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Spenser from the Gutters to the Margins: An Archeology of Reading

Stephen Orgel

The print revolution was in significant ways a reading revolution and a revolution of dissemination and reception, and for histories of the book to encompass this aspect of the subject we must consider reading specifically in relation to ownership, the ways in which reading is also a work of appropriation and a mode of dialogue. Book history is also a sociology of the use of margins and flyleaves. The essay discusses two early annotated Spensers, one an angry Puritan rebuttal to *The Faerie Queene*, the other a comprehensive elucidation. Both show reading as an active intervention in the cultural life of an early modern classic.

The revolution in modern bibliographical studies has in large measure been effected through a willingness to notice what had been unnoticeable, to find evidence in the hitherto irrelevant; so that habits of reading, marginalia and traces of ownership become as central to the nature of the book as format and typography, watermarks and chain lines. The history of the book, in this construction, is not simply a history of print technology; more important, the history of any particular book does not conclude with its publication. Much important recent work in the field focuses on readers, booksellers and collectors, rather than on printers and publishers, on bindings and inscriptions rather than on foul papers, copy texts, scribes, and compositors – this is indicative of how far we have come from the bibliographical world of W. W. Greg and Fredson Bowers. The print revolution was, in significant ways, a reading revolution, a revolution less of technology than of dissemination and reception.

The Construction of Textual Identity in Medieval and Early Modern Literature. SPELL: Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature 22. Ed. Indira Ghose and Denis Renevey. Tübingen: Narr, 2009. 125-141.

My subject is this particular aspect of the history of the book, a history of reading and writing in relation to ownership, and a sociology of the use of margins and other blank spaces. What did early modern people write in their books, and how can we, as historians of the book, take it into account? One of the most commonplace aspects of old books is the fact that people wrote in them, something that infuriates modern collectors and librarians. But these inscriptions constitute a significant dimension of the book's history; and one of the strangest phenomena of modern bibliophilic and curatorial psychology is the desire for pristine copies of books, books that reveal no history of ownership (modern first editions especially lose a large percentage of their value if they have an owner's name on the flyleaf). It is, indeed, not uncommon for collectors to attempt to obliterate early marginalia, as if to restore the book's virginity. A 1997 Quaritch catalogue lists a first edition of *Areopagitica* with two manuscript corrections, which are "very faint . . . all but washed out during some restoration in the past."[1] The same corrections are also found in a presentation copy of the essay, and are almost certainly in Milton's hand – in this case, the price of virginity was the obliteration of the author.

Marginalia of the early modern period are very difficult to generalize about. William Sherman observes that a large percentage of the marginalia he found in literary texts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Huntington Library "had no obvious connection with the text they accompanied – but nonetheless testified to the place of that book in the reader's social life, family history, professional practices, political commitments, and devotional rituals" (xii). The use of books, that is, is not limited by their subject matter – books are, at their most basic, volumes of available paper – and there are other things to do with books besides read them.

I am concerned here with that small percentage in which the text and marginalia are in intense communication with each other. My subject is a pair of annotated Spensers. The more exciting is one I have written about elsewhere, a copy of the 1611 folio that includes a set of critical marginalia, an early Puritan commentary on *The Faerie Queene* – a manuscript text in angry dialogue with the printed poem.[2] I have owned it for a very long time, and it serves me as an essential starting point for considering what is normative and what is special about other annotated books. The second part of my paper is about a Spenser folio I acquired recently with a more standard set of annotations. I present this not simply as a control text, but as one with its own quite distinctive personality.

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[1] Item 50 in Catalogue 1243 (1997).

[2] "Margins of Truth" in *The Renaissance Text*, ed. Andrew Murphy.

These examples demonstrate an important precept, which these days needs to be constantly reiterated: the history of the book is not the history of printing, and the task of bibliography does not stop at the publisher's door. The history of the book is as much a history of response and interpretation as it is a history of invention and production. If we are to understand the nature of literacy in the early modern period, we must be able to take reading and ownership practices, the *use* of books, into account.

I have owned my Puritan folio since I was in college; I found it at G. David's bookstall in Cambridge in 1953, and paid £8 for it. It was cheap because it is not a handsome copy, and the bookseller considered the marginalia a serious blemish. A very faded inscription written directly on the leather cover in a seventeenth-century hand reads "for Mr J. Illingworth at Emmanuel College in Cambridge"; so he is the earliest identifiable owner. The Cambridge University register records the presence at Emmanuel of James Illingworth, who entered in 1645, took his BA in 1649, and was a Fellow of the college until 1660, when he was expelled at the Restoration for political incorrectness. He subsequently became a chaplain in Staffordshire; he was an avid book collector and left the bulk of his library to Emmanuel. The title page bears the signature of a later owner, James Charlton, in a late seventeenth-century or early eighteenth-century hand; a few of the annotations are in his writing, and there are a few nineteenth-century ones in pencil. But the earliest and most detailed of the marginalia, somewhat damaged in a subsequent rebinding, constitute a substantial commentary in an early seventeenth-century hand on Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene* – with one exception, the glosses go no further. The notes are in a mixture of italic and secretary script, and are the work of an owner with strong Puritan sentiments. The writer is not identifiable; he may be James Illingworth, though the inscription on the cover directing the book to him must have been written after the rebinding that damaged the notes, so it seems more likely that they are the work of a previous owner. But Illingworth's interest in the book may well have been precisely in its marginalia: Emmanuel was from its foundation in 1583 a Puritan stronghold.

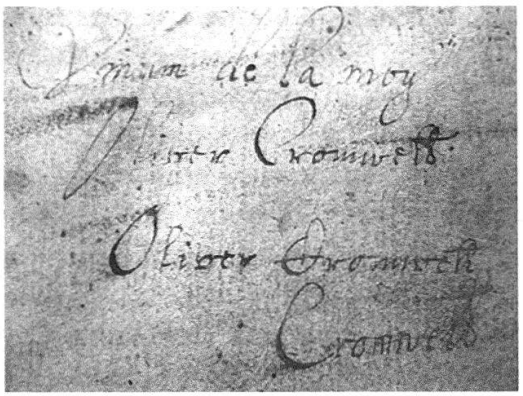
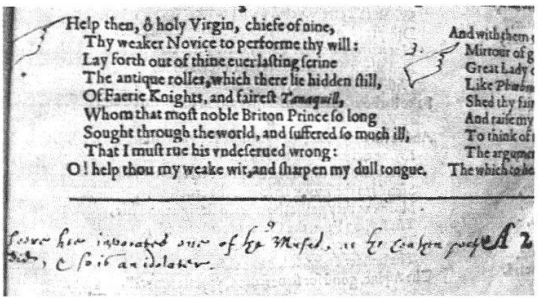


Figure 1: "Oliver Cromwell" on the front flyleaf of the 1613 Spenser folio

On the flyleaf, in three different forms, appears the name Oliver Cromwell, under the macaronic and illiterate phrase "unum de la moy," presumably intended to mean "one of my books." This is certainly not the name of an owner, nor is it the signature of the Lord Protector. Since the flyleaf would have been added during the rebinding, the name, which is unquestionably in a seventeenth-century hand, must be simply a later and quite crude attempt to associate the annotations with the most famous Puritan of the age. Even in the seventeenth-century a history of readership, via the marginalia, was being constructed about this book.

The marginalia in the body of the book allow us a rare opportunity to watch an early reader responding to Spenser. His reaction, from the outset, is basic, powerful and very indignant. Poetic conventions are taken, in the most literalistic way, as marks of heretical leanings: the Proem to Book 1 calls on the "holy virgin, chief of nine," and the annotator observes, "Here he invocates one of the Muses, as the heathen folk did, and



Help then, ô holy Virgin, chiefe of nine,
Thy weaker Novice to performe thy will:
Lay forth out of thine euerlasting scrine
The antique rolles, which there lie hidden still,
Of Faerie Knights, and fairest Tanaquill,
Whom that most noble Briton Prince so long
Sought through the world, and suffered so much ill,
That I must rue his vndeserued wrong:
O! help thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tongue.

And with them
Mirrour of g
Great Lady
Like Phœb
Shed thy fai
And raise my
To think of
The argume
The which to be

Here he invocated one of the Muses, as the heathen folk did, and so is an idolator.

Figure 2: Gloss to the Proem to Book 1, stanza 2

so is an idolator." The gods in the next stanza produce an even stronger reaction: "This Jove what was else but a devil?" (He cites Corinthians: "the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, not to God.") "So Venus and her son Cupid, and Mars, and yet he requests

them to aid him in his poesie. So a man in plain terms should call on the devil, not now straightway abhor him; but now when the devil is masked under other names, he is not perceived." To Spenser's subsequent invocation of Queen Elizabeth, the commentator objects that "he prayeth to Queen Elizabeth to aid him after the manner of the heathens, who deified their emperors, and invocated their help. But if a man should ask how a creature [i.e., a mere human being] can raise the thought and express it home [i.e., act as a muse, serve as inspiration], he could never answer."

In canto 1, the Red Cross Knight is faulted for wearing the cross, "The dear remembrance of his dying lord": the annotator says, "This is not the way to adore him." As for fairyland, "Fairies are devils, and therefore fairyland must be the devil's land. And what a glory is this to any, to call her queen of such a place?" Throughout the book, the designation of fairies as devils every time they are mentioned forms a tedious marginal refrain. By stanza 20 of canto 1, the poem itself has been consigned to the mass of heretical tracts vomited forth by the dragon Error: "A part of this book was there." Most readers experiencing this sort of difficulty with the most basic premises of a work would simply stop reading, but this reader is unusually tenacious, and the invective soon becomes more specific and more interesting.

When the Red Cross Knight and Una encounter a hermit saying his rosary, the figure elicits an immediate marginal objection: "Is this a sign of holiness, to pray on beads? A papist would like this well." Spenser's account of the hermitage is similarly criticized: "This commendation of an hermetical life is naught, for God hath not commanded us to forsake the society of men, but to do good to all." By the time the hermit is found talking of saints and popes, and singing Ave Marys, one would have thought that Spenser's attitude toward him was clear enough; the annotator, however, remains indignant: "Yet he calleth him a godly father." And here, of course, though the indignation is misplaced, the reader is on to something, and his reading is perfectly correct: the hermit is Hypocrisy, the disguised Archimago, who proceeds to trouble the sleeping knight with lustful dreams, to present him, on awaking, with the lascivious Duessa, and to separate him successfully from Una.

But even when the hermit is revealed as a villain, and the Catholic paraphernalia is revealed as a sign of his iniquity, the annotator remains contemptuous of both Hypocrisy's power and Spenser's narrative: "This is an idle fiction, for I suppose that never was any good man or woman so deluded as these were. If Satan could thus do, we were in a miserable case." The contempt, no doubt, is a function of the degree to which the annotator himself has in fact been mistaken about Spenser's allegiances; but this early reader's moral discomfort is surely not entirely misplaced –

it is worth considering just how mistaken he has actually been. Much later, in canto 10, Una leads the Red Cross Knight to the House of Holiness, where they meet the devout Celia, who is described, this time without irony, as "busy at her beads." The reader duly comments, "Why beads, and not prayer? If any say it is poetical, I say, poesie must not grace iniquity." A little farther on the hermit Contemplation is encountered, "That day and night said his devotion,/ Ne other worldly business did apply." The commentator remarks, "The commendation of hermits is naught," this time surely not unreasonably. Vices and virtues, villains and heroes, often do look the same in the poem, and this is certainly part of its moral structure; but our Puritan reader also provides a good index to the degree to which Roman Catholicism remained an indispensable and genuinely troubling element in Protestant poetics, as in the Elizabethan religious imagination generally. The problem is tartly epitomized in the gloss on Contemplation's promise that the Knight of Holiness will become "Saint George of merry England": "A popish saint, devised by idle monks." Indeed: by Spenser's time St. George had been long abolished in the Anglican church.

Most of the marginalia constitute this sort of carping; but there are a few that show a more subtle mind at work. The writer has, to begin with, a classical education. When in canto 2 the Red Cross Knight unexpectedly draws blood from a tree, which turns out to be the transformed Fradubio, the annotator disapprovingly notes the Virgilian parallel: "a fond fable, like that of Polidorus. A wonder it is that Christians should delight in such fopperies." When he defeats and kills the Saracen Sansfoy, the reader comments, "The good knight should have saved him, and not killed. You will say here is a mystical meaning. I think so, but all know not that, and therefore it is not safe to teach murder under such pretences." This is the first place where the fact that the poem is an allegory and requires a certain sophistication of the reader is acknowledged. In canto 7, when the forging of the knight's arms by Merlin is described, the comment reads, "Thus the Red Cross Knight must be relieved by magic, as you may after see, canto 8" – he is now reading ahead before he annotates, so as not to get caught out again. "What simple reader will not commend Merlin and his magic if he listen to this?" In canto 3, when Una's beauty is credited with taming the savage lion – "O how can beautie maister the most strong" – the reaction is entirely predictable: "Here beauty (not God's) stays the lion's fury"; but the comment on Una's musings in the next stanza is quite shrewd. Here is the stanza:

> The Lyon, Lord of euerie beast in field,
> Quoth she, his princely puissance doth abate,
> And mightie proud to humble weake does yield,

Forgetfull of the hungry rage, which late
Him prickt, in pittie of my sad estate:
But he, my Lyon, and my noble Lord,
How does he find in cruell hart to hate
Her that him lou'd, and euer most adord,
As the God of my life? why hath he me abhord? (1.3.7)[3]

This is the gloss: "Here is no thanks to God for her deliverance. Is it a shame for a poet to pray? Not so, for heathen Virgils, and Homers, have made prayers to their gods." And below this, on Una's characterization of her knight as "the god of my life," he remarks that "She had need of some earthly god, for I do not see that she prays to the god of heaven." Two things strike me here: first, the acknowledgment of a genuine religious sensibility in pagan poetry, and the insistence on its validity as a poetic model (even for this reader, there are clearly two ways of looking at the invocation of muses and the praise of Olympian deities); second, the perception that here Una has somehow lost her mystical status and turned into a perfectly conventional romance heroine abandoned by her perfectly conventional knight. The reading is acute and accurate. Milton was unquestionably a more sympathetic reader of Spenser – he told Dryden, after all, that "Spenser was his original," his model, and "a better teacher than Scotus and Aquinas" – but his problems with *The Faerie Queene* were not unlike those of our critic: he firmly rejected the Arthurian subject matter, and made his case for Spenser by reading him not against romance but against philosophy and theology.

Two final marginalia may serve as summaries of the conflicting attitudes of Spenser's early readers. The only mark made by the original annotator outside book 1 of *The Faerie Queene* silently calls attention to this passage in *Mother Hubberds Tale*:

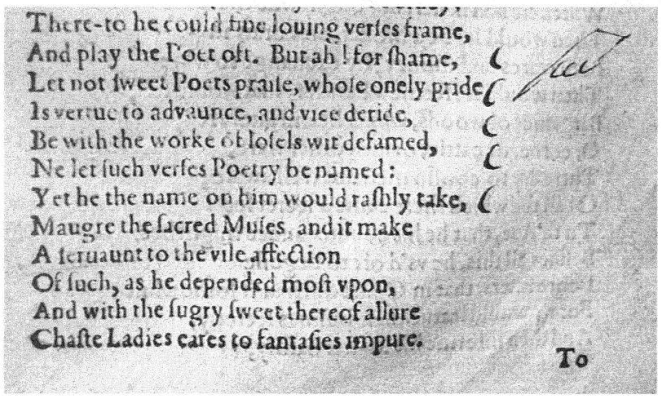

There-to he could fine louing verſes frame,
And play the Poet oft. But ah! for ſhame,
Let not ſweet Poets praiſe, whoſe onely pride
Is vertue to advaunce, and vice deride,
Be with the worke of loſels wit defamed,
Ne let ſuch verſes Poetry be named:
Yet he the name on him would raſhly take,
Maugre the ſacred Muſes, and it make
A ſeruaunt to the vile affection
Of ſuch, as he depended moſt vpon,
And with the ſugry ſweet thereof allure
Chaſte Ladies eares to fantaſies impure.
To

Figure 3: *Mother Hubberds Tale*, lines 810-15

[3] Quotations are from the edition of J. C. Smith.

> But ah, for shame
> Let not sweet Poets praise, whose onely pride
> Is vertue to aduaunce, and vice deride,
> Be with the worke of losels wit defamed,
> Ne let such verses Poetrie be named:
> Yet he the name on him would rashly take. . . . (810-14)[4]

Spenser is made to condemn himself. But in canto 4 of *The Faerie Queene*, history, or rather provenance, takes its revenge.

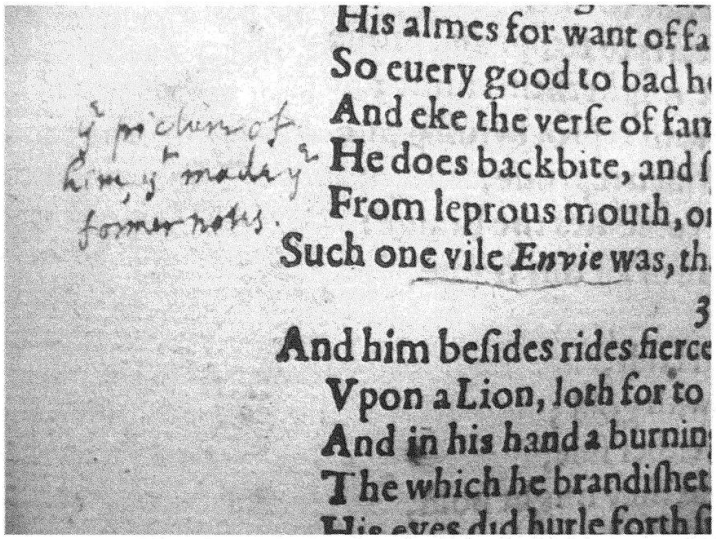


Figure 4: 1.4.32, "The picture of him that made the former notes"

Beside this passage:

> And eke the verse of famous Poets witt
> He does backebite, and spightfull poison spues
> From leprous mouth on all, that euer writt:
> Such one vile *Enuie* was, that first in row did sitt, . . . (1.4.32)

a later annotator (not, judging from the hand, James Charlton) has inscribed, "The picture of him that made the former notes." If this is the Reverend Mr Illingworth's comment, it gives us a nice index to the breadth of Puritan critical opinion about Protestant canonical texts.

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[4] The text is that of Ernest de Sélincourt, *Spenser's Minor Poems*.

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My second example is a 1609 folio including quite a different kind of early seventeenth-century marginalia by a reader who provided himself with a systematic guide through the poem. The volume thereby enables us to see what kind of guide *The Faerie Queene* required for a reader within a generation of Spenser's death. He writes a careful and quite legible hand, italic with some secretary elements – the hand is very similar to Milton's in the Trinity manuscript from the mid-1630s. This reader also copied out several other works of Spenser's (the 1609 folio includes only *The Faerie Queene*), and had the manuscript sheets bound in at the end. These include the letter to Ralegh, *Visions of the World's Vanity*, three of the elegies for Sidney, the *Visions of Petrarch* and the *Visions of du Bellay* – not, that is, any of the shorter works that constitute for modern readers the rest of the best of Spenser: this reader wanted no *Epithalamion* or *Prothalamion*, nothing from *The Shepherd's Calendar* or the *Amoretti*, no *Colin Clout's Come Home Again*, and – probably more problematic from the point of view of literary history – none of the satiric or philosophical poems, which loom so large in the modern construction of Spenser in his own time. The essential Spenser for this reader was the moralizing and memorializing Spenser, just the poetry we tend to ignore. And unlike my Puritan reader, who gave up in despair and indignation after Book 1, this reader read the poem all the way through, attentively, and more than once – the annotations are filled with very useful cross-references.

There is no evidence of the identity of the annotator, but tracing the subsequent provenance of this volume is an adventure in itself, and I shall make only a brief gesture toward it here – it does bear on my subject. The book has lost its original title page and is supplied in a late sev-

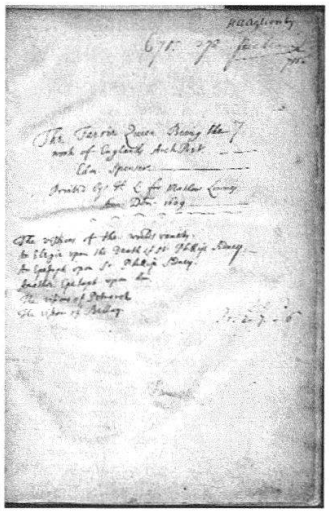


Figure 5: Ms title page to the 1609 folio

enteenth or early eighteenth-century hand with a manuscript title page transcribing the 1609 original and listing the additional material bound in at the back. On the verso, in the same hand, are the dedication to Queen Elizabeth, and some miscellaneous bits of Latin verse which have been crossed out ("Arma virumque cano" is legible as the final one). Two other notes on the recto, not entirely decipherable, though apparently in the same hand, record the price paid for the book, £2l.7s.6d., and what may be the date 1705. Thereafter its provenance is a blank until the early nineteenth century, when it was owned by William Bateman the antiquary (1787-1835), who inscribed his name on the back endpaper and wrote that of Spenser on the blank front flyleaf. Next the radical parliamentarian H. A. Aglionby, who died in 1854, wrote his name at the top of the manuscript title page. The book achieved its current form in the mid-century, when its then owner (not, judging from the handwriting, Aglionby) had it rebound and penciled the following instructions to the binder on the flyleaf beneath Bateman's inscription of Spenser's name:

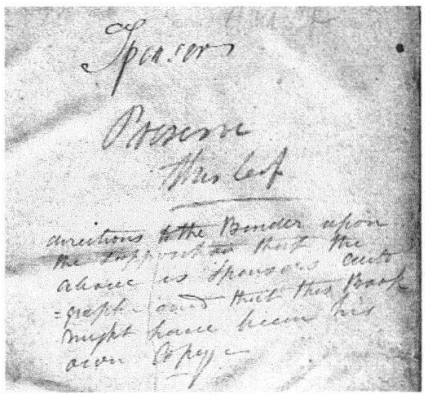


Figure 6: A nineteenth-century bibliophile's instructions to the binder

> Preserve this leaf.
> directions to the binder upon the supposition that the above is Spensers autograph – and that this book might have been his own copy –

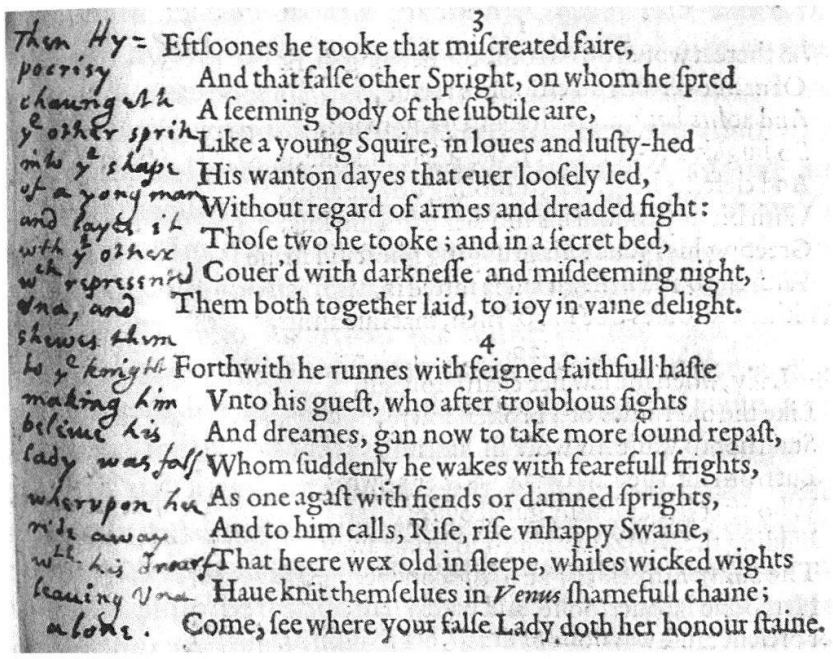
Unfazed by the fact that Spenser died in 1599 and the book was published in 1609, the binder did as he was told, encasing the book in its present blind stamped dark calf with marbled endpapers. This rebinding was probably done for the bibliophile who next affixed his bookplate to the front pastedown: Edwin Cottingham of Bexley, Kent, a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. If so, the note to the binder about Spenser's autograph is his – obviously, despite his investment in the volume, he knew little about Spenser. Cottingham died in 1858. The book then migrated to America: a page later, on the first blank flyleaf, is the pen-

ciled signature of Edward or Edwin H. Gilbert, dated October 1885, in a hand that looks classically American, almost Palmer Method penmanship. Perhaps this is Edwin H. Gilbert of Ann Arbor, Michigan, who fought in the Civil War and died in 1915. In any case the book was in America by the early years of the twentieth century: above Cottingham's bookplate on the front pastedown is the elegant leather bookplate of William Van R. Whitall, a major American book collector and bibliographer of the 1920s. Neither of these owners was responsible for the zany note to the binder, but they cared enough about the book's history to preserve it.

I pause over the book's later provenance because it bears on the question of what collectors want their books to tell them. This book is not a bibliophile's treasure. It is an imperfect copy that has not been especially well cared for, and in the current market it has little value – I bought it quite cheaply from a dealer who offered it to me as the only one of her regular customers who was likely to find it at all attractive. The missing title page, which clearly disappeared quite early, would always have been a major defect, but the contemporary annotations would have interested an eighteenth-century antiquary like Bateman, and for a collector like Whitall would have constituted the book's chief value. As they do, indeed, for me. And like the attempt to associate my other folio with Cromwell, the claim that the book was Spenser's own copy, however preposterous, derives from the same set of assumptions: both attempt, by constructing a provenance, to radically historicize their volumes, and render these particular copies unique. This is the reductio ad absurdum of the perfectly valid notion that contemporary markings confer on the book a kind of historicity that the mere imprint of type does not provide, locate the book in social and intellectual history, and thereby give us some kind of real access to the mind of the past.

It is easy, of course, to over-generalize from the evidence of a single case, and we rarely have more than a very few cases to work from. But marginalia like these do tell us a good deal about the work of reading in the age, and reveal at the very least what one reader was looking for and wanted out of the poem. How representative any individual reader is is another question, and certainly the more interesting of my two readers, the hostile Puritan critic, is the less representative one; but his hostility tells us a good deal about what was at stake in the literary canonization of Spenser a generation after his death. The reader to whom I now turn was careful and systematic (much more so than my Puritan), and his admiration for the poem was unqualified – it is precisely this sort of contemporary admiration that is the context for my Puritan's indignation.

The basic mode of annotation in this case is the running summary. Here is a characteristic gloss, Book 1 canto 2:



3

Then Hypocrisy chaunging the other sprite into the shape of a yong man and layes it with the other which represented Una, and shewes them to the knight making him believe his Lady was false, whereupon he ride away with his Dwarf leaving Una alone.

Eftſoones he tooke that miſcreated faire,
And that falſe other Spright, on whom he ſpred
A ſeeming body of the ſubtile aire,
Like a young Squire, in loues and luſty-hed
His wanton dayes that euer looſely led,
Without regard of armes and dreaded fight:
Thoſe two he tooke; and in a ſecret bed,
Couer'd with darkneſſe and miſdeeming night,
Them both together laid, to ioy in vaine delight.

4

Forthwith he runnes with feigned faithfull haſte
Vnto his gueſt, who after troublous ſights
And dreames, gan now to take more ſound repaſt,
Whom ſuddenly he wakes with fearefull frights,
As one agaſt with fiends or damned ſprights,
And to him calls, Riſe, riſe vnhappy Swaine,
That heere wex old in ſleepe, whiles wicked wights
Haue knit themſelues in *Venus* ſhamefull chaine;
Come, ſee where your falſe Lady doth her honour ſtaine.

Figure 7: Gloss on 1.2.3

"Then Hypocrisy chaungeth the other sprite into the shape of a yong man and layes it wth the other wch represented Una, and shewes them to the knight making him belieue his Lady was fals, whervpon hee ride away wth his dwarf leauing Una alone." This is a concise and accurate summary, but to reduce Spenser to sense in this way is not invariably easy. When the Sansfoy brothers appear in canto 5, it was as difficult for the seventeenth-century reader to distinguish them as it is for us; and he could not retreat into the postmodern argument that it didn't matter be-

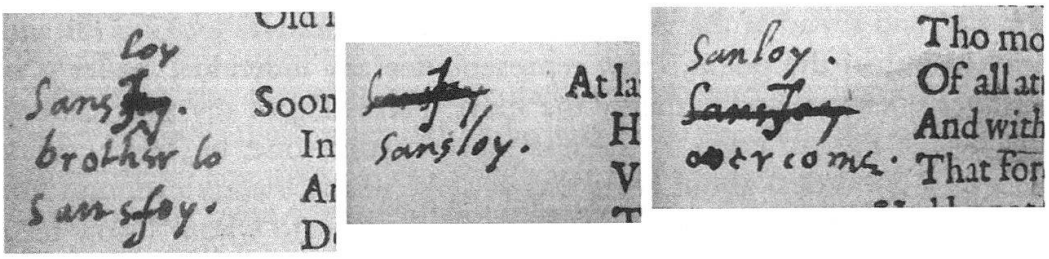


Figure 8: Confusions about Sansfoy
and his brothers, 1.5

cause the whole point is that they are indistinguishable – he worked hard at distinguishing them, which suggests that the confusion may be there precisely to induce the hard work, and that we ignore or dismiss it at our peril.

One of the most interesting aspects of these glosses is the way they undertake to defeat Spenser's confusions by keeping track of the individual plot lines – to produce out of the poem a straightforward narrative. 4.7.11 "read further of this squire c:8. Staf: 50. his name is Amias. C: 8: st: 59"; 4.11.4-5 "Florimells story is here Left but begins again Li: 5: Cant: 2: st: 1: Marinells story continued [which was] Left: Li: 3: Cant: 4: st: 44". Since many stories are simply abandoned, this argues either an extraordinary memory or a very impressive filing system. He also makes useful additions: in Merlin's account to Britomart of her future with Artegall, he supplies the missing name of Vortiger, which he found in the chronicle of kings in the previous book, 2.10; and he makes occasional corrections. Considering how systematic the reading is, however, the corrections are surprisingly haphazard. He does not catch Spenser's own notorious confusion of Guyon with the Red Cross Knight in 3.2, and in 2.1.16, he changes "wayment" to "lament". Wayment is perfectly correct, and there is no variant. Apparently he simply does not like the archaic word. But he also does not change it when it appears again at 3.4.35: "She made so piteous mone and deare wayment." He makes occasional mistakes of his own, for example in 4.12.12 calling Marinell "Florimell." He very occasionally records his admiration for a particular poetic felicity: 4.12.5: "Hee heard Florimell bemone ye Losse of his Love excellently set forthe." Only twice, at the very beginning and the very end, does he identify the figure behind an allegorical allusion, glossing the "goddess heavenly bright" of the proem to Book 1 as "Q. Eliz," and at the very end of Book 6, identifying the "mighty Peeres displeasure" as that of Lord Burleigh.

Paul Alpers, in the book that forty years ago changed the way we read Spenser, acknowledged that his method basically stopped working after Book 3, and that the disjunctions and confusions in Books 4 to 6 were not poetically productive in the same way.[5] I am interested to see, therefore, that my seventeenth-century reader started reading the poem differently when he got to Book 4, adding a new kind of gloss. He starts listing exempla at the beginning of each canto, initially only one or two:

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[5] *The Poetry of the Faerie Queene.*

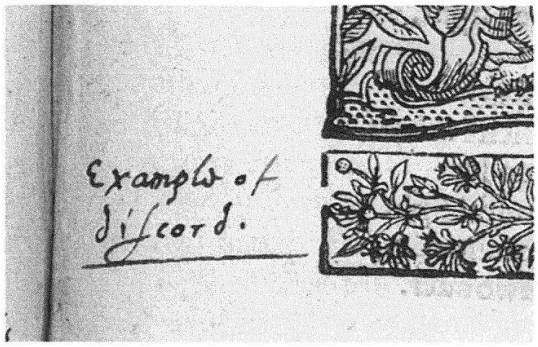


Figure 9: Gloss to the verse summary of 4.1

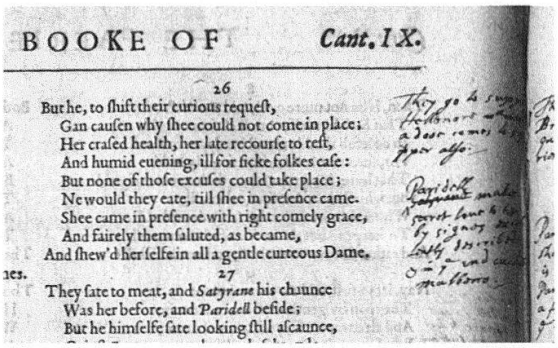
4.1 "Example of discord"; 4.4 "Example of foes turnd frends, & of frends, foes"; but soon the abstracts become more elaborate: 4.6 "Examples. of the torments of a iealous mind in Scudamore. The power of true Love, & false in Arthegall, & Britomarte." 5.2 "Examples. opression & bribery suppressed by Justice in Artegall, & ye Giant Pollente. & Vayne glory inovation subdued in ye Giant, & Talus."

So far we would call this mode of annotation fairly normative for the period – he reads as Erasmus recommended, summarizing, praising, calling attention to memorable moments, extracting bits of wisdom and exempla; preparing the book for many rereadings. In all this there is little that is personal, little sense of a personality. There are many annotated books like this in the period; but some of them come to life suddenly, over a single episode or passage, often in quite unexpected places. The owner of my 1561 Chaucer, for example, read sedately through most of *The Canterbury Tales,* but covered the margins of *The Monk's Tale* and *The Tale of Melibee*, the two prose tales, with enthusiastic notes (he apparently did not even read *Troilus and Cressida*, which literary history assures us was the Chaucer that Elizabethans really liked). My Spenserian reader registers real excitement about only one episode in the entire book, in the margins of which one feels for a few pages an individual psychology at work.

In the Malbecco episode, Book 3 canto 9, the mode of reading changes, and becomes more intense and involved. He underlines key phrases ("a wanton lady,", "a faithless knight," "a crabbed carle," "all his mind is set on mucky pelf"), indicates favorite passages with scare quotes, and covers the bottom margin with a severe but excited moralization: "In Malbecco is shewed ye nature of a Covetous Carle who regards not his curtesy creditt, or worth but only proffitt. In Hellenore A

yong woman yt regards not an old husband. For yt they are naturally inclin'd to lust. An old man to marry a yong wife is ye ready way to make himselfe a cuckold; & causes Jealousy. Jealousy is a vayne thing for a Lascivious woman will find out one way or other to satisfy her Lust bee shee kept never so strictly."

On the next page the moralizations continue: "It is ye parte of a wise man to use curtesy & fayer entreaty before force, wch wins most upon a noble mind. But wth a churlishe nature feare & power, prevailes more then curtesy. as in Malbeccoes yeelding to Satirane." At the dinner table scene the marginal enthusiasm grows especially strong, even registering, in mistaking Paridell for the more suggestively named Satyrane, some real sexual excitement: "They go to supper Hellenore wth much Adooe


BOOKE OF Cant. IX.

26

But he, to ſhift their curious requeſt,
Gan cauſen why ſhee could not come in place;
Her craſed health, her late recourſe to reſt,
And humid euening, ill for ſicke folkes caſe:
But none of thoſe excuſes could take place;
Ne would they eate, till ſhee in preſence came.
Shee came in preſence with right comely grace,
And fairely them ſaluted, as became,
And ſhew'd her ſelfe in all a gentle curteous Dame.

27

They ſate to meat, and *Satyrane* his chaunce
Was her before, and *Paridell* beſide;
But he himſelfe ſate looking ſtill aſcaunce,

Figure 10: Paridell and Hellenore at supper, 3.9.26

comes to supper also. Paridell^~~Satyrane~~ makes secret Love to her by signes excellently described. & in ye end cuckolds malbecco."

After all this I was especially curious to see the reader's response to Malbecco's discovery of the satyrs making love to Hellenore, the most overtly sexual passage in Spenser, including a use of "come" in the sexual sense that predates anything in the OED by decades. Here is the gloss as Malbecco takes his place to view the scene, 3.10.44: "Malbecco disguising himself among ye gotes finds his wife embraced by ye satires whome he woud fayne reclayme but shee likt ye sport too well & woud not go wth him." But about the sex scene – "his lovely wife amongst them lay,/ Embraced of a satyr rough and rude,/ Who all the night did mind his ioyous play:/ Nine times he heard him come aloft ere day. . ." he is silent; the margin is blank. There is, however, a final word of praise for the episode: "Malbecco is metamorphosed under whos name ye nature of a iealous man is excellently described."

At what point did marginalia, the legible incorporation of the work of reading into the text of the book, become a way of defacing it rather than of increasing its value? At what point did the legible evidence of ownership become a detriment? I suggest that the desire for pristine

books, unmediated by use or even by prior possession, relates to the increasing centrality of the author in the way we construe the idea of the book – the book, for us, is the author's, not the reader's. Postmodern theory has not reached the world of bibliophile practice. That centrality is, of course, even today largely fictitious, as any writer who has dealt with the constraints of modern publishers' budgets, house styles and editorial intransigence will be well aware. But the culprit must also be the changing practice of reading itself. I conclude with two eighteenth-century examples. The first is a note in my 1590 quarto of Books 1-3, even in the eighteenth century a dauntingly valuable book to be scribbling in. In the margin beside the account of Una and the salvage nation in 1.6, a reader, almost obliterated by the efforts of a modern conservator, left a very formal testimony to his impatience: "Know all men by these presents that I Will Lennox of Worlingham in the county of Suffolk a man am no devotee Aug ye 5, 1721." The second reader, making his way through a 1613 folio, recorded that he "completed the perusal of this book at Monmouth" on 10 January 1795. He left the margins mostly unencumbered, only noting that in Book 4, during the marriage of the Thames and Medway, he was "Lying down given to slumber," and completely lost it in the catalogue of sea nymphs: "Oh yawn." No elucidation or enrichment here, just complaints about the work of reading. Erasmus would be appalled; my undergraduates would cheer.

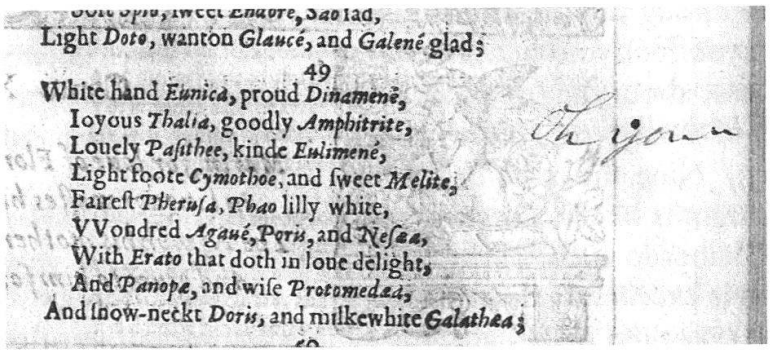

Light *Doto*, wanton *Glaucé*, and *Galené* glad;
49
White hand *Eunica*, proud *Dinamené*,
Ioyous *Thalia*, goodly *Amphitrite*,
Louely *Pasithee*, kinde *Eulimené*,
Light foote *Cymothoe*, and sweet *Melite*;
Fairest *Pherusa*, *Phao* lilly white,
VVondred *Agaué*, *Poris*, and *Nesæa*,
With *Erato* that doth in loue delight,
And *Panope*, and wise *Protomedæa*,
And snow-neckt *Doris*, and milkewhite *Galathea*;

Figure 11: In another copy of the 1609 folio, an eighteenth-century reader grows impatient with the marriage of the Thames and Medway, 4.11.49

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