SAA 2020 seminar: Shakespeare Studies and the Idea of the Interface
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"Great thing of us forgot!" Shakespeare and The Disappearing Page
The material turn in early modern literary studies reimages the page as an interface, a surface positioned between authorial composition and readerly interpretation. This surface, we have come to understand, presents a rugged terrain rather than smooth boundary, hierarchizing information, displaying the contingencies of production, and directing our reading. Literary scholars in particular credit this change to D. F. McKenzie, who insisted that textual forms affect literary meanings. Less frequently considered is why McKenzie had to insist upon this point at all. The collective forgetting of the physical page, both as a cultural practice and as a function of readership, reminds us that interfaces often exist to disappear.

The story of page suppression tends to begin in the eighteenth century, with the convergence of typographical standards and narrative realism that provide the novel with the illusion of transparency. This essay, however, begins with a disappearing page in King Lear, when Gloucester questions Edmund over his forged letter, "Know ye the character to be your brother's?" This quick readerly movement past handwriting into intention, emblematic of the play's delimitation and interrogation of boundaries, raises several questions to which this essay offers preliminary answers: What do pages that appear and disappear tell us about early modern fictions? How did they think about narrative absorption? How do questions of surface and interface gain new urgency in the movement from performance to print?

Kurt Daw
Make Your Best Use of This
User Experience Design (UX for short) is a contemporary design discipline which emerged at the turn of the century and grew to maturity in the last decade that creates products, interfaces and intuitive approaches to information architecture based on the needs, perceptions, and experiences of the intended user(s).
Taking a UX approach to designing an interface for a new critical edition of a Shakespeare play, at least in one specific example in which this writer played a direct role, yields a very different outcome than traditional editions have used almost continuously since the eighteen century, and surprisingly have largely been replicated even in recent electronic editions.

This essay explicates the process and results of this experiment and contrasts it with the implicit assumptions of the generic traditional print interface about who the users are, what it is they want and need, and what agendas are being served.

Gabriel Egan
What are interfaces for, really?
This essay will argue that because of this harmful distinction between numbers that belong to everyone and numbers that are private property, Shakespeare scholars should cease making new interfaces. The materials we are interested in are, in their digital forms, merely strings of zeroes and ones. We already have many digital tools

for decoding texts, sounds, and still and moving pictures and they all work perfectly well for our scholarly and entertainment purposes. These tools are of course interfaces, but we have so many different tools for turning binary digits into readable and listenable words and pictures that these tools effectively cease to function as interfaces. Having so many interfaces is liberating in that we are tied to none. But the files used for digital artefacts in the field of Literary Studies are not usually provided to us in such unfettered formats. For us, the most important content is often tied to particular interfaces. We cannot get at the digital texts in Literature Online (LION) or EEBO except via ProQuest's proprietary web-based interfaces. We cannot get at the images in the Henslowe-Alleyn Digitization Project except via the project's proprietary Adobe Flash based interface. Whereas only a small part of the non-scholarly world is still tied to proprietary formats -- notably, Amazon's e-books and Audible's audio books -- most of the scholarly resources we need are provided to their users only through tightly controlled interfaces.

To see how we got into this position, the essay will survey the history of digital Shakespeare since the 1980s, when the first complete works editions were sold on floppy disks. The history of the evolving transport media for these resources, including magnetic and optical storage and later network delivery, is the history of a kind of arms race between providers who would lock up the resources and sell limited access to them and users who endlessly found new ways to circumvent the locks and limitations. The answer to the question in this essay's title is that in the context of commercialized academic publishing, digital interfaces are 'for' the proprietary control of digital content. The essay polemically advocates for Open Access and Open Source practices, which it presents as not only moral imperatives but also the only means by which reliable scholarly materials can be produced.

David Glimp
Hamlet's Infrastructures, or, Fortinbras

This paper approaches our seminar's topic from the perspective of infrastructure, and specifically the infrastructures that exist mostly in the background of Hamlet. One thing interfaces do is mediate between users and technical infrastructures in order to facilitate action. Focusing on the infrastructures of Hamlet—primarily for this paper, the mechanisms for levying armies, funding and prosecuting war, negotiating international relations, and establishing political legitimacy—draws attention to how Shakespeare explores the geopolitical context of the narrative and its impact on the play's unfolding action. The infrastructures that function to assemble and maintain geopolitical scales of action, to adapt the terminology of Saskia Sassen, and how people interact with those infrastructures, crucially impact the unfolding of action in the play, create the "form and pressure" (3.2.24) of the play's narrative.

Emphasizing the minor character Fortinbras, often cut from performance, provides one way to explore how Shakespeare understands the affordances of infrastructure, how people interact with, use, and repurpose infrastructures to inhabit a volatile and uncertain geopolitical terrain. Fortinbras is a kind of background presence for most of the play, a foil for Hamlet, another son living out an inherited legacy of violence, exploring what it is possible to do within the available infrastructures for geopolitical and political agency. As a character in the play, Fortinbras highlights the systemic realities

that define the world of Hamlet, and in a way serves as a prominent formal mechanism for creating a sense of a narrative world beyond the confines of Elsinore. That is, to draw on Alex Woloch's work on the function of minor characters in the novel, as a minor element of Hamlet's character system, Fortinbras provides an occasion to understand how characters provide an interface for a narrative world. What I propose is to wrestle with is the question of how concepts of interface and infrastructure can help us grasp the processes through which characters project a sense of realities beyond what is immediately present on stage, which is to say how characters function to define and provide audiences access to imagined worlds.

Adam Halstrom
Epistolary Paratext as Interface in Edmund Spenser's *The Shepherd's Calendar*
An interface is both *limes* and *limen*, limit and threshold, barrier and access. My paper explores the idea of the interface using an epistolary paratext from Edmund Spenser's *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1579). The paratextual letter, from the mysterious E.K. to the scholar Gabriel Harvey, is an interface in two ways: once by its nature as a letter and again in its application and publication as a paratext. Desiderius Erasmus gives us the best and most widely accepted definition of a familiar letter when he writes, "the letter is a conversation between absent friends." And, in his book on paratexts, originally published in French under the title *Siuels,* or thresholds, Gerard Genette argues that a paratext is "more than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a *threshold* […] a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*." The "conversation" of the letter and "transaction" of the paratext both invoke the idea of the interface. The combined epistolary and paratextual force of E.K.'s letter creates a complex interface between many different but interconnected entities: E.K., Harvey, the New Poet, the public (anonymous reader), the text (of the letter, the poem, the gloss), and, more abstractly, the present and past, reality and fiction. The letter's effect on our reception and understanding of *The Shepherd's Calendar* and the emergence of the "new Poete" is the subject of my paper.

Eric M. Johnson, Folger Shakespeare Library
Dynamic interfaces in the 16th and 21st centuries
The early modern era's media and today's media differ in stupendously obvious ways, but they share certain similarities in the ways they erect dynamic, unstable, often-evanescent interfaces between their substantive content and their respective audiences. In contemporary language, Shakespeare was a multimedia artist who was aware of his products' interfaces, and crafted suitable content for them. He and his collaborators had to gain official approval before mounting that content before a public audience, in a way that is not entirely unlike the way search engines can make content more or less prominent for online audiences. This paper draws comparisons between these two media landscapes, particularly the transient natures of the theater and the Web.

Lori Newcomb, University of Illinois
Passing Through Interfaces
Where does the idea of the interface take us? This paper joins our collective effort to define this elusive term, and then tests the concept against some specific problems I'm

grappling with now, as a bookish person in a society that increasingly imagines itself digitally. I argue that "the interface" is a heuristic that captures unique relationships and offers a very wide scope – one we should seek to enlarge.

First, I'll review some challenges in the etymology and application of the word, as my contribution to the seminar's central question: *how can the idea of the interface work for us?* I'll suggest that it may be most useful if we re-invigorate its etymology. If the interface is useful to us, or rather, if interfaces are useful to us, the qualities that are useful all embrace contingency: liquidity, reciprocity, selectivity. How can such abstractions be brought to life?

Second, I'll play with the "interface" as a framework for my challenges as a playgoer, Shakespeare scholar, book historian, teacher, library advocate, and fellow in digital humanities. How can "the idea of the interface" be productive in aspects of our academic lives beyond SAA papers and formal research?

Don Rodrigues
"Many Cyruses": Virtue and Virtuality in Sidney's Defense of Poesy

A crucial term in virtuality studies, "presence" is defined by neuroscientists as a "core neuropsychological phenomenon the effect of which is to produce a sense of agency and control: subjects are 'present' if they feel themselves able to enact their intentions in an external world."[1] We might therefore claim that we are "present" in a constructed or virtual environment if within that environment we retain our ability to exert actions that correspond to our intentions. While seemingly a novel concept, the ability to be telepresent—to be "both here and present elsewhere"—is the defining trait of what I call the early modern virtual "I." Such a conception of self depends upon an understanding of the evolving function of Renaissance virtue, a complex system of classical and theological signifiers that came to adjudicate self-worth as well as one's literal "place" in the Western world for centuries. It did so, I argue, by negotiating how behavior ought to correspond to belief—by delimiting the ways in which action and intention bear upon one another in practice. It thereby succeeded in securing relationships, imputed from without, between public and private, self and state. In other words, virtue came to function as an interface between these domains. In this paper, I examine this critical interface by focusing on virtual identities engendered through Sidnean "second nature." Through his vision of the poet bringing forth a golden world composed of "many Cyruses" as opposed to the "brazen" natural world wherein only one Cyrus may ever reign, Sidney exalts the counterfactual possibilities of divinely inspired poetic virtue. Sidnean second nature, composed materially of its many Cyruses, a community of readers brought to virtuous understanding and action vis-à-vis communication with the "vates" or poet-maker, thereby constitutes what one might call a virtual community—indeed, a virtual polis—that is itself subtended by virtuous principles.

Cliff Werier
The Interface is the Message: Design, Cognition, and the Editorial Tradition

While reading Shakespeare, the interface may be taken for granted or become invisible, as the content of the play engages the reader more than design elements that structure cognition. Yet as an indispensable technology, the interface and its mediation

between content and consciousness could be said to create Shakespeare through a complex cognitive interaction whereby the reader must choose between text, commentary, line numbers, word glosses, footnotes, collations, images, and even links to video clips and source texts. According to this model, the interface channels consciousness or provides options through which the reader is able to customize moment-to-moment interactions with the play, depending on the affordances of a particular interface and its cues for attention. Unlike the Shakespeare editorial tradition's emphasis on the transmission, interpretation, modernization, collation and establishment of a text and supportive apparatus, interface theory focuses on the necessary mediating function of material and digital structures which align with the reader's anticipated needs and intentions. This paper investigates how interface theory can productively align with Shakespeare editorial theory, with a special focus on how traditional texts and associated interfaces are increasingly integrated with digital versions. Given that the interface functions as the crucial gateway through which the reader is touched by Shakespeare, interactions between the editor's transmitted content and the edition's interface properties continue to condition every encounter.