

Abstracts for “EEBO Finds, Failures, and Futures”
SAA 2022 Jacksonville
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Laughter and Brutish Transformations:
EEBO and the Human-Nonhuman Boundary

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Text searches in the EEBO database improved and reshaped my current book project, “Almost Human: Boundaries of Personhood in Early Modern England.” An impulsive use of EEBO to understand early modern beliefs about flint related to period understandings of “stony-hearted” people led to systematic identification and tracking of key idioms delineating human-nonhuman boundaries. The book, once an argument based on four case studies that I felt illustrated resonant, ambient cultural concepts, transformed in the process. Case studies were enriched with textual examples from far more varied discursive fields and aimed at more diverse readerships, so that my gut feelings that they represented widespread ideas could be confirmed with clear evidence. Ultimately, I found such intriguing datasets that I added an opening chapter focused on treatment of the book’s core issues in vernacular logic manuals, whose influential coinages and concepts, new to English in the 1550s and brought to my attention in EEBO searches, can be traced in hundreds of subsequent texts across the following 150 years. The new chapter identifies and analyzes a wealth of traits/capabilities cited by early modern writers as defining humanness that have not to my knowledge been treated by scholars before.

This essay describes the above process, offers brief examples and characterization of the datasets I found most exciting and how they were identified, and reflects on institutional conditions that both challenged and supported this work.

Early Modern Textual Geography

Michael Gavin, University of South Carolina

The purpose of the *Early Modern Textual Geography* project is to make possible new histories of geographical thought. Building on existing research funded by the University of South Carolina, we propose to compile a dataset of early modern geography and to author a suite of analytical methods for studying the representation of world geography in early modern writing. The existing dataset, called a gazetteer, includes almost 15,000 unique places, 2,500 of which are located with points of latitude and longitude. Using early modern maps available online through the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, we propose to expand this gazetteer to include places named on maps in every major atlas published between the years 1500 and 1700. Further, computational methods will be designed to identify places mentioned in *Early English Books Online* (EEBO); to sort and select from EEBO using queries derived from the gazetteer; and to perform quantitative geographical and textual analyses of early modern writing.

God-Language and Secularization in English Print, 1473-1700:
An EEBO-Assisted Study of Linguistic Evolution

William M. Hamlin, Washington State University

My essay summarizes a preliminary attempt to chart the gradual secularization of English across the early modern period, and specifically within the dates of EEBO coverage (1473-1700). Using TCP digital transcriptions, drama texts from VEP (Visualizing English Print), and two corpus linguistics tools (AntConc and CQPweb), I explain and illustrate one way in which secularization within the English print record may be “viewed” through a series of empirical, quantifiable analyses. These involve the examination of fluctuations in the lexis of religious discourse – what I call “god-language” – within the vast lexical corpora now available as a consequence of the EEBO-TCP project. As a pilot study, this analysis raises as many questions as it answers, and I offer it to my fellow seminar members in the hope that they will point out whatever shortcomings it may have and suggest ways in which I might revise, strengthen, and further pursue the project.

What We Talk About When We Talk About EEBO

John R. Ladd, Denison University

Scholars typically interact with *Early English Books Online*—and its machine-readable cousin, the *EEBO-TCP*—through web interfaces. These interfaces, particularly ProQuest's, are designed to make this large and variable corpus both searchable and easy-to-use. This is a laudable goal. We all want this corpus, which contains so much information about the cultural and literary history of the early modern period, to be available to and usable by as many people as possible. Occasionally, an interface will alert us to gaps or problems in the corpus, but more often than not the very purpose of the interface is to paper over those problems.

Many of these problems are small. A text we would expect to find is missing; a set of page images is unreadable. But there are also larger, systematic issues with the EEBO corpus that make searchability and computation more difficult, relative to other text corpora of similar size and shape. In a short Observable notebook (an interface for sharing code, visualizations, and written text side-by-side), I'll use EEBO-TCP to illustrate some of EEBO's issues and suggest some solutions. None of the problems with the EEBO corpus are intractable. Instead, they are interesting corpus-wide features that require us to think differently about EEBO than we do about other text corpora.

Prologue to a History of EEBO

Jesse M. Lander, University of Notre Dame