAPHY RESPONSE PROMPT

- National Archives Paleography (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/)
- English Handwriting 1500–1700: An Online Course (Cambridge University; www.english.cam.ac.uk/ceres/ehoc/)
- English Handwriting: An Online Course (Cambridge University Scriptorium; [now defunct][43])

Choosing from the above online courses [linked on course website], pick a handful of lessons to complete. Give yourself at least two hours (ideally, broken up into two one-hour chunks) to complete the online lessons. Write a 200–400-word response about the experience of learning to read handwritten documents. Reflect on how you could use manuscripts in your research or what manuscripts might be understudied in your field of research. Append a bullet-point list of some of the kinds of documents that might be relevant to your field of study and research interests.

It will be particularly useful for you to complete the readings before writing your response.

42 Appendices C and D offer examples of prompts that were part of a series of short reflections over the semester. These reflections were graded on thoughtful engagement with the materials, which means that, in this case, students were not graded on paleographical proficiency.

43 For a website linking to the component parts of Scriptorium, see cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/scriptorium.

Appendix D

REFLECTION PROMPT

Write a 300–500-word reflection on the work it takes to create a scholarly resource. Consider:

- What do you need to know about a search engine or scholarly tool in order to effectively use it?
- Are there tools that you use for your undergraduate research that you will use differently?
- Why is TEI the standard for scholarly editing and how does it change what we can do with digital texts?
- What texts should be encoded? (You might not be able to cover all of this, but these are ideas of directions you can go.)

At the top of your reflection, please include this note: I [would like]/[would not like] to be credited in the official XML document for *DEx: A Database of Dramatic Extracts.*

OPPORTUNITIES WITH OMEKA
COMMONPLACING THE EARLY TUDOR READING EXPERIENCE

ALISON HARPER

COMMONPLACING IS A historically based method of reading and re-appropriating texts that was common in the Middle Ages and Early Modern period but continued into later centuries and is also practised today in largely digital formats. The type that I use here is one of the broadest; simply "the unstructured compilation of verse and prose passages."[1] It has been more rigidly defined and understood in very different ways, as the specific practices of commonplacing changed with the changing technology of the book. The increased access to paper, the gradual shift from manuscript to print and the evolution of a large-scale industry in creating and disseminating books to the general public—all of these changes affected the way commonplacing was used.[2] As a teaching method, the great advantages of

1 Victoria E. Burke, "Recent Studies in Commonplace Books," *Recent Studies in the English Renaissance* 43 (2013): 153–77 at 153.

2 Often used in the early Tudor period as a classroom tool, it became in subsequent centuries more wholly a tool to aid memory; in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the practice focused on excerpting small pieces of larger texts as a way of remembering the whole, thereby "reducing vast amounts of knowledge to a manageable form"; Lucia Dacome, "Noting the Mind: Commonplace Books and the Pursuit of the Self in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65 (2004): 603–25 at 603–4. Later the practice became more focused on collecting common sayings, proverbs and aphorisms and gained a reputation for being dull and platitudinous, Adam Smyth, "Commonplace Book Culture: A List of Sixteen Traits," in *Women and Writing c. 1340–c. 1650: The Domestication of Print Culture*, ed. Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Phillipa Hardman (Woodbridge York Medieval Press, 2010), 90–110 at 109. Today, there are numerous digital platforms that market themselves as online commonplace books, such as Evernote and Notion. But the old paper format is still in use: in March of 2022, Charley Locke wrote an article in the New York Times titled "Commonplace Books are Like a Diary Without the Risk of Annoying Yourself" and discussed the author's long-term habit of using a notebook to jot down beloved fragments of literature. *New York Times* March 22, 2022, www.nytimes.com/2022/03/22/magazine/commonplace-books-recommendation.html.

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commonplacing are in both the variety of texts which are introduced to the student, and the organizational structure imposed on them. Teachers can build on this basic structure when constructing a class syllabus, and, I argue, can most effectively do this using a digital platform such as Omeka. A fairly simple content management system, Omeka is used to store digital versions of artifacts such as texts and images, allowing users to curate thematically related collections. It was first conceived and used as a tool for displaying museum objects in collections to anyone with access to the internet. Originally described as a "small history museum," it has long been open to curators, enthusiasts, teachers, and students as a means of collecting and showcasing interesting, rare, and beautiful items—not simply to be stored as in a database, but actively exhibited in dynamic and exciting ways.[3] It requires the user to consider the structural metadata of every object before publishing online, and therefore is frequently used as a teaching tool in college classrooms. This chapter will explore how the platform can be used to map out commonplace books: late medieval and early modern manuscripts composed of many varied pieces of texts. Omeka lets the user treat every text both as a unique Item, and as part of a group, contained together with the Collection function.[4] Consequently, it is not so daunting for students to try and apprehend hundreds of texts at once, and understand the historical compilation of the material, when using Omeka's digital tools.

Omeka Literature Review

Teachers and scholars have discussed at length how digital tools like Omeka can become integral parts of the academic classroom. Part of this conversation turns on the question of metadata and the extent to which it can be utilized by students or non-experts in a classroom setting. Jane Zhang and Dayne Mauney have discussed the ways in which increasing digitization of content has affected archival practice and the need for adapting archival descriptions systems to more consistently use standard digital object meta-

3 Tom, "Beyond the Museum." Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media. 2007. Accessed February 2019, https://omeka.org/news/2007/11/19/beyond-the-museum/.

4 'Item' refers to the artifacts that are uploaded to the site, 'Collection' refers to the grouping of Items in a digital 'box' and 'Exhibit' refers to a guided tour through chosen Items that may come from a number of Collections. I will be using these terms throughout the chapter.

data.[5] On the other hand, Lincoln Mullen, assessing the value of metadata as a teaching tool, argues that the exercise of creating new, nonstandard metadata vocabularies is a valuable pedagogical activity as his students "learned to be suspicious of categories" but also to "deploy their categories to learn new things anyway."[6] Even more daringly, Edward Benoit III suggests that traditional metadata could be supplanted or at the least strongly supported by nonstandard crowdsourced social tags.[7] More recently, however, Kimmo Elo has reviewed the modern tendency to support user-generated metadata and pointed out the flaws of creating metadata without expert knowledge and intensive research into the historical context of the original material.[8] There has also been in recent years a particular focus on Omeka as a popular platform for this kind of work. Omeka has frequently been used in tandem with history and archaeology courses, with students being assigned the task of creating or adding to an existing project; in the course of this work they uncover and explore problems relating to the contextualization of historical artifacts.[9] Jason Jones agrees that digital platforms like Omeka are well adapted for "juxtaposing text with digital objects" to allow for thought-provoking interpretations of material.[10] Similarly Allison Marsh has acknowledged that, although using Omeka in the classroom sacrifices the opportunity for students to learn actual programming skills, the easy-to-use plat-

5 Jane Zhang and Dayne Mauney, "When Archival Description Meets Digital Object Metadata: A Typological Study of Digital Archival Representation," *The American Archivist* 76 (2013): 174–95.

6 Lincoln Mullen, "Using Metadata and Maps to Teach the History of Religion," *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy* 25 (2014): 112–18 at 116.

7 Edward Benoit III, "#MPLP Part 2: Replacing Item-Level Metadata with User-Generated Social Tags," *The American Archivist* 81 (2018): 38–64.

8 Kimmo Elo, "Big data, Bad Metadata: A Methodological Note on the Importance of Good Metadata in the Age of Digital History," in *Digital Histories: Emergent Approaches within the New Digital History*, ed. Mats Fridlund, Mila Oiva and Petri Paju (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2020), 103–11.

9 Esther Liberman Cuenca and Maryanne Kowaleski, "Omeka and Other Digital Platforms for Undergraduate Research Projects on the Middle Ages," *Digital Medievalist* 11 (2018): 3, DOI: http://doi.org/10.16995/dm.69; Allison C. Marsh, "Omeka in the Classroom: The Challenges of Teaching Material Culture in a Digital World," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 28 (2013): 279–282 at 281.

10 Jason B. Jones, "There Are No New Directions in Annotations," in *Web Writing: Why and How for Liberal Arts Teaching and Learning*, ed. Jack Dougherty and Tennyson O'Donnell (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 251.

form "allows them to concentrate on content and interpretation."[11] Focusing on the student experience, Deborah Vanderbilt suggests that the challenge of trying to use unfamiliar digital tools like Omeka in English classes drives students to think about a broader range of approaches to the subject, and stimulates their intellectual curiosity; Dominic Morais agrees and suggests that the hands-on approach greatly improves student motivation in class.[12] More practically, Jeff McClurken, Stephen Robertson, and E. Leigh Bonds argue that tools like this prepare students more effectively for the modern workplace.[13]

My Archive

While these tools can be used for classes covering all periods of commonplacing, my Omeka project is an archive of miscellaneous late medieval and early Tudor material which can serve as an example for how teachers and students can create their own archives.[14] In this chapter I examine how the

11 Marsh, "Omeka in the Classroom," 280.

12 Deborah Vanderbilt, "Doing a Lot with a Little: Making Digital Humanities at a Small College," *CEA Critic* 76 (2014): 327–35 at 334; Dominic G. Morais, "Doing History in the Undergraduate Classroom: Project-Based Learning and Student Benefits," *The History Teacher* 52 (2018): 49–76 at 69.

13 Jeff McClurken, "Teaching and Learning Online with Omeka: Discomfort, Play, and Creating Public, Online, Digital Collections," in *Learning Through Digital Media: Experiments in Technology and Pedagogy*, ed. R. Trebor Scholz (New York: New School and the MacArthur Foundation, 2011), 137–149 at 138; Stephen Robertson, "The Differences between Digital Humanities and Digital History," in *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*, ed. Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/untitled/section/ed4a1145-7044-42e9-a898-5ff8691b6628##ch25; E. Leigh Bonds, "Listening in on the Conversations: An Overview of Digital Humanities Pedagogy." *CEA Critic* 76 (2014): 147–57 at 148.

14 The medieval and Tudor texts included in the archive are not fully representative of the medieval or early modern period and are not intended to be in any way comprehensive. I built the site as an offshoot of my doctoral studies since these were the manuscripts I was studying; my aim, at the time, was to make the content more generally accessible. My Omeka site consequently has a very narrow focus, although the content would potentially be useful to classes focusing on medieval literature read by early Tudor Londoners. It contains items from the following manuscripts: London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 306, Oxford, Balliol College, MS 354, Huntington, Huntington Library, MS HM 144, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Codex Ashmole 61, London, British Library, Harley MS 2551, London, British Library, Harley MS 2252 and London, British Library, Lansdowne 762. I obtained these sources in the following ways: Balliol College MS 354, Lambeth MS 306 and Huntington MS HM 144 are freely available

features of Omeka can usefully draw out interesting aspects of the historical commonplace book in ways which galvanize student discussion on historical reading practices and modern archiving methods. In the four sections of this chapter, I move from techniques for viewing the commonplace book as a whole, to building the metadata of distinct texts, to editing the user interface via tagging, and finally to using the Exhibit function in order to create unique commonplace books.

As has been frequently noted, one of the most intriguing aspects of early Tudor commonplace books is their idiosyncratic organization, "reflecting the widely differing interests and backgrounds of their compilers."[15] Medieval and early modern scholars have spent much time and energy in discovering the character, interests, or purpose of the person who made the book, based on their choices in reading material. The vogue for learning about anonymous historical figures' history through their pocket libraries has resulted in various 'thematic readings' of these books which come to conclusions such as that the compiler was a Lollard sympathizer, or more nebulously, that the "compilers' most persistent desire is to stimulate hope."[16] Regardless of the compiler's identity, the construction of the book serves the needs and desires of this first reader, who in making the book takes on the role of a creative anthologizer, if not outright author. In this way these

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online at https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/e0d10554-db39-4b58-a944-45da5e66248e/, https://images.lambethpalacelibrary.org.uk/luna/servlet/detail/LPLIBLPL~17~17~178964~124985?qvq=q%3AMS306&mi=44&trs=45 and https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/p15150coll7/id/41008/rec/1 respectively; the manuscript of Codex Ashmole 61 is not available online, but the texts can be found as part of the University of Rochester's TEAMS series at https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/shuffelton-codex-ashmole-61; the digitized manuscripts of British Library Harley MS 2551, British Library, Harley MS 2252 and British Library, Landsdowne 762 I have bought privately. I reference this site in this paper as a working exemplar of how similar digital archives can be created and used in literature classes. It is not possible at the moment for teachers and students to add to it, but similar archives can be created as part of classroom exercises, perhaps using material that has been bought by the university libraries attached to the course. The process of creating a similar site is straightforward, and thanks to the generosity of many libraries today, there are hundreds of digitized manuscripts available online that could be included on similar archives.

15 Fred Schurink, "Manuscript Commonplace Books, Literature, and Reading in Early Modern England," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73(2010): 453–69 at 453.

16 Ralph Hanna III, ""Miscellaneity and Vernacularity: Conditions of Literary Production in Late Medieval England," in *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany*, ed. Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 37–53 at 46.

books can be compared to contemporary social media platforms like Pinterest, with its shareable boards of found text, video, and art, or Buzzfeed pages with their links to eleven photos of different actors who could play the next Batman, based on the ruggedness of their jawlines. These sites, creatively augmented by mainly anonymous contributors, overwhelmingly feature the products of popular culture; but were medieval and early modern commonplace books that different? Maybe the latter include more recipes for horse liniment and the correct form of Sunday prayers, but they also used romantic tales, bawdy ballads, and gnomic proverbs of the day not that dissimilar from a millennial blogger's "inspirational quote of the day." Functionally, the commonplace book is a record of "textual fragments" and a certain style of reading that saw the practice as "a harvesting or mining of the book for its functional parts"[17] like "serviceable topics, fragments tagged for future use."[18] When studying the commonplace book, students can work from a starting point of the question "what is most useful to you?"—and, by interpreting the interests and values of the historical readers, give voice to their own sense of what is practical and desirable. The various features of the commonplace book and its use of pragmatic reading can be easily represented in an Omeka-built archive of historical material and lend themselves to specific classroom exercises.

Figuring Out the Historical Organization of Texts

A monumental part of studying these miscellanies is drawing interpretative connections between the texts. While this kind of reading exercise could be performed with a paper version of the commonplace book, it can only be aided and improved upon with the digital version. Using Omeka, the archive I have built treats every separate commonplace book as a Collection, a function of the site which keeps all texts, or "Items" of the books, together in the order in which they originally appear. This allows users to broadly view the organization of the material. This organization often highlights early modern readers' concern with placing similar items together, as if creating distinct chapters in a book. Often medical recipes (such as *For the pestilence*, *For the biting of a dog*, or *For the pin in a man's eye*) will be collected together, as in Collection Balliol MS 354, where they are gathered in groups of about

17 Marjorie Swann, *Curiosities and Texts: The Culture of Collecting in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 153.

18 Richards and Schurink, "The Textuality and Materiality of Reading," 352.

eight to fifteen items, or in Collection Lambeth MS 306, where over 90 percent of the medical recipes are collected together in a separate booklet sewn into the rest of the manuscript. However, the Items within the Collections can be viewed in several ways, as they can be sorted by date added, title, and creator, as well as via the search function, which allows more specific avenues for narrowing down the material. In this way, Omeka gives students several options for reading them, separately and together, and in finding discrepancies, inconsistencies, and oddities. When searching Items for the word "Recipe," for example, differences may not at first jump out, since over a hundred Items have "Recipe" in their Titles. The actual Items are, to a modern sensibility, a mix of different genres. Scanning through the list of Items, students can see that the Subjects in this section differ from Medical Recipe to Culinary Recipe to Household Recipe, and in content, from curing apoplexy to dying cloth or making vinegar. However, awareness of the Coverage, or spatial placement of the texts (which can be used as a modifier in the search) shows how these texts were originally placed together by the compiler. This aspect of the manuscript provides opportunities for looking at textual organization. A classroom exercise could ask: "Why do these items all appear in one place, when they are not all the same kind of text?"

This kind of question stimulates active reading because there is no answer which is definitively the right one. A student could suggest that these items were gathered together because of their practical usefulness, as separate from the hymns and narratives elsewhere in the manuscript. Another student could respond that these texts are all concerned with housewifely activities––for cooking meals, repairing clothes, and soothing cuts and burns. Other texts of practical usefulness are found later in the book, such as a method for training a hawk; arguably this was a more masculine activity, and consequently it may have been kept apart from the "women's work" of the earlier content. A student who was unconvinced by the thematic relationship of the contents could notice that all of these recipes are short (no more than four or five lines long). It might have been easier for the compiler to put all the short texts in the same place so that he did not have to worry about finding space as he might do if mixing together long and short texts. Building on this idea, a student might consider that there are outlying aspects in every data group and suggest that since most of the texts are medical recipes, the booklet is more properly a medical handbook, with a few other short texts added in where they would be sure to fit. Since we cannot know the real intention of the compiler, the exercise can continue for as long as it seems useful, where the purpose of the class is to better understand early modern reading practices.

Categorizing the Relationships between Texts via Metadata

A physical book may contain a table of contents with some degree of detail about each individual item, but a digital archive combines this detailed approach with the easy ability to search for, access, and link various items together. This is particularly demonstrated by another function of the archive, made possible by Omeka's use of Dublin Core metadata in its databases. Dublin Core metadata is a very simple and therefore broadly used means of explaining and categorizing digital resources.[19] While it could be useful to liaise with the library services and to ask a librarian to lead a workshop on metadata, there are only fifteen elements in the basic version, which is the version used in Omeka. Students and instructors looking for a wider array of categories will be able to find them, but it will not be necessary to go beyond the original fifteen, which can easily be discussed in the classroom. There are also merits to keeping metadata simple. Asking students to use a pre-designed element set of this type forces them to think about the larger readership, who will have to navigate the site using metadata.[20] This has been established as a beneficial part of using Omeka in the classroom: discussing the value of using Omeka as a teaching tool, McClurken argues that when creating or adding to digital projects, students learn to "write for an audience of more than one."[21] Cuenca and Kowaleski emphasized the level of responsibility students held in accurately recording the metadata of their artifacts.[22] However, it is not always possible to achieve complete or unambiguous accuracy, and profitable discussions can be had over how to

19 In 2013, Zhang and Mauney completed a representative survey of 276 digital collection sites, finding that 73 percent of these sites used Dublin Core and noted that it "remains on top of the list of metadata schemas adopted to organize and represent digital collections"; Zhang and Mauney, "When Archival Description Meets Digital Object Metadata," 182. In 2021, Katja Müller reviewed four decades of digital archival work and reported that while "databases without Dublin Core…are technically possible…these modes can be understood as being outside the currently prevailing technological frame for digitizing cultural heritage"; Katja Müller, "Deciding on Digital Archives: Improvement through Collection Management Systems," in *Digital Archives and Collections: Creating Online Access to Cultural Heritage* (New York: Berghahn, 2021), 57–99 at 92n9.

20 The Dublin Core metadata set includes fifteen elements: Contributor, Coverage, Creator, Date, Description, Format, Identifier, Language, Publisher, Relation, Rights, Source, Subject, Title, and Type.

21 McClurken, "Teaching and Learning Online with Omeka," 138.

22 Cuenca and Kowaleski, "Omeka and Other Digital Platforms," 8.

fit the element set to what may be nebulous, strange, or uncertain about the manuscript text.

Some of the simpler aspects of metadata may be obvious to students and can be addressed first, in order to build confidence about their ability to identify Items: the Language is (usually) self-evident, the Subject requires a little discussion, and some preliminary research on the internet or in a library database can generally determine if there is a named Creator. However, this Dublin Core also includes less straightforward metadata like Relation, which in its most basic form is simply "A related resource," and has a lot of potential as a resource for students to identify more precise relationships between different texts in the archive.[23] A classroom exercise could ask the question: "Which texts in the archive correspond best to which aspect of the metadata Relation, and why?" This requires a much closer, more attentive review of the texts, for while some relationships are relatively obvious, some are much more opaque. One clear example is in Balliol MS 354, which includes four separate texts titled *A Business Letter*, *A Formula of a Business Letter*, *A Business Letter (French)*, and *A Formula of a Business Letter (French)*. This addition in parentheses gives away the relationship between these four texts: two of them are business letters, and the other two are French translations of those letters. The translations, while separate Items, can therefore be labelled as having the Relation "isVersionOf." Omeka allows for the texts to be linked directly to each other with URLs, making it easy for students to find and view both, even though they are physically separated in the book.

This linking function is helpful here, but in other cases might be entirely necessary, as with a certain curious set of items in the same Collection: *The Trental of St Gregory* and *This Talle of Pope Gregory*. The first text, a romantic story of Pope Gregory tasked with the quest of saving his mother from Purgatory, was copied into the book by the main compiler, Richard Hill. The second, a THREE-line text, was written by a later reader beneath the "Finis" of the earlier one on the same page of the book and is, in effect, a denunciation of the first text, averring that it is without truth. Clearly the two items have a strong relationship with each other, and the second makes no sense without the first. The requisite Relation metadata option is "references," an ambiguous label defined as "The relation in which the creator of a source resource cites, acknowledges, disputes or otherwise refers to a

23 For example, a classroom exercise could introduce students to more sophisticated forms of the metadata Relation: isPartOf, hasPart, isVersionOf, isFormatOf, hasFormat, references, isReferencedBy, isBasedOn, isBasisFor, requires, isRequiredBy.

target resource."[24] Working with this straightforward relationship, students can deliberate over whether, for example, the second Item needs the Relation of 'references' and the first Item needs "isReferencedBy," or if there is a better option.

Other kinds of texts demand an even more considered approach to quantifying the relationship; a more obscure example is in Collection Codex Ashmole 61, which includes two verse items, each called *The Ten Commandments*. One of these items contains the full text, i.e. all ten commandments. The other, some five folios after it in the manuscript, contains only the first stanza, with a few textual variants. A brief classroom exercise on the Relation between items could ask the questions: "Why might this have happened?" or "What is the most appropriate way to explain the relationship?" As the exact type of Relation called for would depend on the explanation for the second text (called a "false start" by the most recent editor of the manuscript), the archive could be altered several different ways based on the students' responses.[25] For example, would it be "isPartOf"? This label describes the "False Start" Item as part of another, i.e. as only the first stanza and the beginning of the full list of the ten commandments. However, since there are textual differences between the two versions, perhaps it should be "isVersionOf" instead? Or "isBasedOn"? And wouldn't it depend on which one was written first (not often possible to determine)? The uncertainty surrounding this case study makes it useful for an involved classroom discussion. Helpfully, Omeka allows URL links to be created between Items so that a user can instantly jump from one Item to the other, making clear that there is a definite relationship between the texts. However, the choices involved in how to categorize that relationship build students' awareness of archival practice. As several teachers have attested, tasks like this will allow students to "gain an understanding of the ways that scholars approach, contextualize, and interpret sources."[26] Using metadata in this way can be quite challenging. When discussing the relationship between texts in a more traditional academic form, such as a paper, vagueness and idiosyncratic descriptors are allowable (even *de rigueur*). However, when the goal is to create a clear and globally recognized categorization, as Dublin Core asks, students must learn to be decisive.

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24 Dublin Core Metadata Initiative. *RDF Schema Declaration of Relation Types*. Accessed February 2019, http://dublincore.org/documents/rdf-relation-types/.

25 George Shuffleton, *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse* (Kalamazoo: Middle Institute, 2008), 73.

26 McClurken, "Teaching and Learning Online with Omeka," 143.

Remediating the Relevant Content of the Texts for Modern Readers

The use of metadata and the URL links for associating Items are fairly precise means for students to draw relationships between texts. The Omeka platform also offers another way of doing this which encourages more informal participation in describing and editing the archive: tagging. Without changing the main content of Items, students can be invited to impose their own judgment by employing this deceptively simple reading strategy. Social-media-savvy young adults will be familiar with the process of tagging objects with words or phrases, since this is a major feature of tweets, and pictures on Facebook or Instagram. Of course, as teachers have commented before, it is a mistake to assume strong digital expertise for all students; nonetheless, the difficulties students can face in these classes tends to be because "they tend not to apply the digital skills they do have to their academic studies."[27] The tagging function in Omeka is a fairly simple tool, and allows students to choose any word or phrase to describe the Item. As one can use a hashtag on Twitter to clarify a topic or theme, and link individual tweets to broader conversations, the tag function in Omeka allows students to informally connect any Item to any other Item based on similarities they perceive. Students could use this to describe aspects of the texts that are not readily available via the metadata and make them searchable keywords. Esther Cuenca and Maryanne Kowaleski's classroom-based Omeka project *Medieval London*, similarly encouraged students to create individual tags for the Items; this activity "made the students consider how their objects or sites might fall into particular categories rooted in specific historical moments," including reigning English monarchs or historical periods like "Saxon" and "Tudor."[28] Such an activity—which not only reads but remediates the text—is a modern twist on the practice of writing marginalia and other kinds of notations in manuscript folios.

As most commonplace books can attest, readers have frequently marked up various texts by adding corrections, extra details, denials or confirmations of the content, in ways which aided future readers as well as themselves. In the margins of London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 306's *List of Kings*, one early Tudor reader has copied the names of important personages like Queen Gwendolyn and the king's brother Locryne, next to where their names appear in the text; similar to the modern practice of highlighting

27 Vanderbilt, "Doing a Lot with a Little," 327.

28 Cuenca and Kowaleski, "Omeka and Other Digital Platforms."

important information. In other cases, the reader wrote brief descriptions of narrative progression; the story of a female saint, *The Life of St Winifred*, is repeatedly marked with plot points like "she dyed the iijrd day of decembre." Like modern notes, these markings indicate one way to read the text, by suggesting what was most important in the story's structure. In London, British Library, Harley MS 2251, an early owner wrote marginal comments next to 26 percent of the texts in the book that are entirely focused on the texts' readability, such as: "Reade thys agayne," "Reade thys agayne and agayne" and "Do not reade thys but hyde your eye." Whether informative or evaluative, it is similar to the modern practice of tagging social media posts with the names of people in photos, or briefly describing a meal as "foodporn" or a first date as "instalike." A basic classroom exercise would be to use the tagging system embedded in the Omeka platform to similarly augment the archive, and to build discussion activities around the language choices students make in creating the tags. This would open the archive to reflections based in modern and future taste; as Benoit argued, "tagging is a dynamic process that...[reflects] the ever-changing interpretation of records."[29] The significance of these choices is accentuated by the outward-facing nature of the digital project. Instead of creating a paper or written work only to be seen and marked by the class instructor, students have to think about how their judgments will be an indelible part of a digital archive, visible to anyone with an internet connection. While students may be used to creating this kind of online permanency as a part of social media, an academic-based project like this might force them to think about the long-lasting effects of their words.

Analysing tags can encourage students to consider how they might condense a text to its key ideas. To start with, they could consider a relatively simple Item like Oxford, Balliol College, MS 354's *Household Recipe to Take Birds* which describes a method for catching wild birds. Elements of this method for bird-catching include a recipe for a drug, and the process of drugging the birds; appropriate tags could therefore include "hemp seed," one of the ingredients, and the action "drugging," or possibly a more involved description like "hiding drugs in food." This practice of tagging involves a close degree of reading and attention to detail on students' part that is similar in some ways to their work with the metadata, but for which there are a broad number of possible responses. One of the ingredients in the drug is "wort," which unlike "hemp seed," is not a term I would expect most people

29 Benoit, "#MPLP Part 2," 45.

to be familiar with now. As readers and users of the archive, students could engage in a classroom discussion about how to treat potentially ambiguous or confusing tags. Should other users be expected to find their own definition of wort? One solution the students might suggest is to include a basic explanation in the tag itself, e.g., the tag "wort (plant)." Students could also use multiple tags which reference different ways of viewing the same object. Teachers have discussed before the value of digital projects as a means of creating and exhibiting "collective reading" whereby students can access each other's opinions on the textual material and subsequent classes can build on the pre-discussion inherent in the digital text.[30] Jones, in discussing the concept and practice of annotation, claims that the universal nature of digital annotative practices such as tagging makes this a form of learning highly accessible to modern students. Larry Swain has explicitly commented that this kind of "participatory learning" that emphasizes collaboration is a key aspect of how teaching the Middle Ages is becoming rejuvenated.[31] Like the medieval and early Tudor reader leaving marginal comments, the students are brought to think about how they can most helpfully edit the archive for future users, and practise exercising their own judgment—something which is invaluable in a classroom.

The tagging feature, applied fairly consistently across the archive, can be a highly useful tool for finding other Items and surveying the archive via "distant reading." The practice of "distant reading," as developed by Franco Moretti, takes a "quantitative approach to literature" and reimagines large collections of textual data as visualizations—over the last decade, this idea has been popularized through programs like Word Cloud and Voyant.[32] Something similar to these visualizations is provided by the Omeka platform, since once a tag is created, it is included on an easily accessible separate page with every other tag ever created. This means that students can use previously created tags to explore the Items, and, through looking at the visualization, realize the most and least popular tags at a glance. It is also another way to search for connections between texts which might not otherwise appear obvious; for example, I used the tag 'jousting' for both the romance narrative *Lybeaus Desconus*, where it is mentioned as a chivalric activity, and in the prose account *The Dimensions of the Lists at Smithfield*,

30 Jones, "There Are No New Directions in Annotations," 253.

31 Larry Swain, "Past, Present, and Future of Digital Medievalism," *Literature Compass* 9 (2012): 923–32 at 932.

32 Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (London: Verso, 2005), 4.

which is a detailed description of how lists for jousting were built in London during the reign of Henry VIII.

Disassembling the Compilations

Finally, the Omeka platform can be used as a tool for not only containing but also remixing the contents of medieval books. The idea of 'remixing' medieval books is not a new one, and has been practised by owners, users, and students of manuscripts right up until the modern day—although this has mostly not been a good thing. Various unscrupulous collectors over the centuries, and especially during the Gothic Revival in the 1800's, have damaged manuscripts by cutting out the parts which they liked best (illustrations, decorations with gold leaf, illuminated figures) and keeping them for themselves. In some cases, pages of medieval choirbooks have even been remade into household items like lampshades. Even the more well-intentioned kind of dis- and re-assembly is essentially destructive. The seventeenth-century scholar Árni Magnússon repeatedly took apart Icelandic medieval manuscripts and reassembled them in loose thematic collections: for example, putting together copies of the same text. This was meant to be an aid for future scholars and readers, and it did help his students with understanding the material—but at the cost of destroying the original constructions.

Standards are more rigorous nowadays, and no reputable library will let you permanently take apart their 500-year-old books. However, the principle of disassembly remains useful for students. Scholars still mentally plan such fragmentations in order to better understand the connections between the different parts of the book. Critics call this "Museology," where sections of the book (like separate texts) can be thought of as objects in a museum collection. They are currently arranged in one organizational pattern, but they can be rearranged to fit different interpretations about how the books were used—like the clues in a criminal investigation which the detectives fit together in new ways to support different narratives of how the crime might have been committed. So naturally, the advent of digital technology upon manuscript studies has been of immeasurable benefit. Now, we can take apart those 500-year-old books and put them together in new ways, while leaving the physical book untouched. Omeka is geared to make the most of this, and reworking collections by adding, editing, and rearranging items, is a fundamental part of the platform, and a key part of any class that uses it.

But why is this a valuable activity for students? To start with, remixing and reworking the original content which the students have already read strengthens their impression of the texts. Repetition is powerful. By re-

enacting the work of the original medieval readers, while interposing their own judgment for how the Collections should be organized, students can creatively optimize their reading. George Shuffleton, in describing the process of compilation, explained that "the act of compiling a miscellany was not so different from reading one, a series of sudden discoveries that created a flexible, evolving sense of order out of bewildering diversity."[33] It is just this sense of discovery which will drive students' active learning. Remixing also allows students to both take a closer and a broader view of the texts. Omeka is ideally positioned to present individual Items in a way which offers opportunities for adding more information about them, but also for re-presenting them according to the student's individual judgment. Several of the classroom activities mentioned earlier include open-ended questions, to which there is more than one right answer. If students disagree over the most correct way to describe the metadata of an Item, which Items it should be linked with, or how to position it in relation to other Items, they should be free to pursue their own interpretations, without affecting the learning prospects for the other students.

This is where the Exhibit function comes into play. This is an important aspect of the Omeka platform, and along with Item and Collection forms the main tripartite structure of the archive. An Exhibit is similar to a Collection, but with some essential differences. Items in Collections cannot be shared with other Collections, since they are unique objects only found in this particular place. There may be several versions of a certain text in the archive which come from different manuscripts (there are three of John Lydgate's popular medieval guide to good behaviour, *Stans Puer Ad Mensam*); nonetheless, each of them is a singular object with its own textual variations, marginal notes, and mise-en-page. Exhibits, on the other hand, are free to share the same unique Item, which can be copied to multiple places. One text from Codex Ashmole 61, such as *The Knight Who Forgave His Father's Slayer*, can be used by different students for their individual Exhibits. Since each Exhibit would itself be a different compilation of Items, this text would appear in a different light according to its various thematic associations with an idiosyncratic selection of other texts.

These students' Exhibits are not necessarily different versions of the original Collection. With this function, students can also mix the contents of different Collections together: for example, like Árni Magnússon, they could

33 George Shuffleton, "The Miscellany and the Monument" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2002), 43.

collect different versions of the same texts, for the purposes of easy comparison. They could also create their own Items, as individual versions of those already in the Collection. Disagreeing with the metadata, they could produce a corrected version, or make more substantial changes: viewing the digitized image of the manuscript page themselves, they might come up with an alternative transcription of the contents. More simply, they could present the Items with their own explanation and interpretation of what it might have meant to the early Tudor reader—or what it could mean now. Earlier in the chapter I argued for the usefulness of the Dublin Core metadata Relation as a means of clarifying a specific relation between two objects, such as one being a version of another, or referencing another. This allows for very narrow readings that can help train attention to detail and precision; however, students also need the freedom to explore less restricted forms of relationship between texts. A classroom exercise could ask the questions: "What are your favourite texts in the archive?" or "Which aren't worth rereading, and why?"

A more focused Exhibit could result from a student's particular research interests. For example, say a student was particularly interested in the strong strain of anti-feminism and misogynistic texts in early Tudor commonplace books. They would, by viewing the items in the Collections, make their own decisions about what would be most relevant to include in their Exhibit: *Of all creatures women be best*, *Women women love of women* and *Whan netills in wynter bere rosis rede,* texts with similar content that originate in three different Collections. But placing certain texts together is only a first step in creating the Exhibit. The Exhibit function asks the user to decide on a relatively simple layout, which can prioritize the Items themselves in a visual display, or prioritize accompanying descriptive text which they write themselves, or offer a balance between the two. Unlike the Collections, which only present the Items by themselves, the Exhibit Page allows the student to comment on, explain, or present an argument about one or more of the objects. Using the above example of anti-feminist texts, a student could note that each one a) criticizes women's unfaithfulness and lack of trustworthiness and b) expresses this with sarcasm, by pretending to praise them for their inconstancy. Since Exhibits can hold multiple pages, the student could then present another sub-section of anti-feminist texts which, according to their interpretation, employ different strategies, such as narratives like Balliol MS 354's *Jack and his Stepdame and the Frere* which present female characters as stupid or villainous. Depending on what is required from the assignment, these Exhibits could effectively take the place of more traditional research papers, commenting in depth on the Items in their own commonplace book.

They could also stand alone as alternatives to written papers. Cuenca and Kowaleski, discussing the way students curated historical objects on the Omeka-based *Medieval London*, described the way the digital platform helped students "transform seemingly inert objects from the pre-modern era into a kind of language with which they can reconstitute the past into stories...microhistories of objects with their own assumptions, logic, and interpretations."[34] As microhistories, Exhibits can use Pages with a variety of presentational options to create a facsimile of a research paper that constantly refers and links back to the larger archive.

For various kinds of class projects, there are multiple features of the Omeka platform which students can use to curate their objects, and a huge range of possibilities. Each Item requires a caption, necessitating the student to make choices about how to briefly describe them. This lets students, to some extent, disagree with or contradict the form of the Item as it appears in the Collection without needing to create new Items. The text *The Knight Who Forgave His Father's Slayer* from Codex Ashmole 61 is one of those medieval narratives which fits several different genres. In the captions, one student might choose to emphasize that the story is a Romance, and pair it with *Lybeaus Desconus* from Lambeth MS 306. Another might argue that it is a Christian Miracle Story, and, in their caption, draw attention to the fact that it features a crucifix that appears to come to life and embrace a sinful character. This kind of re-categorization can be effectively joined with the practice of creating new Items, especially when smaller Items are created out of pre-existing, larger ones. A student might decide that the best classification for *The Knight Who Forgave His Father's Slayer* was Moral Tale and imagine that a good Exhibit would be a collection of Moral Tales––what about the single Item *Fall of Princes* from Harley MS 2551? Much like *The Seven Sages of Rome* from Balliol MS 354, this object is actually a collection of extracts from the longer tale-collection by John Lydgate which is not represented fully in that manuscript. Some of those extracts may fit with the classification Moral Tale and some would not. The student could then create new Items out of the original one and put those into their Exhibits––and since Items here can be shared, other students could pick them up and add them to a Biblical Narrative Exhibit, Historical Monarchs Exhibit, or even (considering the content of these stories) Gruesome Death Exhibit.

There are many ways in which a class could use and develop the basic Omeka tools in this archive, or others like it, when teaching the study of com-

34 Cuenca and Kowaleski, "Omeka and Other Digital Platforms," 16.

monplace books. While anyone is free to browse my own site, I encourage the creation of independent archives of commonplace book material. While more technologically advanced classes could download, install, and customize the software according to their own specifications, teachers and students may also simply acquire a hosted account on omeka.net which requires few technical skills. As the examples from my archive show, these late medieval and early Tudor manuscripts contain a fantastic array of historical evidence about how these past readers used their books: the textual selections, arrangements, marginalia, and other paratextual information can promote discussion and inspire students to build something new with their own set of reading practices that goes beyond "assessing medieval reading practices through the language and criticism of digital media."[35] However, such reading practices can easily be applied to other disciplines in the Humanities: history, media and culture, music, art, and many more. Using the Omeka platform in the ways I have outlined make reading practices inseparable from writing practices and foregrounds the judgment and interpretation of the students themselves in a dynamic learning environment.

35 Heather Blatt, *Participatory Reading in Late-Medieval England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 8.

POETRY AT PLAY
COMMONPLACE BOOKS IN A GAME-THEMED LITERATURE SURVEY

NORA L. CORRIGAN

RECENTLY, THERE HAS been a flurry of interest in game-based learning at the college level, with the emergence of pedagogies such as Reacting to the Past[1] and professional groups such as Games in College Classrooms.[2] While definitions of and approaches to game-based learning vary, a helpful working definition is "learning through games"—that is, by engaging in activities that are primarily intended to be pleasurable rather than goal-oriented, contain an element of challenge, and are structured by rules.[3] This is distinct from gamification, in which gaming elements such as badges or leaderboards are added to an activity designed primarily for pedagogical purposes.[4] Advocates of game-based learning argue that it offers a variety of benefits: games "allow learners to discuss what they played, interact while playing the game, solve open-ended problems, and … encourage agency and

1 For more on Reacting to the Past, a series of historical role-playing games published by Norton and the University of North Carolina Press, see Mark Carnes, *Minds on Fire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014) and C. Edward Watson and Thomas Chase Hagood, eds., *Playing to Learn with Reacting to the Past: Research on High Impact, Active Learning Practices* (London: Palgrave, 2017).

2 Games in College Classrooms, Facebook, www.facebook.com/groups/1773710516258929/, is a Facebook group dedicated to discussing ways to integrate games into the classroom; most members are in history or other humanities disciplines. This community's focus on analogue and tabletop gaming was intended as a deliberate corrective to the fact that much research on and discussion of game-based learning focuses on video games. However, even in a group friendly to historical content and low-tech gameplay, one member commented on his own recent post about the game *hnefatafl* that he had "hesitated to post this because it's not about a modern game" (Patrick Rael, 28 June 2018).

3 Berna Karakoç et al., "The Effect of Game-Based Learning on Student Achievement," *Technology, Knowledge and Learning* 27 (2022): 207–22.

4 Kyle W. Scholz, Jolanta N. Komornica, and Andrew Moore, "Gamifying History: Designing and Implementing a Game-Based Learning Framework," *Teaching and Learning Inquiry* 9 (2021): 99–115.

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choice for the players."[5] This approach, James Lang argues, is particularly effective at sparking deep learning because games stimulate students' interest and provide a built-in purpose and immediate applications for course content.[6] Similarly, Adam Porter has noted that game-based learning is a successful tool for increasing engagement and empowerment among a generation of students who "have been raised in a world of games."[7] The heightened engagement and emotion sparked by gaming has been linked to improvement in memory and retention.[8]

Concurrently with this trend in pedagogy, literary and historical scholarship on medieval and early modern gaming has flourished,[9] some of it focusing explicitly on the role that games have historically played in educating young people to take their place in society.[10] Less often, however, have these two trends converged. Little has been published concerning the value of making space in the classroom for students to play the *same* games medieval and early modern people played, although classicist Christine Albright describes her considerable success incorporating games based on ancient Greek poetic, theatrical, and athletic competitions into an introductory Greek Culture class.[11] This chapter will consider commonplace books, and early modern poetry more generally, as a form of textual play and offer some preliminary suggestions for engaging modern-day students in such play, based on my experiences teaching a game-themed Early English Literature survey.

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5 Scholz, Komornica, and Moore, "Gamifying History," 101.

6 James Lang, *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 230–35.

7 Adam L. Porter, "Role-Playing and Religion: Using Games to Educate Millennials," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 11 (2008): 230–35 at 232.

8 Thomas Chase Hagood, C. Edward Watson, and Brittany M. Williams, "Reacting to the Past: An Introduction to Its Scholarly Foundation," In *Playing to Learn*, 1–16.

9 See, for example, the recent edited collections Serina Patterson, ed., *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature* (London: Palgrave, 2015), and Allison Levy, ed., *Playthings in Early Modernity: Party Games, Word Games, Mind Games* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 2017).

10 Nicholas Orme's "Games and Education in Medieval England," in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, 45–60, is one case in point; among other topics, Orme explores the use of riddles and wordplay in Latin exercises, and the role that sports and games played in aristocratic education outside of the classroom.

11 Christine L. Albright, "Harnessing Students' Competitive Spirit: Using *Reacting to the Past* to Structure the Introductory Greek Culture Class," *The Classical Journal* 122 (2017): 364–79.

As Andie Silva and Sarah E. Parker note in the introduction to this volume, the long history of commonplacing means that the term can be used to describe a variety of different texts with equally varied purposes, many of which are essentially goal-oriented rather than pleasurable; maintaining a list of sayings and devices to improve one's skill as a rhetorician, for example. The form of commonplace book that students create in my course, however, is essentially a manuscript verse miscellany, in which students are asked to choose texts that they find personally enjoyable and place them in dialogue with one another by writing original reply poems and by exchanging and contributing to one another's books. In her analysis of similar "verse conversations" from early modern miscellanies and commonplace books, Cathy Shrank shows that they have many game-like features: they were a social activity that cemented bonds among groups of friends and were intended to give pleasure to the participants. Further, they are characterized by "playful" use of language—puns, echoing, competing proverbs; by play with identity through the adoption of pseudonyms and poetic personas; and, often, by competitive elements, as in debate poetry.[12]

The Course and Its Contexts

I turned to game-based learning as an instructor at a small, regional public university where the most popular degree programs are nursing, business administration, and public health education.[13] Many of our students are first-generation; about half of our full-time students are Pell Grant recipients.[14] Literature, especially medieval and early modern literature, can be a tough sell in this institutional environment. While our required general education literature surveys function partly as a gateway (and sometimes a recruiting tool) for English majors, most students in the course are nonmajors from sophomore through senior level; they have completed our required composition sequence but may not have taken, or plan to take, any other literature courses at the college level. My primary learning objectives include learning

12 Cathy Shrank, "Answer Poetry and Other Verse 'Conversations,'" in *A Companion to Renaissance Poetry*, ed. Catherine Bates (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018): 376–88.

13 *Mississippi University for Women 2019–20 Fact Book*, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, www.muw.edu/images//ir/muwfactbook/MUWFactBook2019_20.pdf, 57.

14 "Distribution of Federal Pell Grant Funds by Institution," US Department of Education, www2.ed.gov/finaid/prof/resources/data/pell-institution.html. These figures date from academic year 2017–18, the most recent year for which they are available as of this writing.

to read texts with care and attention, becoming familiar with the language and literary conventions of early English literature, and, hopefully, developing appreciation for the rich cultural and historical traditions we're studying. In the fall of 2017, I began structuring this course around the general themes of "game" and "play"—loosely defined. Students are aware of this focus, as I include it in the course description on the syllabus and mention it frequently in class. I made this choice, in part, because I wanted to emphasize that literature is *fun*. Early modern poetry, in particular, was clearly a form of play to its authors, with its elaborately wrought puns, paradoxes and conceits. These very features, however, often make reading it feel frustrating, stressful, and intimidating to modern students. By focusing this course on the idea of play, I wished to bridge the gap between work and pleasure.

We read a variety of texts in this class, many of which explore the risks and rewards of play—from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to Robert Herrick's richly detailed poems about Christmas and May Day games. Along the way, we play a few period games that appear in the texts we were reading—hazard when we read Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale, and the card game Ombre, which features prominently in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. But, especially, I try to make room in the classroom for various ways of *playing with texts*. For example, I begin the first class of the semester by giving half of the class slips of paper with Anglo-Saxon riddles and challenging them to find their counterpart, the student in the classroom who has a commonly accepted answer to the riddle. As an introduction to Marie de France's "Lanval" and "Milun," we play a debate game based on medieval *demandes d'amour*; and finally, I assign an extended commonplace-book project over the second half of the semester, while students are reading a selection of early-modern through early-eighteenth-century poetry as well as one longer dramatic text, usually Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Since this project is primarily completed outside of class, concurrently with daily reading assignments, I have not had to remove anything from the syllabus to accommodate it, although I have made some adjustments to the selection of poetry and to an existing close-reading assignment to connect them to the course theme.

The requirements for the commonplace book project are, first, that students copy at least 28 lines of text (the equivalent of two sonnets) from the course readings into their book each week. Entries may take the form of entire poems, short quotations, or a mixture. In my instructions, I emphasize that students should pick pieces that spoke to *them*, and that they are encouraged but not required to include notes, commentary, illustrations, and anything else they feel like adding. (Generally, "encourage but don't require" is my core principle for this assignment—the idea is that it should

be enjoyable, and that the resulting manuscripts should be as one-of-a-kind as possible.) As keeping a commonplace book is not an inherently competitive activity, it may be objected that it does not fit into traditional paradigms of game-based learning, which usually emphasize competition. It does, however, provide many of the other benefits that have been linked with learning through play, such as emotional investment, creativity, student agency, and the opportunity to engage with and apply course material in a pleasurable way. Further, it can be incorporated into a course in ways that push the idea of textual play to the forefront.

Maintaining a commonplace book is worth 10 percent of the student's final grade. I do not formally assess the books for quality, although they are linked to two graded paper assignments worth an additional 20 percent of the student's final course grade (included in the Appendix and discussed in greater detail below). Instead, students receive an automatic A for this component of the course as long as their book meets all of the required criteria—regular entries totaling at least 28 lines of text per week, plus completion of weekly special assignments requiring deeper interaction with the texts and / or their classmates' books. I spot-check commonplace books throughout the semester to ensure that students are following instructions and including all required elements, but have rarely had to deduct from a student's final grade. In most cases, students who miss an entry or activity respond to informal reminders after spot-checks and make it up by the time they have to submit the final copy of their book.

Poetry as Play: Selecting Texts

In selecting readings, I tried to pick poems that were themselves "playful," and early modern poetry offers a great many possibilities. Online texts make it possible to supplement the standard anthology selections with e-texts showing the full range of early modern wordplay: acrostic poems like Sir John Davies's *Hymnes to Astraea*;[15] echo poetry like Richard Barnfield's Sonnet 13;[16] Sir Walter Ralegh's extended riddle about the pleasures and perils of the gam-

15 Seven of these poems in praise of the queen, in which the initial letters of each line spell out ELISABETH REGINA, can be found online in a student-friendly modern-spelling version at the Luminarium, ed. Anniina Jokinen, www.luminarium.org/renlit/daviebib.htm.

16 Barnfield's sonnet is available at https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Sonnet_13_(Barnfield), although the mythological references and early modern spelling may require some glossing from the instructor. I find it worth the effort; students are invariably intrigued by Barnfield's depiction of same-sex love, and it's an effective way

ing-table, "On the Cards and Dice."[17] Ralegh's poem offers an excellent, small-scale introduction to metaphor and double meaning; students often initially interpret it as a highly serious poem about war or about the Last Judgment, a reading which the poem itself encourages with its prophetic tone and its use of quasi-apocalyptic language: "Full many a Christian's heart shall quake for fear / The dreadful sound of *trump* when he shall hear. / Dead bones shall then be tumbled up and down" (9–11). Pointing out that *trump* is also a term used in card games, and that dice are made of bone and commonly tumbled, leads to a moment of enlightenment; but has the poem's real subject matter been revealed as trivial and mundane, after all? The "great losses" of the gaming table are real, as is the students' initial impression that something grave is at stake, both monetary and moral (6). Whether one reads this poem as an indictment of a society that wastes its Christmastide at the gaming-table, or as a paean to games and the truths that lie beneath their apparent triviality (one very perceptive student suggested that Ralegh is saying life itself is a form of gambling), it uses an inherently playful form, the riddle, to suggest that play is a deeply serious matter.

George Herbert's poetry, likewise, offers a particularly rich variety of word games that are simultaneously playful and profound. To judge by the number of students who copied his poetry into their commonplace books or wrote papers about it, his work strongly resonates with undergraduates at our Bible-belt university. Not only does Herbert employ the puns and conceits that are near-ubiquitous in early modern poetry, but also concrete poetry ("The Altar" and "Easter Wings"), anagrams ("Anagram"), echo poetry ("Heaven"), and hidden messages ("Colossians 3.3"). A brief discussion of "Paradise"[18]—in which Herbert deletes successive letters to form new words—will serve to illustrate the complexity of what might at first appear to be merely a clever gimmick.

> I bless thee, Lord, because I GROW
> Among thy trees, which in a ROW
> To thee both fruit and order OW.

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to introduce Renaissance poetic conventions like the blazon and the use of classical allusions.

17 Luminarium, www.luminarium.org/renlit/cardsdice.htm.

18 "Paradise," in *George Herbert and Henry Vaughn: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Louis L. Martz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 119. An e-text of this poem is also available at Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Calvin College, 2018, www.ccel.org/h/herbert/temple/Paradise.html.

What open force, or hidden CHARM
Can blast my fruit, or bring me HARM,
While the inclosure is thine ARM.

Inclose me still for fear I START,
Be to me rather sharp and TART,
Than let me want thy hand and ART.

When thou dost greater judgments SPARE,
And with thy knife but prune and PARE,
Ev'n fruitful trees more fruitful ARE.

Such sharpness shows the sweetest FREND:
Such cuttings rather heal than REND:
And such beginnings touch their END.

Here, the metaphor of God as a gardener who prunes only to enable growth and fruitfulness is reinforced by rhymes that playfully add layers of meaning by subtracting. Upon even closer examination, the second rhyming word in each stanza—after a single letter has been pared away —often bears a seemingly negative connotation, while the third reveals a more consoling idea after yet another letter has been removed: a neat encapsulation of the poem's central concept of temporary divine chastisement that enables salvation.

In addition to individual texts that employ word games, I also assign several clusters of poems that introduce the idea of poetry as *social* game where poets reply to one another's work, playfully and competitively: Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love," Ralegh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd," and Donne's "The Bait"; Ralegh's "Fortune hath taken away my love" and Elizabeth I's "Ah, silly Pug"; several of Mary Wroth's sonnets and Jonson's "A Sonnet to the Noble Lady, Lady Mary Wroth." This last cluster is also a useful way to introduce the concept of copying out other people's sonnets—"exscribing," in Jonson's terminology—as an activity that inspires poetry of one's own and enriches one's repertoire of poetic vocabulary and techniques. Early modern verse miscellanies with multiple contributors, such as the Devonshire Manuscript, provide abundant evidence for transcribing, annotating, and composing poetry as a form of creative and social play, in which individuals exchange and respond to verses, jest with one another, and intermingle original works with pre-existing ones.[19]

19 Constance Crompton, Daniel Powell, Alyssa Arbuckle, and Ray Siemens, "Building *A Social Edition of the Devonshire Manuscript*," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 34 (2014): 131–56.

The commonplace book project, through a series of low-stakes assignments which I will describe in the next section, offers students an opportunity to experiment with this type of textual play among themselves.

Playing with Poetry: Short Assignments

Along with hand-copying poems or quotations of their choice into their commonplace books, students in my class complete a series of weekly special assignments intended to emulate various forms of early modern textual play. (Examples of these assignments are provided in the Appendix.) First, after we have read a selection of early modern poetic responses to other poets, as discussed in the previous section, students are asked to choose a poem from the course readings and write an original poem of their own in response—participating, in other words, in the same kinds of playful dialogue between texts as the canonical writers we're reading. There are no restrictions about form or content, although I have offered suggestions that they *may* wish to give a voice to a character who doesn't speak in the original poem, echo this poem's language, or even try writing in the same verse form. (A significant number of students do write original sonnets; others make more or less successful attempts at writing in early modern English.)

I have been consistently impressed by the variety of student responses and the level of poetic skill on display. In a single section of the course, I received a teasing rejection in the voice of the young man from Shakespeare's Sonnet 20; a pillar-shaped poem describing the pillars of Islam, reworking George Herbert's play with form and content in "The Altar" into the idiom of a different faith; and a heartbreaking narrative about the birth of stillborn twins, written in reply to Katherine Philips's "On the Death of My First and Dearest Child," written by a student who had hardly ever spoken in class. Nancy Hayes, writing about a similar creative writing activity she employs in her own classes, notes that "allusions to assigned readings which have been so gracefully embedded in the student's own lyrical idiom suggest that a uniquely creative form of learning has taken place, one which cannot be described simply as an analytical process, but rather a more elemental, emotional, or poetic one. The student has internalized the material, and has been changed by the experience of reading and writing early modern poetry."[20] This sort of transformative learning is often elusive in general edu-

20 Nancy Hayes, "Giant, Bloody Fleas and Duct Tape Dragons: Flights of Fancy in the Renaissance Classroom," in *Creating the Premodern in the Postmodern Classroom: Creativity in Early English Literature and History Classes*, ed. Anna Riehl Bertolet and

cation courses, but it is, I feel, one of the things such courses *should* strive to achieve.

I also wanted to give students a sense of how exchanging manuscript commonplace books could itself serve as a social game, so the weekly special assignments include both in-class and out-of-class exchanges of poetry, similar to the book-sharing activities that Dana Schumacher-Schmidt describes elsewhere in this volume.[21] In the in-class exchange, students are asked to copy a poem directly from a partner's handwritten commonplace book into their own. (This provides an opportunity to demonstrate how texts can be transformed through sharing and recopying; since they are asked *not* to work from the printed text in their anthology, the second-hand copy may differ from that text in ways that range from simple misspellings to the complete omission of line breaks.) In the out-of-class exchange, students take a classmate's book home with them, read through the selections carefully, and add a poem their classmate does not already have in their book but that they think their partner might enjoy, based on the other selections in the book. In both cases, I try to encourage students to exchange books with people they are friends with, or at least know outside of class, to simulate the conditions of a real early modern manuscript exchange, but at a school with a high percentage of transfer and commuter students, it is not practical to make this a requirement.

Like many faculty members around the world, I found myself having to adapt my courses for online delivery abruptly during the second half of the spring 2020 semester, and the majority of them remained online throughout the 2020–21 academic year. Like Joshua Eckhardt,[22] I feel that the act of hand-copying is valuable in itself, and, as noted above, it introduces students to the ways that manuscript transmission can produce variant readings. Therefore, I chose to retain the requirement that students maintain a handwritten commonplace book, and asked them to share their work by uploading digital photos or scans to the course LMS. In an upper-level Early Modern Poetry class that was cross-listed in our MFA program in creative writing, I replaced one of our standard weekly discussion board threads with a "verse conversation" game, which I began by posting a few lines from a poem and challenging students to respond in verse—whether excerpts

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Carol Levin (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2018), 1–12 at 11.

21 See the chapter by Schumacher-Schmidt in this volume.

22 See the chapter by Joshua Eckhardt in this volume.

from the poems we were studying, or an original composition of their own. They then selected a portion of the exchange to copy into their books. Thus, many of these activities can be adapted to courses without an explicit focus on gaming or a physical classroom presence.

Examining the Game: Longer Assignments

In addition to these ungraded weekly assignments, students in my survey course also complete two formal, graded writing assignments linked to the commonplace book project, provided in the Appendix. One of these is a close reading paper exploring how an early modern text of their choice plays with language. The other assignment, which they complete after a final, anonymous exchange of books at the end of the semester, asks them to engage in an original primary source analysis of the book they have received: what can a commonplace book reveal about the reading practices of its compiler? This is a challenging assignment, one that requires students to think like scholars, and some are tempted to make wild inferences about their classmates' personal lives rather than focusing on their relationships with *texts*; I have had to tweak the instructions to discourage this. Another pitfall is that very occasionally, a student-produced commonplace book will prove to be either illegible or otherwise unsuitable for analysis (for example, the student has completed only one or two entries and then abandoned the project). I find it helpful to keep a commonplace book of my own and to retain unclaimed examples from previous semesters in order to have a few emergency backups. Despite these challenges, I found that this assignment provided a practical way to bring manuscript analysis into the classroom, a benefit that is particularly useful at colleges and universities that do not have rare book collections. Students need to identify texts that may not be labeled with title or author, notice and account for textual variants, observe patterns, and make inferences about what elements such as the selection and arrangement of texts, as well as handwritten notes and original poetry, might reveal about the compiler's individual, interactive relationship with the written word. While not all students can do all of these things successfully, simply making the attempt introduces them to the challenges and rewards of original research.

Having now used some version of this commonplace book project in five sections of the early British literature survey, as well as two upper-level courses, I believe it has significantly increased student engagement and appreciation of the works we were reading. Several course evaluation comments identified this project as an assignment that students particu-

larly enjoyed. Further, it seems to have tapped into a rich vein of textual and artistic creativity. I would estimate that about half of the commonplace books I have received incorporated original art of some sort, ranging from cartoon illustrations of the poems to truly accomplished work. Even more importantly, given what I was trying to do with this project, many of the students are clearly having fun with the interplay of language and image; one produced a delightful rebus version of Donne's "The Bait," with most of the nouns in the poem replaced with small images of the thing they represented. It became evident that students are extraordinarily adept at *playing with* early modern poets––and by "playing with" I mean not only manipulating the text in clever and pleasurable ways, but also coming to see these long-dead writers as partners in an ongoing game of poetry, as equals, as fellow human beings.

Appendix

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 1 — Response Poem

This week, you should do the standard weekly assignment (copying at least 28 lines from the course readings into your commonplace book), **but also** choose one of the poems you're copying this week, or one that you have previously copied into your commonplace book, and write an original poem of your own in reply. You may write from your own point of view, as Queen Elizabeth does in her reply to Sir Walter Ralegh's "Fortune hath taken thee away" and Jonson does in his reply to Wroth's sonnets, or you may write from a perspective of a fictional character, as Ralegh does in his reply to Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love." Giving a voice to someone who doesn't speak in the original poem—like Sidney's Stella—is often a good way in.

As our early modern poets do, you'll probably want to echo some of the language and images in the original poem, as well as responding to the ideas. (You might even want to try your hand at using the same verse form, although you're certainly not required to do so!)

WEEK 2 — In-Class Commonplace Book Exchange

At the beginning of class, we'll be setting aside time to share books with another student. Read through your partner's commonplace book entries, pick a poem or a quote you like, and *copy it out into your own book*. (You should copy directly from their book, without checking the original text in your anthology—if this takes longer than time permits, you may also take a photo of the page in their book and work from the photo.)

WEEK 3 — Out-of-Class Commonplace Book Exchange

During class, exchange commonplace books with another student in the class. Ideally, this should be someone you know outside of class; it may or may not be the same person you exchanged books with last week. Take their book home with you and bring it back to class at our next meeting to return it to its owner.

Between today and our next class meeting, read through the poems and quotations your classmate has selected, and *add one new poem or quotation that you think they would enjoy, based on their other choices*. This may be

from anything we have read at any point during this course. The only rules are that it should be something your classmate has not yet included in their commonplace book, and that you should choose it with *their* interests and tastes in mind, rather than simply picking something *you* happen to like.

WEEK 4 — Exploring Further

Add a poem or quotation to your commonplace book from any work by any of our early modern poets (Wyatt, Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, Queen Elizabeth, Wroth, Barnfield, Ralegh, Marlowe, Donne, Jonson, Philips, Herbert, Herrick, Marvell, Milton, or Lovelace) that was NOT specifically assigned for class. (It does not even need to be in the *Norton Anthology*—feel free to use online resources to find additional works by these writers.) As always, you should pick a piece that you like and find meaningful.

"Language at Play" Paper

For this assignment, pick EITHER a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century poem we've read in class (any poem from Wyatt on forward) OR a short passage (around thirty to fifty lines) from *Twelfth Night*. In this paper, focus closely on the poem or passage you've chosen, and explore how the writer plays with language. What seems to be the overall purpose of this wordplay: how might it show off the author's cleverness, force the reader to see something in a new and different way, or express a serious idea playfully?

Examples of playing with language may include:

- Punning on multiple meanings of the same word or phrase; for example, in *Twelfth Night* 3.1, Viola and Feste's first exchange turns on the fact that "live by the church" can mean either "live physically next to the church" or "make one's living through the church."
- Playing with words that have *similar* sounds, like "love" and "glove" or "hart" (male deer) and "heart."
- Reversing a phrase: "Better a witty fool than a foolish wit."
- Playing with contradictions and paradoxes: "I fear and hope, I burn and freeze like ice."
- Doing unexpected things with poetic forms and conventions—for example, writing a poem in the shape of the thing it describes, or a sonnet where every line has twelve syllables instead of the usual ten.

– Imitating, replying to, or parodying work by another writer—for example, Ralegh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" echoes and responds to Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd…" while Shakespeare's Sonnet 130 pokes fun at poetic comparisons in general.

Other forms of wordplay (Barnfield's echo sonnet or many of Herbert's poems might fall into this category).

You're encouraged to use a historical dictionary of the English language, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* or the *Online Etymology Dictionary* (www.etymonline.com) to research how words were used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially ones that seem to have multiple meanings or mean something different from what they do today.

Commonplace Book Analysis

At the beginning of the final exam period, you will receive a commonplace book created by someone else with whom you have not exchanged books before. Examine the commonplace book, identify as many of the pieces as you can (you may use your textbook and the Internet for this), and write an essay analysing the reading and quoting practices of your classmate and his or her coterie (the student or students with whom the book has previously been exchanged). In other words, *what can this book tell you about how its creators read and interpret the text?*

Questions that you might want to consider include:

– What sort of subject matter seems to appeal to the creator of the book? Are there themes or authors that come up repeatedly, or other common threads that unite multiple works in the collection (for example, works by women)?

– How is the collection organized? What kinds of things does the creator seem to think it is important for you to know about the poems? (For example, are authors' names included, or line numbers or notes from the textbook?)

– If the book's creator has added notes, titles, illustrations, etc., what might this material tell you about the reader's interpretation of the poems?

– Are there any differences between the handwritten versions of the poems in this book and the versions in your course texts (such as missing words / lines, line breaks in different places, differences in

wording or spelling, modernization of certain words, etc.). If so, what might this tell you about how the creator of the book is reading the texts? (Although textual differences may, in some cases, reveal misreading or inaccurate copying, think of them as transformations, whether deliberate or not, rather than errors. Do they make sense on their own terms? Do they change the meaning or emphasis of the work?)

- What do the creator's original poetry, and the responses written during exchanges with other students, reveal about how these readers understood and responded to the early modern material?
- When you encounter pieces that were not specifically assigned for class, do your best to identify what they are. Are they early modern? Contemporary? Original? How might they relate to the other selections in the book?

For an example of an analysis of a real commonplace book from the sixteenth century, see http://www.tudortimes.co.uk/people/the-devonshire-manuscript.

Important note: Be careful about making assumptions about the creator's personal life or experiences, unless you have *positive* evidence that this is the case (such as a note where the creator describes a personal experience, or an original poem that seems clearly autobiographical). Remember that people often enjoy works that do NOT reflect their personal experience; you don't, for example, have to be a gangster to like movies about organized crime. Therefore, avoid observations like "The person who created this commonplace book seems to have had a turbulent love life"; instead, try "The creator seems to be particularly attracted to poetry that depicts love as painful or distressing."

Coda

MANAGING THE COMMONPLACE BOOK ASSIGNMENT

PUTTING THIS VOLUME TO PRACTICE

SARAH E. PARKER

MANY OF THE contributors to this volume first began discussing how to use commonplace books in the classroom at the annual International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan. In a roundtable format, we shared a variety of strategies for using commonplace books as a pedagogical tool, primarily in the British Literature 1 survey classroom. In the course of that discussion, one of our panel participants commented that pedagogical scholarship sometimes has a tendency to present a given strategy or classroom technique as a panacea. We read pedagogical scholarship hoping for the approach to teaching, the assignment idea, the insight that will jazz up our classroom, engage our students, improve retention, and make our lives as teachers easier with lightning-fast assessment. Many scholars of pedagogy write with an enviable optimism about how their ideas will accomplish all of these things.[1] Of course, no teaching strategy is perfect. There are a number of issues that may leave readers hesitant to integrate commonplace books into their teaching. In this coda to the volume, I hope to address some of the inherent challenges of using commonplace books that tend to surface when using this assignment. I will synthesize and

1 That said, there are important exceptions to this tendency. See Phillip Dawson and Samantha L. Dawson, "Sharing Successes and Hiding Failures: 'Reporting Bias' in Learning and Teaching Research," *Studies in Higher Education* 43 (2018): 1405–16; Gwen Shaw, "Bending So As Not to Break: Pedagogical Flexibility as an Asset," *Visible Pedagogy*, February 24, 2017, https://vp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/2017/02/24/bending-so-as-not-to-break-pedagogical-flexibility-as-an-asset/; see also the recurring series, "Teaching Fails" in *The Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*, https://jitp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/category/teaching-fails/.

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propose strategies for dealing with each of these challenges, which range from finding the time for yet another assignment in an already-full course, activating student engagement and, of course, grading.

Scaffolding: Fitting the Commonplace Book Assignment into a Packed Syllabus

When teaching any course, but perhaps especially a survey course, we all lament in unison: it is impossible to fit everything into one semester. Many of us make agonizing decisions each time we update a syllabus, as we try to stuff all of the content our students simply must encounter into a short fourteen- to sixteen-week term.[2] Given the content demands of an early British literature survey course, the idea of adding yet another assignment seems counterintuitive. The contributors to this volume have proposed a number of low-effort/high impact ways to fit commonplacing into the course, all of which integrate the commonplace book into aspects of the course that you may already have developed. These include:

- Schumacher-Schmidt's idea to use the commonplace book as a reading journal where students can synthesize themes and concepts across course readings by creating their own headings and indexing system.
- Hagstrom-Schmidt's class activities that allow students to discover thematic connections across readings by using the commonplace book for in-class group work.
- Integrating commonplace books into the discussion and group work portion of a given class. For example, writing in the commonplace book could be the "think" part of a think, pair, share, [square] activity. Students could copy a short poem into their books before beginning a class-wide discussion. During these activities, instructors can circulate and check on what students have written, sketched, or outlined, though it is important to do this with a spirit of curiosity and encouragement rather than as a looming policing figure.

2 John Guillory's *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993) is a foundational work on this issue. See also Wendell V. Harris, "Canonicity," *PMLA* 106 (1991): 110–21. My thanks to Jessie Hock and Emily Vasiliasukas for their insights on this topic.

- Eckhardt's proposal to replace the course textbook with a commonplace book of poetry that students compile from freely available digitized primary sources.
- Silva's strategy to make commonplacing a part of the research paper assignment as a place for brainstorming and documenting the research process (for both student and instructor).
- Schumacher-Schmidt's suggestion to develop test questions based on what students have been writing in their commonplace books.
- Cumulative final exam presentations of the student's commonplace book, as Schumacher-Schmidt outlines.

Grading

When introducing any new assignment, instructors must consider the logistics of assessment. Though no single chapter of this volume focuses exclusively on assessment, many contributors suggest ways to make the commonplace book assignment less onerous for the instructor to grade and more beneficial to the student's learning process, as opposed to a last-minute project.

I work at a small, liberal arts institution in northeast Florida, and my contract requires me to teach four classes per semester. Each of those sections typically has 19–22 students. Even if only two of those sections are completing commonplace books, the assessment can sometimes feel overwhelming. Commonplace books, as this volume demonstrates, are major projects. Most of them reach into scores of pages and thousands of words. If your students choose to use analogue media, as most of my students do, you can find yourself lugging what feels like hundreds of pounds of antique-looking leather journals around, sacrificing your spine to the gods of good pedagogy. Here are some ideas from the volume and from my own experience that can make assessment more manageable:

Ask students to trade their commonplace books and give each other feedback at several points during the semester, either in class or as a take-home assignment. In addition to mimicking early commonplace book practices, this gives students an opportunity to see what their classmates are doing and get peer feedback. (See Corrigan for a peer-assessment assignment; see also Schumacher-Schmidt, Eckhardt, Silva).

Require informal check-ins with students. Silva recommends that these can take place a couple of times during office hours and/or just before or after class.

Make indexing a key part of the assignment. This is another practice that draws on early commonplacing, and it allows students to practice organization and retrieval. I also like to pitch indexing as a way for them to find what they have written and learn good note taking habits in other contexts, but this also helps with assessment. If you develop a rubric with a certain number of required entries (e.g. some instructors may want students to copy so many lines of poetry or to write so many words per week in reflective essays), a well-indexed book allows you to find exactly what you need to grade more quickly, especially since some students enjoy commonplacing so much that they will develop pages and pages of reading notes.

Use colour-coded post-its to leave commentary. For example, yellow could signal a "needs improvement" and include a quick comment about what to expand, while blue might signal "great work!" I first came up with the idea to use post-its because I felt extremely hesitant to write in my students' books when many of them were so exquisitely artistic. For example, I asked students to draw a picture of Penshurst based on Ben Jonson's country house poem, and one student's drawing was so beautiful that I wanted to ask if I could have it framed. Post-it commentary allows me to give students feedback on their work and signal that I had taken the time to engage with it while leaving the commonplace book itself in the hand of the student. That said, I know that many contributors to this volume invite cross annotation, and we know that the history of commonplacing itself was rarely single-authored. In terms of instructor feedback, though, I found this method to be minimally intrusive, foregrounding the voice of the student, but also efficient for the grader.

Use a holistic rubric. The rubric I developed adopts a typical grid model moving from "excellent" to "needs improvement." For my commonplace book assignment, which serves more as a reading journal and study tool than as a replacement for exams and papers as some use it, I outline criteria to assess the index, quotations, creativity, and required written assignments (see the rubric in Appendix below).

To save your back, you might consider requiring students to turn in pdf scans of their books for periodic assessment as Eckhardt's essay recommends.

To avoid having to carry commonplace books home for grading, I allow a flexible due date. In a Tuesday/Thursday class, students can decide to turn them in either day, or to leave them on my office door at another time dur-

ing the week. This allows me to space out the grading, which I do entirely on campus, and students respond well to a little self-direction in choosing their due date.

Pasupathi points out that integrating commonplace books into the research paper process has made her student's writing more varied in terms of both topics and choice of passages as argumentative evidence, which in turn makes grading the research papers more interesting for the instructor. I have also found this to be the case.

Learning Outcomes and Student Engagement

Each of the chapters in this volume emphasizes the fact that students tend to embrace the commonplace book assignment. Though students are sometimes resistant to unconventional assignments with new assessment criteria, nearly all of my students have tended to cite the commonplace book as their favourite part of the class. In addition to teaching them about early notetaking practices, they learn to synthesize the course material while feeling empowered to make it their own. Commonplacing also signals to the students that I encourage creative thinking, and since integrating it into the assignments, students have tended to feel empowered to select more creative research topics for the final research paper assignment.[3]

Commonplace books have been used to good effect in writing classrooms to help students develop their own style, to help them learn to develop multiple perspectives, and to help students synthesize the fragmented way that they encounter information in the modern world.[4]

These outcomes can be transferable to the literature survey course as well, since that course typically builds on the writing sequence at most universities. For example, Gaillet argues that commonplacing is one way to encourage students to think about style, which offers a useful way to tackle the stylistic differences between medieval and early modern writing and contemporary prose. In asking students to pull one quotation per reading (i.e. two per week in a class that meets two days a week), copy it out and

3 See the chapter by Pasupathi in this volume.

4 See Lynee Lewis Gaillet, "Commonplace Books and the Teaching of Style," *Journal of Teaching Writing* 15 (1996): 285–94; Paula M. Carbone, "Using Commonplace Books to Help Students Develop Multiple Perspectives," *English Journal* 99 (2010): 63–69; and Anna Maria Johnson and Nusrat Jahan, "Assessing the Impact on Critical Reading and Critical Thinking: Using Commonplace Books and Social Reading Practices in a First-Year Writing Classroom," *Pedagogy* 21 (2021): 277–94.

write about it, their first instinct will always be to focus on content. That is an important part of the assignment and also central to the original uses of commonplace books, which organized quotations based on theme. Yet this focus on quotation coupled with reflection also encourages close reading skills. As Gaillet shows, it can even give students a place to think about what kind of writing style appeals to them and reflect on their own development as writers. Such writing assignments, paced evenly throughout the semester, can refocus students away from a "timed product-centred" approach to writing.[5] I integrate this element of personal style and the development of individual voice into the holistic rubric as a separate line item to indicate to students that this is one of the assignment's goals, but also to show them that I encourage their creative development in the course.

As Carbone as well as Johnson and Jahan show, commonplacing also helps students to develop basic skills in critical thinking, such as encountering and considering multiple perspectives and evaluating multiple information sources.[6] At my institution, the British Literature survey is a course that can also count toward general education requirements for non-English majors, so I often have a student population that ranges from highly motivated English majors to students who feel less comfortable with literature and are only taking the class to fulfill a basic requirement toward graduation. The commonplace book allows that diverse group to meet the requirements within the purview of their current skill sets while also encouraging critical thinking, a key learning outcome for general education courses in the humanities.

Several contributors to this volume address the challenge of encouraging consistent student engagement with the commonplace book assignment.[7] Commonplace book assignments need to be developed in a way that avoids students' tendency to engage thoroughly at the beginning of the course and then lose enthusiasm as the demands of the semester increase. I have two strategies for encouraging student engagement with the commonplace book assignment throughout the semester. The first relates to assessment. The commonplace book assignment in my current courses is worth a significant 20 percent of the student's grade, but I collect it four times throughout the semester. The first collection takes place only two weeks into class, so that I can identify students who are not engaging with the assignment and work

5 Gaillet, "Commonplace Books," 293.

6 Carbone, "Using Commonplace Books"; Johnson and Jahan, "Assessing the Impact."

7 See the chapters by Eckhardt, Pasupathi, Hagstrom-Schmidt, Corrigan, and Schumacher-Schmidt in this volume.

with them to improve from the start. Four collection points also render each assessment worth 5 percent, rather than giving students a grade worth 20 percent at the end of the semester (as is traditionally done with, for example, the final exam or the research paper). Breaking the assessment down and giving students early feedback is key to setting expectations for the assignment and maintaining student engagement with their commonplace books throughout the term.[8]

Another strategy I used that worked to increase student engagement in my class was a class-wide competition. This competition for the best commonplace book helped to improve engagement from students who might otherwise procrastinate on the assignment.[9] For readers of this volume who may be hesitant to embrace the commonplace book as a central part of the class (and worth a majority of the grade) but still want to give the assignment a try, I recommend the competition as a way to encourage stu-

8 I also integrate the commonplace book into classroom activities, such as in-class commonplace book exchanges and response poems, similar to those used by other contributors to this volume. For concrete examples of such in-class assignments see the chapters by Hagstrom-Schmidt, Eckhardt, Corrigan, and Schumacher-Schmidt in this volume.

9 Some instructors may be uncomfortable with the phrase "competition" and may prefer to describe the assignment as a "class-wide challenge." Competition will create a negative pedagogical environment if it allows any public shaming. To avoid this, I do not rank the commonplace books or announce finalists. I simply build up the prize and announce it to applause at the end of the term. Because students are able to work at their own pace, this kind of competition avoids pitting students against each other or ranking them in any way. On the potential pedagogical benefits of competition see Rebecca Brown, "Promoting Cooperation and Respect: 'Bad' Poetry Slam in the Nontraditional Classroom," *Pedagogy* 11 (2011): 571–77; Michael Pennell, "The H1n1 Virus and Video Production: New Media Composing in First Year Composition," *Pedagogy* 10 (2010): 568–73; and Steve Nebel, Sascha Schneider, and Günter Daniel Rey, "From Duels to Classroom Competition: Social Competition and Learning in Educational Videogames within Different Group Sizes," *Computers in Human Behavior* 55, part A (February 2016): 384–98. Paige D. Ware, "Confidence and Competition Online: ESL Student Perspectives on Web-Based Discussions in the Classroom," *Computers and Composition* 21 (2004): 451–68, suggests that mediating assignments through online discussion boards (rather than face-to-face peer review) can give ESL students more confidence, and classroom activities that involve exchanging the commonplace book might serve as another such mediating tool; on the benefits of competition in the classroom, see also Nora Corrigan's chapter in this volume. For a negative model, see Elizabeth A. Canning, Jennifer LaCosse, Kathryn M. Kroeper, and Mary C. Murphy, "Feeling Like an Imposter: The Effect of Perceived Classroom Competition on the Daily Psychological Experiences of First-Generation College Students," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 14 (2020): 647–57, though the latter is specifically about a broader sense of competition in STEM fields rather than a specific classroom assignment.

dent participation without making the commonplace book as central of an assignment as some chapters have recommended (though our hope is that many of our readers will go on to integrate the commonplace book assignment more thoroughly into their classes).

The first time that I introduced commonplacing into a syllabus, I was reluctant to allow it to displace other central assignments in a trial run, but I wanted to provide an incentive to my students that would replace the typical threat of a bad grade on a large assignment. I told the students on the first day of class that the best commonplace book would win a gift card to Chamblin's, a local used bookstore that is legendarily massive and highly popular among my students. Throughout the course of the semester, I would remind them of this prize, and most students got into the spirit of the competition. To be sure, I still received some less-than-stellar last-minute submissions, but most of my students got excited about the prospect of a reward beyond the promise of a good grade for a relatively small assignment. By the end of the semester, I had a handful of commonplace books that I felt were stellar, and I asked two colleagues to serve as outside judges to help me with the final decision. Awarding the gift certificate on the last day of class was a fun way to end the semester as well.

Unfortunately, the gift certificate idea became problematic when administration gave everyone a firm reminder of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) rules about giving college athletes gifts. To provide context for readers who may not work at schools with large athletics programs, the NCAA sets out guidelines regarding student athletes that have an impact in the classroom regarding everything from attendance policies, to academic misconduct, to rewards systems. At my institution, student athletes make up 16.5 percent of the total student population.[10] College athletics is a multi-million dollar industry in the United States, and the NCAA has strict rules regarding "impermissible benefits" to discourage underhanded bribes in student-athlete recruitment.[11] Though the policy was designed to

10 At time of publication, there are 444 student-athletes out of 2,686 undergraduate students.

11 On NCAA profits, see "NCAA earns $1.15 billion in 2021 as revenue returns to normal," ESPN, February 2, 2022, www.espn.com/college-sports/story/_/id/33201991/ncaa-earns-115-billion-2021-revenue-returns-normal. While the recent introduction of the name, image and likeness policy has allowed some student athletes (usually in major sports like football and basketball) to profit from their success, the NCAA policy against impermissible benefits remains in place. On name, image, and likeness, see Michelle Brutlag Hosik, "NCAA Adopts Interim Name, Image and Likeness Policy," NCAA, June 30, 2021, www.ncaa.org/news/2021/6/30/ncaa-adopts-interim-

prevent corruption in big-money sports, like men's football and basketball, the rules apply equally to all college athletes at NCAA schools. For example, if I have a student-athlete from the women's softball team whose textbook did not arrive in time for the course, it is impermissible for me to give her an extra textbook from my personal collection. Similarly, any prize of value could come under scrutiny under the impermissible benefit policy if the winner were to be a student athlete. Though my first commonplace book winner had not been an NCAA athlete, I wanted to ensure that I did not step into that particular quagmire. One solution was to refashion the award as an extra credit award. I offered the winner of the competition a significant extra credit boost to the final grade, a strategy that has proven effective. On the one hand, the winner is sometimes the kind of student that would have earned a good grade without the extra credit boost, but I have also found that the extra credit motivation works well for students who have different learning abilities and skill sets beyond standard academic writing, as well as for those students who might otherwise have been less motivated to engage thoroughly with the assignment. While this model has worked well for my classes, it does have the drawback of emphasizing grading. The spirit of friendly competition and the fact that extra credit points are a reward without any attendant possibility of penalty helped to mitigate those issues. Overall, the competition has proven beneficial to the goal of encouraging consistent student engagement with the commonplace book assignment.

Conclusion

No assignment is going to enthrall every student and be a breeze to grade. That said, the chapters in this volume offer concrete strategies for using commonplacing to improve student engagement with old texts, encourage active student learning and critical thinking, and offer creative ways to assess student work. Commonplace assignments have the potential to convince our students that their ideas and experiences are valid, which is especially important in a syllabus that prioritizes white, Christian, male, and dominant language (English) texts, as the early British Literature survey tends to do.[12] Yet by engaging in a notetaking practice that is rooted in early British history, students also learn to see beyond only what they can relate to, which

name-image-and-likeness-policy.aspx. On impermissible benefits, see the NCAA Bylaws, "16: Awards, Benefits, and Expenses for Enrolled Student-Athletes," https://web3.ncaa.org/lsdbi/search/bylawView?id=6885.

12 See the chapter by Silva in this volume.

can lead to boringly repetitive paper topics.[13] Despite the challenges that any new pedagogical approach is sure to present, we hope that the readers of this volume will be inspired to adopt and adapt these ideas for using commonplace books in the medieval and early modern classroom. The commonplace assignment has consistently appeared on my course evaluations as a favourite among my students. I have benefited in turn from the reward of seeing them create truly stellar work. My students have expressed their creativity in lyrical essay-length responses, cartoons inspired by *Beowulf*, drawings of various authors and poetic settings, and truly insightful commentary about the reading, often from students who might not be bold enough to speak up in class. Commonplacing is both pedagogically useful and creative for the students and more interesting to grade for the professor.

Appendix

SAMPLE HOLISTIC GRADING RUBRIC

Criteria	5 (excellent)	4 (very good)	3 (satisfactory)	2 (needs work)	1 (unsatisfactory)
Detailed and clear Index					
Quotations: at least one for each class reading and why it stood out to you.					
Reflections: At least one 300-word response per literary work (e.g. *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain*)					
Class Notes: Notes from each class meeting					
Creativity of Language: Unique voice of author					
Creativity of Design: Layout/drawings communicate thought process					
Overall Visual Appeal (Not necessary for a good grade, but a factor in the competition)					

13 See the chapter by Pasupathi in this volume.

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