

Edified by the Margent: Early Modern Readings of Biblical Marginalia

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This article traces the evidence left by early modern readers who marked their Bibles' annotations—both by taking attentive notice of them and by leaving their own inky traces on them. Among the burgeoning critical interest in both printed and manuscript marginalia there has been little interrogation of the intersection between the two. This article traces the evidence of what the readerly marginalia of biblical annotations can tell us about their readers. It argues that literacy formed and fostered by reading annotated Bibles was likely to be skillful and attuned to issues of interpretation and meaning-making.

INTRODUCTION

THOSE WHO READ what is written in the margins read with attention. My undergraduate tutor instructed us to read all the notes in Alastair Fowler's incomparable Longman edition of *Paradise Lost*—informing us that the last student to obey this injunction was now one of the world's leading Renaissance scholars. Modern readers often skip the footnotes—relegated to the bottom of the page, they seem not to ask for our attention—but the margins of early modern books place annotations in the reader's eyeline, where, as Robert Hauptman puts it, “they seduce with their immediate demand.”¹ The architecture of the printed page is complex—a “responsive entanglement of platform, text, image, graphic markings, and blank space”²—and the mise-en-page of early modern texts meant that their readers were much more likely to read the notes.

¹ Hauptman, 74. For the best work on the shift from marginal annotations to footnotes (and, incidentally, my favorite ever academic article), see Lipking.

² Mak, 5.

In particular, they were far more likely to read their Bibles' annotations, for—unlike most modern Bibles—almost all early modern English vernacular Bibles, even those which might be traditionally thought of as unannotated, were printed with notes. One such reader who read the margins of his Bible was Edmond Copping. Copping owned a 1537 Matthew Bible and inscribed his name repeatedly on its pages. Although nothing else is known about him, it is clear that he read his Bible's marginalia, for on one occasion he corrected a mistake. Copping's Protestant sensibilities were caught by the passage about idols in Psalm 135 and he underlined this passage and wrote "Ymages" in the margin. The printed marginalia cross-references these verses to an identical passage in Psalm 115—but a misprint has crept in, which Copping has corrected, crossing out the erroneous "Psal. cxiii" and replacing it with the correct "cxv."³ This misprint and its readerly correction preserve, in a way legible almost half a millennium later, an act of reading: Copping reading the printed annotation and turning the page to find the reference. Copping's careful emendation enables a rare trace to remain of marginal reading which in perhaps many millions of other instances have passed silently into history. The misprint makes reading recognizable through its correction.

The errata sheets appended to so many early modern books evoke painstaking readers. The printer John Mellis (fl. 1582), for example, asks the "gentle Reader" "with thy penne . . . to amende in the Margente of the booke."⁴ Seth Lerer records a number of volumes in which readers have followed this advice, arguing that the errata sheet stands "as a place holder in the ongoing narratives of book making and book reading," embodying the way in which "the early book is always a work in progress and in process, a text intruded upon for emendation, a text that invites the correction of the reader."⁵ Errata sheets both implicitly and explicitly imagine an active reader who is able to correct further mistakes for themselves: "Other escapes of lesse weight and small importance, I referre (gentle Reader) to thine owne correction, in thy priuate reading."⁶ But they also draw attention to readers attending to the marginal annotations: "Iudicious and ingenuous" readers who noted and amended errors committed even in the fine print of "the margent" provide direct proof of

³ *The Byble*, 1537a, fol. 25^v (Psalms 135:15–18). Bibles with marginalia are listed together with other manuscript and archival sources in the *Early Modern Bibles and Archival Sources* bibliography. Only when I am citing Bibles with marginalia do I list the shelfmark.

⁴ Record, sig. Yy7^r.

⁵ Lerer, 42.

⁶ Bishop, sig. ¶¶5^r.

attentive and skillful readers who paid careful attention even to the margins of their books.⁷

The Geneva Bible advertises on its title page that it comes “with most profitable annotations vpon all the hard places,” and much of its preface is taken up with a discussion of what is “in the margent noted” for the “edification” of the reader.⁸ Shakespeare’s own reading of this preface is suggested in Horatio’s quip “I knew you must be edified by the margent ere you had done”—for, surprising as it might seem, Shakespeare (like untold numbers of other early modern readers) did indeed read the Geneva notes.⁹ As Alec Ryrie has stated, in the early modern period “reading meant, first and last, reading the Bible”—but, nonetheless, much of the wider scholarship on the reader has ignored it.¹⁰ The Bible, however, was the axiomatic book of early modern England—the platform on which the whole edifice of early modern religious, social and political institutions was built—and among its many early modern vernacular editions, it appears to have been the most heavily annotated translation that had the most profound effect.¹¹ The Geneva Bible was, in all probability, “the most widely distributed book in the English Renaissance”; it was issued in over 127 editions and swiftly became “the Bible of Elizabethan England.”¹² Femke Molekamp argues that its extensive annotations were an important part of the Geneva’s appeal—inviting the reader “to participate in the community of interpretative brethren through the reading experience”¹³—and that the Genevan paratext “popularized in England a host of distinctive material features which helped to domesticate Bible reading . . . [playing] an important role in shaping the landscape of the English Reformation.”¹⁴

Studies of early modern biblical reading have begun to address the materiality of individual Bibles. This work, as Molekamp argues in her important study of Geneva Bibles, “yields information as to how the act of reading is inscribed in these texts.”¹⁵ Jennifer Richards and Fred Schurink have argued cogently for the importance of studies that try to close the gap between printed paratexts and real, historical readers. Led by the groundbreaking work by William Slights, William

⁷ Morton, 371. See also Calvin, 1580, sig. L3^r; Willet, 94.

⁸ *The Bible*, 1595, sig. ¶iii^r.

⁹ Shakespeare, 93 (*Hamlet* 5.2.152). See Groves.

¹⁰ Ryrie, 271. For example, foundational collections for the field—such as Suleiman and Crosman’s *The Reader in the Text*—which covers a vast array of types and theories of reading, have no section on scriptural reading.

¹¹ Sharpe, 2003, 123.

¹² Sherman, 2008, 71; King and Pratt, 86; Betteridge, 44.

¹³ Molekamp, 2013, 23.

¹⁴ Molekamp, 2015, 52. See also Hardie-Forsyth, 11.

¹⁵ Molekamp, 2006, 1.

Sherman, and Molekamp, critics have begun to ask how to recover the ways in which the crowded *mises-en-page* of early modern Bibles conditioned the responses of readers.¹⁶ Recent work by Thomas Fulton, Jeremy Specland, and Renske Annelize Hoff (the latter of whom works on Dutch Bibles) has explored the existing evidence for how biblical readers shaped, and were shaped by, the margins of their texts.¹⁷ This is work on which the current essay builds by exploring an aspect of English Bibles that has not yet received sustained attention: readerly marking on the printed annotations themselves.

The Geneva Bible was indubitably the most widely read, heavily annotated text in early modern England, and its notes effectively “transmitted Genevan theology to an English readership.”¹⁸ These annotations, however, shifted over time—intending to be definitive, they yet represent the evolution of contemporary interpretation. The original 1557 New Testament marginalia were reprinted in the first complete edition of Geneva Bible (1560). But although the annotations of the Old Testament remained fixed from this point, the New Testament notes were replaced in many editions (from 1576 onwards) with notes by Laurence Tomson (1539–1608), based on his translation of the annotations of Theodore de Bèze (1519–1605).¹⁹ This rapidly became the most common form of annotation in Genevan New Testaments, but in complete Geneva Bibles (to which Tomson annotations were sometimes added from 1587) the original Genevan annotations remained more common. The Geneva New Testament marginalia was further revised, with new notes on Revelation by Franciscus Junius (1545–1602) (published separately in 1592), which replaced the Tomson annotations in some Geneva Bibles from 1602, thus creating a composite Geneva-Tomson-Junius Bible.²⁰ Both the wealth

¹⁶ Richards and Schurink. For work on manuscript marginalia in Bibles, see Slights, 1992; Sherman, 1999, 2008; Higman; Molekamp, 2006, 2009, 2013; Narveson; Fulton, 2021; Fulton and Specland; Specland; Hoff, 2019. See also Hoff’s forthcoming article “Transformative Actions: The Fluidity of Materiality and Meaning in Sixteenth-Century Dutch Bibles,” in *Readers’ Hands*, ed. S. Corbellini, W. François, and R. A. Hoff, 1–28 (Leiden: Brill). For more general studies of Bible reading, see Tribble; Collinson, 1995; Green; Cummings; Stallybrass; Sharpe, 2003; Owens; Cambers; Rylie; Hardie-Forsyth; Fulton, 2017a; Hooks; Kilbride, Kotva, and Ravenscroft.

¹⁷ Fulton, 2021; Fulton and Specland; Specland; Hoff, 2019.

¹⁸ Molekamp, 2015, 39.

¹⁹ For more on Tomson’s annotations, see Molekamp, 2015, 49.

²⁰ Shaheen, 30–31. See Shaheen, 17–38, for an overview. The Geneva-Tomson-Junius Bibles dated 1599 appear to be a later, pirated edition (32). However, the Junius edition of Revelation (available from 1592) could have been bound at the end of Bibles before this date. Edward Seager’s 1598 Geneva-Tomson Bible (discussed in more detail below), for example, has a 1594 printing of Junius bound subsequent to the Tomson Revelation.

of, and shifts in, the Geneva's paratextual materials "fostered self-conscious reading practices," and the shifting sands of Genevan marginalia in particular highlights their "self-reflexive artificiality," drawing (inadvertent) attention to the inherently conditional nature of interpretation.²¹

There has been an important move in hermeneutic and critical theory away from the authorship and towards the consumption of texts; marginalia is crucial to this turn to the reader in early modern scholarship.²² Printed marginalia frames, and manuscript marginalia records, the reading experience, representing (as Fulton has argued in reference to the Genevan annotations) "an interface between the ancient code of biblical meaning and the currency of the early modern world."²³ In the early modern period, printers created complex paratexts to guide readers—creating "the text embodied"²⁴—while readers eagerly marked up what white space was left: annotating their books "in greater numbers than ever before and more actively, perhaps, than at any time since."²⁵ Marginalia unites modern critical interest in both the reader and the liminal—concepts that encounter each other on the literal margins of the text. The blank space of the margin functions "as an anchor that may be grasped physically and conceptually by the reader."²⁶ Building on Michael Camille's and Gérard Genette's foundational work on the liminal, Renaissance scholars have become increasingly intent on margins—studying both printed marginalia and, to an even greater extent, readerly annotations.²⁷ There has, however, been little interrogation of the intersection between these burgeoning fields—the question of how early modern readers responded to printed annotations.²⁸

This essay explores the readers who annotated the annotations of their Bibles. It is based on a corpus of eighty-five English vernacular Bibles (printed prior to the King James Version [1537–1610]), which are housed in the

²¹ Molekamp, 2013, 35; Gribben, 14. See also Green, 519; Higman, 117.

²² See Suleiman and Crosman; Sharpe, 2000; Darnton, 2014; Bennett; Raven, Small, and Tadmor; Kintgen; Manguel; Chartier and Cavallo; Fischer; Colclough; Sherman, 2008; Towheed, Crone, and Halsey; Connolly.

²³ Fulton, 2021, 3.

²⁴ Tribble, 1.

²⁵ Sherman, 2008, 3.

²⁶ Mak, 32.

²⁷ Camille; Genette. For work on printed marginalia, see Lipking; Slight, 1989; Tribble; Rhodes and Sawday; Slight, 2001; Andersen and Sauer; Hackel; Sherman, 2008; Hauptman; Smith and Wilson; Fulton, 2021; Shuger. For work on manuscript marginalia, see McPherson; Stoddard; Jardine and Grafton; Evans; Grafton; Sharpe, 2000; Jackson; Baron, Walsh, and Scola; Roberts; Gingerich; Hackel; Beal and Edwards; Cormack and Mazzio; Fleming; Fulton, 2010; Scott-Warren; Richards and Schurink; Orgel; Acheson; Spedding and Tankard.

²⁸ One excellent recent exception is Jeremy Speckland's work on psalters: see Speckland.

Bodleian Library, Oxford. The decision to explore this corpus was based, in part, on the fact that the Bodleian preserves one of the largest collections of Bibles in English that has not yet made part of a study focusing on readerly marginalia (such as Molekamp's study of the British Library Geneva Bibles or Sherman's study of the Huntington's Bibles).²⁹ This article—which focuses solely on one small but vital aspect of these markings: the manuscript annotations of the printed annotations—is a prelude to a larger study of these Bibles' readerly marginalia.³⁰

Following Maurice Betteridge's classic 1983 essay on the Genevan annotations, scholars such as Tom Furniss and Fulton have analyzed their political, cultural, and theological implications.³¹ The Genevan annotations were famously dismissed in 1604 by James I as "seditious" and by Archbishop Parker (1504–75) as "preiudicall" and "bitter,"³² while modern critical opinion has often concurred in thinking poorly of them: Slights, for example, describes them as "impenetrable."³³ Christopher Hill, meanwhile, in an inversion of James's and Parker's attitude, but sharing their outlook, argued influentially in 1965 that "the Geneva Bible with its highly political marginal notes, came near to being a revolutionists' handbook."³⁴ While these readings of the Genevan annotations notes are well known, this essay gathers new evidence for the attitude of a wider variety of early modern readers in order to assess how accurately these judgments reflect the ways in which these notes were actually read. The early modern manuscript marginalia in the Bodleian collection provides no evidence for the dismissal of the Genevan notes as either "bitter" or "impenetrable" among those who read them, but it does deliver some intriguing evidence for James's fear, and Hill's celebration, of their revolutionary potential.

²⁹ Molekamp, 2006; Sherman, 2008.

³⁰ Six of the Geneva Bibles in the Bodleian collection preserve readerly marginalia on the notes: *The Bible*, 1570; *The Bible*, 1577; *The Bible*, 1578; *The Bible*, 1586; *The Bible*, 1594; *The Bible*, 1598. Likewise, one Great Bible (*The Byble in Englyshe*, 1541) and one Bishops' Bible (*The holi Bible*, 1569). At eight, this represents nearly 10 percent of the dataset. In all likelihood, this is representative of a much larger historical sample, as collectors sought unmarked Bibles and annotations have often been rubbed or even sliced away by overzealous collectors.

³¹ Betteridge; Furniss; Fulton, 2021. See also Jensen; Killeen.

³² Barlow, 47; Pollard, 295. Parker's view of the Genevan annotations can likewise be inferred from his note to the translators of the Bishops' Bible "to make no bitter notis vppon any text, nor yet to set downe any determination in places of controversie" (297).

³³ Slights, 1989, 692.

³⁴ Hill, 4.

Surviving manuscript marginalia proves that some readers paid careful attention to these notes. While in the majority of cases readers annotate the biblical text with far more regularity than they do the notes, in the corpus of Bibles covered by this essay there are two exceptions who pay equally marked attention to the printed notes as to biblical text itself. These two readers are also of interest, since I have been able to ascertain their names and dates: they are Edward Seager (fl. 1648) and Edward Duke (fl. 1618–28). In the dataset of marked Bibles it is rare to be able to identify annotators, but Duke inscribes his name in his 1577 Geneva Bible, and notes therein the dates of the death of his brother (1618) and that of his “deere” wife (1628).³⁵ Seager, meanwhile, inscribed his name regularly on his 1598 Geneva Bible and may have signed, as well as dated, the final page of the concordance—perhaps marking a completed reading of his Bible on this date: “[obliterated words] 1642 Lord establish my intent with the perfection of thy holy Spirite Amen.” He likewise dated his signature (1648) near the beginning of the *Whole Booke of Psalmes* (1595) that is bound to his Bible.

I have not been able to find out anything further about these two readers from external sources, but it is clear from their marginalia that Seager was drawn to the Calvinist temper of Genevan marginalia, and that Duke was an antimonarchist who drew from his Genevan text and annotations conclusions about kingship that justified James I’s worst fears. Duke’s annotations, in particular, support the current scholarly apprehension of the Genevan notes as “politically radical,” but Duke’s marginalia is likewise interesting for the evidence it provides about the cognitive condition of early modern reading.³⁶

This essay aims to sharpen the discussion of what the cultural role of the Genevan annotations might have been, arguing that early modern marginalia on these notes provides evidence of their being attended to by committed, theologically engaged, and politically informed readers. But this marginalia also provides evidence for the mental freedom of those readers. Duke—and other similarly adversarial, though anonymous, readers who marked their Genevan annotations—enthusiastically accepted the interpretation of many of the Genevan notes, but they also felt free to contradict and even, on occasion, to mock their conclusions. Such readers were keenly attentive to what they could glean from the Genevan annotations’ scholarship, but their readerly freedom was not circumscribed by what they read in the margins of their texts. The markings left in Geneva Bibles offer some unique insights into the interpretative independence of early modern readers.

³⁵ *The Bible*, 1577, fol. 20^r (Genesis 47:9).

³⁶ Furniss, 7. See also Hill, 4.

THE POPULARITY OF THE GENEVAN ANNOTATIONS

Despite the antagonism of the most famous reading of the Geneva notes—James I's attack on them as “very partiall, vntrue, seditious, and sauouring too much, of daungerous, and trayterous conceites”³⁷—the evidence from surviving manuscript marginalia of their importance to readers is supported by wider circumstantial evidence. Annotations are difficult to set and hence, as Heidi Brayman Hackel convincingly argues, printers are unlikely to have gone to this trouble unless annotations “helped sell books,” and she notes the regularity with which title pages advertise their book as being “plentifully garnished” with marginalia.³⁸ One edition of the King James Bible, indeed, provides a particularly startling piece of evidence for readerly enthusiasm for the Genevan paratext, in that—despite the difficulties and inaccuracies involved—it was printed with the Genevan marginal annotations.³⁹

The Geneva notes were the most avowedly loved marginalia of the early modern period. Thomas Fuller (1608–61), for example, wrote that some readers even complained “that they could not see into the sense of the Scripture for lack of the spectacles of those Geneva Annotations.”⁴⁰ Patrick Collinson argues that they were central to Reformed preaching and exegesis, stating that “it was from the Geneva Bible that the preachers expounded and to its text and apparatus of ‘profitable annotations’ that they pointed their hearers, who were learning to carry their bibles to the sermons and at home to exercise themselves and their families in its study.”⁴¹ Indeed, well into the seventeenth century these annotations were cited as interpretative guides to scripture, with godly margins directing readers towards “the *Geneva* Notes on 1 *Cor.* 11” or suggesting “*vide Geneua* Notes in 2. chap. Acts.”⁴² As late as 1660 (a century after they were first published), readers continued to be advised to “read those Annotations in the Bible, the *Geneva* Print.”⁴³

Such references to the continuing popularity of the Genevan marginalia are borne out by the evidence left by early modern readers who read their Bible with a pen in hand. Molekamp's survey of the British Library's Geneva Bibles, for example, notes that among the readerly annotations (present in over half the volumes) engagement is often shown with marginal commentary

³⁷ Barlow, 47.

³⁸ Hackel, 130, 131.

³⁹ *The Holy Bible*, 1642. This seems to have been popular, as it was reprinted in 1643, 1672, 1679, and 1715. See Herbert, Darlow, and Moule, 189–90, 212, 243.

⁴⁰ Fuller, 1655, sig. Hhh^v.

⁴¹ Collinson, 1979, 231.

⁴² Browning, 157; Sydenham, 40. See also Lewthwat, 7.

⁴³ Gaskin, 67.

as well as the text.⁴⁴ Specland, likewise, provides evidence of a 1576 Geneva Bible (in the Cambridge University Library) in which the reader has underlined a “large portion of the text and paratext” and a 1578 Geneva Bible (in the New York Public Library) in which the reader likewise marks annotations.⁴⁵ In a 1586 Geneva Bible in the Bodleian collection (which passed down through generations of the Oswald family), a reader has underlined the whole of the fourth chapter of the Song of Solomon, and drawn a circle around all of its notes.⁴⁶ Another anonymous reader of a 1570 Geneva Bible in the Bodleian has recorded their careful reading of the annotations by scrupulous correction of a cross-reference in Proverbs.⁴⁷ Edward Duke underlined hundreds of annotations throughout his 1577 Geneva Bible, picking out interpretations that particularly interested him, such as “The disobedience both of Moses and of y^e people sheweth that their deliuerance cam onely of Gods free mercie” and “Where God giueth not faith, no miracles can preuaile.”⁴⁸ The notes kept by Richard Stonley in his Elizabethan reading diary, meanwhile, imply (as Ryrie wryly suggests) that Stonley “seems to have read the Geneva Bible’s chapter summaries more carefully than the text itself.”⁴⁹

Edward Seager, meanwhile, annotated hundreds of the marginal notes in his 1598 Geneva Bible, with neatly drawn manicules that show more attention to the printed annotation than to the text.⁵⁰ Readers such as Seager customized their Bibles, creating a bespoke text which would be more meaningful both to their future selves and to readers to whom they bequeathed or lent their most precious book. Such markings were personalized navigational tools. Annotating one’s own Bible was believed to increase the benefit of reading: “In thine own book . . . Men shoot best in their own Bowes: work best with their own Tools. David did best with his own Scrip, and Sling. The side of the leafe is remembred, when the chapter and verse cannot be thought on.”⁵¹ Like David fashioning his own sling, readers who marked their Bibles created their own spiritually powerful tools.⁵²

⁴⁴ Molekamp, 2006, 9.

⁴⁵ Specland, 846, 863.

⁴⁶ *The Bible*, 1586, fol. 257^v (Song of Songs 4:1–16).

⁴⁷ *The Bible*, 1570, fol. 304^r (Proverbs 30:23).

⁴⁸ *The Bible*, 1577, fol. 24^r (Exodus 6:30); fol. 25^r (Exo 8:32). All underlining in quotations indicate underlining by the reader.

⁴⁹ Ryrie, 274.

⁵⁰ *The Bible*, 1598.

⁵¹ Capel, sig. B5^v.

⁵² Modern eye-tracking research has validated the early modern belief that marking a text would assist both the retention of the marked passage and draw future readers’ attention: Chi, Gumbrecht, and Hong, 597.

Such manuscript marginalia mark out the early modern page as a shared, as well as a private, space. Early modern books “were passed around, and as they circulated, aspects of communal life—the negotiation of relationships, the debating of reputations—rubbed off on them.”⁵³ As Hoff has argued in reference to readers’ marks in sixteenth-century Dutch Bibles, “the early modern Bible was a fluid, malleable, and accumulative thing,” establishing “open-ended, creative spaces for the transformative actions of readers.”⁵⁴ Manuscript marginalia on the Genevan annotations mark the way in which something that was held to be particularly precious—a reader’s interpretation of scripture—might be recorded and bequeathed to future reading generations.

CLEAVING TO THE MARGENT: EDWARD SEAGER’S 1598 GENEVA BIBLE

Seager marked up his 1598 Geneva Bible with a preface of his own devising to guide future readers as to how scripture should be read. On the final blank space of his 1599 Book of Common Prayer (bound directly before his Bible), Seager wrote (fig. 1): “If thou Desirous to Benifit By the Scriptures follow the subiect that thou takes in hand Cleaue th^rought the Scriptures by the margant and the notes.”⁵⁵ The sense that this preface is directed to others, perhaps even more than to himself, is suggested by Seager’s unusual addition of a marginal *nota bene* to his own inscription: “Marke this Well.”

Seager’s advice emphasizes the importance of marginal annotation for understanding the Bible. If the reader is to benefit from their scriptural reading, Seager writes, they should cleave to specific subjects via “the margant and the notes.” Seager emphatically follows his own advice, “cleaving” to the margent and notes with frequent, and beautifully drawn, manicules. Seager draws manicules at a roughly similar rate beside the glosses and text throughout his Bible, suggesting that he read both with similarly painstaking care. In some parts of his Bible Seager pays the printed notes even more marked attention than the text. In the book of Psalms, for example, he draws manicules pointing to the printed notes even more often than he does to the biblical text itself (marking seventy-four glosses, but only fifty-nine psalm verses).

⁵³ Scott-Warren, 379–80. See also Wakelin, 32.

⁵⁴ See Renske Annelize Hoff’s article “Transformative Actions: The Fluidity of Materiality and Meaning in Sixteenth-Century Dutch Bibles,” forthcoming in *Readers’ Hands*, ed. S. Corbellini, W. François, and R. A. Hoff, 4, 22. With thanks to Renske Annelize Hoff for sharing this essay with me prior to publication.

⁵⁵ *The Booke of Common Prayer*, sig. E8^r.

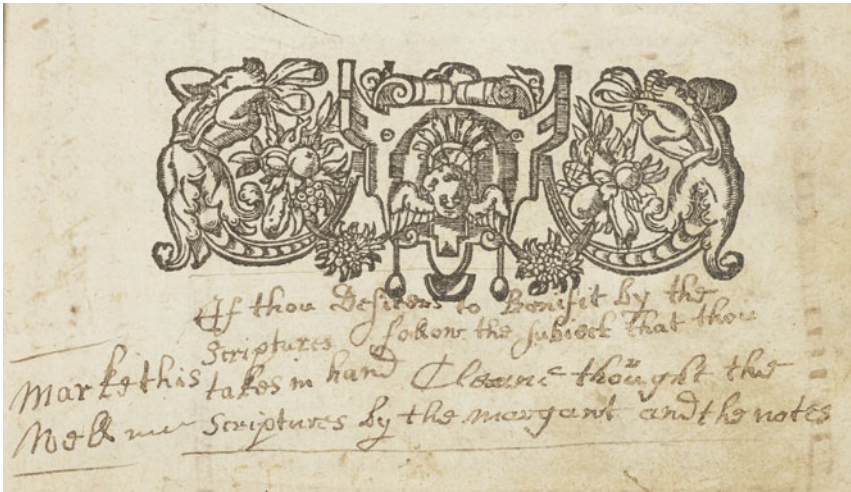


Figure 1. An instruction for reading his 1598 Geneva Bible inscribed by Edward Seager on the final page of his Book of Common Prayer. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Bib. Eng. 1598 e.3, E8^r.

Manicules (Seager's notation of choice) were particularly popular in the early modern period and, as Sherman argues in his illuminating study, they transmit an embodied sense of the reader: "With modern readers, their *handwriting* is going to be distinctive while their symbols will tend to look pretty much like other people's symbols. For early modern readers it is the other way around—their symbols, and in particular their *pointing hands*, are more likely to be recognizably theirs."⁵⁶ Seager's distinctive manicules—particularly his signature manicule with its ornately dotted and wavy sleeve—perfectly embodies Sherman's argument (fig. 2).⁵⁷ Seager creates a personalized text, marked up and manipulated to highlight the biblical passages and annotations that he wished to find again easily, draw attention to, and connect with other parts of his reading.

Molekamp describes a reader of one Huntington Library Geneva Bible who was sufficiently moved by the marginal notes (as well as the biblical verses) to annotate with them comments such as "Very Glorious," "Mind this," and "O Blessed."⁵⁸ Seager, likewise, marks up annotations that are personally significant to him. In particular, he repeatedly manicules marginalia which reads the text in an explicitly Calvinist way, such as the note about "secret election" where the Genevan annotator co-opts a verse in Psalm 81 ("oh that my people had hearkend vnto me") as

⁵⁶ Sherman, 2008, 52 (see also 34–37). Emphasis in original.

⁵⁷ *The Bible*, 1598, fol. 47^v (John 20:29–31).

⁵⁸ Molekamp, 2013, 35.

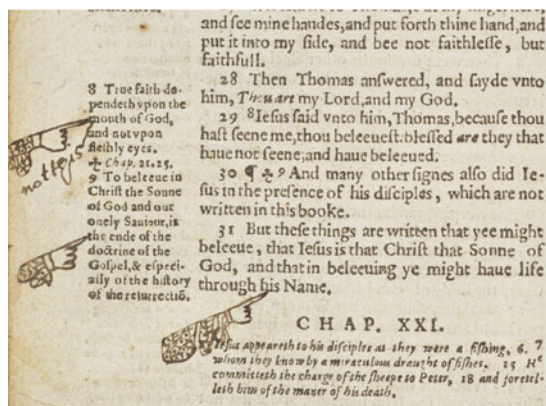


Figure 2. Some fine examples of Edward Seager's distinctive, ornately sleeved manicule. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Bib. Eng. 1598 e.3, fol. 47^v.

evidence for limited atonement: "God by his word calleth all, but his secret election appointeth who shall heare with fruite."⁵⁹ Seager likewise marks—with two manicules and a "marke this"—the profoundly Calvinist annotation to the passage in Genesis that tells how "Reuben went, and lay with his Bilhah his fathers concubine": "This teacheth that the fathers were not chosen for their merites, but by Gods onely mercies whose election by their faultes was not changed."⁶⁰

Throughout the book of Psalms, for example, the most strongly Calvinist glosses of the verses draw Seager's marked approval. For example, he manicules the annotation, which reads a comforting promise in Psalm 9 ("the hope of the afflicted shall not perish for euer") as a text about the importance of suffering: "God promisetht not to help vs before we haue felt the crosse."⁶¹ In particular, Seager regularly manicules marginalia that reads the psalms (rather against the grain of the text) as evidence for the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity—for example, the annotation to "teache mee, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I will keepe it vnto the ende" in Psalm 119: "He sheweth that he cannot follow on to the end, except God teach him oft times, and leade him forward."⁶² Seager not only consistently manicules such Calvinist marginalia, but these tend to be his most emphatic markings. The most extensively marked passage in the whole of the psalms, for example, is a reading of a confident verse in Psalm 19 ("so shal I be vpright") with a marginal caveat which emphasizes humanity's innate depravity:

⁵⁹ *The Bible*, 1598, fol. 17^r (Ps 81:13).

⁶⁰ *The Bible*, 1598, fol. 14^r (Gen 35:22).

⁶¹ *The Bible*, 1598, fol. 3^r (Ps 9:18). See also fol. 11^r (Ps 51:12); fol. 28^v (Ps 145:17).

⁶² *The Bible*, 1598, fol. 24^v (Ps 119:33).

"If thou supresse my wicked affections by thine holy spirit."⁶³ Seager circles this annotation and marks it with two manicules. Triple marking a passage like this is unusual for Seager and always aligns with a strongly Calvinist interpretation.⁶⁴

It has been cogently argued that some aspects of the Genevan annotations were "designed to educate their readers into Calvinism and supply them with answers to challenges to it."⁶⁵ This argument is supported by one of Edward Duke's annotations in his 1577 Geneva Bible, in which he underlines the printed note to Exodus 32.8 ("They are soone turned out of the way, which I commanded them"): "Whereby we see what neecessitie wee haue to pray earnestly to God to keep vs in his true obedience and to send vs good guides" and writes beside it, "Hence appereth that they worshipped the calf and not God in y^e calf as some object."⁶⁶ Duke here articulates a theological challenge and underlines the annotation that he believes assists him in answering it. It seems likewise clear—both from Seager's ability to pick out the most Calvinist interpretations, and from the emphatic nature of these markings—that he sought out glosses that reinforced his own theological inclination. Seager responds to the theological temper of the Genevan annotations with enthusiasm, and though he may learn specific interpretations from his reading of the Genevan marginalia, it is evident that his theological enthusiasms already incline him towards these readings. Seager is in no sense an oppositional reader of the Genevan marginalia, but his deep sympathy with the theological slant of these annotations suggests, likewise, that his own interpretation was not impeded by what he read. The enthusiasm with which Seager responds to the Calvinist emphasis of the Geneva notes suggests a reader who brings to the text opinions that he finds ratified by the marginalia that he reads.

DID THE GENEVAN ANNOTATIONS CONSTRAIN INTERPRETATIVE FREEDOM?

In an influential article in the study of the history of the book, Robert Darnton argues that "texts shape the response of readers, however active they may be. . . . The history of reading will have to take account of the ways that texts constrain readers as well as the ways that readers take liberties with texts."⁶⁷ Historians of reading have often focused on this idea of constraint to imply that marginalia circumscribes readers' interpretations, impressing "a single way of reading the

⁶³ *The Bible*, 1598, fol. 7^r (Ps 19:13).

⁶⁴ See *The Bible*, 1598, fol. 14^r (Gen 35:22); fol. 24^r (Ps 119:8).

⁶⁵ Gribben, 6.

⁶⁶ *The Bible*, 1577, fol. 36^v (Exo 2:8).

⁶⁷ Darnton, 1982, 79.

text” or fostering “passive submission.”⁶⁸ Criticism has stressed the idea that marginalia—like other printerly “blackening of the page”—attempts to control the reader’s interpretative power by both literally and figuratively removing their interpretative space: “As they enclose and surround the main text, these paratexts narrow the interpretations available to readers.”⁶⁹ Paul Saenger and Michael Heinlen’s seminal article on incunables goes so far as to argue that as printing became established, “reading became increasingly an activity of the passive reception of a text that was inherently clear and unambiguous.” They note, as evidence for this passivity, that “by the end of the second decade of the sixteenth century, even the pointing hands, formerly provided by the reader-emendator, were placed in the text by the printer.”⁷⁰

This critical attitude to marginalia in general is intensified in the case of the Bible—and the Geneva Bible in particular, which is often approached by modern readers (as described by the marginalia critic Slight) as encumbered by “impenetrable masses of doctrinally slanted marginalia.”⁷¹ In his pioneering and influential work *Slight* argues that printed marginalia is intended to fix interpretation: “There is no free play of signifiers across the borders of early English Bibles but rather a series of pre-emptive strikes in the white space intended to defend the perimeter of Scripture from the unholy attacks of contending sects.”⁷² He argues that biblical annotations not only “bordered” the text but were engaged in “*debordement* in the sense of outflanking the interpretive opponent.”⁷³ *Slight* argues that the heavily annotated Genevan margins aimed to end the expression—or even formation—of “differences of opinion, encouraging the reader’s reliance on an external authority and constraining individual exegesis simply by occupying the interpretive space surrounding the text.”⁷⁴ More recent critics have concurred, stating that the Geneva editors “sought to be the final arbiters of meaning, closing the lid on the hermeneutical ferment,” thus creating a text that “does not want to leave interpretative ‘gaps’ for its reader to fill in creatively.”⁷⁵

But they were filled nonetheless. To be attentive to the evidence left by actual readers is to find that even in this text, with its cramped and

⁶⁸ Hackel, 133; Narveson, 23.

⁶⁹ Saenger and Heinlen, 256; Hackel, 90–91.

⁷⁰ Saenger and Heinlen, 254.

⁷¹ *Slight*, 1989, 692.

⁷² *Slight*, 1992, 258. See also Tribble, 55, 160; Hackel, 83; Narveson.

⁷³ *Slight*, 1992, 270.

⁷⁴ *Slight*, 2001, 111.

⁷⁵ Gribben, 11; Jensen, 37. See likewise the contemporary response of Miles Smith, who celebrated the King James Version as free from the “dogmatiz[ing]” of the Genevan margins: Fulton, 2021, 201.

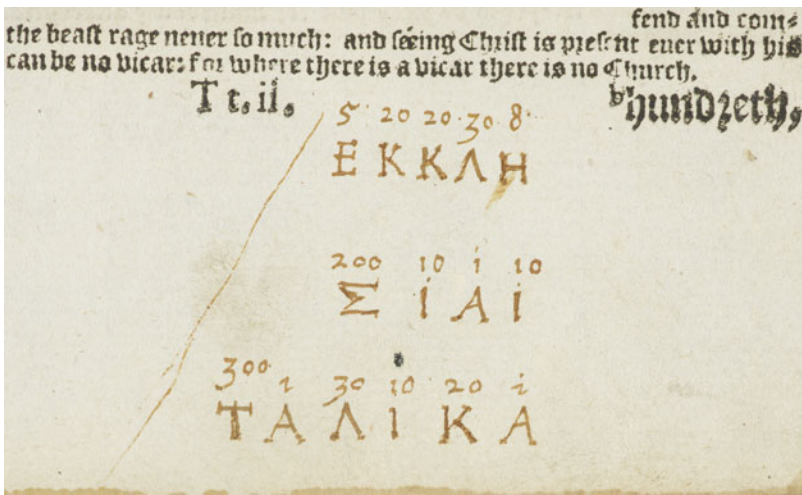


Figure 3. A reader of a 1578 Geneva Bible writing a solution to Revelation's bestial cryptogram. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Vet. A1 b.13, fol. 110^r.

overdetermined margins, readers retained their interpretative freedom. An anonymous reader of one of the Bodleian's 1578 Geneva Bibles, for example (who dates one of their annotations 9 February 1600),⁷⁶ writes in its margins a reading that contradicts that of the annotator. The Genevan marginalia on the number of the beast in Revelation states that this should be construed as "Lateinus," which (once translated into Greek) can be added up to 666 by giving the letters number values. The anonymous reader of the Bodleian copy is entirely in sympathy with the anti-Catholic slant of this interpretation—linking the beast with the Pope and Vulgate—but they have inserted their own solution to the cryptogram (fig. 3). This anonymous reader replaces "Lateinus" with "Ekklesia Italika" (the Roman Church), which likewise adds up to 666.⁷⁷ The reader is in theological agreement with the Genevan notes, but they have not simply accepted the reading of the printed annotations, inscribing instead their own favored interpretation into their Bible's margins.

Another moment in which this reader is in fundamental agreement with the Genevan marginalia, and yet expresses this in a strikingly adversarial way, is recorded by their reading of Romans 9:15 (fig. 4). The Genevan marginalia to Romans 9:15 ("I wil haue mercies on him, to whom I will shew mercie") notes: "As the onely will and purpose of God is the chiefe cause of election and reprobation." This reader has underlined "chiefe" and added "know ye

⁷⁶ *The Bible*, 1578, sig. ***2^v.

⁷⁷ *The Bible*, 1578, fol. 110^r (Revelation 13:18).

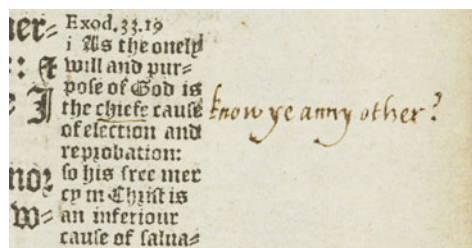


Figure 4. A strikingly adversarial response to a printed annotation written into a 1578 Geneva Bible. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Vet. A1 b.13, fol. 69^r. With thanks to Ryan Diamond for sharing this find with me.

anny other?”⁷⁸ This anonymous reader has preserved in their annotations both their careful reading of the printed Genevan marginalia and their mental freedom to question, oppose, and even, in this remarkable example, mock its wording as theologically jejune. The overwhelming critical consensus (surveyed above) notes that the Genevan annotators intended to close down, rather than open up, interpretation. But the fact that such annotation was intended to curtail readerly freedom does not mean that it succeeded.

The modern critical disagreement about the power that the Genevan annotations held over their readership was, in fact, anticipated in the seventeenth century. Peter Heylyn (1599–1662) complained about the misleading interpretative power of the Geneva’s “false” and “factious” notes—an idea that Fuller, although likewise of royalist sympathies, robustly rebuts.⁷⁹ Fuller counters that the majority of the annotations are “*pious* and *proper* to expound their respective places” and, as for those which are not, “I am (I thank God) old enough to eat fish, feeding on the flesh thereof, and laying by the bones on my Trencher.”⁸⁰ Fuller’s vivid metaphor expresses the traditional understanding of reading as a form of consumption. Unusually, however, it stresses the way in which readerly acumen allows readers to sort the wheat from the chaff—to read, like Ben Jonson, “*tanquam exploratur*” (“as a scout”) in “a spirit of free but self-possessed enquiry.”⁸¹ Fuller refers specifically to the interpretative freedom that remains for the reader in spite of printed notes—he is confident that he can read the Geneva Bible circumspectly, without accepting

⁷⁸ *The Bible*, 1578, fol. 69^r (Romans 9:15); Diamond, 6. With thanks to Ryan Diamond, who first spotted this piece of marginalia and kindly shared it with me.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Fuller, 1659, 96 [mispaginated 93]–97.

⁸⁰ Fuller, 1659, 96 [mispaginated 93].

⁸¹ Donaldson, 357. Jonson annotated his books with “*tanquam exploratur*” as his personal motto.

everything that the annotations say. Specland has recently explored the way in which readerly marginalia may even indicate “fierce reader independence from the prescriptions of the printed text” in early modern psalters.⁸² Texts such as the 1578 Geneva Bible discussed above, and the psalters explored by Specland, suggest that many ordinary early modern readers could, like Fuller, engage with the printed paratexts of their Bibles and yet maintain their readerly autonomy. One such example of this readerly autonomy is provided by Edward Duke’s marginalia to his 1577 Geneva Bible. Duke is a reader who is at once politically and theologically engaged by the Genevan annotations, but also forms his own—often strikingly independent—interpretations.

EDWARD DUKE AND ADVERSARIAL READING

Edward Duke, who annotated his 1577 Geneva Bible across a number of years in the early seventeenth century, was a committed reader of the Genevan marginalia.⁸³ Like Seager, Duke marks the Genevan marginalia at a similar, or sometimes even greater, frequency to the biblical text itself (for example, he underlines the text of Genesis only twelve times, but underlines its notes thirty-eight times). Duke reads his text by the light of the Geneva notes, but he also often extends their implications into more markedly political territory. As Fulton has argued, the hermeneutic tendencies of Protestant reading in general, and the Genevan annotations in particular, were “always intent on transforming the ancient text for use in the early modern present.”⁸⁴ Furniss likewise argues that this was “most significant tendency of the Geneva Bible’s editorial apparatus”—to encourage direct connections between the reader and what they read, inculcating the habit of reading themselves into the experiences of the Israelites.⁸⁵ Duke performs precisely such a reading, extending (for example) the anti-Catholic implications of the Genevan annotation to Joshua 8:35: “There was no a worde of all that Moses had commanded, which Ioshua read not before all the Congregation of Israel, as well before the women and children, as the stranger that was conuersant among them” (fig. 5). The printed annotation underscores the universalizing message of the text: “So neyther yong nor olde, man nor woman were exempted from hearing the word of y^c Lord”—but Duke takes the implication of this annotation and transforms it into an explicit and pointed contemporary reference: “This maketh against the papists who

⁸² Specland, 846. See also Specland, 832.

⁸³ For the evidence that Duke annotated his Bible across a number of years, marking it up in both 1618 and 1628, see above.

⁸⁴ Fulton, 2021, 15.

⁸⁵ Furniss, 8.

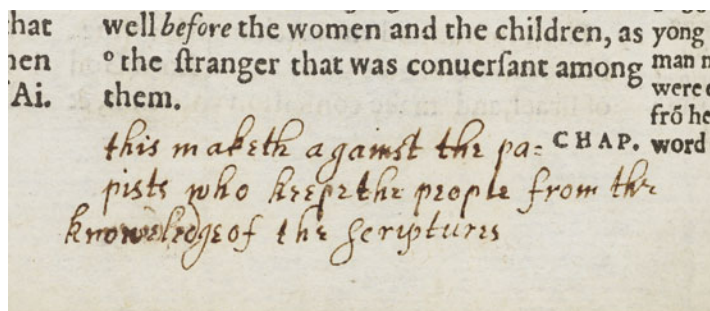


Figure 5. An explicitly anti-Catholic reading, extending that suggested by the printed marginalia, inscribed into his 1577 Geneva Bible by Edward Duke. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Bib. Eng. 1577 d.1, fol. 90^v.

keepe the people from the knowledge of the scriptures.”⁸⁶ Similarly, when the Genevan gloss to Revelation 18:23 construes the scriptural phrase (“thy marchants were the great men of the earth”) as a reference to the Church of Rome, Duke follows this identification, but his reading is far more explicitly and pointedly political than that of the printed notes: “Rome and hir heads haue shed the blood of the saints of God as in all ages is manifest especially in the Maryan times.”⁸⁷ Duke’s annotation of the Genevan marginalia to Joshua and Revelation are explicit pieces of evidence that what Fulton has called the “presentist deployment of the biblical text” by the Geneva paratext was accepted and understood by its readers.⁸⁸

Duke’s annotations also preserve interpretations that diverge from those of the Genevan marginalia, including times when he explicitly questions the printed paratext. For example, when it is commanded in Exodus 29:26 that “thou shalt take the brest of the ram of the consecration, which is for Aaron, and shalt shake it to and fro before the Lord,” Duke underlines the Genevan gloss, which explains, “this sacrifice the Priest did moue towarde the East, West, North and South” (fig. 6). However, Duke has underlined this passage in order to question it. Duke regularly adds “quere”⁸⁹ to his margins, and at this point it expresses explicit dissatisfaction with the annotation “quere? what author proueth it, or rather what Scripture sayth it.”⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *The Bible*, 1577, fol. 90^v (Joshua 8:35).

⁸⁷ The Genevan annotation is: “The Romish prelates and marchants of soules are as kings and princes: so that their couetousnes and pride must be punished: secondly their craftes and deceits: and thirdly their crueltie.” *The Bible*, 1577, fol. 114^r (Rev 18:23).

⁸⁸ Fulton, 2021, 140.

⁸⁹ “Ask, inquire, query”: See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. *quaere*.

⁹⁰ *The Bible*, 1577, fol. 35^r (Exo 29:26).

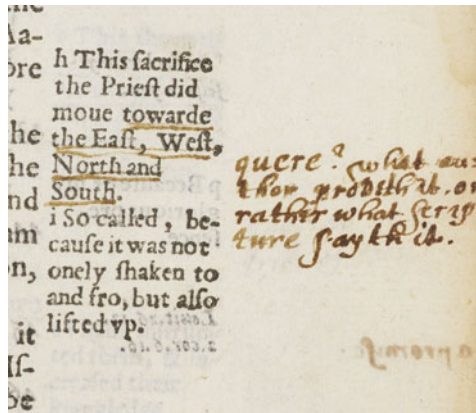


Figure 6. Edward Duke querying a printed annotation in his 1577 Geneva Bible. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Bib. Eng. 1577 d.1, fol. 35^r.

Duke brings his own wider reading to bear on his interrogation of the Genevan annotations and undermines some of the Geneva readings on the authority of what he has read elsewhere. His reading of William Gouge's *Commentary on the Whole Epistle to the Hebrews* (1655), for example, causes him to refute a Genevan annotation in Judges which notes that Ipthah gathered idle fellows together “as some thinke, against his brethren.” Duke writes, in contradiction of this interpretation: “Dr Gouge in his sermon upon Heb:11.32 saith it was against y^e enemies of y^e Church of God.”⁹¹ Similarly, Duke brings his reading of Nicholas Byfield's *The Rules of a Holy Life* (1619) to a passage in Ecclesiastes, in order to suggest a reading diametrically opposed to that of the Genevan marginalia. The passage runs: “Be not thou iust ouermuch, neither make thy selfe ouerwise: wherfore shouldest thou be desolate? Be not thou wicked ouermuch, neither be thou foolish: wherfore shouldest thou perish not in thy time.”⁹² The Geneva glosses this passage, “Boast not too much of thine owne iustice and wisdom,” but Duke stresses the opposite interpretation of the passage: “Account not too vilely of thy self, denying Gods gifts in thee, & refusing ye iust comforts ye shouldst take to they self: aggrauate not against thy owne soule, thy weakenes aboue reason & measure Bifield. Holy life.fol.50 cap.4.”⁹³

Duke is highly attuned to the Genevan marginalia's sense of limits of monarchical power but, likewise, he is not simply guided by the printed annotation.

⁹¹ *The Bible*, 1577, fol. 103^r (Judges 11:3).

⁹² *The Bible*, 1577, fol. 256^v (Ecclesiastes 7:18–19).

⁹³ *The Bible*, 1577, fol. 256^v (Eccl 7:18–19).

He extends the antimonarchical slant, utilizing the inherent freedom of manuscript annotation to express uncensored political beliefs. In 1 Samuel 19:19, for example, an unnamed informant divulges to Saul David's hiding place: "But one tolde Saul, saying, Behold, Daud is at Naioth, in Ramah." Duke underlines this passage and the factual information about Naioth that the Genevan annotator provides. But he also provides his own, more political, reading of this passage: "No Prince so wicked but shall finde instruments and flatterers to execute their wicked designs."⁹⁴

Duke cross-references back to this moment when, shortly afterwards, he reads a similar story about Saul's abuse of power. The Genevan annotator has glossed this episode (in which the king's servants refuse to obey an unjust order to kill priests): "For they knew that they ought not to obey the wicked commandment of the king in slaying the innocents." Duke's reading extends the printed interpretation: "Princes ought not to be obeyed, when their commands tend to the dishonor of God, or the destruction of his saints and servants."⁹⁵ Duke explicitly reads this moment of resistance in Samuel (against "the wicked commandment of the king") as one that can be generalized into his own present time: "Princes ought not to be obeyed." Duke's change of the Genevan's apolitical "innocents" into "saints" makes it clear that he reads the "priests of the Lord" in 1 Samuel as parallel to the saints of contemporary religious discourse. (And if, as is possible, Duke annotated this passage in the Elizabethan era, his shift from "king" to the less explicitly gendered "princes" might also be a pointed application to his present circumstances.)

In Duke's most independent piece of marginalia, however, his antimonarchical ideology finds itself in opposition to the Genevan annotation. The Bible records how after David tells Saul that he has unjustly persecuted him "Saul lift vp his voyce, and wept" (1 Samuel 24:17). These tears are viewed as true tears of contrition by the Genevan gloss: "Though he was a most cruel enemy to Daud, yet by his great gentleness his conscience compelled him to yeelde." Duke, however, is not convinced and writes the uncompromising "crocodiles teares" in the margin (fig. 7).⁹⁶ At this point Duke's reading is in flat contradiction of the Genevan interpretation.

Duke's startlingly independent reading at this point is of particular interest due to the political charge that Saul and David's story held during this period. It was read, as Furniss has shown, as the story of "the exemplary tyrant and the exemplary king respectively," enabling, as Fulton has likewise argued, "the Davidic story to become a sixteenth-century power struggle between

⁹⁴ *The Bible*, 1577, fol. 118^r (1 Samuel 19:19).

⁹⁵ *The Bible*, 1577, fol. 119^v (1 Sam 22:17).

⁹⁶ *The Bible*, 1577, fol. 120^r (1 Sam 24:17).

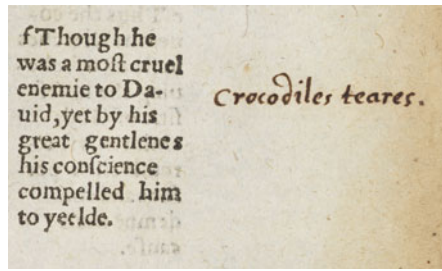


Figure 7. Edward Duke's dismissal of the printed marginal interpretation of Saul's tears, written into his 1577 Geneva Bible. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Bib. Eng. 1577 d.1, fol. 120^r.

Protestants and Catholics.”⁹⁷ Duke's careful annotations of the Genevan marginalia to 1 Samuel, therefore, are a fascinating glimpse of a contemporary reader engaging with one of the most politically charged aspects of the Genevan paratext. For this reader, however, the printed gloss does not go far enough. Duke's querying of the Genevan annotations—his extensions, additions, and occasional outright disagreements—show that his reading was not constrained by the glosses to which he pays such careful attention. The annotations aid his reading, but he can both disagree with and build on them to form his own—sometimes entirely divergent—interpretations.

ADVERSARIAL MARGINALIA

There is a long history of manuscript adversaria in which the etymology of the term (derived from the position of the notes facing the text) chimes with the way some readers pen robustly adversarial responses in their margins.⁹⁸ The first attestation of *fuck* as a swear word, for example, is found in the margins. In 1528 a reader annotated a manuscript of Cicero's *De Officiis* (On moral duties) with “O d fuckin Abbot”—and it is possible that its placing in a treatise about good behavior was intended to be pointed.⁹⁹ Students of marginalia have collected a pithy set of these robust reader responses—from the reader of Zwinger's *Theatrum Humanae Vitae* (The theatre of human life) (1586) who wrote “Ridiculous” in response to a quip by which they remained unamused;¹⁰⁰ to another who wrote in a 1630 edition of John Hayward's

⁹⁷ Furniss, 12; Fulton, 2021, 126.

⁹⁸ On this terminology, see Sherman, 2008, 22.

⁹⁹ Wilson.

¹⁰⁰ Blair, 249–50.

Edward the Sixt “I am a ffolle for Reding this and hee that Reades itt may kis the Righters Ass.”¹⁰¹ Some disagreements are measured—such as the reader who took Francis Bacon to task in the margins of his *Essays*, or another who wrote “ut dicitur” each time they doubted the argument¹⁰²—while others are more abusive. Nicholas Hare annotated the flyleaf of Pietro Martire’s *Decades of the New World* (1555) with this unlaudatory verse: “As in Christmas men eate pies / so in lent you maie reade lies / whereof this booke hath cruell store.”¹⁰³ A wittily hostile reader of William Allen’s *A True, Sincere, and Modest Defence, of English Catholics* (1584) wrote in the margin “here hee fishethe for a Cardenalls hatt” and, at one point, neatly added a marginal “T” in front of “reasonable.”¹⁰⁴

Fulton and Specland provide a fascinating example of such readerly independence towards biblical marginalia in the highly charged instance of the 1589 Fulke-Rheims New Testament. This was a biblical text that printed the Bishops’ Bible text and William Fulke’s marginalia (attacking the Rheims text and annotations), alongside the original (Catholic) Rheims text and marginalia. An annotating Catholic reader of this text (who is, presumably, using the Fulke-Rheims to access a Catholic translation) records an unsurprisingly adversarial reaction to Fulke’s polemical annotations, calling it “wretched railing stuff and abominable lies.”¹⁰⁵ But, more surprisingly, Fulton and Specland also identify two Protestant readers—Thomas Aylesbury (1597–1660) and Peter Gunning (1614–84)—who are willing to engage with the scholarship of the original Rheims annotations, while remaining independent from its theological stance. Their inquisitive independence is nicely expressed by Gunning’s writing of “verbatim” beside quotations from the Fathers in the Rheims annotations.¹⁰⁶ Gunning is interested to learn from the scholarship of the Rheims glossators, and acknowledge when it is correct, but he does not take its accuracy on trust.

Gabriel Harvey (ca. 1552/3–1631) describes the pleasure of rereading one’s own marginalia as the “sovereign repetition of [one’s own] most excellent notes.”¹⁰⁷ Harvey’s word “sovereign” expresses the way in which manuscript marginalia creates an interpretative space in which the reader is king. For, as

¹⁰¹ Hackel, 10.

¹⁰² Sherman, 2008, 12–13; Sharpe, 2000, 296.

¹⁰³ Scott-Warren, 378.

¹⁰⁴ Hackel, 31.

¹⁰⁵ Fulton and Specland, 272, 273.

¹⁰⁶ Fulton and Specland, 262–63.

¹⁰⁷ Stern, 190.

Kevin Sharpe has argued, readerly marginalia charts “the endless negotiations between the efforts of authors and exegetes to impose and control readings and readers to follow their own mind and faith. In doing so it offers an exemplar of that larger negotiation that we call the exercise of authority, be it textual or governmental.”¹⁰⁸ Manuscript marginalia in Geneva Bibles display the liberties readers take with texts. They witness to readerly freedom, despite the constraint that paratextual apparatus attempts to place on interpretation.

CROSS-REFERENCING, SCRIPTURAL UNITY, AND CREATING A COHERENT TEXT

The evidence presented thus far provides the fullest granular evidence yet presented that early modern English readers paid careful attention to the annotations of their Bibles. But what kind of reading might such attention encourage?

As Darnton has argued, “throughout most of Western history, and especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries . . . reading remained a sacred activity.”¹⁰⁹ The autobiography of Adam Martindale (1623–86) expresses one practical reason for this—the Bible was the foundational text for early modern literacy. The Bible was literally, as well as figuratively, the first among books. Martindale recalls how “when I was neare six years old, one Anne Simpkin . . . bestowed an A B C upon me . . . and I, by the help of my brethren and sisters that could read, and a young man that came to court my sister, had quickly learned it, and the primmer also after it. Then of mine owne accord I fell to reading the bible and any other English booke.”¹¹⁰ Martindale gives a glimpse of the sociability of early modern literacy—a godmother’s gift and a young man courting his sister taught him to read. But his autobiography also provides insight into the way in which the Bible came before “any other English booke.” The Bible was the foundation on which all further reading was built. It seems likely, therefore, that the approach to text taught via biblical reading continued to guide those readers whose literacy it had fashioned.

Indeed, critics who have assumed difference have found unexpected continuities in reading across biblical and secular texts. Sherman, whose survey of the readerly marginalia of the Huntington Library STC collection is a landmark in the field, at first assumed that the Bibles would be unmarked but discovered that “the overall frequency of marginalia in

¹⁰⁸ Sharpe, 2003, 123.

¹⁰⁹ Darnton, 2014, 166.

¹¹⁰ Martindale, 5.

Bibles and prayer books at the Huntington Library turns out to be almost identical to that of the whole collection: just over one book in five contains significant inscriptions by early readers.”¹¹¹ Literacy, as Sherman has noted, “did not mean just reading; it meant *reading the Bible*.”¹¹² It makes sense, therefore, that the underlying assumptions of English biblical paratexts would have shaped readers’ expectations of how texts work. As Kevin Killeen has argued, biblical exposition “constitutes a key resource in discerning the reading protocols of the era—by far the most significant in terms of bulk, the most prestigious in terms of its complexity, and the most rigorously theorized.”¹¹³ One of the most basic, and yet overriding, aspects of the reading protocols taught by biblical annotation was to approach texts as coherent entities. The Bible is not, after all, an obviously cohesive text: it is a disparate collection of a wide variety of genres, composed hundreds of years apart by many different hands. But as Debora Shuger has recently argued, “Like most cutting-edge biblical interpretation before the late seventeenth century, these Geneva notes do not call into question but rather strengthen both the coherence of the narrative and its historical actuality.”¹¹⁴ One of the primary aims of biblical paratexts is to transform the heterogeneity of the biblical text into the sacred monolith: scripture.

Protestant theology newly stressed the unity of scripture in which the Old and New Testaments both declare what Calvin calls “the covenant of the gospel, the sole foundation of which is Christ.”¹¹⁵ The Genevan annotations repeatedly emphasize this single covenant of grace which binds the people, and the texts, of the Bible together (and, tellingly, these theologically important notes were among those that Duke underlined).¹¹⁶ Molekamp notes, in particular, how the unity of the scriptures—founded on the unity of covenantal

¹¹¹ “I quickly decided to make my work more manageable by skipping the seemingly endless section of Bibles. Influenced by my own exposure to religious communities in which holy books were treated as the most precious of objects, I assumed that in front of this sacred textual space even the most active readers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would have set down their pens. . . . When I later returned to the Bibles to complete my survey, I learned how wrong I had been. The overall frequency of marginalia in Bibles and prayer books at the Huntington Library turns out to be almost identical to that of the whole collection: just over one book in five contains significant inscriptions by early readers”: Sherman, 2008, 72–73.

¹¹² Sherman, 2008, 71. Italics in original.

¹¹³ Killeen, 492.

¹¹⁴ Shuger, 190.

¹¹⁵ Calvin, 1980, 20:2.10.4. See also Bray, 466; McGiffert, 474–75; Coolidge, 77–98, 102.

¹¹⁶ See, for example: *The Bible*, 1577, fol. 140^r (1 Kings 8:54); fol. 173^r (1 Chron 29:23), both of which were underlined by Duke. See also fol. 85^v (Deut 31:14); fol. 296^v (Jer 31:31); fol. 83^r (Gal 3:16).

history—is stressed by the paratextual arguments appended to each book of the Geneva Bible.¹¹⁷ Reformed theologians stressed the idea of one covenant because it highlighted both the integrity of God’s word and the antiquity of the election of their church: “The same covenant which he entered into with Israel he has in these latter days entered into with us, that we may be one people with them, one church, and may also have one covenant.”¹¹⁸ This belief in the unity of scripture underscores it as a single, inerrant, and self-interpreting text.

The central early modern belief about scriptural interpretation was that “the supream and absolute meane of interpretation is the Scripture it selfe.”¹¹⁹ As Luther (1483–1546) put it: “All Scripture calls to grace, extols grace, searches for Christ.”¹²⁰ In early modern understandings of scripture, therefore, “collation . . . of places” will always illuminate the text, as Christ unifies the whole Bible, ratifying the truth of each part.¹²¹ This idea was not only stated by the Genevan margins; it was also enacted by them through extensive collation, or internal cross-referencing. Such cross-referencing is the most ubiquitous form of early modern biblical annotation. Almost every edition of the English Bible used its margins to point readers towards internal parallels. The importance of cross-referencing is illustrated by its presence even in sparsely annotated Bibles, such as the Matthew and Great Bible, as well as its retention in the (avowedly unannotated) King James Bible. In a particularly telling example, even in sixteenmo printings of Geneva-Tomson Bibles (in which, due to the exigences of space, almost all marginalia were excised), cross-references remain.¹²²

Grace Mildmay (ca. 1552–1620), an extensive Bible reader, wrote how “in mine own study in the scriptures I have found most profit, comfort and delight to clear one scripture with another.”¹²³ Mildmay notes, likewise, that such reading is inspired by the shape of scripture itself: “Neither was I satisfied with a bare reading thereof, (a touch and away) but I must follow upon it over and over, again and again, without the which I could find no profit in a bushel. The whole scriptures of the law, the prophets, the psalms and the gospel do make many repetitions of the principal points thereof, from one place to another.”¹²⁴

¹¹⁷ Molekamp, 2015, 48. For a reader marking the “Argument” to Genesis, see *The Bible*, 1594, sig. A3^r.

¹¹⁸ Zwingli, 227. See also Calvin, 1980, 20:2.10.1.

¹¹⁹ Perkins, 31.

¹²⁰ Luther, 14:196.

¹²¹ Perkins, 32.

¹²² King and Pratt, 83.

¹²³ Mildmay’s “book of my meditation” (ca. 1603–20), transcribed in Pollock, 71.

¹²⁴ Pollock, 72.

One primary interpretative action performed by the Geneva paratext was to promote this sense of the Bible as a single, cohesive, and self-interpreting text. A preface added to most Geneva Bibles from 1579 (entitled “Howe to take profite by reading of the holy Scriptures”) argued that “who so euer mindeth to take profite by reading scriptures” must “marke and consider the Coherence of the text, how it hangeth together . . . [and the] Agreement that one place of Scripture hath with an other, whereby that which seemeth darke in one is made easie in an other.”¹²⁵ While much early modern marginalia (like modern footnoting) points the reader outside the text, the Bible includes virtually no such citation of authorities as it recognizes no external validation. As John Hales put it in 1617, “other expositions may giue rules & directions for vnderstanding their authors, but Scripture giues rules to exposition it selfe, and interprets the interpreter.”¹²⁶

Christian scriptural exegesis, of course, has always stressed the Bible’s internal echoes, but it is a form of exegesis that was perhaps particularly dominant in the early modern period. For example, the early instruction book for nascent readers, *The King’s Book* (1543), stresses intratextuality in such a way that a fledging reader “would be likely to conclude that reading required some kind of allusion, some kind of gathering of texts.”¹²⁷ John Rastrick (1650–1727) was a precocious example of a reader recognizing such internal biblical echoes. He records how, as a child reading the book of Psalms on his father’s knee, “as I read vers 103. How sweet are Thy Words unto my Tast, yea sweeter than honey to my mouth I called to mind and told me Father the like passage in Psalm: 19.10. and observed to him how fitly they agreed, and pointed to one another.”¹²⁸ This kind of reading was highly valued in early modern reading culture—indeed, Rastrick records that this observation caused his father to weep for joy at his son’s perspicacity. It was disseminated throughout a wide range of early modern pedagogic contexts—from biblical commentaries and sermons to commonplace books and scriptural florilegia—but it achieved its most compressed and emphatic expression in the margins of the Geneva Bible.

The Geneva was the first English Bible to be printed with numbered verse divisions, and its dedicatory “Epistle to the Queen” defended this innovation as both “moste profitable for memorie” and as an aid to internal cross-referencing.¹²⁹ In addition to being the first English Bible with verse numbers,

¹²⁵ *The Bible*, 1598, sig. ¶4^r.

¹²⁶ Hales, 4.

¹²⁷ Kintgen, 113. See also Hunt.

¹²⁸ Rastrick, 32.

¹²⁹ Betteridge, 42; *The Bible*, 1560, sig. ***4^v.

the Geneva Bible radically changed the mise-en-page of the English Bible (hitherto printed in continuous prose): it emphasized these new verse divisions by separating each off into its own paragraph.¹³⁰ However, despite the obvious difficulties, earlier English Bibles—such as the Coverdale Bible (1535), Matthew Bible (1537) and Great Bible (1539)—all contain marginal cross-references (they reference the larger, alphabetized sections of text into which biblical pages were divided prior to verse numbering). Indeed, the regular cross-references of the 1537 quarto printing of the Matthew Bible—including extensive cross-references such as “Psa. 136b / Esay 34a / Jere 49.b / Ezech. 32 f. and 35.a”—are its only printed annotations.¹³¹ The Geneva Bible’s verse numbering enabled more precise cross-referencing, but it is a sign of the importance accorded to this mode of biblical hermeneutics that marginal cross-references preceded verse numbering. And imprecise intratextual references are, importantly, predicated on the existence of a careful and committed reader who will do the work of finding the exact place referenced.

It is evident that readers were, indeed, attentive to such cross-references, and this is particularly clear when they copy out cross-references or correct them. Duke rectifies a printed cross-reference to “Josh.9.39,” neatly correcting the final number to 26.¹³² Duke has likewise followed the cross-reference to “iohn.3.14.” in Numbers and annotated the Old Testament passage with the Johannine reading: “The brasen serpent, a tipe of Christ.”¹³³ Seager expresses his attention to cross-references by both copying them out and regularly marking them out with manicules.¹³⁴ Particularly noticeable are the charming and unusual double-fingered manicules that he draws, underlining his anxiety that not a single cross-reference be overlooked (fig. 8).¹³⁵

The impact of this marginal cross-referencing, however, is best illustrated by the fact that readers enthusiastically added their own. A particularly striking example has been found by Specland: a late Elizabethan reader of a 1576 Geneva Bible housed at Cambridge University Library who has added “hundreds of cross-references to every page of the Book of Psalms, exponentially outstripping those printed in the margins.”¹³⁶ Kate Narveson notes that among

¹³⁰ See Molekamp, 2013, 33, 59–65. See also Fulton, 2017.

¹³¹ *The Byble*, 1537b, fol. 137^v (Ezekiel 25:12–13). See likewise the Great Bible, for example: *The Byble in Englyshe*, 1541, fol. 90^v (John 8:17).

¹³² *The Bible*, 1577, fol. 132^r (2 Samuel 21:1).

¹³³ *The Bible*, 1577, fol. 64^v (Numbers 21:8).

¹³⁴ See, for example, the cross-reference to Amos 3:6 (*The Bible*, 1598, fol. 55^r [Isaiah 45:7]) and to Romans 12:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:17: *The Bible*, 1598, fol. 33^r (Luke 18:1).

¹³⁵ *The Bible*, 1598, fol. 7^r (Matthew 11:29–30).

¹³⁶ Specland, 846.

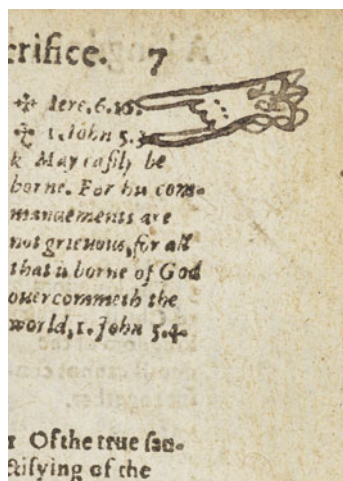


Figure 8. Edward Seager's two-fingered manicule carefully marking out all the cross-references in the printed annotation of his 1598 Geneva Bible. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Bib. Eng. 1598 e.3, fol. 7^r.

the manuscript notes kept by readers, a passion for collecting cross-references is something that particularly marks out Bible readers, and indeed formed “the main means of taking notes on Scripture.”¹³⁷ The importance of intratextual collation in readers’ notebooks is replicated in their Bibles—and the Bodleian Library collection, like that of the British Library, affords evidence of many Bible readers who were not content to rest with the printed cross-references provided.¹³⁸ One anonymous reader of a 1541 Great Bible, for example, begins by adding additional cross-references.¹³⁹ Duke, likewise, supplies a list of cross-references to 1 Samuel to illustrate that: “No tirant so cruel but shal finde ministers to execute his crueltie: as c.19.19. & c.23.19 & 24.2. & c.26.1” (fig. 9).¹⁴⁰ An anonymous reader of a 1570 Geneva Bible, meanwhile, provides astonishingly full additional cross-references. A Genevan annotation in 1 Kings, for example, glosses the phrase “iudge their cause” as “Or, mainteine their right” and prints a number of cross-references in support of this reading: “2.Chro.6,36. Eccles.7,22. I.Iohn.1.8,10.” This reader, however, has more

¹³⁷ Narveson, 30.

¹³⁸ Molekamp, 2013, 35.

¹³⁹ *The Byble in Englyshe*, 1541, fol. 3^r (Gen 7:6; 7:12).

¹⁴⁰ *The Bible*, 1577, fol. 119^v (1 Sam 22:17–18).

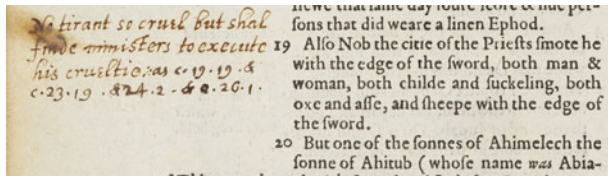


Figure 9. Edward Duke's political reading of 1 Samuel, and his addition of cross-references absent from the printed annotations of his 1577 Geneva Bible. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Bib. Eng. 1577 d.1, fol. 119^v.

than doubled the number of cross-references, adding: "Pro.20.9. & 30.12. Ps.32.1.2.5. & 116.11.Iac.3.2."¹⁴¹ They provide these lists of additional cross-references particularly frequently in the psalms, and particularly in reference to "the wicked," as at the beginning of Psalm 37 (fig. 10).¹⁴² When, for example, Psalm 10 notes of "the wicked" that "his waies alwaies prosper," the Genevan paratext does not supply any cross-references, but this reader has supplied an extraordinarily extensive list to compensate for this absence: "Ps.17.14. & 37.1.7. & 73.2. &c. & 4.7. Iob.21.7 &c. Iere.5.28. & 12.1. & 44.17.18. Abac.1.3. Eccle.7.17. & 8.11.14."¹⁴³

Readers who add such personalized cross-references witness both to their individual enthusiasms and to their own sense of the biblical text's coherence. A certain "John," for example, (who, in 1574, inscribed his name on the New Testament title page of his 1569 Bishops' Bible) uses his wider Pauline reading to help him understand the expression "god of this worlde," which is used for Satan in 2 Corinthians. The Bishops' Bible's printed annotation tacitly acknowledges the awkwardness of this phrase: "To wit, Satan. Luk.viii.f. John.xiii.f." John has underlined "To wit, Satan" but he has also supplied his own additional cross-reference, pointing to a passage in another Pauline epistle in which "god" is used to mean a false idol: "[The god of this] world: as in another place he calleth ye Belly their God. Philip. 3.19."¹⁴⁴ The use of *he* here is particularly interesting, suggesting that this reader has recognized the surprising use of the word *god* for something idolatrous as an aspect of Paul's style. John's intratextual cross-reference, and his expectation of coherence across different biblical books, has enabled him to read the Bible—as desired—as a self-interpreting text.

¹⁴¹ *The Bible*, 1570, fol. 163^r (1 Kings 8:45).

¹⁴² *The Bible*, 1570, fol. 256^r (Ps 37:1).

¹⁴³ *The Bible*, 1570, fol. 250^v (Ps 10:5).

¹⁴⁴ *The holi Bible*, 1569, fol. 90^r (2 Corinthians 4:4).

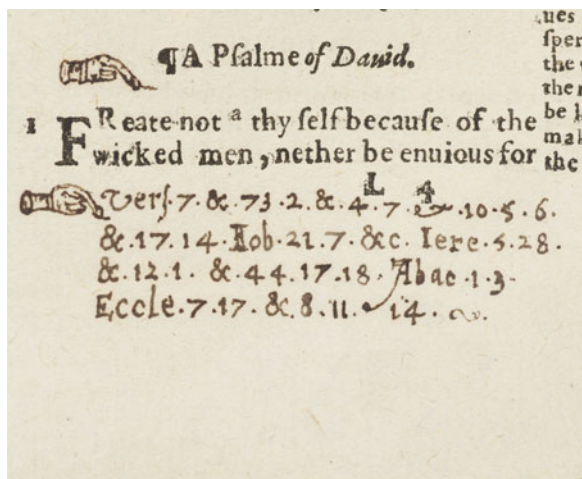


Figure 10. A reader adding multiple cross-references to augment those present in the printed annotations of their 1570 Geneva Bible. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Bib. Eng. 1570 d.1, fol. 256^r.

BIBLICAL CROSS-REFERENCES AND COMMONPLACING

This gathering of cross-references on a specific topic has clear links with commonplaceing, a much-studied practice in recent considerations of early modern reading.¹⁴⁵ Bible readers were, indeed, strongly encouraged to keep commonplace books in order to aid their own biblical study.¹⁴⁶ Commonplacing is generally thought of as an aspect of humanist pedagogy, but, as Sherman notes, “in fact the period’s most explicit set of instructions on how to construct a commonplace book can be found not in a humanist pedagogical treatise but in Edward Vaughan’s 1594 guide to Bible study, *Ten introductions how to read . . . the holy Bible*.”¹⁴⁷ Molekamp, meanwhile, emphasizes the way in which printed biblical cross-references encourage the kind of fragmentary reading familiar from commonplace books, promoting “discontinuous, concordant reading practices.”¹⁴⁸ Richards and Schurink, however, have usefully critiqued the extent to which modern methodologies of early modern reading have focused on discontinuous reading. They argue that the seeming fragmentation of texts via commonplaceing was often done in the service of another kind of coherence: it was generally preparatory to redigesting these thoughts into

¹⁴⁵ Sharpe, 2000, 277–83.

¹⁴⁶ Perkins, 29–30.

¹⁴⁷ Sherman, 2008, 75.

¹⁴⁸ Molekamp, 2013, 33.

new writing.¹⁴⁹ As Narveson has argued, for biblical reading in particular, “the religious manuscripts that survive might have their origins in simple notes on Scripture, but they decisively attest to the many ways in which reading practices led to composition.”¹⁵⁰ Mildmay, a meticulous Bible reader, is a perfect exemplar of this. Her own writing is marginated throughout with biblical references (“quoted in the margin for prooffe”) taken from the Geneva Bible.¹⁵¹ Mildmay embodies the intratextual reader whose intensive, allusive mode of both reading and writing has been shaped by the Genevan marginalia.

For biblical reading, however, it is not merely that commonplacing—given its subsequent recombination into writing—might be less fragmentary than it first appears, but that concordances are not commonplace books, however similar they seem. Readers, in creating commonplace books, excised passages from their original contexts and reconstituted them under their own personally chosen headings, which meant that, as Sharpe puts it, “every educated Englishman or woman [became] a reader who very much made his or her own meaning.”¹⁵² Sharpe’s classic reading of Sir William Drake’s marginal annotations illustrates how “a gentleman with a conventional upbringing and education could, and did, principally through his own reading, formulate values and beliefs radically at odds with the official scripts and teachings of his age.”¹⁵³ Drake’s readerly marginalia fragments his texts—taking quotations out of context and recombining them in his commonplace books for quite different ends, so that, in Drake’s hands, “even Scripture is used to teach Machiavellian lessons.”¹⁵⁴ But cross-references in the margins of a Bible are never taken out of context, if one accepts the early modern belief in the Bible as a single, self-interpreting text. Biblical cross-references always seek, and affirm, the unity of the text. Intra-biblical cross-referencing is in one sense discontinuous (ignoring the narrative coherence of each passage), but only in the service of promoting a different form of coherence. Concordant reading disrupts narrative continuity but promotes the unity of the text as a whole.

As Collinson notes, concordances were not simply indexes and the word *concordance* itself “is interchangeable with the word ‘harmony.’”¹⁵⁵ The *concord*

¹⁴⁹ Richards and Schurink.

¹⁵⁰ Narveson, 50.

¹⁵¹ See Booy, 61.

¹⁵² Sharpe, 2000, 41.

¹⁵³ Sharpe, 2001, 64. See also Sharpe, 2000.

¹⁵⁴ Sharpe, 2001, 60, 62.

¹⁵⁵ Collinson, 1995, 93. See also Gaudio for the specific, and extraordinary, case of the concordances produced at Little Gidding.

inherent to a concordance speaks to the desire to find congruence in scripture. It is enacted at the level of particular verses, but it is a harmonizing, not an anatomizing, impulse. Those who, like Isabella Twysden (d. 1638), created their own biblical concordances left behind a record of “a practice of reading the Bible that collapses and fissures it as a single text . . . demonstrating that the Bible is a self-sufficient text that quotes only itself.”¹⁵⁶ As Robert Hauptman has noted, “Christian commentators regularly make the claim that, in the special case of Scripture, intertextuality is a built-in writing and reading procedure rather than an externally imposed strategy of the editor or interpreter.”¹⁵⁷ Readers who followed and marked cross-references would have perceived themselves not as imposing a reading on their text, but as revealing a commentary inherent within it.

This kind of biblical reading is, therefore, fragmentary only in the most banal sense. The readers of the Bibles in the Bodleian collection who have marked verses as proof texts to illustrate that scripture disapproves of sexual licentiousness or monarchical power, or that comfort will follow times of tribulation, are reading in a commonplacing way. They sought phrases to turn to when they needed comfort, wanted to attack the king, or argue with a philandering spouse. But they were also reading this way because they believed in the essential unity of the Bible. Evidence that God punishes sexual sin and tyrannical rulers, or comforts sufferers, is sought by these readers throughout the whole Bible because they believe that biblical texts are all revelations of the same God. Such reading depends on the fact that its practitioners believe that the book they are reading has a unified theological core.

A reader who marks, or creates, cross-references in their Bible is not simply bringing together similar ideas as they might in a commonplace book. They are creating constellations of meaning. When Edmond Copping underlined the gloss of “zele” in the marginal annotation of Psalm 69—“Of this zeale or jealousy ye haue in Exo. xx Deu. iii. d. and ii. Reg. xix. v”—it was because, like the annotator of his Matthew Bible, he believed that every passage in which the word was used would enrich and inflect his understanding of this key Reformed concept.¹⁵⁸ Intratextual collation is an astonishingly rich way of reading which fragments each specific text in order to perceive new relationships within the whole. The evidence given here of manuscript marginalia that marks, transcribes, and augments the cross-references of early modern Bibles provides new insight into readers engaging with this kind of reading. It is a highly complex and thoughtful way of approaching a text, and one that the Genevan marginalia

¹⁵⁶ Booy, 62–63.

¹⁵⁷ Hauptman, 257.

¹⁵⁸ *The Byble*, 1537a, fol. 10^v (Ps 69:9).

transmitted in a uniquely compressed form to a new generation of readers. The Geneva Bible marked the apogee of bringing this exegetical tradition to the widest readership and was thus a central text in creating early modern readers who sought coherence in the texts they read.

CONCLUSION

A reader who attends to the annotations proves themselves a painstaking reader, but this form of reading can, in turn, help them grow as a reader. This article began with the idea that reading all the notes to Fowler's edition of *Paradise Lost* might help fashion a fit reader. Milton famously speaks of his desire to find a "fit audience" for his poem, with the implication that the complexities of his poem work to fashion the reader it deserves.¹⁵⁹ As Sharon Achinstein has argued, "Milton urged his readers to become a fit audience, revolutionary readers, and they were to do this by reading between the lines."¹⁶⁰ And, as this article has suggested, they would likewise have benefited from reading beside the lines, in the margins of their Bibles. One reason for Milton's confidence in the ability of *Paradise Lost* to transform its readers lay in the poem's own status as a form of commentary on the most transformative text he knew: the Bible.¹⁶¹

Milton's own favorite biblical translation—the King James Bible—is famously short on notes.¹⁶² But it does have some, and its discussion of its own marginalia suggests that Milton's idea of difficult texts fashioning fit readers may be biblically rooted. Bishop Bancroft's "Rules to Be Observed in the Translation of the Bible" initially states that "no Marginall Notes at all" should be affixed to the new translation, but he then qualifies this injunction with "but only for the Explanation of the *Hebrew* or *Greek* Words," adding further, "such Quotations of Places to be marginally set down as shall serve for the fit Reference of one Scripture to another."¹⁶³ The King James preface notes of these glosses that "some peradventure would have no variety of senses to be set in the margine, lest the authority of the Scriptures . . . by that shew of uncertainty, should somewhat be shaken."¹⁶⁴ But the authors of the preface take the contrary position, claiming that scripture can be hermeneutically complex (except in places which are essential to salvation, which are always

¹⁵⁹ Milton, 391 (*Paradise Lost* 7.31).

¹⁶⁰ Achinstein, 222.

¹⁶¹ See Werman.

¹⁶² For Milton's annotations on his 1612 King James Bible, see Fulton, 2021, 200–21. Sims observed that Milton's allusions to this version increase after he goes blind, suggesting it is the version he knows by heart (4–5).

¹⁶³ Opfell, 319.

¹⁶⁴ *The holy Bible*, 1649, sig. A5^r.

plain), for “partly to exercise and whet our wits . . . it hath pleased God in his divine providence, here and there to scatter words and sentences of . . . difficulty and doubtfulness.”¹⁶⁵

One example of such difficulties are hapaxes: “Words in the Scriptures which be never found there but once . . . so that we cannot be holpen by conference of places. . . . Now in such a case, doth not a margine do well to admonish the Reader to seek further, and not to conclude or dogmatize upon this or that peremptorily? . . . They that are wise, had rather have their judgments at liberty in differences of readings, than to be captivated to one, when it may be the other.”¹⁶⁶ In the fascinating, and exemplary, instance of hapaxes (words that do not exist in extant Hebrew texts beyond a single scriptural use), the King James preface tacitly acknowledges that there is no single way to read a translated text. The glosses and alternative readings given in the biblical margins implicitly acknowledge that all translation is an act of interpretation. Making a text as complex as the Bible the central foundation for literacy meant that all readers (and especially those who paid attention to paratexts) would be encouraged to be alert to complex literary concepts such as translation, etymology, polysemy, and metaphor.¹⁶⁷ People of the early modern period became literate through reading a text which, as early modern exegesis acknowledged, both promoted and enabled careful and complex reading—as the King James preface has it, “to exercise and whet our wits.”

Early modern readers marked (in both senses) the printed annotations of their Bibles, proving themselves attentive and engaged readers. This article illustrates through material traces the portable nature of hermeneutic authority, “slipping back and forth between the hands of translators [and annotators] and the hands of the reader.”¹⁶⁸ The granular evidence gained from the material traces left by readers such as Copping, Seager, and Duke—as well as numerous anonymous readers—proves some of the ways in which the Bible (and, in particular, the Geneva Bible) was read in the early modern period. As Molekamp has argued, the Geneva Bible was “the most intensively read text of a large proportion of early modern households during its publication life in England.”¹⁶⁹ The Bible, moreover, would have been the exemplary reading experience for early modern people—literally first, as the book through which

¹⁶⁵ *The holy Bible*, 1649, sig. A5^r.

¹⁶⁶ *The holy Bible*, 1649, sig. A5^r.

¹⁶⁷ See, for example, how *The King's Book* (1543), a book for early readers, stressed the biblical polysemy of words such as *bread* and *faith*: Kintgen, 107–12. See also Cummings; Hoff, 2019, 250.

¹⁶⁸ Molekamp, 2009, 123.

¹⁶⁹ Molekamp, 2009, 121.

their literacy had been taught, and metaphorically first, as the book they cherished above all others. While the Bible was qualitatively different from all other books, it was also foundational, and hence it seems fair to hypothesize that readers' responses to the Bible might tell us something about the wider cognitive conditions of early modern readership.

This idea is supported, as mentioned above, by the suggestive parallel in the rates of inscription in biblical and non-biblical books.¹⁷⁰ But it is also supported by a number of the early modern individuals who left records of what and how they read. John Rastrick, whose autobiography relates the way that he learned to read through reading the Bible, recounts that he later schooled himself through keeping a commonplace book. This commonplace book mingled together scriptural and non-scriptural passages, and Rastrick spent his time "in Reading and conferring the Bible and other good Books" and "collecting and composing (according to my capacity) certain Prayers out of the Psalms and other parts of the Bible, and good books, writing them down together."¹⁷¹ Nehemiah Wallington (1598–1658) followed a personal discipline of reading not only the Bible daily but also "read in some other good booke: euery day or night"—following a similar reading pattern for biblical and non-biblical material.¹⁷² As Ryrie has argued, "Most literate, mainstream Protestants were, or aspired to be, voracious readers, and while other books might be categorically different from Scripture, the ways in which readers approached them and the experiences they found in them were very similar."¹⁷³ Those whose literacy was formed reading the Bible came to other texts with reading habits shaped by this encounter.

Samuel Clarke (1599–1683) recorded the godly reading of Ignatius Jordan, a prominent citizen of Exeter in the 1620s, explicitly noting the parallels between the ways in which he read the Bible and other "good, and holy books" in which he likewise delighted.¹⁷⁴ Jordan took delight in multiple rereadings of Foxe, as he did with the Bible, and he marked up many of his books—alongside his Bible—with asterisks at the places he felt applied particularly to himself (evidence of what Fulton has called the "presentist deployment of the biblical text" expanding into Jordan's wider reading practice).¹⁷⁵ Lady Margaret Hoby (1571–1633) likewise kept a record which shows that, while her reading

¹⁷⁰ Sherman, 2008, 73.

¹⁷¹ Rastrick, 33.

¹⁷² Quoted in Ryrie, 282.

¹⁷³ Ryrie, 282.

¹⁷⁴ Clarke, 453.

¹⁷⁵ Fulton, 2021, 140.

centered on the Bible, she approached her reading of godly treatises and sermon collections in similar ways—discussing them with her chaplain and annotating her biblical text in response, just as she did with her scriptural reading.¹⁷⁶

While Rastrick, Wallington, Jordan, and Hoby's reading practices point to parallels between their reading of the Bible and other "good books," Elizabeth Isham (1609–54) documents connections between the way her family read the Bible and much a wider range of texts. Isham's *Diary* (1609–48) and *Book of Remembrance* (1638) record a familial reading community in which Isham both read aloud to, and was read to by, her female relatives. Communal reading centered on the Bible, and in her *Book of Remembrance* Isham regularly documents reading it to her mother, while her diary records reading through the Bible with her nieces.¹⁷⁷ But Isham also heard her female relatives read a striking range of other books aloud, recording, for example, that "this summer wee had good company of my cosen Anne my uncle pagitts daughter we spent our time for the most part working and hearing one read my cosen being a good reader I loved to hear: the Bookes wherein she read were, Ovids Metamorfeces. in Sandyes travels of the holy land. and Gods [revenge] against Murther."¹⁷⁸ In Isham's family the Bible was read out loud in a female kinship group alongside an eclectic range of texts: Ovidian poetry, travel narratives, and works of somewhat salacious moralism (the latter work's full title being *God's revenge against murder and adultery . . . exceedingly Entertaining and Instructive; and very necessary to deter and restrain us from giving a Loose to our Passions and irregular Appetites*).

This parallel reading approach to scriptural and non-scriptural texts is likewise displayed in commonplace books, which document readers for whom the Bible was contiguous with wider reading. As Earle Havens argues, "Early modern manuscript commonplace books did not often conform to prescribed hierarchies with regard to the moral authority of authors and their subject matter. Biblical passages frequently appeared under headings such as 'Charity' and 'Chastity' but often right alongside excerpts from modern secular texts, or even ribald ones."¹⁷⁹ Such commonplace books, just like the more pious reading records described above, confirm the idea that there were substantial continuities between early modern reading of the Bible and other texts.

As Molekamp argues, the material condition of the Geneva Bible had a profound effect on reading and ushered in the "authority of the individual to

¹⁷⁶ Hoby, 59.

¹⁷⁷ Isham, 1638, fol. 17^r; Isham, 1609–48, years 1642 and 1643.

¹⁷⁸ Isham, 1638, fol. 20^v.

¹⁷⁹ Havens, 71. See also Sharpe, 2001, 60.

design her reading acts.” It fostered private reading practices and encouraged readers to mark “their Bibles with personal systems of hermeneutics, through underlining, notes, cross-references, and other signs.”¹⁸⁰ Early modern readers approached non-scriptural texts with a reading methodology shaped by the Bible. Those whose literacy was formed by studying scripture were likely to have carried with them, for example, a basic but crucial assumption about the vital importance of reading. It is likely that such readers would have likewise believed that reading was a serious business, that marginal annotations were to be attended to, and that texts were cohesive, meaningful entities.

This article has traced the way in which early modern readers annotated their Geneva Bibles as evidence for the way in which these readers were, as Horatio puts it, “edified by the margent[s]” of their books. Annotated marginalia proves the existence of active readers who were engaged with their books in an intensive and attentive way. The concrete traces left by early modern Bible readers, as they scoured their text’s margins for meaning, gives evidence of readers who were fully engaged in their task.

Reading the notes marks out a careful and assiduous reader. The early modern period was both the first and last time that most of the English laity could read a fully annotated Bible—and a large proportion of them did. It seems likely, therefore, that this domestication of biblical reading affected early modern reading as a whole. As Fulton has argued, the hermeneutic tendencies of the Genevan annotations “demonstrate and, of course, inculcate in their readers” an attempt “to transform biblical passages for use in the early modern present.”¹⁸¹ Annotated Bibles would have attuned their readers to the application of texts to their own social and political culture, but also to the literary complexity of what they read. Typological readings were drawn out, while the provision of glosses and multiple readings acknowledged the hermeneutic complexity of translation. Cross-references delineated the whole Bible as a coherent whole, a synchronistic text in which the reader should learn to be attentive to internal echoes and structural relations. Meanwhile, the shifts in the Genevan annotations themselves tacitly acknowledged interpretation as partial and ongoing. Marginal annotation, therefore, figures reading as an intricate and fascinating exercise in which readers are influenced by their Bible—and its translators and annotators—but also shape it in their turn. The mere fact that the literacy of early modern readers was formed through contact with annotated Bibles marks them as readers liable to be attentive to issues

¹⁸⁰ Molekamp, 2009, 135.

¹⁸¹ Fulton, 2021, 113–14.

of interpretation and meaning-making. Early modern readers who read biblical margins carried within them an implicit awareness of their own act of reading as taking place within a complex and ever-evolving hermeneutic context.

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