

“DRAWING THE DOWN ON A BUTTERFLY’S WING”:
A PERFORMANCE IN TWO BOOKS

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Readers will find throughout Jerome McGann’s *Radiant Textuality* an emphasis on “making.” In fact, the book argues for it: “The next generation of literary and aesthetic theorists who will most matter are people who will be at least as involved with *making* things as with writing text” (19). McGann came to this conclusion while building the *Rossetti Archive*. In many ways, *Radiant Textuality* is a record of his discovery that working with digital tools turns you into “a maker” and *that* experience changes the way you pose, answer, and keep open questions related to the methods and materials of your digital projects.

This essay looks at two books that were made in 2014 and 2019 respectively. They were created alongside our work on the *Yellow Nineties Online* and then as it was re-imagined as *Yellow Nineties 2.0*. The first book, *Elements of Ruskin: A Deformance in Three Parts*, was conceived at the same time that we were beginning the process of transitioning between platforms. One of the reasons for the transition was to give us more control over the design of the site and thus our roles were starting to shift from content creators to *makers*. And, like McGann, taking on this new role threw up all kinds of new questions. *Elements of Ruskin* is a book that looks forward to that possibility, testing out what it feels like to recursively shape something. It is, as McGann says, “a speculative foray” (15).

While *Elements* casts itself forward, imagining what’s to come, the second book we made, *A Riot of Type*, looks back at and memorializes what has already been accomplished. In the five years between books, the *Yellow Nineties* had been remade and *A Riot of Type* reflects that change. Unlike the often open-ended making of a digital resource, a book seems very “finished,” and when I have presented these books to students and academics, I often fall into the trap of talking about them in that way, at the endpoint of their production, with all the uncertain moments of their making unremarked. This