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SURFACE READING PAPER AS FEMINIST BIBLIOGRAPHY

Georgina Wilson

How can we read paper? What possibilities does such an activity afford? Are we to apply literary skills of analysis to interrogate a material surface or to consider how paper's physical affordances shape rhetorical meaning? To "read" paper can mean both to consider the bibliographical evidence of its production, circulation, and use, and to analyze how paper is deployed as a rhetorical trope laden with "imaginative power."¹ Paper is a physical substance that, despite its generative capacity as a writing surface, exists in three dimensions. As Jonathan Senchyne notes, it is helpful to think of paper in layers. Senchyne categorizes these as the material (paper is made up of cellulose fibers meshed together), the representational (words and images on paper invite interpretation), and the "presence layer" (the traces of individuals who have contributed to its making).² I extend these categories to include the temporal palimpsest of paper's production (a sense that paper piles moments of its own biography upon one another), and the cumulative semiotics of that history (the hidden or less legible meanings which paper affords to text). Paper is layered in both a physical and a figurative sense; it demands both intellectual and haptic engagement from its readers. Those two modes of attending to paper collide when we attend to "material texts" in their richest sense.³

In this article I read paper's layers both materially and metaphorically. Specifically, I take up metaphors of dimensionality: metaphors that traditionally operate in critical theory yet are realized and inflected by paper's material forms. The materiality of paper pulls toward a theoretical model of reading structured by depths and surfaces, and this article explores what happens when we bring the theoretical and the material together. The theoretical model of surfaces and depths has a history that stretches back to the 1970s, when "symptomatic reading" dominated English faculties in the United Kingdom and North America. Symptomatic reading is a Freudian inheritance that sees repression everywhere: its practitioners assumed that the "real" meaning of texts was hidden deep within. The proper work of a literary critic, therefore, was to plumb the depths of a text

to triumphantly reveal what it was reluctant to give up. While a Freudian patient was assumed to be hiding past trauma, a text instead represses “the political conditions or forces bearing down at the moment of its making.”⁴ The critic, peering suspiciously past these conditions, restored to the surface what had previously been pushed beneath. Depths, in this scholarly mode, were a metaphorical environment for plucking out latent meanings that otherwise scuttled into the shadows and for hauling into view the prior causes of a text’s agenda.

This model of reading fell out of fashion as scholars grew skeptical of the implication that, if only one could dig deep enough, a text signified a fixed and stable set of truths. Depths—at least in the Freudian, repressive sense—gave way to surfaces and to an interest in reading texts literally; reading a text on its own ethical or rhetorical terms; or attending to the patterns that structure texts without trying to move past them. In a seminal issue of *Representations* on “surface reading” (2009), Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best parse the possibilities of this approach. They acknowledge that while surface-minded scholars might consider surfaces in a physical sense, and so tend towards material readings, rarely do their own contributors refer to “the literal surface of texts: paper, binding, typography, the sounds of words read aloud.”⁵ Marcus and Best prioritize the metaphysics above the materiality of surfaces; surfaces thus become “what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts; what is neither hidden nor hiding.”⁶ They account for the surface as something that “insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*.”⁷ In this sentence, as they acknowledge, Marcus and Best follow Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass, who deploy the same paradigm of reading (that is, looking at rather than through) though to opposite purpose. While Marcus and Best advocate surface reading to gaze at texts’ outermost formal and rhetorical structures, de Grazia and Stallybrass demand that we look at textual surfaces to consider their material aspects: “old typefaces and spellings, irregular line and scene divisions, title pages and other paratextual matter.”⁸ Models of figurative and material surfaces, deployed by scholars coming from the seemingly opposed camps of theory and book history, have curiously similar attachments to the subject of their enquiry. Theoretical models of “surface reading” demand the same critical stance of “looking at” texts by which readers come to attend to their material forms.

That eddying symbiosis between critical theory and textual materiality has not always been manifest. Bibliography—the earliest form of materially attentive textual studies—emerged as a pocket of resistance at the moment when theory, including symptomatic reading, was flourishing

in the academy.⁹ Opponents of theory believed that it abandoned historical context for abstraction; bibliography, on the other hand, was rooted in empiricism. The perceived split between bibliography and the subjectivity of theoretical responses allowed bibliography to continue at a remove from the diversification of subject matter—the centering of postcolonial or queer readings, for example—that theory invited and demanded.¹⁰ This special issue contributes to the growing sense of urgency to bring book history and theory together, and demonstrates the generativity of doing so. Together these articles take up the mantle of critical bibliography, which “dissolve[s] barriers between theoretically informed cultural studies and deep attention to the materiality of texts.”¹¹ By drawing on the empirical presence *and* imaginative generativity of material texts, critical bibliography moves away from a binary of objective/subjective readings and instead engages with the intellectual, political, and emotive responses available to readers.

Among the proliferating possibilities of critical bibliography is feminist bibliography, which Kate Ozment defines as “the use of bibliographic methodologies to revise how book history and related fields categorize and analyze women’s texts and labor.”¹² Beginning with Leslie Howsam’s call in 1998 for a heightened awareness of the process of bookmaking—in particular the role of women as book users¹³—feminist bibliography evolved to critique the ways in which women’s interventions have been sidelined by book history as both a practice and a discipline.¹⁴ Feminist bibliography is not just bibliography about women, but a scholarly approach that pays attention to the structures that gender our readings of who makes, and makes meaning in, material texts. Helen Smith, Paula McDowell, and Maureen Bell have traced a particular strand of feminist bibliography that recovers the work of women (as hawkers, booksellers, printers, and compositors) within the production and distribution of printed texts, and I continue this line of thought by expanding the network of book production to center women’s roles.¹⁵ However, while much research shows how women historically intervened in the life of a text *after* it has been written, this article uses the paper trade to consider women’s labor in pretextual production, which is to say, their role in the making of forms that anticipate printed sheets. By fusing close reading with an account of paper’s conceptual and material depths, I offer a new mode of feminist bibliography that reveals fresh affordances of paper—not only in the early modern imagination but for the affective and political nature of reading in our own moment.

Early modern paper was made from rags usually collected by women, who then sorted the rags by quality and color. In the paper mill, the rags were pulped to produce a watery sludge called “stuff.” The vatman would dip a mold (a rectangle wire mesh, surrounded by a wooden frame, or “deckle”) into the vat, and as the water drained away, a paper sheet would begin to form. The coucher would press that sheet onto a felt, which would then be stacked by another, more junior, member of the team. The stacked sheets were pressed and dried, and then distributed to individuals, to printing houses, and, for the lower quality papers, to grocery shops as wrapping paper.¹⁶

Accounting for the early modern paper trade in our book history makes room for a greater network of individuals, including women, who intervened in early modern texts. As Heidi Craig has shown, female ragpickers were among the most marginalized members of the community.¹⁷ Yet their work was vital to literary production and challenges the parameters of authorial labor. To focus on the author in the conventional sense is to overlook the array of other agents whom book history since the 1980s has sought to recenter.¹⁸ Recent work on compositors, compilers, and printers demonstrates the literary aspects of their labor, which shapes textual form and the experience of reading.¹⁹ Lisa Maruca has coined the term “text work” to foreground those who contributed not only to “the technologies of printing [but] . . . even the business of planning, marketing, and selling print.”²⁰ Text work was understood by early modern readers and writers to be a creative and collaborative part of book production, and so Maruca offers what she calls “a collective alternative to anachronistic notions of creativity centered in the singular author.”²¹

To think about papermaking as a coordinate on the timeline of literary production is to double down on this sense that text work extends beyond the author. Paper relies on a collaborative network that stretches beyond those legible in imprints or others who are otherwise easily identified.²² Watermarks, in particular, remember how texts are entangled within a community who shape pretextual forms. Watermarks were introduced in the thirteenth century, when papermakers would sew wire initials, or figures such as pots, crowns, and animals onto the mold with fine wire knots.²³ Molds were used in pairs with inevitably not-quite-identical watermarks, which themselves were prone to warp over time.²⁴ Nevertheless, the unique nature of watermarks meant that early modern paper could be traced to a specific mill, and so watermarks connect each sheet to the site of its early formation. The watermarks of a printed sheet give a glimpse

onto those otherwise less legible individuals who interacted with its pretextual state. Formed by the impression left by the wire mold in the sheet, watermarks are also a reminder of paper's flawed and three-dimensional form.

Watermarks, then, testify to the depths of paper in at least two senses. While their physical makeup emerges from paper's three-dimensional form, their materiality models the figurative depths which accumulate through the layers of paper's production history. Watermarks are a reminder of the hidden forms of labor present in material texts: its encounters with hands and bodies beyond the uppermost "author." Figurative and physical depths collide in watermarks, which prompt us to read beneath the surface of paper.

This kind of looking resists an older model of paper as the passive receptacle of ideas: a model that privileges the work of white, educated men whose intellect is stamped onto paper's surface. John Bidwell buys into this notion when he describes paper as a "mute vehicle, rarely noticed except when it fails its purpose."²⁵ Bidwell's description of paper idealizes those moments of "surface reading" when readers hover above the sheet, seemingly unaffected by its material form and oblivious to the stories paper tells other than those imprinted by authors and printers on its surface. In the early modern archive populated with handmade rag paper, such moments of surface reading are nearly impossible to achieve even were they desirable. Texts demand more from us than the kind of surface reading that engages with inscription to the exclusion of the support, which, by its very nature, makes the presence of those inscriptive marks possible. Watermarks tell a story of production that clashes with the narrative written on a text's surface, and so they epitomize paper's refusal to remain silent. Imaginatively, paper shapes (which is to say that it enables and yet also restricts) how early modern writers imagine race, gender, and sexuality, as work by Brandi Adams, Miles Grier, and Senchyne (among others) has shown.²⁶ And paper as physical form is about as "mute" as a field of rustling hempseed: its shives and flaws bear witness to a history of production in which human hands transform plant matter into linen, into rags, into paper sheets.

Watermarks invite readers to look past or through paper's uppermost surfaces and become sensible to modes of textual labor beyond the work of "authorship" in a narrow sense. To read watermarks in this way is to undertake a form of feminist bibliography, because it demands a new way of analyzing women's labor as a material and intellectual contribution to the field of book history. This article makes the

case that papermaking, including the predominately women's work of ragpicking, is a literary contribution that shapes the form, and thus the meaning, of texts.

Over the course of this article, I pursue a case study from my own area of literature—printed texts in early modern England—to model how surface reading paper works as a mode of feminist bibliography. My chosen text is Ben Jonson's dramatic tragedy, *Sejanus His Fall*, first printed in quarto in 1605. The tale narrates the death of a real Roman soldier, who lived under the reign of the emperor Tiberius in the first centuries BC and AD. Sejanus ascends to and then falls from power, as Tiberius raises him a favorite and then betrays him for overambition. To describe *Sejanus* in these narrative terms is already to take part in a kind of surface reading: to focus on the inscriptions that populate the uppermost layers of the page. Surface reading, in this sense, describes how we are first taught to read paper: focusing on the text as a series of interconnected semiotic units disassociated from the apparently passive substrate that forms its visual background. As we have seen, one of the implications of this mode of reading is a prioritization of the author: the person who forms the linguistic structures and makes the initial marks (although this mark-making is deferred by printing) that are read on the surface of the text. Read in this light *Sejanus* becomes the work of Ben Jonson, mediated through his various classical sources.

Yet *Sejanus* offers a particularly profitable avenue for redefining the boundaries of authorship. In the first instance this is because Ben Jonson was unusually involved in dictating how his plays took form as printed objects, and so he expands the role of an author to someone involved in the making of material texts.²⁷ Second, *Sejanus*'s watermarks announce its origin from a paper mill whose owner and workers linger in literary and nonliterary texts. The watermarks of twenty-eight copies of *Sejanus* show their connection to a paper mill in Dartford, Kent.²⁸ This mill was owned by John Spilman, who held the legal monopoly on the production of white paper (as opposed to brown paper, which was generally not suitable for writing or print),²⁹ and who therefore has a very visible presence in early modern material history. In February 1589 Spilman was granted a ten-year patent for the exclusive production of white paper, as well as a monopoly on the raw materials, including linen rags, that white paper demanded.³⁰ That the patent exists in Spilman's name reiterates his

autonomy as papermaker and erases those individuals, including ragpickers, vatmen, and couchers, who enabled a supply of paper to emanate from mill. Yet Spilman's employees partially emerge in a warrant from October 30, 1588, which orders "all suche highe Germaines that be workmen with Mr Spilman her Maiesties Jeweller in his Paper mill" to appear before the Privy Council.³¹ Spilman's German workforce, who emigrated from his own country of birth, are fleetingly brought into view as their precariousness position as skilled papermakers becomes clear. The warrant suggests that Spilman's German workforce experienced hostility: a response also provoked by the female ragpickers who worked peripherally to the mill. These women ranged from Kent into London to provide the paper mill with rags that, despite Spilman's monopoly, remained in short supply. Spilman's ragpickers attracted complaints from the Lord Mayor of London William Rider, who in May 1601, wrote to the Privy Council to complain that John Spilman "[b]egan to offer wrong to the charters of the city by authorizing great numbers of poor people, especially girls and vagrant women, to collect rags, etc. within the city and liberties, who under pretence of that service, ranged abroad in every street, begging at men's doors, whereby the discipline of the city was weakened."³² Rider casts moral aspersions on the geographical wanderings of these "girls and vagrant women" beyond proprietorial boundaries. His complaints are partly economical (Rider believed it "more convenient for the city in the gathering of such refuse stuff, to employ rather our own poor, otherwise idle") and heavily gendered: the implication is that by mobilizing poor women to roam freely Spilman makes a particular misjudgment.³³ Women's labor is transformed from a source of economic productivity or cultural impetus into an opportunity for sexual temptation and civic unruliness. In this passage ragpicking is overdetermined not because it signals the making of literary forms but because it acts as a cover for impropriety. Collecting rags supposedly leads to weakened "discipline," as Rider subsumes the women's proximity to grimy materials into a kind of blemished virtue. The presence of these women—homogenized, marginalized, and demonized—lingers beneath the surfaces of *Sejanus*.

Thomas Churchyard's poem "A Discription and Playne Discourse of Paper," printed in *A Sparke of Frenship and Warne Goodwill* (1588), helps bring to light these less legible modes of labor that gave form to the 1605 quarto. Printed on paper made in Spilman's paper mill, "A Discription" is a eulogy to papermaking, to Spilman's paper mill, and to its owner. The poem accredits Spilman as the individual who "First framde the forme, that sundry paper wrought."³⁴ This language of "forms" densely populates the poem, not only in terms of the mill—"brought to perfect frame

and forme” (405)—but also in the description of the process of papermaking. To speak about the forms of paper, and specifically the forms of white paper predominately used for writing, is to articulate a connection between texts’ material and figurative structures. While an author fashions narrative form out of his sources, papermakers participate in the making of pretextual forms from existing, raggy matter.

Churchyard’s poem overtly makes this point overtly by naming Spilman “[t]he author than, of this newe Paper Mill” (414). To call Spilman an author and a maker of forms suggests a meaningful connection between the framing of literary matter (the role of the author in a conventional sense) and the fashioning of physical material which goes into the longer timeline of textual production. The poem makes space, too, for the labor of Spilman’s workforce, acknowledging that “Through many handes, this Paper passeth there/before full forme, and perfect shape it takes” (409). Those “many hands” are not those of John Spilman, but belong to the predominately female group who deal in “ragges and shreads” (409). These individuals are present in paper, which, as Senchyne notes, “absorbs traces of people, places, and actions, making them available for thinking and touching.”³⁵ Their work is geographically and temporally removed from conventional sites of textual production yet remains integral to the making of literary forms. Churchyard sweeps Spilman into the category of “author” because he gives “perfect frame and forme” to the paper mill, which in turn gives form to paper. Applying the same logic to those men and women whose hands and bodies give paper its “full forme” means acknowledging that these oft-overlooked individuals also fashion future literary forms and so participate in the broader modes of authorship that the paper trade and the early modern literary imagination invite.

One payoff, then, of thinking about the “forms” of paper, is to reintegrate the work of marginalized papermakers into the shaping of literary forms and so to extend literary production beyond its usual gendered and socioeconomic coordinates. Jonson’s classical tragedy is usually read as a story of a canonical male author who fashions literary matter by gathering and reworking classical sources. *Sejanus* is an early modern rewrite of the fourth book of Tacitus’s *Annals*, upon whose subsequent translation into English in 1600 by Justus Lipsius Jonson heavily relies.³⁶ In the preface to the reader, Jonson freely acknowledges his debt not only to Tacitus but to Dio Cassius, Suetonius, and Seneca, among others. Yet underneath the printed texts which testify to Jonson’s reshaping of literary material is the papery substrate, which has its own production history. The prior life of paper is legible

if only we look for it: as Lisa Maruca notes, “[R]eading has not always been a process of screening out the physicality of the print product and those who manufactured it.”³⁷ To read *Sejanus* as a material text is to engage, as early moderns did, with the labor of those who reshaped paper’s raw materials to produce literary forms. By close reading *Sejanus*’s sheets, the authorial focus shifts away from Ben Jonson, or the stationers who manufactured the printed codex, and makes legible the ragpickers whose labor is documented in and on paper.

Where there has historically been a tendency to hierarchize these forms of labor such that inscription comes out materially and intellectually on top, paper’s surfaces and depths demand a more nuanced approach to reading its layered history. In his reading of Anne Bradstreet’s “Author to her Book,” Senchyne observes that “the critical moves [Bradstreet] makes are lost if we critics ignore the presence effects of paper in favor of our tendency to privilege the interpretation of what is written on paper.”³⁸ I agree, and yet we do not need to rely on authorial intent to restore the significance of paper’s three-dimensional presence. Paying attention to the material and figurative depths signified by the watermarks of *Sejanus* does the opposite of entrenching its white male writer, and instead reinstates the labor of marginalized and less legible individuals who give shape to literary forms.

In fact, the materiality of watermarks alters the available meanings of *Sejanus* in ways that go beyond Jonson’s intention or control. *Sejanus* is infiltrated with a language of hierarchy, in which upper and lower levels define its characters’ lives, ambitions, and speech. In act 3, when Sejanus makes the mistake of asking Tiberius for his daughter’s hand in marriage, Tiberius gives multiple reasons against the marriage, all of which show that Sejanus misunderstands his place in relation to those above him. Tiberius questions whether his newly widowed daughter would wish to “raise thee with her loss” and points out that other nobles “Stick not, in public, to upbraid thy climbing / Above our father’s favours, or thy scale” (3.562–63).³⁹ Despite encouraging Sejanus to his face that “we not know / That height in blood, or honour, which thy virtue / And mind to us, may not aspire with merit” (3.572–74) Tiberius broods to the empty stage that “no lower object” (3.624) than Livia’s hand will suit Sejanus. At the same time as he articulates Sejanus’s subordination, Tiberius remembers that Sejanus is “wrought into our trust / Woven in our design” (3.626), deploying a language of intertwined egalitarianism (oddly resonant, for this article, of how watermarks are “woven” into their mold) to signify Sejanus’ current favored position. Yet in the same breath Tiberius

reiterates the importance of maintaining vertical distance between himself and Sejanus:

'Tis then a part of supreme skill to grace
 No man too much, but hold a certain space
 Between th'ascender's rise and thine own flat,
 Lest, when all rounds be reached, his aim is that. (3.643–6)

Tiberius views it as his “skill” to maintain and impose levels between his subjects, and between his subjects and himself, such that even a soldier on the ascent will not reach Tiberius’s “own flat.” Abandoning Sejanus for his overambition, Tiberius swiftly moves onto Macro, telling him, “You stand so high, both in our choice and trust” (3.665). The power structures that infiltrate *Sejanus* are insistently vertical ones. The play is driven by fluctuating political levels which Tiberius constantly re-creates to dominate his subjects, as they are all too aware, by choosing whom to raise and lower.

While *Sejanus* plays out on a historical background in which everyone’s aim is to rise to the top, the play reveals the fault lines in that structure. Reading the play simultaneously as text and as material form is to reckon with the alternative hierarchical models embodied in its paper. The narrative of *Sejanus* makes clear the instability of its vertical structures, in which individuals can shift between the heights of power and sudden subordination. The play’s sense of political levels as unfixed, contingent, and subjective, offers a model for interrogating our reading of the materiality of its paper form. A critical tendency to prioritize the uppermost inscriptions on paper surfaces arises from an attachment to a particular vertical model that is equally unfixed, contingent, and created within a particular intellectual environment. It is this model’s prioritization of paper’s surfaces that my reading of *Sejanus*, by foregrounding those individuals and modes of labor seemingly buried in paper’s depths, attempts to overturn.

To advocate for a discussion of depths appears to revert to an older model of symptomatic reading, in which the feminist bibliographer takes up the mantle of restoring what is “really” going on under the surface of the text. Yet the language of repression embedded in that post-Freudian critical mode does not quite map onto what I am attempting here. The material and metaphorical layers of *Sejanus*, which redefine the making of literary

forms, are not subject to some agonized relationship between the text and its own moment. Making legible those individuals whose labor shapes the longer life of paper relies instead on the relationship between the text and the equally historicized stance of the literary scholar. In this article I have actively sought to model a feminist bibliography and so do a particular kind of politicized work. As we are by now well aware, “no narrative of history is unbiased, and no material object comes forth from a space or process anesthetized of the cultural identities of its creators or modern practitioners.”⁴⁰ By melding book history with theory to model a new feminist bibliography, this article uses the materiality of paper as a prompt to extend the cast of characters whose agency is accounted for in the making of material texts. This account of *Sejanus* does not pretend to impartiality but knowingly arises out of a historical moment and an intellectual environment which pursues a critical bibliography in order to challenge our always political assumptions about how to read paper.

In a recent account of surface and depth models of reading, Rita Felski advocates for personal interests, priorities, and emotions as both powerful and valid factors in determining critical responses to texts. Resisting the intellectual suspicion which is embedded in both symptomatic and surface reading, Felski suggests that “we cannot help projecting our pre-existing beliefs onto the literary work, which are modified in the light of the words we encounter” and asks why we are “so hesitant to admit that studying literature can be, among other things, a way of fashioning a sensibility, redirecting one’s affections, re-evaluating one’s priorities and goals.”⁴¹ For Felski, every encounter between a text and its reader has the potential to render each afresh. Texts can be read neither as transcendently timeless nor “imprisoned in their moment of origin,” because their meanings are inflected by the scholarly intentions, intellectual frameworks, historicized assumptions, and fluctuating emotive responses of the reader, which are themselves partly governed by the makers of the text. In rejecting models of depths and surfaces for one in which readers are cocreatively entangled with their reading matter, Felski also rejects forms of vertical reading. Her “postcritical” reading is instead “a matter of attaching, collating, negotiating, assembling—of forging links between things that were previously unconnected.”⁴²

Felski’s postcritical reading describes, more accurately than models of depths and surfaces, the way in which I have been reading watermarks in this article. Looking to watermarks as an intellectual prompt one final time, a materially attentive close reader might conclude that neither depths nor surfaces sustain wholly satisfactory models for conceptualizing paper. Reading for paper’s depths suggests that if only we look hard

enough, we can find its stable semiotics waiting to be discovered: a notion instantly undermined by paper's lively generative potential. Meanwhile, surface reading paper means engaging with paper's uppermost inscriptions: privileging paper's role as writing substrate and so restricting attention to specific forms of literary production. Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass come up against the same shortcomings when analyzing how models of metaphorical dimensionality have been conventionally applied to Shakespeare. De Grazia and Stallybrass note that the materiality of Shakespearean texts was often understood to signify the inconvenient bric-a-brac of historical transmission through which a canny editor could plunge to retrieve the "true" meaning of the Bard: "No less than depth, surface is locked into the dichotomy of outer/inner, form/content, appearance/reality."⁴³ De Grazia and Stallybrass move past this set of (implicitly hierarchical) binaries by affirming the significance rather than the inconvenience of a text's material form. Rather than surfaces and depths, they suggested, "Perhaps a more helpful way of conceptualizing the text is to be found outside metaphysics, in the materials of the physical book itself: in paper."⁴⁴

While this article has been broadly about paper, it is more specifically about the significance (both the importance, and the potential to signify) of watermarks. Watermarks suggest how we might read paper: materially and metaphysically, as a three-dimensional form. Watermarks are formed as cellulose fibers enmesh themselves around a wire mold and so they take part, in Felski's words, in a process of attaching, collating, negotiating, assembling—of forging links between things that were previously unconnected. The intertwined fibers of watermarks model the network of more disparate moments in the making of literary forms—writing, printing, papermaking, and ragpicking—and prompt us to consider these codependent forms of labor on an equal plane. Paper "creates proximity" between the agents who shape its history, including not only an array of early modern authors in the richer sense that I have come to employ that term here but also between its early modern origins and its modern readers.⁴⁵ By acknowledging my own intent to model a new feminist bibliography, I have deployed watermarks for a postcritical reading of *Sejanus*, which advance my own interests and priorities while generating a new reading of that play both as narrative text and material form. Watermarks enable a mode of reading that emerges between the realities of early modern papermaking and the undercurrents of contemporary scholarship: they accumulate the layers of meaning embedded in paper from its beginnings to the present day.

Georgina Wilson is an Early Career Research Fellow in early modern literature at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge. She is working on a book about paper's imaginative and material role in the making of literature.

NOTES

1. Helen Smith, "'A Unique Instance of Art': The Proliferating Surfaces of Early Modern Paper," *Journal of Northern Renaissance* 8 (2017), <https://jnr2.hcommons.org/2017/4847/>. See also Emma Depledge, "Ink/Paper," in *Shakespeare/Text*, ed. Claire Bourne (London: Arden, 2021), 383–401, which moves from the "textual allusions" to the "bibliographical truths" of paper (385).
2. Jonathan Senchyne, *The Intimacy of Paper in Early and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2020), 5.
3. Senchyne, 5.
4. Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 60.
5. Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best in "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 1–21, quotation on 9. The exception is Leah Price's article "From the History of a Book to a 'History of the Book,'" *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 120–38.
6. Marcus and Best, "Surface Reading," 9.
7. Marcus and Best, "Surface Reading," 9.
8. Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass, "The Materiality of the Shakespearean Text," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (1993): 255–83, quotation on 256.
9. James Raven, *The History of the Book* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 4.
10. Kate Ozment, "Rationale for a Feminist Bibliography," *Textual Cultures* 13, no. 1 (2020), 149–78, esp. 160.
11. Senchyne, *Intimacy of Paper*, 7.
12. Ozment, "Rationale," 151.
13. Leslie Howsam, "In My View: Women and Book History," *SHARP News* 7, no. 4 (1998): 1–2.
14. See, for example, across three historical moments, Molly Yarn, *Shakespeare's "Lady Editors": A New History of the Shakespearean Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Michelle Levy, "Do Women Have a Book History?," *Studies in Romanticism* 53, no. 4 (2014): 297–317; and Laura E. Helton, "On Decimals, Catalogues, and Racial Imaginaries of Reading," *PMLA* 134, no. 1 (2019): 99–120.
15. Helen Smith, *Grossly Material Things: Women and Book Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace, 1683–1730* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); and Maureen Bell, "Women and the Production of Texts: The Impact of the History of the Book" in *The Book Trade in Early Modern England: Practices, Perceptions, Connections*, ed. John Hinks and Victoria Gardiner (London: British Library Publishing Division, 2014), 107–31.

16. For a more detailed explanation see Dard Hunter, *Papermaking: The History and Technique of an Ancient Craft* (New York: Dover, 1974), 170–202.
17. Heidi Craig, “English Rag-Women and Early Modern Paper Production,” in *Women’s Labour and the History of the Book*, ed. Valerie Wayne (London: Arden, 2020), 27–35; Heidi Craig, “Rags, Ragpickers and Early Modern Paper-Making,” *Literature Compass* 16, no. 5 (2019): 1–11.
18. It is also to take a distinctly unearly modern perspective of literary production, at a moment when collaborative authorship, especially for playwrights, was common.
19. Claire Bourne, *Typographies of Performance in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); and Megan Heffernan, *Making the Miscellany: Poetry, Print and the History of the Book in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021).
20. Lisa Maruca, *The Work of Print: Authorship and the English Text Trades, 1660–1760* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 17.
21. Maruca, *The Work of Print*, 18.
22. While this chapter is concerned with human agents, the extended timeline of paper also draws attention to its origins as nonhuman matter. Joshua Calhoun *The Nature of the Page: Poetry, Papermaking and the Ecology of Texts in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).
23. From the late seventeenth century, international conventions led watermarks to signify paper size and quality rather than a unique papermaker. Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 1995), 61–62.
24. Hunter, *Papermaking*, 266.
25. John Bidwell, “The Study of Paper as Evidence, Artefact and Commodity”, in *The Book Encompassed: Studies in Twentieth-Century Bibliography* ed. Peter Davison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 69–82, quotation on 69.
26. Brandi Adams, “Faire/Foul,” in *Shakespeare/Text*, ed. Claire Bourne (London: Arden, 2021), 29–49; Miles Grier, “Inkface: The Slave Stigma in England’s Early Imperial Imagination,” in *Scripturalizing the Human: The Written as Political*, ed. Vincent Wimbush (London: Routledge, 2015), 193–200; and Senchyne, *Intimacy of Paper*.
27. Joseph Lowenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), esp. 133–60.
28. The paper of the other four copies have a watermark with the initials BC and a bunch of grapes, and came from France, mostly likely Normandy.
29. Hunter, *Papermaking*, 119–21.
30. Patent: PRO C66/1331.
31. National Archives, SP 12/217, fol. 114. My thanks to Heather Wolfe for sharing her work on Spilman.
32. National Archives, SP 12/279, fol. 165.
33. Craig, “Rags,” 7.
34. *John Nichol’s The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I: A New Edition of the Early Modern Sources*, vol. 3, 1579–1595, ed. Elizabeth Goldring, Faith Eales, Elizabeth Clarke, Jayne Elizabeth Archer, Gabriel Heaton, and Sarah Knight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 395–415, quotation on 408.

35. Senchyne, *Intimacy of Paper*, 19.
36. Daniel Boughner, "Jonson's Use of Lipsius in *Sejanus*," *Modern Language Notes* 73, no. 4 (1958), 247–55, esp. 249–53.
37. Maruca, *Work of Print*, 8.
38. Senchyne, *Intimacy of Paper*, 81.
39. Ben Jonson, *Sejanus His Fall*, ed. Tom Cain, vol. 2, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. David Bevington, Martin Butler, and Ian Donaldson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 211–391.
40. Ozment, "Rationale," 165.
41. Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 178–79.
42. Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 173.
43. De Grazia and Stallybrass, "Materiality of the Shakespearean Text," 80.
44. De Grazia and Stallybrass, "Materiality of the Shakespearean Text," 80.
45. Senchyne, *Intimacy of Paper*, 19.

