LET'S GET DIGITAL

Making Broadsides Ballads User Friendly / OR / My Experience Working on a Digital Archive

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Introduction:
The English Broadside Ballad Archive (EBBA) aims to make broadside ballads user friendly. EBBA is an online database where each broadside ballad is digitally preserved.

Working as a research assistant for EBBA has given me opportunities to see how a digital archive of popular culture so far removed from our own can be made accessible to the public. In the 16th and 17th century, broadside ballads were versatile works of creativity. EBBA, with its many intricate parts, revolves around giving accurate representations of these works of printed literary art to be searchable on the database.

Discussion:
As a research assistant I have worked on two aspects of the project: keywording ballads, Third Pass Cataloging, checking ballad citation pages, and even uploading transcriptions to the site. This work helped me understand how information should be presented and contextualized with how I researched broadside ballads. It affected how I chose the information I present on the site, how I analyze the broadside ballads and the tunes, what terms I use to describe certain aspects of the broadside, and how I relate these early modern works to 21st century ideas.

In collaboration with EBBA, and as a part of the Amhold Undergraduate Research Fellows Program, I have been working on my own research — the creation of a website dedicated to the study of a particular broadside ballad and its many literary lives. While working on this digital archive, I came to appreciate how the database is structured and the resources that are available.

Keywording
"The Glance"/Third Pass Cataloging
Ballad Research

EBBA is a database and, with all databases, the user's ability to search is paramount to their experience. EBBA's "Advanced Search" allows the user to search not only by title, first lines, tune, date, author, etc., but also by keyword. The keywords applied to each broadside ballad are essential to the search process and the user's experience on the site.

As a research assistant, one of my tasks was to read over ballads that needed keywords and assign them 3-5 keywords. To do this, I had to read the broadside ballad in a different way. I was not only looking at what the ballad was about, but what kind of keywords best represented the broadside ballad as a whole.

This process helped me in my own research and influenced what information I present, how I categorize that information, and ensuring the information uses terms that are relevant.

"The Glance" was the process of looking over each broadside ballad entry. I checked to make sure all the necessary things were there: all parts of the ballad entry including transcriptions, citation information, recordings, and images. Unlike the Third Pass Cataloging, this was much less about details.

Third Pass Cataloging meant remediation: looking at the information on the broadside ballad and making sure it is presented correctly.

While keywording influenced how I read broadside ballads, "The Glance" and Third Pass Cataloging influenced how I described them, focusing on what part of the broadside ballad could give more insights into its popularity and literary life.

Through all of my tasks as a research assistant, I have benefited from the experience. My research involved creating a website with pages dedicated to certain aspects of the broadside ballad, and within those pages sections aimed at more specific focuses. EBBA has influenced how I thought about my site and how I structured it. During my time at EBBA I have been supported and encouraged by the EBBA team and the Director Patricia Fumerton, and have found my time as a research assistant invaluable.

Come Live With Me: Living the History of a Ballad is an interactive multimedia research tool intended to facilitate the study of both the poem and the broadside ballad of Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love."

My hope is that this site will be a space that not only encourages the research of Christopher Marlowe's ballad but where the research would be presented in a way that made it an interactive experience. This project will help us to reimagine how we view and research these kinds of works using the technology available so what we learn can be disseminated to the audience of our peers and students, and they too can participate in the research-learning experience.

https://comelivewithmeballad.wordpress.com