



Humor in a Microcosm: Isolation and The Young Idea

By Teresa Navarro for the University of New Haven

What is The Young Idea?

The Young Idea: A Naval Journal Edited on Board the H.M.S. Chesapeake in 1857, 1858 & 1859 is a newspaper edited by A.D. McArthur, a clerk aboard the H.M.S. Chesapeake, and published in 1867 by Paul Jerrard, a publisher in London. *The Young Idea* focuses on the daily lives of the crewmembers on this English flagship. I read, transcribed, and encoded thirteen issues to let the people of today see the culture, issues, and experiences of the 1850s, specifically those of the crewmembers of the H.M.S. Chesapeake.

What did I do?

My SURF experience began with transcribing the extracts of *The Young Idea* as seen in J.W.L. Bampffield's journal extracts. Slowly, I became a master at reading both the neat handwriting of McArthur and the messy scrawl of Bampffield. With time, I transcribed a prologue and seven issues of Bampffield's journal and thirteen issues of the published version of *The Young Idea*.

Once the transcription was complete, it was on to coding. Every time a name, a boat, or anything else deemed necessary by our team was tagged within the text for future users and readers to use in their own research. This tracked data could be used to track ships' whereabouts, help historians with seeing how many English soldiers came to aid during the Indian Revolution, or even help somebody find out about their ancestors. Besides tagging names and ships, within coding, this process created a digital edition of *The Young Idea*, which was ultimately Dr. Mary Isbell's goal with this project. However, once the transcription was done, there was still much more to do.

Once my partner and I did our mandatory transcriptions, together, we swapped each other's work and collated our transcription. Through a program, we made a side by side comparison of our transcriptions and every time there was an error, we checked the original photograph to see which transcription note was correct. This was tedious, but necessary to create an accurate digital edition of *The Young Idea*.

In between transcribing, collating, and coding, I was also researching for my own personal project. My research looked at how the people of the nineteenth century perceived humor. In order to get a sense for what these people laughed at, I went to the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library located on Yale's campus. Besides looking at delicate books handwritten in the 1800s, I have accumulated research both on humor analysis and the issues during 1857 and 1858 to help me understand what these shipmen found humorous and what they found hurtful.

SURF in Action

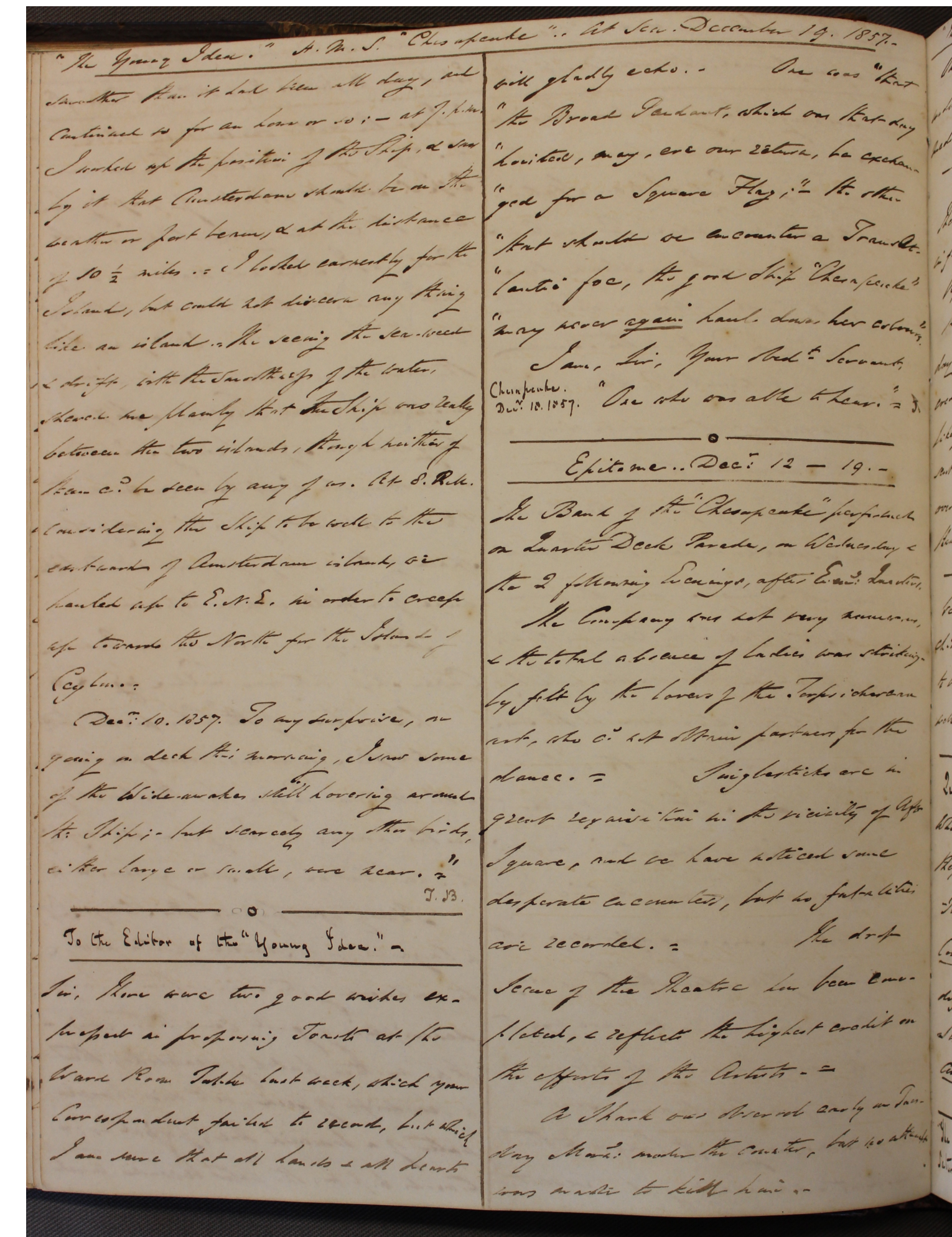
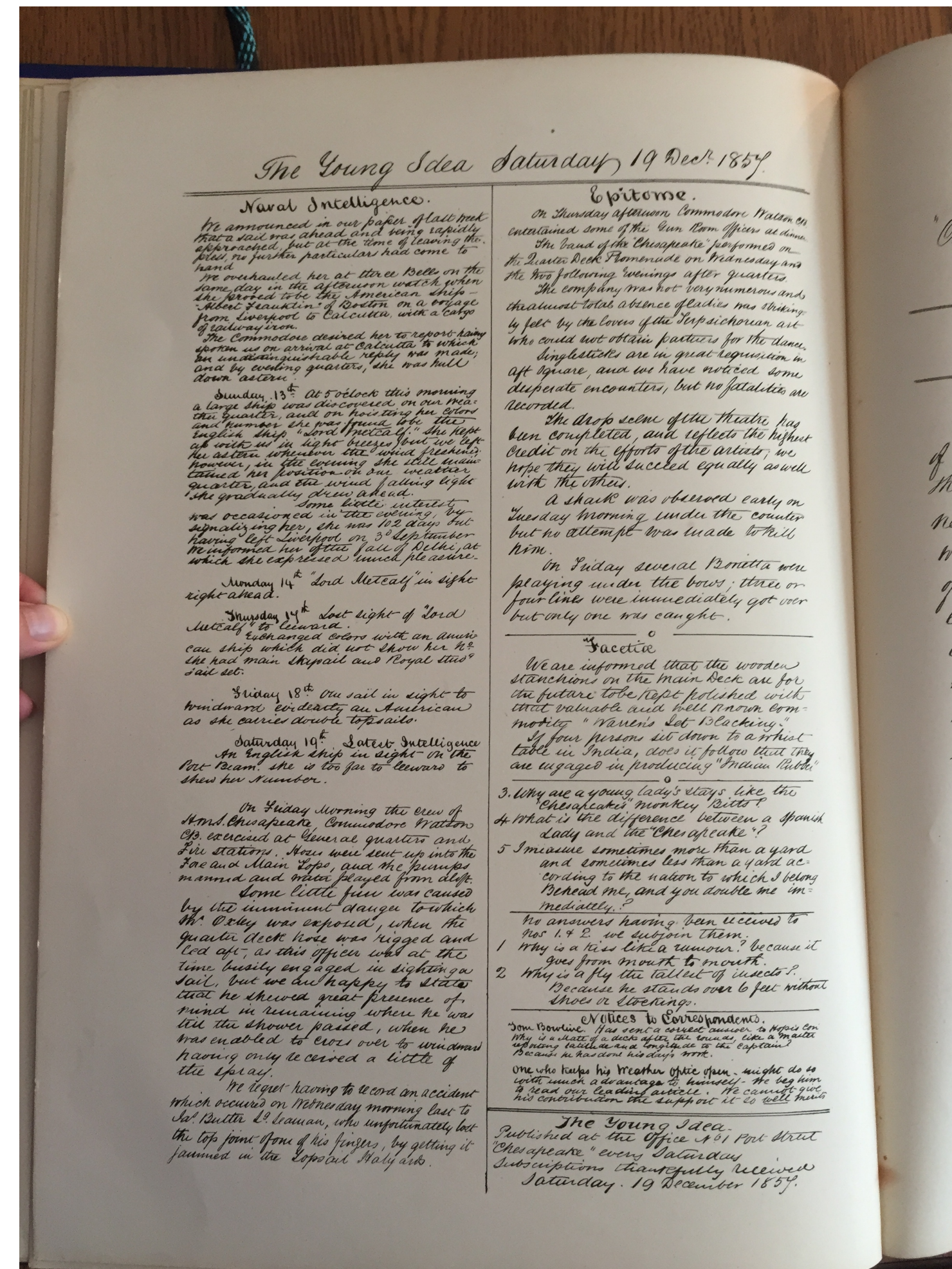
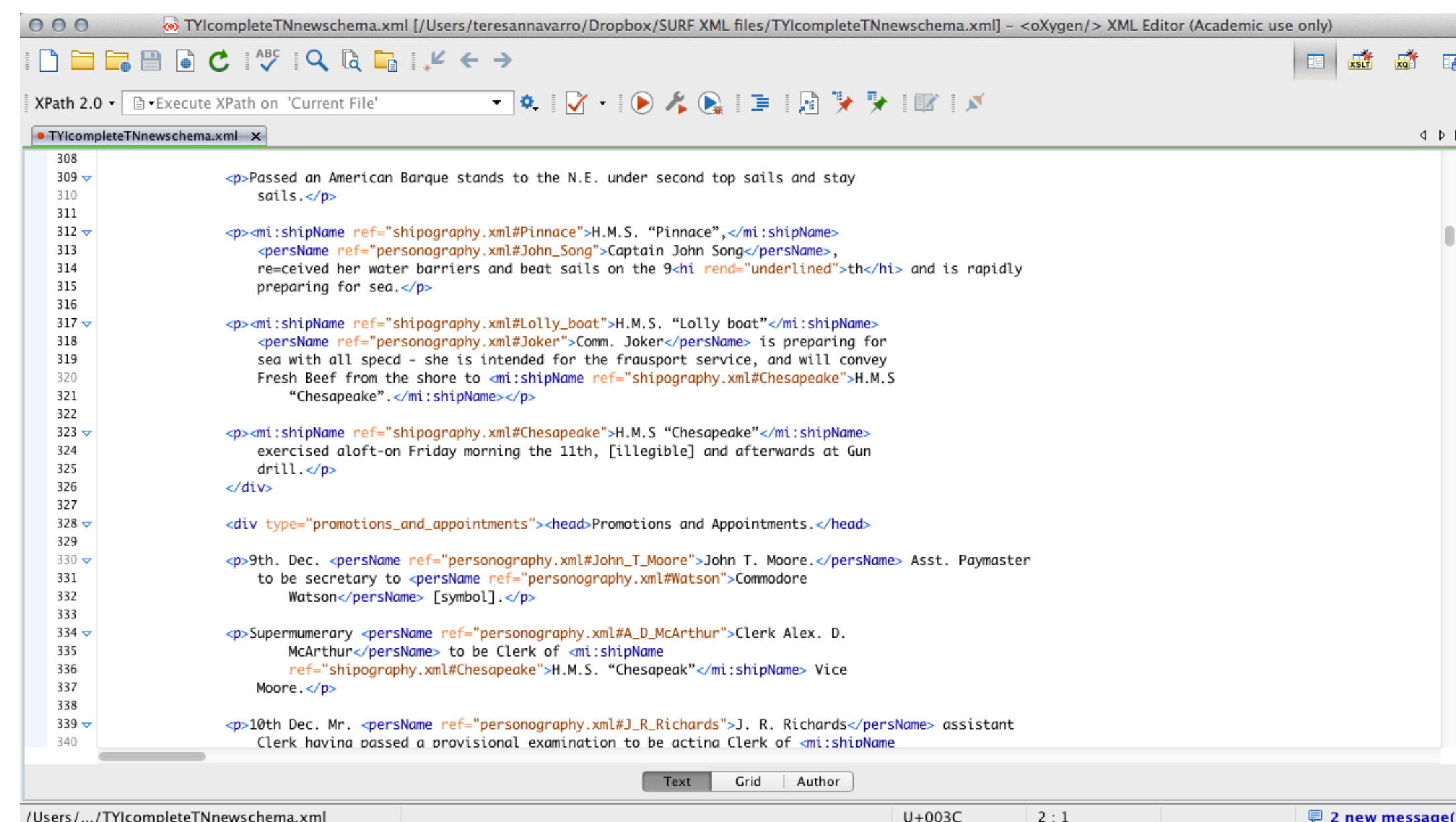


Photo Courtesy to Dr. Mary Isbell and National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England



What is my Research?

Looking at microcosms, one will notice that slowly with time, a small group will grow and change in comparison to people who are not in the microcosm. In this situation, I am looking at how humor has warped while members of the H.M.S. Chesapeake stayed on this naval flagship. By comparing the use of riddles, puns, anecdotes, and other types of comedy to the rest of England's sense of humor, I am able to look at how being isolated changes your humor.

Humor usually is a reflection of one's beliefs and ideas. As these men faced the Indian Revolution head on, while the rest of the English got filtered news reports, one sees different beliefs and ideas between these isolated shipmen and the rest of their native country. Besides the subjects of the jokes, it is also important to look at what types of humor was important to these two groups of people. Of course much more research needs to be done, but even with the small amount of research made, there are some obvious differences emerging, even within these short, thirteen chapters.

Most of the jokes seen within *The Young Idea* are usually in relation to naval equipment or people of foreign races. Though my data lacks in the field of nineteenth century England, I am going to assume that the people on the mainland were not as savvy in ship terms and humor as the people aboard *The Young Idea*, which was sometimes called "Our floating home".

What's next?

There are many things to do once SURF is done. Dr. Mary Isbell this summer has invited me to serve as a co-editor on a selection from the digital edition that will be published on ScholarlyEditing.org because of the work I did this summer has proven circuitous to that project.

This March, there is a The Humanities and Technology Camp (THATcamp) being held on the University of Connecticut campus, specifically aimed towards humanities writers that focus on maritime research. This is an "unconference," which means we will present our research and findings in a collaborative and informal setting.

A second conference we are interested in attending is hosted by the Nineteenth Century Studies Association. Money that we requested when we applied would fund our travel to Lincoln, Nebraska in April, and we will actually get to meet the editors of Scholarly Editing in person because the University of Nebraska publishes that online journal. More on the traditional side, this specific conference would be an excellent experience, as it would give me a reason to expand my research and go above and beyond my SURF experience.

Obviously, it is necessary that I continue my research on humor analysis and what the people of nineteenth-century England found entertaining. By continuing to read journals and published works, I will hopefully find answers on whether or not being in a microcosm effects what a person finds humorous, especially those have been on the H.M.S. Chesapeake.

Above: A side by side comparison of the fourth page of the second issue of *The Young Idea*. On the left is the published version by McArthur that was funded by subscription. The image on the right is a handwritten extract by J.W.L. Bampffield, the ship's chaplain. Besides handwriting, words, names, and grammar may be different. We do not know if Bampffield's extracts are a draft or not.

Left: This image is what XML coding in the program Oxygen looks like. Used to tag the transcriptions of *The Young Idea*, here we see tagging in action. Each ship mentioned in *The Young Idea* was tagged so readers can track where these boats have moved.