

**Renaissance and Reformation**  
**Renaissance et Réforme**



**O'Callaghan, Michelle, ed. Verse Miscellanies Online: Printed Poetry Collections of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries**

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O’Callaghan, Michelle, ed.

*Verse Miscellanies Online: Printed Poetry Collections of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.*

Oxford: Bodleian Libraries, 2013. Accessed 6 December 2019.

versemiscellaniesonline.bodleian.ox.ac.uk.

For the better part of a decade, *Verse Miscellanies Online* has served as the most readily accessible and most helpfully annotated edition of a series of poetry books originally printed in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. Working with Alice Eardley, Michelle O’Callaghan began the series with *Tottel’s Miscellany* or, more precisely, the second edition of *Songes and Sonettes*, printed in 1557. Their series proceeds to six or seven subsequent collections, depending on whether one counts titles or editions: *A Handful of Pleasant Delites* (1584), *The Paradise of Daintie Devises* (1585), *A gorgeous Gallery, of gallant Inuentions* (1578), *The Phoenix Nest* (1593), two editions of *Englands Helicon* (1600 and 1614), and *A Poetical Rapsodie* (1611).

By focusing on these seven or eight printed sources, O’Callaghan affirmed and modified an editorial practice that stretches back to John Payne Collier. In between 1865 and 1867, Collier produced his “Blue series” of reprints, starting with the first edition of the book that he effectively renamed, in gold Gothic type on its front cover, *Tottel’s Miscellany*. He followed this with reprints of most of the same poetry collections that are now available on *Verse Miscellanies Online*, with a few differences. Collier skipped *A Handful of Pleasant Delites*; he included *England’s Parnassus* (even though it offers mere excerpts organized under roughly alphabetical headings, like a commonplace book); and he stopped in 1602, including only the first editions of *England’s Helicon* and *Davison’s Poetical Rhapsody*. In the title of the general introduction to these reprints, Collier influentially called them “SEVEN ENGLISH POETICAL MISCELLANIES.”<sup>1</sup>

In the 1920s and 30s, Hyder Edward Rollins succeeded, and superseded, Collier in editing all the same miscellanies, minus *Englands Parnassus* and plus *Brittons Bowre of Delights* (1591). By excluding both of these sources, *Verse Miscellanies Online* focuses on titles that both Collier and Rollins edited. Rollins

1. See Arthur Freeman and Janet Ing Freeman, *John Payne Collier: Scholarship and Forgery in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 892–94, 1275–1304.

improved upon Collier's work in several ways. For example, he produced type facsimiles of his sources. Whereas Collier had arranged for mere reprints, allowing printers to reset and rearrange the poems, Rollins directed Harvard University Press to reproduce the page layout of the originals, including even their page numbers and signatures (although not the physical structures of the gatherings, of course). *Verse Miscellanies Online* valuably follows suit. It reproduces not only the text and the spelling but also the arrangement and page layout of its sources, all organized by the original signatures. Each web "page" therefore replicates an actual page. Like Rollins's editions, the website does this not with photography but with type (albeit digital type). In keeping with those nearly hundred-year-old Harvard editions, *Verse Miscellanies Online* offers little or nothing in the way of images of their originals. It offers instead a new, digital, and therefore searchable text, arranged to approximate the layout of the original.

The texts for *Verse Miscellanies Online* come from "files" produced by the Early English Books Online–Text Creation Partnership (EEBO–TCP). The edition thus demonstrates the potential of some of the digital resources that scholars have had at their disposal in the twenty-first century, as well as the tremendous amount of work required to realize that potential. The site also illustrates a moment in the history of technology and media. Early English Books Online (EEBO) began by offering the opposite of what *Verse Miscellanies Online* does: images of old books only, without much text transcribed, and not very good images at that. The low quality of the images, even in the relatively large Tagged Image File Format (TIFF), is due to the fact that they are digitizations of microfilm reels published under the original series title, *Early English Books, 1475–1640*. Whether online or off, even these grainy images of "Early English Books" convey valuable visual information that neither Rollins's nor O'Callaghan's type facsimiles could retain quite so precisely. Nevertheless, both editors attended to such visual information with great care, relaying much of what they observed in the originals by reproducing and approximating the books' layout and design about as well as their modern tools would allow. The visual information from microfilms, though, comes at some expense to the texts and to usability. Not many users enjoy microfilms or microfilm readers. Waiting for individual digital images from those microfilms to load on EEBO, and then trying to make out the words, is not always much better. Partly for this reason, EEBO's Text Creation Partnership (TCP) coordinated

the digital transcription of EEBO copies, eventually making them searchable and more usable. *Verse Miscellanies Online* features precisely those EEBO–TCP transcripts—produced in Extensible Markup Language (XML) according to the protocols of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI). But the editors of the site did not simply upload the pre-existing transcripts. As explained in the website’s section on “Editorial method,” those transcripts had been encoded in “XML-TEIP4”; James Cummings at Oxford University Computing Services converted them to “XML-TEIP5.” The editors also checked illegible parts of the EEBO images against the originals that had been used to produce them. Or, if those were not accessible, they referred to “other available copies of the same edition in the British Library or the Bodleian Library.”<sup>2</sup> This is one point at which the online edition may have become a critical edition in the traditional sense of that phrase, insofar as it presents a text produced by choosing critically between the texts of more than one copy of a work. In addition to producing a complete text from at least one copy of one edition of each title, the editors commendably restored and tagged a number of visual or material features of the originals: initial capitals, indents, abbreviations, and turnover (|) and turnunder (||) lines (at the ends of lines of verse that are too long to fit within a given textblock). They also assigned individual identification numbers, verseforms, and rhyme schemes to each poem, relying on May and Ringler’s *Elizabethan Poetry: A Bibliography and First-Line Index of English Verse, 1559–1603*.

In addition to replicating the visual appearance of the originals, the editors added unobtrusive but helpful annotations to virtually every poem. The combination of these annotations with the digital type facsimile makes for the great advantage of *Verse Miscellanies Online*. The modern, digital type on a white, WordPress background is perfect for assigning to students and projecting at conferences. It is clearer and easier to read than almost any photographic facsimile. It is also searchable and hyperlinked. Classical names, for instance, show up in blue. Clicking on one takes the user to the glossary of historical persons and classical figures. Even more frequently, the website features blue crosses or addition signs (+). Clicking on these opens a “window” with a note or gloss on each subject. The site offers helpful information, much of which directly aids the reader’s understanding, without requiring that reader to flip to the back of one of Rollins’s editions, or even to look down to footnotes.

2. [versemiscellaniesonline.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/about/method/](http://versemiscellaniesonline.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/about/method/).

Readers hardly need to pause to check one of these + notes; the windows open quickly without loading a new webpage, usually without covering or obscuring the main text of a poem.

Since its original publication seven years ago, *Verse Miscellanies Online* has already been “migrated” once. Perhaps because of that migration, the website has stopped living up to some of its initial claims. Most disappointingly, the site’s edition of *A Poetical Rhapsody* has disappeared. It is likely to reappear, perhaps at the site’s next migration. Also, the site’s digital editing tool, called the “Commonplacer,” has stopped working. This tool was “intended to facilitate engagement with the processes of selection, modification, and compilation underlying the creation of each of the printed volumes” (main page). And it was intended to be maintained for five years. Its digital lifespan, in other words, has come to an end.

Even without this digital tool, *Verse Miscellanies Online* remains a supremely accessible, legible, and helpful source for the major Elizabethan and Jacobean printed collections of poetry. Of course, it makes it much easier for readers to find the texts of these collections—for free and online. It also helps readers attend to the visual layout of the originals. And it offers readers particularly valuable annotations, explaining the poems’ more obscure references when readers want them, and staying out of readers’ way until they do.

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**Leong, Elaine, Lisa Smith, Amanda E. Herbert, R.A. Kashanipour, Sarah Peters Kernan, Joshua Schlachet, Laurence Totelin, Jess Clark, et al., eds.**

***The Recipes Project—Food, Magic, Art, Science, and Medicine. Other.***

OpenEdition: Hypotheses. Accessed 18 June 2019.

[recipes.hypotheses.org](http://recipes.hypotheses.org).

*The Recipes Project—Food, Magic, Art, Science, and Medicine* is a Hypotheses-hosted scholarly blog focused on the history of recipes, which grew out of the Medicinal Receipts Research Group formed in 2002. The aims of this international group are to promote the study of recipes: first, by encouraging