

From Old to New:

Or, Modernizing the Crawford Collection



EBBA (English Broadside Ballad Archive) provides and makes accessible digitized facsimiles and readable transcriptions of early modern ballads. The project is currently archiving the Crawford collection at the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

The project exposes students to digital archiving and encourages a reading and knowledge of ballad culture. Elements of a ballad include woodcuts, ornaments, seals, tunes, and of course the text itself.



Before: A ballad with original black-letter print

Seventeenth century ballads are, in many ways, very similar to modern day popular culture. By learning to transform and digitize material, the transcriber familiarizes themselves with the nature and themes of ballads, and why they are formatted in a certain way. Cuckoldry, love, battle, and news are a few of many topics expressed in the poetry of the ballads. Woodcuts are re-used for certain ballads with similar themes. Encountering new and unfamiliar images, such as the music sheet above, is exciting and noteworthy. The ballad project is a great and collaborative resource for those interested or curious about ballad culture.



After: A transcribed white-letter print (Roman type)

Transforming the text with Photoshop CS 5 requires decision-making. How do you blanch the background and border without sacrificing the visage of the original ballad? Should the font be made larger, or is expanding the spacing preferred? Consistency is paramount, and certain judgment calls are entrusted to the transcriber.



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