Towards a Network of Marks

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Abstract: This paper will explain how an archivist and a librarian at the University of Tennessee applied their interest in highlighting marginalia to UT Libraries' Shaheen Antiquarian Bible Collection, a significant but understudied collection of 221 volumes, many from the 16th and 17th century. The collection's previous owner, Shakespeare scholar Naseeb Shaheen, tracked Shakespeare's many Biblical references back to different Early Modern English translations. While Shaheen studied the translation and glosses (or printed marginalia) "layers" of Biblical text, we looked at evidence of the books' physical history via handwritten marginalia and ownership marks left by largely anonymous readers, in an effort to emphasize the importance of books as historical objects containing evidence of readers' interactions with text and books as objects over centuries. We found that 77 percent of the books had intentional marks added by readers and owners, and that these marks fell into one of four categories. Our next step is to bring our methods to students and instruction, apply what we have learned to other collections, and create ways to share this information with a larger network of scholars that would benefit from this data.

Introduction

In 2010, the University of Tennessee acquired roughly 221 Bibles and other period texts collected by Shakespeare scholar Naseeb Shaheen (1931-2009) and used as research for his four books on biblical allusions in Shakespeare's plays. His scholarship culminated in *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays*, 1999. Shaheen meticulously cross-referenced phrases in Shakespeare's plays back to particular early modern English translations of the Bible, giving insight into what editions Shakespeare may have used in the creation of his works. Shaheen collected hundreds of period examples of Bibles to which Shakespeare may have had access.

While Shaheen studied the translations and the glosses (or printed marginalia) "layer" of the collected texts, our own research focus was the centuries of reader evidence they contained: marks created by readers and owners, as opposed to authors, editors, and typesetters. We wanted to know what sort of reader-added marginalia we could find in a somewhat homogenous collection of books. Could we see patterns in these marks? Was there a way to keep track of, and give access to, what we find? Could we teach our methods of chronicling to students? This project would be a pilot to test the feasibility of a marginalia-focused project and whether it would be a worthwhile and repeatable pursuit.

The Shaheen collection was chosen because of its size, age, and relative homogeneity. There are 221 books from 1519-1986, and most of them originate from the 16th and 17th centuries. Eighty-four volumes (34% of the collection) were printed in the 1500s, and 104 volumes in the collection (47%) were printed in the 1600s. Completing the collection are 8 volumes from the 1700s, 15 from 1800s and 5 from 1900s.

The collection consists of 136 Bibles and 27 other Christian texts. The remaining 56 texts include drama, historical works, reference, and poetry. 187 of the books (or 87% of the collection) are in English or

contain significant English text. The remaining books are in Greek (eleven volumes, all Bibles), Latin (twelve volumes, nine of those being Bibles), French (two Bibles and two historical works), Italian (four books of drama and poetry), German (two Bibles), and Syriac (one Bible).

Problem Statement

Our objective was to assess and document the kind of marginalia present in a small collection of mostly English language early modern European books and to learn from that assessment whether or not a low-cost and relatively simple study of marginalia in our collection was possible, and whether the marginalia and accompanying metadata was valuable enough to expose.

The value of at least a certain kind of marginalia is already well demonstrated: that of the well-known author or scholar. The value of this marginalia has been written about in mainstream as well as academic publications.[1] Most existing projects, like Melville's Marginalia and the Walt Whitman Archive, showcase the marginalia of well-known people.[2] Unlike these exemplar projects, our project focuses on the marks left by largely unknown authors and owners.[3]

In addition to projects that feature the marginalia of well-known writers, there is a small but significant body of work on marginalia independent from the study of a given author or critic. Scholars such as Heather Jackson, Heidi Brayman Hackel and William Sherman have written about looking at marks made in books by unknown (and known) hands, and what those marks can tell us about readers over the course of history. Some categories for marginalia in Bibles already exist within this literature. In chapter four of his *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England*, William Sherman identifies eight types of "reader's marks in printed Bibles during the first century or so after the break with Rome" (80). These are ownership notes, penmanship exercises, cross-references, "liturgical instructions for the reading of lessons", numberings, corrections, polemical notes, and dating "of various kinds."[4] We did not set out to test our findings against existing research, but nonetheless it is worth noting that many of the marks we found validated Sherman's own schema (we will discuss the categories further in the "Results" section of this paper). Sherman does not assert that his categories are comprehensive, and we did find that there are some marks in the Shaheen collection that may fall outside of his categories. For example, Sherman does not note family histories as a category of reader-added marks that he found in the Bibles he studied, but reader-added family histories are significantly present in the Shaheen collection.

In addition to giving us a wider context about what kind of marks have been found in other books of the same era, we have learned from scholars like Jackson and Sherman that making marks in books is and has

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[1] For one example of marginalia discussed in a mainstream publication, see Johnson, Dirk. 2011. "Book lovers fear dim future for notes in the margins." *The New York Times,* February 20.

[2] See *Walt Whitman Archive* http://www.whitmanarchive.org/ and *Melville's Marginalia Online* http://melvillesmarginalia.org/.

[3] Many of these projects of well-known annotators also use TEI (Text Encoding Initiative) or related XML formats to transcribe and semantically tag reader-added text as well as printed text. As we are currently less concerned with the texts that are being annotated than we are with the annotations themselves, we decided against pursuing this approach.

[4] Other schemas exist. As Sherman notes, Carl James Grindley broke down the marginalia in copies of the "Reading Piers Plowman C-Text Annotations" into six major categories and over 25 subcategories. (Grindley 2001, 77-79).

been considered valuable for the process of reading and learning. Marginalia therefore has also been used to study or highlight trends in reading. Jackson demonstrates that marginalia often connects books -- often someone copied the text of one book in the blank spaces of another -- in a way which gives clear evidence of how social the act of reading may be (Jackson 2008, 123).

Our research is highly informed by the work of these scholars, and in many cases, underscores their findings, but our work is different because we are attempting to address historical marginalia from the point of view of library and archives practitioners. Much of the information science literature on marginalia focuses on these marks from the perspective of creating tools for annotation in electronic resources as opposed to surveying the marks which exist in our collections, which is our intention.[5] These questions matter because as libraries run out of, or reallocate, space for books, relying on microform or digital surrogates (see EEBO, HathiTrust, Google Books, among others) may become a more attractive alternative to having physical, and often historically valuable, copies on the shelves. While these digital surrogates provide indispensable access to primary texts, and enhance scholarship opportunities, they obscure the existence of textual variants that may have important additions or alterations not present in the digitized version. Consultation of multiple copies of the same text is an established practice in bibliographic study, and the presence of unique readership marks enriches the scholarship possibilities.

A large part of our interest was in how we could make our local marginalia and information about marginalia available to scholars. Our goal was to develop a method of keeping track of marginalia in a way that was meaningful and durably constructed, so that our work (and the work of other scholars) could remain accessible long after our project was finished. In addition, we wanted to see if we could find any patterns that would give the sum of the marks greater meaning.

To summarize, our goals were to find out how much marginalia could be "harvested" from a collection of rare books in our collection, and how we could track the marks we found. In addition, we wanted to know if we could identify any patterns in what we found, and if the marks and patterns we discovered would be helpful in instruction, or for other researchers. It is important to note that these questions (as well as our research) are preliminary ones. We must answer these questions before we embark on the larger question here: How can librarians and archivists best use marginalia in their collections as a way to connect and deepen scholars' knowledge of history?

Methodology

As we set out to explore the annotations in the Shaheen Bible Collection and share the annotations we found within it, there were a few issues with which we had to contend. These issues included identification, recording, and, finally, communicating our results.

IDENTIFICATION
We had to make sure that we could clearly identify and link specific volumes in the collection with our data, which took the form of photographs of pages containing annotation and accompanying volume-level textual metadata. Each volume already had its own record in our library's catalog, but we discovered that a few books shared a call number, as the Shaheen collection contains many copies of the same edition of a book (for instance, there are seven Geneva Bibles from 1599 alone). Naseeb Shaheen had his own indexing system, but it referred back to a collection that had been split up, as at least some of his books were given to or purchased by other institutions, and a few of the books that ended up in our collection

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[5] For example, see Blustein, James, David Rowe, and Ann-Barbara Graff. 2011." Making sense in the margins: a field study of annotation." *TPDL'11 Proceedings of the 15th international conference on Theory and practice of digital libraries: research and advanced technology for digital libraries*, 252-259. Berlin: Springer-Verlag.

did not have a Shaheen index number. Because the existing systems had gaps and duplicates, and because we also wanted to use images to record information about marks, we chose to create volume-unique prefix identifiers for numerous images from one volume. However, the catalog information and the provenance and acquisitions information Shaheen kept filed by volume was valuable to us. We used Open Refine to merge Shaheen's information and identifiers with a records report from our cataloging staff. This gave us one place to track the books, including our own notes and identifiers.

RECORDING

The next issue was how we could record what we found. We decided that for our purposes it was not enough to merely note that reader-added marks were present. We investigated simply providing a description for each instance of marginalia — a transcription of what was written, or our interpretation of what a doodle was meant to be. But given the extent of the marginalia and the ambiguous nature of many of the marks, it seemed insufficient to describe in words what may have appeared to be a scribble resembling a duck to one viewer but to another viewer appeared to be a human face. An image would capture more accurate information.

We also faced a time concern in exploring the collection. Given that we examined the books in the area where they were held — an area which was at a significant remove from our respective offices — we benefited from being able to spend our time with the books photographing the marks we found, and then going back later to analyze what was there. During photography we would enter in the note field for each volume that we had examined that volume for marginalia, and give an overview of the markings there. In the beginning these notes were rather vague — "notes in several hands, incl greek? many instances of marg." — as the process went on, we became more savvy about adding where marks occurred, in case that was not obvious from the photographs. We also informally assigned specific names to types of marginalia once we discovered that most marks fell into a limited number of categories (e.g., ownership marks, family history, scholarly notes, etc.)

Because of time and resource restrictions, we decided for this exploratory project that we did not need to have high-quality images and would use our iPad cameras instead. We purchased a camera stand and light especially made for the iPad and used foam cradles and book snakes to ease our workflow.

Tracking which photographs came from which volumes required a multi-step solution. First, we needed to establish rules about how we photographed each book. Thankfully, each volume had a bookmark with both the call number and Shaheen's index number, the latter we used for double-checking our place in the project. We photographed at least the first shot of each book with these numbers visible, providing a quick visual cue later as we scanned through hundreds of photographs.

Next, when we transferred the images to our library servers, we batch-renamed the images based off of the unique identifier we had assigned each volume. For example, the 1535 Coverdale Bible with the call number BS145 1535a had the SBC project ID of 9, so the image files that depicted that book would be named SBC009001, SBC009002, and so forth, and we could easily identify which volume the images came from even if there was no bookmark with identifying numbers in the pictures. This made later retrieval much more efficient.

COMMUNICATING FINDINGS

We created a blog in order to share our findings and set up a physical exhibit of marginalia in our library (using mostly Shaheen materials), which has drawn interest from researchers outside of our immediate community. But due to lack of time for promotion, on-site instruction seems like the most worthwhile way to share what we have found. In Fall 2016, we intend to teach a course cross-listed between the Honors College and School of Information Sciences, wherein the study of book history will be enhanced

by a hands-on lab that will allow the students to expand the work we did with the Shaheen collection to other collections. On a much smaller scale, we have made pilot attempts at the student-aided analysis of early 18th century texts in collaboration with an upper-level English class.

As mentioned, the task of making our project known to the wider public has been slow-going. We do maintain a blog, but our ability to update it has lagged, partly because the farther we got into the project, the more we saw that the information was more valuable with more context: We could not, like some twitter accounts (The British Library's @BLMedieval account being one of the more prominent) merely post our marginalia without explanation.

Our loftiest aspiration for this project was to contribute to the development of a metadata schema for annotations. We currently lack the expertise to do this in a solid, repeatable fashion, but have consulted with metadata experts who see promise in further pursuit of the idea, as there is not a known standard for recording this kind of metadata.

Results

Our analysis of the Shaheen collection's reader-added marks established that many of the books in the Shaheen collection did indeed contain reader-added marks. Of the 221 books, 171 books (77%) had marks which we could reasonably claim were intentionally created. Independent of Sherman's scheme, which we later found verified our categories, we discovered we could place these marks in roughly four categories: ownership marks; scholarly and reverential marks; pen tests, scribbles and practice writing; and family histories.

Ownership marks were the most common type of marks in the collection, as is consistent with other studies of marginalia (Jackson 2001, 19). Seventy-one of the books (32%) bore some kind of ownership mark. Frequently, the owner of the book will include their name, and frequently the date of such claim and -- with less frequency -- the location where the claim was made or the book was stored or read. As older Bibles had multiple owners over time, books often include many names, often beside simple equations to determine how many years had passed between the markings. More recent marks (19th century on) often discuss aspects of the volumes themselves -- a common handwritten addition made by an owner was to explain that the volume was a rare "Breeches" bible, or to note some illustrious or beloved past owner. Some 19th century owners also pointed out the religious persecution of those involved with the book's creation.

Fifty-three of the books (23%) contained marks which could be categorized as being of a scholarly and reverential nature. These marks exhibit an engagement with the text that the other categories do not. Scholarly marks could be anything from a delicate little check mark or arrow pointing out a printed paragraph, to pages and pages of handwritten argument or explanation. Some of these books were bound or re-bound with interleaved blank pages for convenient note-taking, which Jackson tells us was once a common practice in educational settings (Jackson 2001, 68). The interleaved volumes in the Shaheen collection often have lectures or other materials carefully hand-copied into them. Other reader-added scholarly or reverential notes we found include translations, quotes from other books, notes on history, doctrine and narrative; declarations of faith, and scheduling of prayer or recital. Given that the majority of these books were Bibles or had a religious subject matter, deciding which marks were motivated by spiritual practice and which were academic in nature was often not possible.

Thirty-eight of the books (17%) had marks which bear no relation to the text. These marks we placed in a category which we have entitled "Pen-Tests and Scribbles." The writers of these marks take advantage of blank space for purposes unrelated to the content of the book, and unlike owner's notes or family histories, the marks do not seem to have been created for any sort of long-term function. They often include drawings, handwriting practice, and belabored lines whose patterns suggest their author was trying to test a pen. "Pen-Tests and Scribbles" is the most ambiguous of our categories, as we have used it to include marks where we are unsure if a mark was made intentionally. For instance, is a leaf from a tree left as a bookmark (or merely to use the book as a press) an intentional mark? That might be more ambiguous than a stain, where we are pretty certain no one doused a fingertip in ink on purpose, but we could argue at least we knew the book was open to that page.

Nine percent, or 19 of the books in the collection, contained family histories. The Bible passed down from one generation became the repository for information about families. Almost an extension of ownership marks, family histories record names, dates and places of births and deaths. These are often found at the beginning of volumes, the first or last pages of books of the Bible. These kinds of marks are found only in the collection's Bibles and related devotional texts, such as psalm books.[6]

Findings

The most basic finding of our project is that marginalia exists in our collections, specifically in the Shaheen Bible collection. In addition, we were able to develop methods to reveal and track the marginalia in the books, and provide a record of what kind of marginalia was present in each volume. We discovered that our workflow was reasonably successful for our needs, although in the future it should be more rigorous: We need to be more consistent with what we photograph and note, in terms of identifying books as well as the marginalia therein. But with these modifications, we feel confident that our workflow can be easily replicated by students.

Allowing students a hands-on role will give us more possibilities to expand the exploration of marginalia in additional collections and fulfill part of our goal to make our work valuable to instruction in classes concerning, or touching on, book history. As we have observed during instruction sessions where students have had access to these reader-annotated books, the knowledge that one is touching the same book someone read and doted over 400 years ago appears to evoke a powerful feeling that can boost an interest in history, especially when the evidence of actual people interacting with books (an indignant note, an irreverent doodle) is right in front of the reader. It is a direct, physical way of examining history, and, in the case of students assisting with the chronicling of marks, contributing to the scholarly record that we think has appeal to at least some humanities students. We plan to further test this with a cross-listed Honors College and School of Information Science class in the fall of 2016.

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[6] For an interesting analysis of how the British system of patrilineal inheritance informed the practice of using the Bible to house family histories, see Wulf, Karin. 2012. "Bible, King and Common Law: Genealogical literacies and family history practices in British America*." Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 10 (3): 467-502.

We discovered that marginalia from the collection is significant and falls into a handful of categories. These categories are similar to those categories outlined by book scholars. However, we also discovered that some marginalia in Bibles differs from marginalia in other kinds of books, and a significant part of that difference is tied to family histories. This leads us to the belief that the marginalia in our collections is rich enough for further exploration, and that finding a new way to track these marks is a worthwhile endeavor for scholars and students investigating the cultural record.

Conclusion

Our modest project was successful in that we were able to find and record instances of reader-added marks and analyze why, in this case, people wrote in the margins of books. With our pilot project, our aims were (necessarily) vague. For the next marginalia-discovery project, we will be clearer in our goals, and therefore make developing criteria for recording a stated priority. Such future goals will possibly include a quantitative study of where certain marks occur in certain books, and what percentage of our Library's holdings contains significant reader-added marginalia.

Beyond an analysis of our library holdings, our hope is to create a way to make this information shareable across interested academic communities. As previously mentioned, we believe one way to accomplish this will be the creation of a marginalia-specific metadata schema. In addition, we hope to engage in conversation with scholars across disciplines that would benefit from knowing more about marginalia in certain collections. While we can use the information we collect to argue for growing or maintaining our physical collection of books, the intended audience are those scholars of history and culture who rely on the resources that it is our mission to provide. Experimenting with looking differently at our holdings is a worthwhile endeavor which library and archives professionals are well positioned to take on.

Resources

Grindley, Carl James. 2001. "Reading Piers Plowman C-Text Annotations: Notes toward the Classification of Printed and Written Marginalia in Texts from the British Isles 1300–1641." *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower*, edited by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo, 73-141. Victoria: University of Victoria.

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