

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Hobby, Elaine, Gillian Wright, Mel Evans, Claire Bowditch, and Alan Hogarth, core team. Editing Aphra Behn in the Digital Age (E-ABIDA). Other

Joseph Rudman

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**Hobby, Elaine, Gillian Wright, Mel Evans, Claire Bowditch, and Alan Hogarth, core team.**

**Editing Aphra Behn in the Digital Age (E-ABIDA). Other.**

Sheffield, UK: Digital Humanities Institute, University of Sheffield, 2018.

Accessed 30 June 2021.

[aphrabehn.online](http://aphrabehn.online)

Editing Aphra Behn in the Digital Age is a website whose stated objective is to make all of Behn's works (in all of her working genres) more widely available. One stated end product (and the *causa causans*) of the project is to "produce an eight-volume, original-spelling, carefully annotated edition of Behn's writings with Cambridge University Press" ("About E-ABIDA"). The site can be viewed as a "project notebook," but in an outline form. But more than that, the site is full of valuable digressions for the early modern scholar—stylistics, authorship attribution, book history, scholarly editing, chronology, and more. The quality of Aphra Behn's (1640–89) prodigious literary output deserves the effort put into this project. When I first used the E-ABIDA site for an article I published a few years ago, everything was so intuitive I gave no thought to the site's design and layout. The ease of navigating the site and finding the pertinent information belies the amount of work in its construction. In addition to the support of the entire project by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, there are three other prominent partners: Clio's Company, The Digital Humanities Institute at Sheffield University, and The National Archives. This illustrious quartet shows the importance of the project and the respect it has. The project has an excellent core group; each member brings an added area of expertise outside of their knowledge of Behn and her writings. Yet this group also reaches out to many other scholars (who are listed on the site) for advice and collaboration. The editorial team adds fifteen scholars to the core team to edit various entries for the eight Cambridge volumes. An editorial board adds six more international scholars. The project management board adds another seven members.

When first entering the site, I suggest you click on the "About E-ABIDA" entry in the second banner from the top for a clear and concise paragraph about the project's main end product. Then I suggest you go through the seventeen "Archive" entries in reverse chronological order starting with the June 2018 entry by Mel Evans, "First Steps: Learning the Art of Computational Stylistics"—found in the penultimate listing on the entry page. Next, go

through the “Blogs”—again, read in reverse chronological order. This will fill you in on the progression of the project. A hidden gem in the archives is Gillian Wright’s entry, “Aphra Behn in Lampeter,” which follows Mel Evans’s entry in the October 2018 archive. Wright discusses an area of Behn research at the Lampeter Library of the University of South Wales Trinity Saint David that will be valuable to many users. Make sure that you recognize the abundant hyperlinks scattered throughout the project site; they elucidate and expand the material manifold. A good example of this is in the August 2018 Archive: the hyperlink to Elaine Hobby’s 2018 article published on the British Library’s “Discovering Literature” website, “*The Rover*: An Introduction.” There are also informative “pop-ups.” You will see bibliographic entries, notices of conferences, recorded presentations, and much more. The archives, blogs, and hyperlinks will also give you a good grasp of the surprisingly important peripheral (or rather imbedded) subjects treated in this site. The first of these I want to discuss is stylistics. The very first entry of this project was Evans’s “First Steps,” and the third was her “Looking at the Small Words.” Identifying exactly which of the Behn *dubitanda* to include in the final printed volumes could not be done with the same degree of certainty without their painstaking work with stylistics. This work was then part of the formula to determine authorship: stylistics plus statistics plus the computer. Parts of this attribution work can be seen in the above stylistic articles and in the 19 July 2019 archive entry by Evans, “Attribution Corpora: An Overview of Text Preparation,” also in Alan Hogarth’s 6 March 2020 archive entry, “Authorship and Adaptation.” The project also addresses the concomitant problems of collaboration and sub-genres. The second major area I would like to discuss is the editing, de-editing, and re-editing of the Behn canon. This complicated process for the Behn Cambridge edition is complicated further by the vastly different methodologies used to produce the final printed version and those of the final digital version designed to be used as the authorship attribution corpus (which the project promises to make available to scholars as soon as possible after the printed version is published). Since the preparation of the printed version is a more traditional process, it is obvious why the methodologies for the digital attribution corpus would be given in more detail. But there is more than adequate attention paid to the traditional. There is a hyperlink to the Yale Symposium on “Scholarly Editing of Literary Texts from the Long Eighteenth Century” in the July 2020 Archive. This also contains

an informative paper by Elaine Hobby, “On the Editing Processes and Wider Aspects of the *Editing Aphra Behn in the Digital Age* project.”

While I do not want to make an ideal site the enemy of an excellent site, I nonetheless suggest eight modifications and additions: 1) remove the “Anne Finch” entry, because although it is of interest to most early modern scholars, it does not seem to fit; 2) remove two of the three duplicated entries titled “What’s Next for the Behn Project” dated 25 May 2021; 3) remove one of the two duplicated entries titled “International Women’s Day – Guest Lecture on ‘Aphra Behn’s Other Worlds’” dated 19 April 2021; 4) add an annotated bibliography that includes the important published articles growing out of the project;<sup>1</sup> 5) add an index of the site; 6) involve more non-traditional attribution scholars to give Mel Evans and Alan Hogarth added insights and avoid the problems (including *ex post facto* sniping) that plagued the *New Oxford Shakespeare*—although if the project involves only one practitioner, Hugh Craig is an outstanding choice;<sup>2</sup> 7) since this site should be acting as an experimental project notebook, details about the project should be made specific and vague words (“etc.,” “such as”) avoided, both to allow replication of the attribution process and to help students learn how to edit, de-edit, and un-edit early modern texts; 8) add “Archives” to the ten entries in the banner below the title.

This project as it exists is an excellent endeavour—a *sine qua non* resource for Aphra Behn studies—and it promises to get better. The first of the eight volumes of the Cambridge edition (vol. 4) was published in March 2020; “Questions of attribution, collation, print history, biography and literary import preside over the remaining seven volumes of the edition” (E-ABIDA 25 May 2021). I highly recommend E-ABIDA to every scholar of the early modern period.

JOSEPH RUDMAN

Carnegie Mellon University

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1. Especially Evans, and Evans and Hogarth.

2. For a more complete critique of the authorship question in this project, see Rudman.

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**Braddick, Michael J., principal investigator; Marcus Nevitt and Bridgette Wessels, chief investigators; Keira Borrill, research associate.**

**George Thomason's Newsbooks. Other.**

Sheffield, UK: Digital Humanities Institute, University of Sheffield, 2020. Accessed 23 June 2021.  
dhi.ac.uk/newsbooks/.

George Thomason's Newsbooks is a dataset and search interface resulting from an AHRC-funded project, run by Sheffield University, called Participating in Search Design: A Study of George Thomason's English Newsbooks.<sup>1</sup> According to the project website (dhi.ac.uk/projects/newsbooks-project), the interface was developed through a process called "Participatory Design," a technique that involves "users and potential users in the design of a new interface, system and/or service."<sup>2</sup> The interface was designed with the aid of a series of focus groups and meetings with key stakeholders and users.<sup>3</sup> Though the project took place in 2012, the associated resource has just been released. The project team took as its pilot dataset a portion of the Thomason Tracts: a collection held by the British

1. For more information on the project see Wessels et al.

2. Wessels et al., "Executive summary."

3. See Braddick and Nevitt, 155–56.