

'There was a time when researching the Early Modern period was a laborious process', lecturers at the University of Toronto recall. Trawling through facsimile copies at a university library or funding expensive trips to the British Library in London were necessary activities for Early Modernist scholars.

The advent of *EEBO*, now containing about 100,000 titles brought with it a small revolution in the nature of research at the University of Toronto. *Early English Books Online* covers the period 1473 to 1700, bringing rare and fragile printed works to the fingertips of thousands and thousands of undergraduates, graduates, researchers and lecturers worldwide. It's also led to inspired exemplars of teaching practices.

Dr Georgia Wilder is a lecturer in English and in a 'Writing and Rhetoric Programme' at the University of Toronto. *EEBO* was made available at her university library just as she was writing up her thesis, 'Public Voices, Private Closets and the Naked Truth: The Pamphlet Wars 1640-1660.' Whilst fact checking quotations from primary documents, Dr Wilder made some striking discoveries of her own, 'sometimes word usages, ideas (and sometimes whole texts) predate notions of originality and periodization ascribed by earlier scholarship.'

'I use the resource in different ways for the different levels that I teach' she says. For first and second year students, Wilder employs texts written in verse to help students puzzle out the correct words in places where text is difficult to read. Secondly, she tends to select non-canonical works for assignments.

'As students are unlikely to find secondary sources that apply directly to these works, they are unlikely to plagiarise.' For large classes, where close lecturer supervision is impossible, plagiarism can cause real problems. In setting assignments using non-canonical texts from *EEBO* Dr Wilder found the plagiarism problem disappeared. Pleasingly, students were also less likely to recycle academic clichés. Their prose was that much more interesting to assess.

Teaching students at a higher level, Dr. Wilder aims to instil a sense of 'revisionism' using primary source evidence to challenge notions established in scholarship. The sense of a shared research experience between lecturer and pupil gives the student a real sense of accomplishment. Wilder finds that steering students towards the use

of non-canonical texts 'draws much more out of them that is brave and original.' Students graduate feeling confident that it is possible to make an original contribution to the intellectual field.

In Dr Wilder's course, 'Prose Styles across Genres', *EEBO* provides the basis of two term paper questions. This fourth year course focuses on methods for analysing various aspects of prose styles, tracing rhetorical trends across a broad textual history.

Term paper, 8-10 pages long:

1 Susan Sontag asserts that 'disease is a metaphor'. We have seen this phenomenon in works that pre-date Sontag's examples. Seventeenth-century royalist pamphlets describe democratic ideas as a deformed body politic, a schismatic disease, or many-headed hydra; radical sectarian texts align monarchy with biblical plagues. Discuss the interplay of physical deformity or infirmity and metaphoric disease in two of the following texts available in *EEBO*:

Samoth Yarb [Thomas Bray] – *A New Sect of Religion Descryed* (1641)

Abiezer Coppe – *Some Sweet Sips of Some Spiritual Wine* (1649)

Anon – *The Ranters Ranting* (1651)

Anon – *The Declaration of a Strange and Wonderful Monster* (1652)

2 Milton's *Areopagitica* argues for freedom of expression as a virtue, yet claims that 'bad books' like 'monstrous' babies can be justifiably drowned at birth. Consider the ways in which the rhetoric of early republican documents operate over a long period of increasing emancipation, suffrage, and expectations of democracy. Compare the assigned online editions of 'The Declarations of Independence' and Sojourner Truth's 'Ain't I a Woman?' to one seventeenth-century text:

Milton – *Areopagitica*

Gerard Winstanley – *Laws of Freedom in a Platform*



Dr Georgia Wilder

"Students were shocked by the obscene woodcuts in the first assignment. This piqued the interest of those who would otherwise prefer to investigate works of current popular culture.' Harnessing visual imagery sets the scene for further investigation and provides an excellent way to involve the class in a particular historical period. 'Despite having been exposed to modern works which are far more explicit, they expected religiously motivated documents to be "old fashioned" dry, and modest.'

Once interest was piqued, Dr Wilder found the quality of work rewarding. Students drew on their own areas of interest to respond to this assignment, linking concerns of politics and law to provide a rich contextualised understanding of the way text works within historical boundaries.

The English Department at the University of Toronto is the preeminent English Department in Canada. With a full-time group of over 70 in the St. George Department and over 90 in the University-wide Graduate Department, with over 70 distinguished retired professors and more than 20 sessional instructors the department is strong in virtually every area of English Studies.

