

POETRY AT PLAY

COMMONPLACE BOOKS IN A GAME-THEMED LITERATURE SURVEY

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RECENTLY, THERE HAS been a flurry of interest in game-based learning at the college level, with the emergence of pedagogies such as Reacting to the Past¹ and professional groups such as Games in College Classrooms.² While definitions of and approaches to game-based learning vary, a helpful working definition is “learning through games”—that is, by engaging in activities that are primarily intended to be pleasurable rather than goal-oriented, contain an element of challenge, and are structured by rules.³ This is distinct from gamification, in which gaming elements such as badges or leaderboards are added to an activity designed primarily for pedagogical purposes.⁴ Advocates of game-based learning argue that it offers a variety of benefits: games “allow learners to discuss what they played, interact while playing the game, solve open-ended problems, and ... encourage agency and

1 For more on Reacting to the Past, a series of historical role-playing games published by Norton and the University of North Carolina Press, see Mark Carnes, *Minds on Fire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014) and C. Edward Watson and Thomas Chase Hagood, eds., *Playing to Learn with Reacting to the Past: Research on High Impact, Active Learning Practices* (London: Palgrave, 2017).

2 Games in College Classrooms, Facebook, www.facebook.com/groups/1773710516258929/, is a Facebook group dedicated to discussing ways to integrate games into the classroom; most members are in history or other humanities disciplines. This community’s focus on analogue and tabletop gaming was intended as a deliberate corrective to the fact that much research on and discussion of game-based learning focuses on video games. However, even in a group friendly to historical content and low-tech gameplay, one member commented on his own recent post about the game *hnefatafl* that he had “hesitated to post this because it’s not about a modern game” (Patrick Rael, 28 June 2018).

3 Berna Karakoç et al., “The Effect of Game-Based Learning on Student Achievement,” *Technology, Knowledge and Learning* 27 (2022): 207–22.

4 Kyle W. Scholz, Jolanta N. Komornica, and Andrew Moore, “Gamifying History: Designing and Implementing a Game-Based Learning Framework,” *Teaching and Learning Inquiry* 9 (2021): 99–115.

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choice for the players.”⁵ This approach, James Lang argues, is particularly effective at sparking deep learning because games stimulate students’ interest and provide a built-in purpose and immediate applications for course content.⁶ Similarly, Adam Porter has noted that game-based learning is a successful tool for increasing engagement and empowerment among a generation of students who “have been raised in a world of games.”⁷ The heightened engagement and emotion sparked by gaming has been linked to improvement in memory and retention.⁸

Concurrently with this trend in pedagogy, literary and historical scholarship on medieval and early modern gaming has flourished,⁹ some of it focusing explicitly on the role that games have historically played in educating young people to take their place in society.¹⁰ Less often, however, have these two trends converged. Little has been published concerning the value of making space in the classroom for students to play the *same* games medieval and early modern people played, although classicist Christine Albright describes her considerable success incorporating games based on ancient Greek poetic, theatrical, and athletic competitions into an introductory Greek Culture class.¹¹ This chapter will consider commonplace books, and early modern poetry more generally, as a form of textual play and offer some preliminary suggestions for engaging modern-day students in such play, based on my experiences teaching a game-themed Early English Literature survey.

5 Scholz, Komornica, and Moore, “Gamifying History,” 101.

6 James Lang, *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 230–35.

7 Adam L. Porter, “Role-Playing and Religion: Using Games to Educate Millennials,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 11 (2008): 230–35 at 232.

8 Thomas Chase Hagood, C. Edward Watson, and Brittany M. Williams, “Reacting to the Past: An Introduction to Its Scholarly Foundation,” In *Playing to Learn*, 1–16.

9 See, for example, the recent edited collections Serina Patterson, ed., *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature* (London: Palgrave, 2015), and Allison Levy, ed., *Playthings in Early Modernity: Party Games, Word Games, Mind Games* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 2017).

10 Nicholas Orme’s “Games and Education in Medieval England,” in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, 45–60, is one case in point; among other topics, Orme explores the use of riddles and wordplay in Latin exercises, and the role that sports and games played in aristocratic education outside of the classroom.

11 Christine L. Albright, “Harnessing Students’ Competitive Spirit: Using *Reacting to the Past* to Structure the Introductory Greek Culture Class,” *The Classical Journal* 122 (2017): 364–79.

As Andie Silva and Sarah E. Parker note in the introduction to this volume, the long history of commonplacing means that the term can be used to describe a variety of different texts with equally varied purposes, many of which are essentially goal-oriented rather than pleasurable; maintaining a list of sayings and devices to improve one's skill as a rhetorician, for example. The form of commonplace book that students create in my course, however, is essentially a manuscript verse miscellany, in which students are asked to choose texts that they find personally enjoyable and place them in dialogue with one another by writing original reply poems and by exchanging and contributing to one another's books. In her analysis of similar "verse conversations" from early modern miscellanies and commonplace books, Cathy Shrank shows that they have many game-like features: they were a social activity that cemented bonds among groups of friends and were intended to give pleasure to the participants. Further, they are characterized by "playful" use of language—puns, echoing, competing proverbs; by play with identity through the adoption of pseudonyms and poetic personas; and, often, by competitive elements, as in debate poetry.¹²

The Course and Its Contexts

I turned to game-based learning as an instructor at a small, regional public university where the most popular degree programs are nursing, business administration, and public health education.¹³ Many of our students are first-generation; about half of our full-time students are Pell Grant recipients.¹⁴ Literature, especially medieval and early modern literature, can be a tough sell in this institutional environment. While our required general education literature surveys function partly as a gateway (and sometimes a recruiting tool) for English majors, most students in the course are nonmajors from sophomore through senior level; they have completed our required composition sequence but may not have taken, or plan to take, any other literature courses at the college level. My primary learning objectives include learning

12 Cathy Shrank, "Answer Poetry and Other Verse 'Conversations,'" in *A Companion to Renaissance Poetry*, ed. Catherine Bates (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018): 376–88.

13 *Mississippi University for Women 2019–20 Fact Book*, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, www.muw.edu/images//ir/muwfactbook/MUWFactBook2019_20.pdf, 57.

14 "Distribution of Federal Pell Grant Funds by Institution," US Department of Education, www2.ed.gov/finaid/prof/resources/data/pell-institution.html. These figures date from academic year 2017–18, the most recent year for which they are available as of this writing.

to read texts with care and attention, becoming familiar with the language and literary conventions of early English literature, and, hopefully, developing appreciation for the rich cultural and historical traditions we're studying. In the fall of 2017, I began structuring this course around the general themes of "game" and "play"—loosely defined. Students are aware of this focus, as I include it in the course description on the syllabus and mention it frequently in class. I made this choice, in part, because I wanted to emphasize that literature is *fun*. Early modern poetry, in particular, was clearly a form of play to its authors, with its elaborately wrought puns, paradoxes and conceits. These very features, however, often make reading it feel frustrating, stressful, and intimidating to modern students. By focusing this course on the idea of play, I wished to bridge the gap between work and pleasure.

We read a variety of texts in this class, many of which explore the risks and rewards of play—from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to Robert Herrick's richly detailed poems about Christmas and May Day games. Along the way, we play a few period games that appear in the texts we were reading—hazard when we read Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale, and the card game Ombre, which features prominently in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. But, especially, I try to make room in the classroom for various ways of *playing with texts*. For example, I begin the first class of the semester by giving half of the class slips of paper with Anglo-Saxon riddles and challenging them to find their counterpart, the student in the classroom who has a commonly accepted answer to the riddle. As an introduction to Marie de France's "Lanval" and "Milun," we play a debate game based on medieval *demandes d'amour*; and finally, I assign an extended commonplace-book project over the second half of the semester, while students are reading a selection of early-modern through early-eighteenth-century poetry as well as one longer dramatic text, usually Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Since this project is primarily completed outside of class, concurrently with daily reading assignments, I have not had to remove anything from the syllabus to accommodate it, although I have made some adjustments to the selection of poetry and to an existing close-reading assignment to connect them to the course theme.

The requirements for the commonplace book project are, first, that students copy at least 28 lines of text (the equivalent of two sonnets) from the course readings into their book each week. Entries may take the form of entire poems, short quotations, or a mixture. In my instructions, I emphasize that students should pick pieces that spoke to *them*, and that they are encouraged but not required to include notes, commentary, illustrations, and anything else they feel like adding. (Generally, "encourage but don't require" is my core principle for this assignment—the idea is that it should

be enjoyable, and that the resulting manuscripts should be as one-of-a-kind as possible.) As keeping a commonplace book is not an inherently competitive activity, it may be objected that it does not fit into traditional paradigms of game-based learning, which usually emphasize competition. It does, however, provide many of the other benefits that have been linked with learning through play, such as emotional investment, creativity, student agency, and the opportunity to engage with and apply course material in a pleasurable way. Further, it can be incorporated into a course in ways that push the idea of textual play to the forefront.

Maintaining a commonplace book is worth 10 percent of the student's final grade. I do not formally assess the books for quality, although they are linked to two graded paper assignments worth an additional 20 percent of the student's final course grade (included in the Appendix and discussed in greater detail below). Instead, students receive an automatic A for this component of the course as long as their book meets all of the required criteria—regular entries totaling at least 28 lines of text per week, plus completion of weekly special assignments requiring deeper interaction with the texts and / or their classmates' books. I spot-check commonplace books throughout the semester to ensure that students are following instructions and including all required elements, but have rarely had to deduct from a student's final grade. In most cases, students who miss an entry or activity respond to informal reminders after spot-checks and make it up by the time they have to submit the final copy of their book.

Poetry as Play: Selecting Texts

In selecting readings, I tried to pick poems that were themselves “playful,” and early modern poetry offers a great many possibilities. Online texts make it possible to supplement the standard anthology selections with e-texts showing the full range of early modern wordplay: acrostic poems like Sir John Davies's *Hymnes to Astraea*;¹⁵ echo poetry like Richard Barnfield's Sonnet 13;¹⁶ Sir Walter Raleigh's extended riddle about the pleasures and perils of the gam-

15 Seven of these poems in praise of the queen, in which the initial letters of each line spell out ELISABETH REGINA, can be found online in a student-friendly modern-spelling version at the Luminarium, ed. Anniina Jokinen, www.luminarium.org/renlit/daviebib.htm.

16 Barnfield's sonnet is available at [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Sonnet_13_\(Barnfield\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Sonnet_13_(Barnfield)), although the mythological references and early modern spelling may require some glossing from the instructor. I find it worth the effort; students are invariably intrigued by Barnfield's depiction of same-sex love, and it's an effective way

ing-table, “On the Cards and Dice.”¹⁷ Raleigh’s poem offers an excellent, small-scale introduction to metaphor and double meaning; students often initially interpret it as a highly serious poem about war or about the Last Judgment, a reading which the poem itself encourages with its prophetic tone and its use of quasi-apocalyptic language: “Full many a Christian’s heart shall quake for fear / The dreadful sound of *trump* when he shall hear. / Dead bones shall then be tumbled up and down” (9–11). Pointing out that *trump* is also a term used in card games, and that dice are made of bone and commonly tumbled, leads to a moment of enlightenment; but has the poem’s real subject matter been revealed as trivial and mundane, after all? The “great losses” of the gaming table are real, as is the students’ initial impression that something grave is at stake, both monetary and moral (6). Whether one reads this poem as an indictment of a society that wastes its Christmastide at the gaming-table, or as a paean to games and the truths that lie beneath their apparent triviality (one very perceptive student suggested that Raleigh is saying life itself is a form of gambling), it uses an inherently playful form, the riddle, to suggest that play is a deeply serious matter.

George Herbert’s poetry, likewise, offers a particularly rich variety of word games that are simultaneously playful and profound. To judge by the number of students who copied his poetry into their commonplace books or wrote papers about it, his work strongly resonates with undergraduates at our Bible-belt university. Not only does Herbert employ the puns and conceits that are near-ubiquitous in early modern poetry, but also concrete poetry (“The Altar” and “Easter Wings”), anagrams (“Anagram”), echo poetry (“Heaven”), and hidden messages (“Colossians 3.3”). A brief discussion of “Paradise”¹⁸—in which Herbert deletes successive letters to form new words—will serve to illustrate the complexity of what might at first appear to be merely a clever gimmick.

I bless thee, Lord, because I GROW
Among thy trees, which in a ROW
To thee both fruit and order OW.

to introduce Renaissance poetic conventions like the blazon and the use of classical allusions.

17 Luminarium, www.luminarium.org/renlit/cardsdice.htm.

18 “Paradise,” in *George Herbert and Henry Vaughn: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Louis L. Martz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 119. An e-text of this poem is also available at Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Calvin College, 2018, www.ccel.org/h/herbert/temple/Paradise.html.

What open force, or hidden CHARM
 Can blast my fruit, or bring me HARM,
 While the inclosure is thine ARM.

Inclose me still for fear I START,
 Be to me rather sharp and TART,
 Than let me want thy hand and ART.

When thou dost greater judgments SPARE,
 And with thy knife but prune and PARE,
 Ev'n fruitful trees more fruitful ARE.

Such sharpness shows the sweetest FREND:
 Such cuttings rather heal than REND:
 And such beginnings touch their END.

Here, the metaphor of God as a gardener who prunes only to enable growth and fruitfulness is reinforced by rhymes that playfully add layers of meaning by subtracting. Upon even closer examination, the second rhyming word in each stanza—after a single letter has been pared away—often bears a seemingly negative connotation, while the third reveals a more consoling idea after yet another letter has been removed: a neat encapsulation of the poem's central concept of temporary divine chastisement that enables salvation.

In addition to individual texts that employ word games, I also assign several clusters of poems that introduce the idea of poetry as *social* game where poets reply to one another's work, playfully and competitively: Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love," Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd," and Donne's "The Bait"; Raleigh's "Fortune hath taken away my love" and Elizabeth I's "Ah, silly Pug"; several of Mary Wroth's sonnets and Jonson's "A Sonnet to the Noble Lady, Lady Mary Wroth." This last cluster is also a useful way to introduce the concept of copying out other people's sonnets—"exscribing," in Jonson's terminology—as an activity that inspires poetry of one's own and enriches one's repertoire of poetic vocabulary and techniques. Early modern verse miscellanies with multiple contributors, such as the Devonshire Manuscript, provide abundant evidence for transcribing, annotating, and composing poetry as a form of creative and social play, in which individuals exchange and respond to verses, jest with one another, and intermingle original works with pre-existing ones.¹⁹

19 Constance Crompton, Daniel Powell, Alyssa Arbuckle, and Ray Siemens, "Building A Social Edition of the Devonshire Manuscript," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 34 (2014): 131–56.

The commonplace book project, through a series of low-stakes assignments which I will describe in the next section, offers students an opportunity to experiment with this type of textual play among themselves.

Playing with Poetry: Short Assignments

Along with hand-copying poems or quotations of their choice into their commonplace books, students in my class complete a series of weekly special assignments intended to emulate various forms of early modern textual play. (Examples of these assignments are provided in the Appendix.) First, after we have read a selection of early modern poetic responses to other poets, as discussed in the previous section, students are asked to choose a poem from the course readings and write an original poem of their own in response—participating, in other words, in the same kinds of playful dialogue between texts as the canonical writers we’re reading. There are no restrictions about form or content, although I have offered suggestions that they *may* wish to give a voice to a character who doesn’t speak in the original poem, echo this poem’s language, or even try writing in the same verse form. (A significant number of students do write original sonnets; others make more or less successful attempts at writing in early modern English.)

I have been consistently impressed by the variety of student responses and the level of poetic skill on display. In a single section of the course, I received a teasing rejection in the voice of the young man from Shakespeare’s Sonnet 20; a pillar-shaped poem describing the pillars of Islam, reworking George Herbert’s play with form and content in “The Altar” into the idiom of a different faith; and a heartbreaking narrative about the birth of stillborn twins, written in reply to Katherine Philips’s “On the Death of My First and Dearest Child,” written by a student who had hardly ever spoken in class. Nancy Hayes, writing about a similar creative writing activity she employs in her own classes, notes that “allusions to assigned readings which have been so gracefully embedded in the student’s own lyrical idiom suggest that a uniquely creative form of learning has taken place, one which cannot be described simply as an analytical process, but rather a more elemental, emotional, or poetic one. The student has internalized the material, and has been changed by the experience of reading and writing early modern poetry.”²⁰ This sort of transformative learning is often elusive in general edu-

20 Nancy Hayes, “Giant, Bloody Fleas and Duct Tape Dragons: Flights of Fancy in the Renaissance Classroom,” in *Creating the Premodern in the Postmodern Classroom: Creativity in Early English Literature and History Classes*, ed. Anna Riehl Bertolet and

cation courses, but it is, I feel, one of the things such courses *should* strive to achieve.

I also wanted to give students a sense of how exchanging manuscript commonplace books could itself serve as a social game, so the weekly special assignments include both in-class and out-of-class exchanges of poetry, similar to the book-sharing activities that Dana Schumacher-Schmidt describes elsewhere in this volume.²¹ In the in-class exchange, students are asked to copy a poem directly from a partner's handwritten commonplace book into their own. (This provides an opportunity to demonstrate how texts can be transformed through sharing and recopying; since they are asked *not* to work from the printed text in their anthology, the second-hand copy may differ from that text in ways that range from simple misspellings to the complete omission of line breaks.) In the out-of-class exchange, students take a classmate's book home with them, read through the selections carefully, and add a poem their classmate does not already have in their book but that they think their partner might enjoy, based on the other selections in the book. In both cases, I try to encourage students to exchange books with people they are friends with, or at least know outside of class, to simulate the conditions of a real early modern manuscript exchange, but at a school with a high percentage of transfer and commuter students, it is not practical to make this a requirement.

Like many faculty members around the world, I found myself having to adapt my courses for online delivery abruptly during the second half of the spring 2020 semester, and the majority of them remained online throughout the 2020–21 academic year. Like Joshua Eckhardt,²² I feel that the act of hand-copying is valuable in itself, and, as noted above, it introduces students to the ways that manuscript transmission can produce variant readings. Therefore, I chose to retain the requirement that students maintain a handwritten commonplace book, and asked them to share their work by uploading digital photos or scans to the course LMS. In an upper-level Early Modern Poetry class that was cross-listed in our MFA program in creative writing, I replaced one of our standard weekly discussion board threads with a “verse conversation” game, which I began by posting a few lines from a poem and challenging students to respond in verse—whether excerpts

Carol Levin (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2018), 1–12 at 11.

21 See the chapter by Schumacher-Schmidt in this volume.

22 See the chapter by Joshua Eckhardt in this volume.

from the poems we were studying, or an original composition of their own. They then selected a portion of the exchange to copy into their books. Thus, many of these activities can be adapted to courses without an explicit focus on gaming or a physical classroom presence.

Examining the Game: Longer Assignments

In addition to these ungraded weekly assignments, students in my survey course also complete two formal, graded writing assignments linked to the commonplace book project, provided in the Appendix. One of these is a close reading paper exploring how an early modern text of their choice plays with language. The other assignment, which they complete after a final, anonymous exchange of books at the end of the semester, asks them to engage in an original primary source analysis of the book they have received: what can a commonplace book reveal about the reading practices of its compiler? This is a challenging assignment, one that requires students to think like scholars, and some are tempted to make wild inferences about their classmates' personal lives rather than focusing on their relationships with *texts*; I have had to tweak the instructions to discourage this. Another pitfall is that very occasionally, a student-produced commonplace book will prove to be either illegible or otherwise unsuitable for analysis (for example, the student has completed only one or two entries and then abandoned the project). I find it helpful to keep a commonplace book of my own and to retain unclaimed examples from previous semesters in order to have a few emergency backups. Despite these challenges, I found that this assignment provided a practical way to bring manuscript analysis into the classroom, a benefit that is particularly useful at colleges and universities that do not have rare book collections. Students need to identify texts that may not be labeled with title or author, notice and account for textual variants, observe patterns, and make inferences about what elements such as the selection and arrangement of texts, as well as handwritten notes and original poetry, might reveal about the compiler's individual, interactive relationship with the written word. While not all students can do all of these things successfully, simply making the attempt introduces them to the challenges and rewards of original research.

Having now used some version of this commonplace book project in five sections of the early British literature survey, as well as two upper-level courses, I believe it has significantly increased student engagement and appreciation of the works we were reading. Several course evaluation comments identified this project as an assignment that students particu-

larly enjoyed. Further, it seems to have tapped into a rich vein of textual and artistic creativity. I would estimate that about half of the commonplace books I have received incorporated original art of some sort, ranging from cartoon illustrations of the poems to truly accomplished work. Even more importantly, given what I was trying to do with this project, many of the students are clearly having fun with the interplay of language and image; one produced a delightful rebus version of Donne's "The Bait," with most of the nouns in the poem replaced with small images of the thing they represented. It became evident that students are extraordinarily adept at *playing with* early modern poets--and by "playing with" I mean not only manipulating the text in clever and pleasurable ways, but also coming to see these long-dead writers as partners in an ongoing game of poetry, as equals, as fellow human beings.

Appendix

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS**WEEK 1 — Response Poem**

This week, you should do the standard weekly assignment (copying at least 28 lines from the course readings into your commonplace book), **but also** choose one of the poems you're copying this week, or one that you have previously copied into your commonplace book, and write an original poem of your own in reply. You may write from your own point of view, as Queen Elizabeth does in her reply to Sir Walter Raleigh's "Fortune hath taken thee away" and Jonson does in his reply to Wroth's sonnets, or you may write from a perspective of a fictional character, as Raleigh does in his reply to Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love." Giving a voice to someone who doesn't speak in the original poem—like Sidney's Stella—is often a good way in.

As our early modern poets do, you'll probably want to echo some of the language and images in the original poem, as well as responding to the ideas. (You might even want to try your hand at using the same verse form, although you're certainly not required to do so!)

WEEK 2 — In-Class Commonplace Book Exchange

At the beginning of class, we'll be setting aside time to share books with another student. Read through your partner's commonplace book entries, pick a poem or a quote you like, and *copy it out into your own book*. (You should copy directly from their book, without checking the original text in your anthology—if this takes longer than time permits, you may also take a photo of the page in their book and work from the photo.)

WEEK 3 — Out-of-Class Commonplace Book Exchange

During class, exchange commonplace books with another student in the class. Ideally, this should be someone you know outside of class; it may or may not be the same person you exchanged books with last week. Take their book home with you and bring it back to class at our next meeting to return it to its owner.

Between today and our next class meeting, read through the poems and quotations your classmate has selected, and *add one new poem or quotation that you think they would enjoy, based on their other choices*. This may be

from anything we have read at any point during this course. The only rules are that it should be something your classmate has not yet included in their commonplace book, and that you should choose it with *their* interests and tastes in mind, rather than simply picking something *you* happen to like.

WEEK 4 — Exploring Further

Add a poem or quotation to your commonplace book from any work by any of our early modern poets (Wyatt, Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, Queen Elizabeth, Wroth, Barnfield, Raleigh, Marlowe, Donne, Jonson, Philips, Herbert, Herrick, Marvell, Milton, or Lovelace) that was NOT specifically assigned for class. (It does not even need to be in the *Norton Anthology*—feel free to use online resources to find additional works by these writers.) As always, you should pick a piece that you like and find meaningful.

“Language at Play” Paper

For this assignment, pick EITHER a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century poem we’ve read in class (any poem from Wyatt on forward) OR a short passage (around thirty to fifty lines) from *Twelfth Night*. In this paper, focus closely on the poem or passage you’ve chosen, and explore how the writer plays with language. What seems to be the overall purpose of this wordplay: how might it show off the author’s cleverness, force the reader to see something in a new and different way, or express a serious idea playfully?

Examples of playing with language may include:

- Punning on multiple meanings of the same word or phrase; for example, in *Twelfth Night* 3.1, Viola and Feste’s first exchange turns on the fact that “live by the church” can mean either “live physically next to the church” or “make one’s living through the church.”
- Playing with words that have *similar* sounds, like “love” and “glove” or “hart” (male deer) and “heart.”
- Reversing a phrase: “Better a witty fool than a foolish wit.”
- Playing with contradictions and paradoxes: “I fear and hope, I burn and freeze like ice.”
- Doing unexpected things with poetic forms and conventions—for example, writing a poem in the shape of the thing it describes, or a sonnet where every line has twelve syllables instead of the usual ten.

- Imitating, replying to, or parodying work by another writer—for example, Raleigh’s “The Nymph’s Reply to the Shepherd” echoes and responds to Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd...” while Shakespeare’s Sonnet 130 pokes fun at poetic comparisons in general.

Other forms of wordplay (Barnfield’s echo sonnet or many of Herbert’s poems might fall into this category).

You’re encouraged to use a historical dictionary of the English language, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* or the *Online Etymology Dictionary* (www.etymonline.com) to research how words were used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially ones that seem to have multiple meanings or mean something different from what they do today.

Commonplace Book Analysis

At the beginning of the final exam period, you will receive a commonplace book created by someone else with whom you have not exchanged books before. Examine the commonplace book, identify as many of the pieces as you can (you may use your textbook and the Internet for this), and write an essay analysing the reading and quoting practices of your classmate and his or her coterie (the student or students with whom the book has previously been exchanged). In other words, *what can this book tell you about how its creators read and interpret the text?*

Questions that you might want to consider include:

- What sort of subject matter seems to appeal to the creator of the book? Are there themes or authors that come up repeatedly, or other common threads that unite multiple works in the collection (for example, works by women)?
- How is the collection organized? What kinds of things does the creator seem to think it is important for you to know about the poems? (For example, are authors’ names included, or line numbers or notes from the textbook?)
- If the book’s creator has added notes, titles, illustrations, etc., what might this material tell you about the reader’s interpretation of the poems?
- Are there any differences between the handwritten versions of the poems in this book and the versions in your course texts (such as missing words / lines, line breaks in different places, differences in

wording or spelling, modernization of certain words, etc.). If so, what might this tell you about how the creator of the book is reading the texts? (Although textual differences may, in some cases, reveal misreading or inaccurate copying, think of them as transformations, whether deliberate or not, rather than errors. Do they make sense on their own terms? Do they change the meaning or emphasis of the work?)

- What do the creator's original poetry, and the responses written during exchanges with other students, reveal about how these readers understood and responded to the early modern material?
- When you encounter pieces that were not specifically assigned for class, do your best to identify what they are. Are they early modern? Contemporary? Original? How might they relate to the other selections in the book?

For an example of an analysis of a real commonplace book from the sixteenth century, see <http://www.tudortimes.co.uk/people/the-devonshire-manuscript>.

Important note: Be careful about making assumptions about the creator's personal life or experiences, unless you have *positive* evidence that this is the case (such as a note where the creator describes a personal experience, or an original poem that seems clearly autobiographical). Remember that people often enjoy works that do NOT reflect their personal experience; you don't, for example, have to be a gangster to like movies about organized crime. Therefore, avoid observations like "The person who created this commonplace book seems to have had a turbulent love life"; instead, try "The creator seems to be particularly attracted to poetry that depicts love as painful or distressing."

