When Poetry Becomes the Page: Materializing Devotion in the Sidney Psalter

Registering the material reality of the Book of Psalms illuminates how the text's poetic and devotional natures actively took shape in the lives of early modern Psalm readers. Simultaneously understood as a book of poetry and a book of devotion, the material record for the Book of Psalms provides insights into how early modern readers merged the aesthetic sentiments of poetry with the embodied reality of devotion. This paper asks how the material form of the Psalms enabled this merging of poetic and devotional experience for early modern readers. In other words, by carefully considering how the Book of Psalms functioned as a book, we are able to witness the poiesis of devotion—a poetic participation with the text that is anchored in the material world.

In order to demonstrate the poetics of devotion associated with early modern Psalm translations, this paper turns to the Sidney Psalter manuscript held at the Rare Books & Manuscript Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (shelf mark Pre 1650 MS 0259), with particular attention to its textual materiality. Using a methodology informed by new formalist close reading, critical bibliography, and cultural material studies, I argue that this manuscript demonstrates a type of devotional poesies specifically associated with making. Bringing these methods together allows the analysis to illuminate how material and poetic forms mutually reinforce one another. By weaving together the material and textual iterations of manuscript pages, the creator of the manuscript transferred an awareness of poetic form into the material representation of the text. To say this another way, the poetry informed the making of the literary object, specifically at the level of the page, which, by extension, frames the manuscript page as the creator's interpretive landscape. In doing so, the paper shows how the manuscript page itself becomes a site of devotional interpretation, contributing to broader discussions of the poetics of the early modern page.

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SAA 2026: Poetics of the Page

Residuals: Bioarchives and the End of Time

This paper theorizes the now international practice of genetic testing at major research libraries. In the early twenty-first century, rare books conservators began extracting waste matter, both human and nonhuman, from texts during repair for further analysis. In turning my attention to the nexus of book history, genomics, and proteomics, I focus not on the potential futures of such discoveries—such as the much-invoked fantasies of recuperating Shakespeare's DNA—but rather on how these research objectives fundamentally reshape the "archive" as a concept. Not only does the swabbing of rare materials deploy the same techniques of collection as that performed on living patients, but it also produces a temporal flattening, where the extracted sample incorporates biological debris from across the book's usage that consolidates into the "specimen" of the now.

In broad terms, this essay speaks to the valuation of human biological materials across time. More particularly, I organize my theory of the bioarchive around a close reading of John Donne's "The Relique" that rethinks the status of the relic from medieval reliquaries to the immortalized cell line of modern medicine. I argue that if bioarchives (e.g., biobanking but also, say, the Bodleian) flatten temporal difference, the intersection of poetic articulations of time with premodern attachments to the reliquary offers a framework for grappling with both the temporal jostling of the archive and its resultant ethical quandaries.

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“Togither with:” Gascoigne’s Vengeful Compilation
SAA 2026 “Poetics of the Page”

George Gascoigne claims that his “Complainte of Phylomene” is an afterthought. Though the elegy is “co[m]piled [. . .] Togither with” his estates satire “The Steele Glas” in a 1576 quarto (tp), Gascoigne tells his patron, Lord Grey of Wilton, that he wrote it “twelue or thirteen years past” (Iivr), completing it for the present volume only “coblerlike,” having “clouted a new patch to an olde sole” (Rir). Following Gascoigne’s metaphor of writing as suturing disparate elements, this essay examines how the book “compiles” two supposedly unlike poems. It argues that the much-anthologized “Glas” ought not to be read without the neglected “Complainte,” as the poetics of the page direct the quarto’s readers to view them as one double work, the author’s revenge against critics of his notoriously lewd 1573 collection *The Hundredth Sundrie Flowres*.

This essay combines close readings of the “Glas” and the “Complainte” with attention to the quarto’s paratexts and material features. The “Complainte” has its own title page (Iiiir), dedicatory epistle (Iivr-v), and colophon (Rr). Neither the initial dedicatory epistle (Aiir-Aiiir) nor “The Author to the Reader” (Aivv) mention the “Complainte.” These features support Gascoigne’s narrative of composition. However, continuous signatures and consistent paper stock belie that narrative, as does a running title (“THE EPILOGVE”) carried from “Glas” (Iiv) to the “Complainte” (Iivv). The material text’s unity underscores the poems’ correspondences. Each has a fourfold structure, with Gascoigne’s four estates (kings, knights, peasants, priests) echoing Phylomene’s four notes (“Tereu,” “Phy,” “Iug,” “Nemesis”). And in each Gascoigne constructs complicated personae. In the “Glas” he is Satyra, a Philomela-like prosopon of the *Flowres* (1573); in the “Complainte,” “George” (Rir) ventriloquizes the nightingale and Nemesis. Through such rebarbative play, the quarto activates both sixteenth-century meanings of “compile,” for Gascoigne feigns collecting pieces while in fact composing a whole.

Lineation / Intervention
Fran Connor, Wichita State University

As an editorial practice, lineation – which for our current purposes I'll define as the editorial intervention of emending lines in printed plays to recover what the editor argues is an un-embodied 'proper'/'intended' metrical line – is somewhat under-theorized. Since Alexander Pope went nuts in the 18th century turning Shakespeare into a poet of firmly regular pentameter, textual editors have cast an iambic ear on the early texts of Shakespeare[1], turning prose to poetry and poetry to prose when one feels Shakespeare's mighty line did not properly translate onto the printed page. Since Edward Capell[2] we've been arranging/indenting part-lines of speeches so that nobody misses the metrical sway of shared dialogue. There are defensible reasons to emend lineation, especially for student/popular editions. But I feel a little icky about it.

My contribution to this panel will be thoughtfully grumbling about editorial practices concerning one, maybe two, quartos that offer some distinctive lineation issues: *Romeo and Juliet* (the 1597 Q1 version, mostly[3]) and *Love's Labor's Lost* (1598 Q1[4]). *Romeo* has some classic lineation problems, most famously the Nurse's speech in Scene 4, verse rendered prose (it's plausibly thought) because compositors needed to squeeze text into the forme. 'Solutions' to the Nurse's speech demonstrate the fraught issue of editorial lineation: editors' 'corrected' lineation varies, and these attempts are further complicated by other possible errors in the passage. *Romeo* and *LLL* share another lineation issue: both have a number of embedded poems, stanzas, sonnets in the dialogue, which are often indicated in modern editions with special indentation, spacing, centering, etc. Generally, I simply want to think about what is gained and lost when editors reshape plays into poems, [taking over?] [guiding?] the ear and eye of the reader – to what end, perhaps, are these early printed quartos asking readers to discover the poetry embedded within, rather than aiming to preserve and highlight the verse of The Author?

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[1] or, honestly, textual editors have frequently trusted the ear of predecessors like Pope. Do we even teach scansion anymore?

[2] I think he's the first to do this? Didn't have time to double-check 'cause I'm banging this out in between piles of grading and departmental budgeting

[3] a good quarto, despite its bad reputation

[4] a glorious mess of a quarto, despite its good reputation

SAA 2026: The Poetics of the Page

“Britomart, Busirane, and ‘Faults Escaped’ in the 1590 *Faerie Queene*”

Spencer Grayson

University of Virginia

Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590) famously ends with an escape. Britomart, the Knight of Chastity, spends the final cantos of the poem making her way through the House of Busirane to rescue Amoret from the tortures of an enchanter, the eponymous Busirane. After forcing Busirane to undo his enchantments, Britomart escorts Amoret out of the House to discover that the House has “vanisht utterly.”

In some copies of the 1590 *Faerie Queene*, a textual “escape” of sorts accompanies Britomart’s retreat from the House of Busirane. Following Spenser’s letter to Sir Walter Ralegh are several commendatory and dedicatory verses, as well as an errata list titled “Faults escaped in the Print.” The list includes one hundred and fourteen places for correction. This paper takes up the final two “faults escaped,” in which a printer, compositor, or other printworker identified two personal masculine pronouns in the stanza describing Britomart’s retreat from the House and called for future printers or readers to change the pronouns to the feminine gender, with the goal of textually clarifying Britomart’s femininity. Following Adam Smyth’s approach to the errata list as a literary form, I read these textual “faults escaped” in relation to Britomart’s pronominal gender to ask how the gender multiplicity incurred by the errata list intersects with the perplexing space of the House of Busirane and Britomart’s ostensible escape from it. While most bibliographical work on the 1590 edition focuses on its paratexts independent of the poem, I look to the trans potential of gendered errata to consider the intersections of textual and literary-allegorical spaces in *The Faerie Queene*. I propose that these “faults escaped” are not a separate addition that inflects and corrects Spenser’s poem, but instead a material extension of the poem’s literary-allegorical spaces. Using recent trans bibliographical methodologies, this paper aims to question the essentialist distinctions between the early modern book’s literary text and material forms.

Emending Epitaphs

Adam G. Hooks

SAA 2026 – The Poetics of the Page

How do you emend a text written in stone? How does one account for errors or variants in the most durable of material forms? The epitaph on Shakespeare's grave takes the form of a simple curse – one so simple, in fact, that it has either been explained as an uncouth unauthor-ized text, or as proof of his abiding concern with the materiality of mortality. The crucial context for the epitaph has been lost – the charnel house that once stood only a few feet away from the grave – a context that early pilgrims to Holy Trinity in Stratford were well aware of. The epitaph circulated widely, in manuscript and in print, and this paper attends to the variation, transmission, and interpretation of it, across the centuries. How does one re-mediate the inscriptive epitaphic letter-forms? How do we account for variations in transcriptions of the epitaph? And what of the funeral monument above the grave, which includes a manifest error in the inscribed verses?

While considered marginal texts now, the various posthumous, funereal texts are in fact crucial to an understanding of the Shakespeare canon, as they provided a key test case for unlocking the apparently personal sentiments and revelations found in his works. This paper also reveals that Shakespeare was a well-known writer of epitaphs, including a popular one written at the expense of a Stratford contemporary and acquaintance of the poet's. We should recognize and acknowledge a new, coherent Shakespearean genre: epigrams and epitaphs. How does poetic genre, and poetic work, connect to the labor of art and artifice? (Are stone-carving and sculpture forms of *poeisis*?) How do these material forms effect meaning? And how might emending be a form of remembering?

Writing on Bark: Pastoral Songs and Dendroglyphs in Sannazaro's *Arcadia*

--Nicholas Jones (Oberlin College, retired)

Inscriptions on living trees—dendroglyphs—are well known in pastoral literature, from Theocritus and Virgil on into the Renaissance. In *As You Like It,* Orlando "abuses our young plants with carving 'Rosalind' on their barks" and hangs "odes upon hawthornes and elegies on brambles." The word "abuse" seems fitting—a hiker who carves hearts on a tree today would deserve our scorn. But Orlando's "civil sayings" are more than a "false gallop of verses," as Touchstone mocks. They're both lovesick and elegiac, marking "how brief the life of man / Runs his erring pilgrimage."

My paper will look at dendroglyphs in an earlier pastoral, Sannazaro's *Arcadia* (1504), where writing on bark draws attention to lovesickness and to another humanist concern—books. *Arcadia's* many bark-carvings highlight the contingencies that threaten both life and literature. A shepherd sings an elegy for a dead leader, and a second shepherd writes the elegy down on bark, frames it, and hangs it in a tree. What happens to it afterward? Another elegy, the lament of a humanist scholar for his dead wife, is manifest first in tiny fragments, some carved in trunks, some hung high on a tree; then as half-remembered snippets of song; and eventually in the transcribed voice of the widower and on her stone epitaph. Which of these many fragments will endure? How can we preserve the songs of the past? Through the coded correspondences of pastoral, the ephemeral songs of half-literate Arcadians point to key humanist concerns: finding, preserving, editing, and disseminating the old writings of the classics; writing, publishing, and creating support for their own "classics"; negotiating the new and treacherous world of printing; and simply surviving in the chaos and invasions of late-15th-century Italy.

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Nothing Pleaseth But Rare Accidents
Or, Are Errors Poetic?

The 1598 quarto *Love's Labour's Lost* (Q1) features many textual peculiarities. In the so-called "Rosaline/Katherine tangle," the text evidently confuses two women characters when Berowne flirts with what seems like the wrong one according to the speech prefixes. Later, two apparently missed deletion marks result in early and revised versions of two passages being printed sequentially. Much of the play's Latin seems garbled, and it is unclear who garbled it and for what purpose. The final moment of the play ends bizarrely with an unattributed line, printed in larger typeface: "The vvordes of Mercurie, are harsh after the songes of Apollo." These and other features of Q1 *LLL* seem like obvious errors. Surely, the task of the modern editor is to remove such accidental noise from the reader's presence. Get behind me, errors!

This paper extends recent scholarship in book history, editing, and *LLL* to argue that these errors constitute the very poetics of the play. Indeed, these textual accidents are bound up in the *poesis* of the play itself: the Rosaline/Katherine tangle speaks to *LLL*'s critique of the interchangeability of women under patriarchy. The visibility of Shakespeare's revisions speaks to the play's querying of mimetic representation. The scrambled Latin takes us, as the play itself does, to the limits of humanism. And the singular final line performs the self-positioning required of the theater industry. These accidents of printing make up a kind of love poem to the play itself.

Nica Franklin
SAA 2026: The Poetics of the Page

Meter Guiding Silent Reading: Misparsing and Line-Internal Metrical Complexity in Shakespeare's Sonnets

Sonnet 23 ends: "To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit." This paper considers the aurality of silent reading in Shakespeare's sonnets; the wit generated by hearing with eyes. Line-internal metrical inversions present perhaps the most prominent site of such visual listening.

Attempting to formalize the rules governing Shakespeare's meter, linguists working in the field of generative metrics such as Paul Kiparsky (1975) and Bruce Hayes (1989) noticed that, in the sonnets, metrical inversions (a lexically prominent syllable in the weak position of an iambic foot) only occur at the juncture, or left-boundary, of a phonological phrase (as distinct from a syntactic phrase). Emergent in their finding is the question of why these inversions might be present in the first place—or, what function a line-internal metrical inversion might have.

Line-internal metrical inversions produce a "stress clash": a clash which, from one perspective, is admissible only between phonological phrases; or one which, looked at the other way, directs the reader toward a phrasal or intonational break. Assuming that a silent reader must project a prosodic and phonological structure onto a word string in order to parse its syntactic structure, this paper argues that Shakespeare's line-internal metrical inversions instruct readers to avoid mis-parsing and misreadings in the form of "garden path" sentences. Which is to say, Shakespeare's meter helps resolve potential ambiguities produced because of silent reading. In this way, Shakespeare's meter serves as a cue for silent reading—a form of "pointing" that is less a rhetorical guide than a phonological one.

At the same time, the absence of line-internal metrical inversions at the juncture of phonological phrases can direct induce mis-parsing. Taken together, Shakespeare's line-internal metrical inversions signal a consciousness of the reader's work of phonological phrasing in silent reading and can be understood as an attempt to put it to poetic use.

Matthew Ritger
SAA 2026 - Denver
Poetics of the Page

Hamlet's "insert" and Q2's "margents"

This essay is part of a longer piece titled "'Like life in excrements': *Hamlet*'s 'garbage,' Q2's 'addition[s],' and the tragedy of waste," which explores the paradoxical importance of waste in *Hamlet.* The full essay reinterprets *Hamlet*'s language of "garbage," "offal," "droppings," "compost," "maggots in a dead dogge," or what Gertrude abhors as the uncanniness of "life in excrements" as part of the play's metacommentary on the poetics of tragedy. I focus on the second quarto printing, "enlarged to almost as much againe as it was," and some of its unique features, including the question of Hamlet's "insert" written for the play-within-the-play, which I argue is indexed in the "margent" in this edition. I then turn to the two longest Q2-only passages: the prince's extended interview with the soldiers in Act 4, beginning "Truly to speake, and with no addition" (+60 lines) and his "mole of nature" speech in Act 1, beginning "with Swinish phrase[s]" that "Soile our addition" (+22 lines). I explore the possibility that these passages refer to themselves as "addition[s]," perhaps due to the ironic interpolation of a deletion mark or a censor's marginalia ("no addition"). Ultimately, I argue that Q2's suggestive metacommentary can be understood as part of *Hamlet*'s critique of tragedy as waste, a critique that anticipates twentieth-century efforts to reanimate the genre's political potential while simultaneously reinforcing the thematic significance of abhorrent details from everyday life—Hamlet's garbage—within the metaphorical lexicon of all three early versions of the play.

The SAA paper will focus exclusively on the question of the addition Hamlet suggests penning for the players' script: "You could for neede study a speech of some dosen, or sixteen lines, which I would set downe, and insert in't, could you not?" Textual features of Q2 that have usually been treated as errors might actually have helped readers of this particular quarto to locate the beginning and end of Hamlet's accusatory "insert." These include an additional line that interrupts the rhyme scheme and has been considered one of Shakespeare's (rather than Hamlet's) "false starts," as well as two of Hamlet's interjections from the audience that appeared in the body text in Q1 and F but were printed in the margins of Q2—the only two lines of dialogue to be printed this way in Q2, consistent across both 1604 and 1605 press variants.

Ashley Thomas

Margaret Cavendish's Laboratory of the Printed Page

When we open the 1668 edition of *Poems and Fancies* (1653), we are greeted by a portrait of Margaret Cavendish standing in a niche, flanked by Apollo and Minerva looking up at her. Below Cavendish's portrait is an inscription, urging readers to "read those Lines which She hath writt, / By Phancy's Pencill drawne alone, / Which Peece but She, Can justly owne" (l.10-12). Cavendish immediately stakes a claim to authority with this portrait and its accompanying verse, elevating herself above classical emblems of learning and introducing Fancy as her poetic methodology. From the outset, the printed page of *Poems and Fancies* becomes the space in which Cavendish presents herself as a poet and philosopher who transmits knowledge through print, the very medium through which scientific authority was being established and contested during her time.

Poems and Fancies marks Margaret Cavendish's first public engagement with literary and scientific communities in England and Europe. In this volume, Cavendish positions verse and Fancy as legitimate methods of scientific discourse that surpass the accuracy of institutional epistemologies like empiricism. This paper examines the printed page as the experimental medium through which Cavendish is able to stake those claims. Barred from the physical spaces of empirical philosophers whose experiments were staged in laboratories and subsequently reported in print, Cavendish uses print itself as her laboratory. The page becomes a space where hypotheses are formulated, revised, and occasionally abandoned, and the poems themselves enact Fancy's motion through iteration, juxtaposition, and formal play. Nowhere is this clearer than in Cavendish's atom poems, whose brief, self-contained verses circulate across the page like the particles they describe. Their short forms invite comparison, contradiction, and recombination, so that Cavendish's speculative physics does not precede publication but arises through the printed arrangement of the book. I argue that *Poems and Fancies* stages Fancy as both subject and method, turning print into a laboratory of imaginative knowledge.