# Marginalia

## READERS WRITING IN BOOKS

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chapter one

# Physical Features

The physical features of books have changed really very little since 1700, at least from the annotator's point of view. It is true that formats changed, from the handsome folios of the seventeenth century to the neat octavos of the eighteenth, and from the luxury quartos of the Romantic period to the triple-deckers of the Victorian era and the closely printed paperbacks of the mid–twentieth century. Printing technology passed from monotype to stereotype and linotype and so to computer composition. Paper shortages led to experiments with wood pulp and other substitutes for rag content, with serious and irreversible consequences. In terms of layout, the phasing out of printed marginal glosses in favor of the footnote—a development of the early eighteenth century—and the still unresolved rivalry between the footnote and the endnote have no doubt influenced the annotator's practice, as has the generally diminishing provision of empty space between lines, in margins, and in flyleaves.[1] Books nevertheless continue to present themselves in a familiar shape. They have covers, half-titles and title pages, front and back endpapers, and chapter divisions that leave convenient blanks at the bottoms and tops of certain pages. Annotators throughout the period can be seen to make distinctly different, though standard, use of these various spaces—that is to say, custom and perhaps physical necessity



dictate appropriate kinds of use for separate areas in the book. In this chapter I shall describe the typical physical features of manuscript annotation, subordinating content as far as possible. Content, however, is a force of nature: you can drive it out with a pitchfork, but it will soon find a way back. I have not even attempted to suppress it altogether.

All the front area of a book, from the inside of the front cover to the beginning of the text proper, presents an opportunity to provide introductory material, and the first impulse of any owner appears to be the impulse to stake a claim. Ownership marks are far and away the commonest form of annotation. The inside front cover, whether it is the paste-down of the endpaper or the actual verso of the cover itself as in a modern paperback, is the traditional place for a bookplate. Presentation inscriptions there or on the title page are likewise statements about ownership not written by the owner. More usual, however, is the owner's signature or initials, generally to be found on the top right-hand corner of the first free page, whether it is a flyleaf or the title page. An owner's initials constitute the minimum of annotation.

The marginalia of children are instructive, and a case can be made for their revealing fundamental readers' attitudes in a particularly raw state. Before they can read, children may scribble—pretending to write—or draw pictures in books that come their way, but as soon as they can read and write, they write their names, often over and over again in the one book. A work in which the annotations are conveniently dated 1700, exactly the starting point for this study, a copy of Claude Mauger's *French Grammar,* contains no notes whatever in the text, and no notes having any connection with French grammar, but voluminous writings on the endpapers: the owner, Grizel Baillie, writes her own name several times with various spellings ("Grisall," "Grisell," "Grissell"), and her address, and an upper-case and lower-case alphabet, and a lot of fists, and four copies of a short letter to her cousin—all with the same wording, so the practice must have been for penmanship. Such behavior was and continues to be perfectly normal.[2]

One of the rare cases I have been fortunate enough to find of a barely literate but, on the evidence, adult reader shows similar features. Listed in the Bibliography under "Wesley," it is actually a heavily used collec-

tion of English and American sermons of the later eighteenth century. All the notes are in pencil and by the same unformed hand. One or two notes in the body of the text ("Salvation" as the subject of one of the sermons, for instance) indicate that the owner understood its contents, but practically all the writing is on the front and back flyleaves and endpapers and has nothing to do with the sermons. There is the standard ownership claim, in this case a list of names, apparently because the book was a family treasure: "Mary an Banks | Martha Banks | Eliza Banks | William Banks | Sarah Banks | William Henry Banks." And then there are miscellaneous memoranda: a list of prices of household goods, such as matches at two cents, lard at eight cents, cotton at five cents; some scribbles; some figures; a bit of verse mildly risqué for early America; and a declaration of love—"my Dear Mister Brown i love you With all my heart and i Hope you do the same"—that seemingly could not be suppressed. These are readers with little experience of books who have not yet learned the customary use of different areas for annotation, and whose very irregularity proves the rule. For the library reader such volumes are a lucky dip—you never know what may turn up.

A marvelous fictional example of the lucky dip into the mind, via the marginalia, of an immature reader is the experience of the narrator, Lockwood, in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights.* In his bedchamber, unable to sleep, Lockwood examines a few musty old books with Catherine Earnshaw's name in them:

> Catherine's library was select, and its state of dilapidation proved it to have been well used, though not altogether for a legitimate purpose; scarcely one chapter had escaped a pen-and-ink commentary—at least, the appearance of one—covering every morsel of blank that the printer had left. Some were detached sentences; other parts took the form of a regular diary, scrawled in an unformed, childish hand. At the top of an extra page (quite a treasure, probably, when first lighted on) I was greatly amused to behold an excellent caricature of my friend Joseph,—rudely yet powerfully sketched. An immediate interest kindled within me for the unknown Catherine, and I began forthwith to decipher her faded hieroglyphics.[3]



Besides the supporting evidence that this passage provides of the use of books for scrap paper, continuing into the nineteenth century, Catherine's marginalia illustrate the value of marginalia as a literary device. In *Wuthering Heights,* they are a means for introducing a new voice in a particularly direct and personal way, a means for securing interest for Catherine through the reaction of the narrator, and a means for obliquely indicating the distance between them—as a respectable man, he is rather shocked by her flouting of "legitimate" usage. They also trigger Lockwood's dramatic dreams about her. But they are a credible reflection of reality as well as a useful narrative technique.

The Osborne Collection of children's books includes enough annotated books to show patterns that are constant over time, in the relatively stable experience of child readers, as well as some striking individual aberrations.[4] On the whole, preschool children are not real annotators. Coloring black-and-white illustrations does not count. Writing notes in response to a text appears to be a habit acquired at school. Very young children who can read and write use their books rather as spare paper for drawing or writing practice, and confine themselves to the blank leaves at the front and back. A charming case from the late eighteenth century is a copy of John Aikin and Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *Evenings at Home.* The first owner, Hannah Andrews, wrote her name in ink on the front flyleaves and opening pages of the text. A later owner used the back endpaper for her own writing practice, first copying the name "Hannah Andrews" several times and then finally in triumph writing her own name, Lucy Weldron or Meldron, and adding, "I am much improved in my writing since I wrote that ugly Hannah Andrews." Elvie Favet's copy of *The Babes in the Basket,* a gift from her aunt, is decorated front and back with delicate watercolor paintings of birds, mostly owls in pink and blue.

Under instruction, children learn to mark the text conservatively, and to use the endpapers for institutionally approved, standard kinds of note-taking. Florence Nightingale's copy of Mrs. Trimmer's *New and Comprehensive Lessons, Containing a General Outline of the Roman History* (1818) has Nightingale's autograph in pencil on a flyleaf (p. −1) and penciled marks—an "x" or an "A"—at the ends of chapters to show

how far she had got with her reading. A copy of A. E. Marty's *Ontario High School Reader* (1919) that was passed down in the Clements family displays, immediately upon opening, the signatures of successive child owners; a drawing that is surely a portrait of the class teacher; and a list of reading assignments, with page references—all in ink—besides a library bookplate giving the name of the donor, herself presumably the last of the original signatories (fig. 2). More advanced versions of these school readers and similar textbooks do contain manuscript notes within the text, especially definitions of terms, solutions for mathematical problems, and some notes from class, such as the birth and death dates of an author, or comment on a specific passage. Carrie Rae's copy of *Five Longer Poems* (1927), a fifth-form textbook, includes interlinear and marginal notes that gloss words like "wassail-bowl" ("beverage") and paraphrase lines of the text. She also attempted some of the questions proposed at the back of the book, explaining the appeal of Wordsworth's poem "Michael," for example, thus: "It tells us of their simple life & sets an example for us by showing us that even although Luke was well brought up there were things in the city which tended to contribute to his disgrace. It is so original, different, love for his son." Historians of education and of criticism could work with material like this to ascertain, not merely by retrospective reminiscence and anecdote, what went on in the classrooms of a given place at a given time.

Besides these representative examples of normal use one sometimes encounters oddities like the Osborne Collection copy of *Tommy Trip's Valentine Gift* (1785), which contains an account of the origin of St. Valentine's Day, together with improving moral tales and illustrations that are now colored in. The neat inscription in ink on the front pastedown reads, "Edwin Griffith | the gift of his wife | Eliza Noble | 1790"; to it an untidy child's hand has added "and three"—meaning, not 1790 but 1793. On the same page in the same hand are two further notes, "March 4th 1793 | a nice book" and "Fred brought me this for Easter." There are no reader's marks in the text, but the back flyleaves (pp. +1–+5) are filled with notes that reaffirm ownership and provide a vivid impression of the owner's circumstances and feelings. Eliza Noble was a playmate, the play "wife" of young Edwin. These are the notes in full: "Edwin

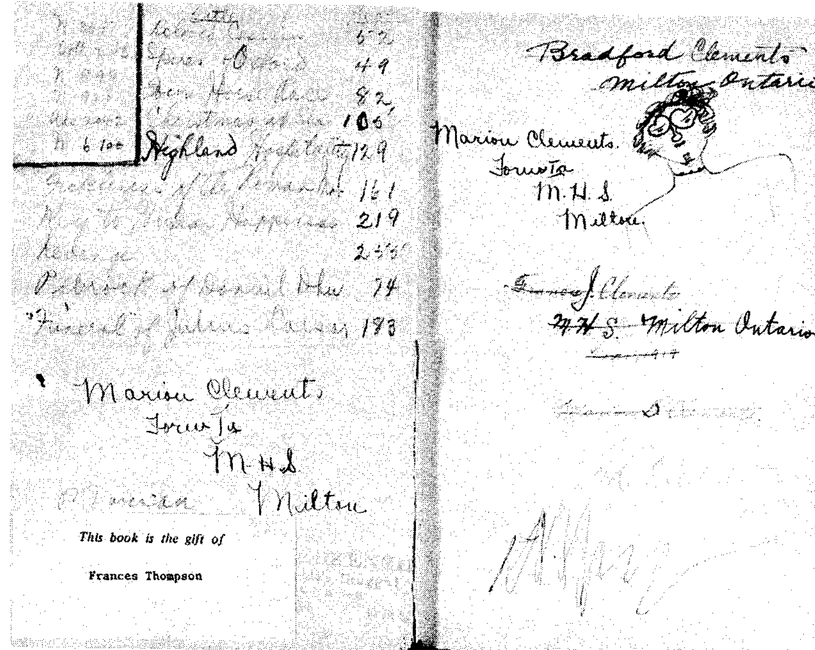


FIG. 2 A. E. Marty, ed., *Ontario High School Reader* (1919). Front endpaper and flyleaf. (Used by permission of the Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books, Toronto Public Library)

Griffith the Gift of his wife—March 4 1793 Edwin G[.] I shall keep this book as Long as it is in being. I shall show it to my wife every time she comes here—. My Grandmother and my Aunt is here playing at cards just by me—. Mrs Noble is at home with Eliza Noble for she has got the whooping cough and cannot come here which I am very sorry about, for she is a charming girl[.] I hope none read this for it is sad[.] Nonscence I am going to bed it is nine a Clock—Farewell[.] This now given to me at 10 a Clock[.]"

Edwin Griffith is like other young annotators in using the blank leaves in his book for writing paper without reference to the text.[5] He is remarkable, in a way that makes one aware of the internal or external restrictions that usually apply, in declaring an opinion about the "nice" book, and even more so in using the book to display the emotions of the moment. I wish I knew what became of Edwin Griffith. I suspect he may

have been set already on the road leading to the fanaticisms of Chapter Six. Nevertheless, the point should be made that although the content of his notes is unusual, the way he uses the blank spaces of his book is not: the introductory inscription and assertion of ownership are where convention dictates that they should be, and the personal notes at the back are in a way an extension of the initial assertion. Like Samuel Maude, he affirms his property rights as he turns the book into a diary.

When they go beyond the basic declaration of ownership, child and adult readers alike tend next to fill in details of acquisition. Tradition gives children more scope than adults, who are expected to be drily factual, and brief. An adult owner often supplies an address, a date, and the name of the source—bookseller, for instance, or book sale. Ann Owen Hay's copy of Lambert's *Little Henry* (1823) also gives an address on the front flyleaf. It was written at first in pencil, and later overtraced in ink as a permanent record: "Ann Owen Hay | Hadley | Barnet | Middlesex | England | Great Britain | Europe | P. Ocean [*sic*] | World | Air | Nothing." The first note on the front flyleaf of an eighteenth-century school edition of Cato reads, "William Curzon Is My Name And England Is My Nation Breedon Is My Dwelling Place And Heaven Is My Habitation. July. ye. 19th. 1737[.]" (When I was at school we completed the rhyme with "destination," but "habitation" could be a legitimate variant.) Dates, like addresses, are open to adaptation under circumscribed conditions. Hence William Makepeace Thackeray dated his battered "Collection of English Poems," when he was at school in the 1820s, with a typically ritualistic list, counting down the days "to the holidays" from "Only 2 weeks" to "Only 13 days" and so on down to one.

William Curzon goes on to provide the next indispensable thing—still reinforcement of the ownership claim—as the second note in his Cato, further down the page: "Steal Not This Book For Fear Of Shame For Here You See The Oners Name William Curzon His Book July ye. 19 1737[.]" Iona and Peter Opie divide such anathemas into two categories, "book protection" and "book desecration."[6] A longer version of this one is the first in their collection. They do not have the one Robert Odell of Petrolia, Ontario, used in his *Third Reader* in 1897, and perhaps it is a colonial creation: "Steal not this book for fear of life for the owner



has a big jackknife." Adult readers like Joshua Earnshaw, who acquired a second-hand copy of Joseph Townsend's *Physician's Vade Mecum* in 1824, may prefer more sophisticated wording (Earnshaw adopts the Latin "Hic Nomen pono | Quia Librum perdere nolo"—"I put this name down because I do not wish to lose the book"), but the impulse is the same. Holbrook Jackson documents traditional anathemas already in use as early as the twelfth century.[7]

Possession established, owners often begin the process of customizing their books by introducing in the preliminary blank spaces the sort of material that they might have encountered in the apparatus of textbooks. At the most mundane level, the owner of a composite volume containing several short items—plays, poems, sermons, or tracts—may provide a manuscript Table of Contents. (The list of readings shown in figure 2 provides that sort of guide.) The British Library contains many books annotated by John Mitford, who was a clergyman, a classical scholar, editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine* from 1834 to 1850, and a lover of English literature. Mitford was systematic. He marked text in his books sparingly, but at the front he always carefully wrote in his name and the date of acquisition, and then filled the opening pages with pasted-in clippings from booksellers' catalogues or extracts from periodicals; bibliographical notes in his own neat, small hand, in ink; and passages about the book or the author, copied out from other books. In his Rabelais, for example, he noted in 1812, "'Garagantuas is decisively Francis I and Henry II is Pantagruel, and Charles V, Picrocole. Rabelais imitated in many passages, the Literae Virorum Obscurorum.' Warton's Pope V. iv. p. 273. and see the Preface p. xxxvi."

Not scholars or ex-scholars only, but readers of all sorts similarly collected, in the front of their books, materials from other books that could be used as aids and reinforcements for the reading of the book at hand. Notes of this kind are not original, but they indicate by the principles of selection and by the trouble taken to preserve them the frame of mind that the reader considered appropriate in the approach to the work. John Keats's friend Richard Woodhouse used some of the front pages of a copy of Keats's *Poems* (1817) that is now at the Huntington Library for a collection of quotations, some from Keats and some from other authors,

of a kind that might be appropriate as epigraphs—"Verses from which the soul would never wean," for instance. His *Endymion* (1818) also begins with short passages quoting Keats himself on the nature of poetry, as well as other authors whose words can be construed as tributes to him, all by way of psychological preparation for the reader—like the old editions of Shakespeare that begin with poetical testimonials; like modern publishers' blurbs. With less piety, an irritated reader of Jonathan Edwards's *Dissertation Concerning Liberty and Necessity* (1797) provides an epigraph from Milton on the title page, right after the author's name: "So spoke the Fiend, and with NECESSITY, / —excused his dev'lish deeds."

Generally more personal are the expressions of opinion that readers put down on the opening pages of their books. These appear to be intended, normally, either to serve as an aid to memory for future reference, or—like their equivalents in print—to make introductions, to act as a mediator between the text and later readers. Francis Hargrave, a lawyer and legal scholar whose collection of annotated books was purchased for the British Museum in 1813, patiently explains the bibliographical status of his 1614 edition of John Selden's *Titles of Honour* on a front flyleaf, and gives his reasons for keeping this copy:

> In 1631 Mr. Selden published a folio volume with the same title; & stiled it in the title page a second edition. It is divided into two parts, as this first edition is. But the first edition is scarce a third of the second in point of quantity; & the latter is in great measure a newly written work. Yet this edition has its use. It contains the author's first thoughts. Some matter here, though of importance, is omitted in the second edition; & an instance of this may be found in the author's account of the beginning of feuds in chap. 8. of 2d. part in this edition. Besides this edition has the advantage of various indexes none of which are in the second. The dedication & preface to this edition are different from those in the other. F. H. 28. Aug. 1803.

Hargrave's note combines scholarship and personal judgment in a way that is typical of conscientious readers before and since—though



the proportions vary. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle endorses many of the volumes in his collection of books about spiritualism and parapsychological experience with a signed note on the title page: of L. Margery Bazett's *After-Death Communications* (1918), for example, he says, "A very useful little book with many good cases entirely beyond Criticism." When you open the American poet Witter Bynner's copy of Dante's lyric sequence *The New Life* you find an original poem, "Perhaps they laughed at Dante in his youth," which he must have written after reading the book, but which he chose to put at the front. It is a sensitive, striking, and strikingly appropriate response to the text. If he gave even a moment's thought to the location of the note, he would have said to himself that the front of the book was where such a response belonged, that's where one would expect to find such a thing; but back of that thinking is a long tradition of prefatory apparatus. The front flyleaves of Coleridge's books also often contain a general assessment, sometimes in the form of a warning. This practice he adopted quite early, for example in a copy of Gerhard Voss's *Poeticarum institutionum, libri tres* (1647): "I have looked thro' this book with some attention, April 21, 1803—, and seldom indeed have I read a more thoroughly worthless one."

In the body of the text, different functions are assigned to different spaces. The top margin, naturally, is for "heads"—in a printed (or for that matter manuscript) book, the section or chapter title that tells you where you are, or, more narrowly, the subject heading that summarizes the content of the page. Readers as a rule put their own heads at the outer edges of the page, top right on the recto, top left on the verso. In books printed since 1700, the bottom margin, the foot of the page, is commonly reserved for footnotes. Readers occasionally mimic the conventions of print by putting footnote cues in the text that are keyed to their own notes below—Alexander Pope's copy of Boileau is a case in point. This practice, however, appears not to be common. Some readers put their subject heads at the foot of the page—as long as it's always in the same part of the page so that you don't have to scan the whole page at every turning, it does not make much difference whether it's top or bottom—but most of them use the bottom margin simply for overflow from the sides. When the side margins are narrow, readers have to use what space

they can find elsewhere, not only the bottoms of pages but also the odd bits of lines left blank at the ends and beginnings of paragraphs. The one thing they hardly ever do is trespass into the text itself to write heads or commentary between the lines: that space is reserved for a special kind of reader's aid, the interlinear gloss or word by word translation of the kind I mentioned earlier in my account of schoolbooks. (If there is no room for words between the lines, however, readers' aids will spill out into the margin.)

The side margins, then, are universally, in English-language books, the favored place for the reader's running commentary on the text. Because most of the rest of this study will have to do with notes of this kind and from these spaces, I offer only brief samples here.

Readers' marginal comments range from hasty marks to extended essays. The most basic marks are signs of attention, a line across the margin or running vertically down it, or underlining of the text itself.[8] These are often coupled with a fist or an asterisk, or one of the conventional symbols indicating approval or disapproval: the check, exclamation mark, cross, or question mark. Multiples are used to heighten the effect, five exclamation marks expressing perhaps the maximum of astonishment. Like other systems of notation this one is tried and true, easy to use, readily understood, but crude and unrefined. Now and again, for private purposes or for greater discrimination in communication, readers experiment with systems of their own. When Coleridge was invited to comment on William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* in 1818, he tried introducing a ranking system: "N.B. I signifies, It gave me pleasure. I̱, still greater—I̱I̱, and greater still. ⊖, in the highest degree, o, in the lowest."[9] We do not know whether he used these marks on the work itself; we rather hope not.

The fate of that copy of *Innocence and Experience* is not recorded, but a large part of the manuscript of William Godwin's play *Abbas*, with Coleridge's commentary dating from 1801, has recently come to light, and there also he adopted a set of symbols for common problems, "false or intolerable English," "*flat* or mean," "common-place *book* Language," and "bad metre."[10] He did the same for a copy of *Joan of Arc* that he annotated in 1814. *Joan* is an epic poem, revolutionary in its politics, that had been jointly written by Coleridge and his brother-in-law Robert Southey and published in 1796. Nearly twenty years later, with a history of difficult family relations between them, Coleridge devised and used a shorthand system to criticize Southey's part of the poem:

*S.E.* means *Southey's English*, i.e. no English at all.
N. means Nonsense.
J. means discordant *Jingle* of sound—one word rhyming or half-rhyming to another proving either utter want of ears, or else very long ones.
L.M. = ludicrous metaphor.
I.M. = incongruous metaphor.
S. = pseudo-poetic Slang, generally, too, not English.[11]

In this case the very terms of the system, application aside, convey the settled hostility of the annotator: in contrast to the Blake one, there is no room here for commendation. But schemes like these are devised for particular occasions and seem not to last. Every time you invent a custom-made system, you have to explain it somewhere, so that it is liable to be more trouble than it's worth. There may be annotators with private codes that they used over and over again, but I have not come across them.

The next step up is the brief word or phrase. It offers more scope and more precision than the standard marks, though it takes a little longer to write. The "don't agree" and "good idea" of the student annotator of Fletcher described in the Introduction belong to this category, which is, however, capable of greater nuance. John Ruskin's copy of Philip Nichols's *Sir Francis Drake Revived* (1626) illustrates the potential range of such brief jottings: within a few pages, he writes, "very obscure" (p. 27), "Fleche?" (p. 28, against the line, "a Fletcher to keepe our Bowes and Arrowes in order"), "Where?" (p. 33, "*Diego* the Negroe aforesaid"), "don't understand at all" (p. 41), and "Panama—first mention?" (p. 52). These few notes fluctuate between resistance and engagement as they register Ruskin's reactions: some passages he finds difficult, and is inclined to blame the author; but others lead him to make connections

and note small discoveries—the origin of the word "fletcher" in the French word for an arrow, and possibly the first reference to Panama in an English publication. Running notes like these are perhaps on balance more likely to be negative than positive. An author and an annotator himself, Thackeray was ruefully aware of the reader's capacity for negative criticism. He tries to anticipate and defuse it when he imagines the reaction to the scene in which Amelia leaves her boarding school, at the beginning of *Vanity Fair:* "All which details, I have no doubt, Jones, who reads this book at his Club, will pronounce to be excessively foolish, trivial, twaddling, and ultra-sentimental. Yes; I can see Jones at this minute (rather flushed with his joint of mutton and half-pint of wine), taking out his pencil and scoring under the words 'foolish, twaddling,' &c., and adding to them his own remark of '*quite true.*'"[12] For readers like Jones, marginalizing with single words or brief phrases is a careless habit; for readers like Ruskin, it appears to be an intellectual discipline that keeps them alert.

There is an obvious correlation between the level of interest and absorption in the reader and the length of the reader's notes. Some particularly intense readers respond sentence by sentence and even point by point, especially when they disagree with the author. In 1783, Richard Watson, the Bishop of Llandaff, published *A Letter to His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury* as part of an unsuccessful campaign to have the revenues of the Church of England redistributed. At least one copy fell into the hands of a member of the clergy who was opposed to any such change, and who makes his views quite clear in his marginal notes. (Sometimes books are annotated this way as preparation for a published response, but that does not appear to have been the case here.) His use of the space in the volume is quite revealing. The first eleven pages of this nice quarto volume with generous margins are neatly filled with a torrent of invective; then it stops. The reader appears to have gone on reading, however, for there is one more isolated note, a note to a footnote on the very last page (p. 54). His opinion is summed up not at the back but, according to custom, at the front of the book, on the half-title, where he completes the publisher's line "A Letter to His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury" with a subtitle that introduces his own contribution as



though he had been the editor of the volume: "with critical Notes & Observations to elucidate, explain, & clear ye Obscurity false Reasoning not to say palpable gross Lies which this impudent Son of the Church has wrote & published to ye World supposing them to be blind & could not see, ignorant & knew not, & ye worst of Slaves to submit ye Understandings which ye Great GOD ye Fountain of all Knowledge has given them to use for his Glory (to submit I say their Understandings) to ye Devil, ye Pope, his Conclave or any of his *Apes,* existing in any Kingdom of Utopia."

Within the text, the reader's notes present themselves directly opposite the printed sentences and in a larger size, in a "struggle for control of position," as Evelyn B. Tribble would say.[13] In order to reproduce in print the in-every-sense adversarial effect of the marginalia in this volume I shall quote all the notes from one page (p. 11), splicing author and annotator, first giving Watson's text and then on a separate line the reader's response. The underlining is by the annotator.

> I am far from saying or thinking, that the Bishops of the present age <u>are more obsequious in their attention to Ministers than their Predecessors have been,</u>
>
> Sing tantararara Bow All!
>
> or that the Spiritual Lords are the only Lords who are liable to this suspicion, or that Lords in general, are the only persons on whom expectation has an influence;
>
> What Business have You with any Lords besides Lords Bishops?
>
> but the suspicion, whether well or ill founded, is disreputable to our Order;
>
> Dont your Practice countenance support & declare to all ye World yt [that] it is so?

> and, what is of worse consequence, it hinders us from doing that good which we otherwise might do; for the Laity, whilst they entertain such a suspicion concerning us, will accuse us of Avarice and Ambition,

> Fie! dont accuse ye Laity by laying ye Faût of Suspicion on them for you have confest it concerning yr Brethren!

> of making a gain of Godliness, of bartering the dignity of our Office for the chance of a translation, in one word of—Secularity—; and against that accusation they are very backward in allowing the Bishops or the Clergy in general, such kind of defence as they would readily allow to any other class of Men, any other denomination of Christians,

> ye other Classes of Men & any other Denominations of Xristians should have been out of ye Question as they are not our Lords Bishops

> under the similar circumstances, of large families and small fortunes.

The annotator who can put this amount of energy into the disruption of a single sentence is a formidable opponent, at least on the page. Still it is worth emphasizing that he accepts the physical limitations of the margin and the page, and that he attempts to work within the existing conventions of book format, writing subtitles and side-notes—the equivalent of the printed marginal glosses that had been the norm a century before, and that continued to appear long after the introduction of the footnote—and not just blowing off steam in random abuse of the author.

The legend that everyone knows about writing in the margins of books is the story of the French mathematician Pierre de Fermat who declared, in a note written about 1637 and published posthumously in 1670, that he had a proof for an important problem, but that the margin was too small to contain it. This tantalizing statement occupied mathematicians for centuries after.[14] It is not clear that it was seriously and not just teasingly meant. Had Fermat been in earnest, however, and had he had his wits about him, the solution to the logistical problem should not have been hard to find; the mistake lay in tamely accepting, like Watson's otherwise rough reader, the constraints of the page. Had he been less inhibited, more imaginative, or more strongly impelled to persist, he would simply have turned the page and continued on the next page and the next until he had laid out his proof. There are also other ways of resolving the problem. Sometimes readers start a long note at the relevant point in the text and continue it at the foot of the page or, with a cue such as "turn to," on a later page with more blank space, or on a flyleaf. One of the Shipleys coped with the extremely narrow margins of a cheap trade paperback by turning the book ninety degrees and writing along the margin instead of across it, as we have seen Samuel Maude do.[15] This trick gives you a long run in the side margins where you might otherwise have to break words frequently; but your note no longer looks anything like a printed gloss.

Another option, one that was until recently quite readily available, is interleaving. For as long as binderies were plentiful, and especially during the period when books were issued in boards or paper covers so that you could have them bound to your own specifications—up till roughly the middle of the nineteenth century—it was relatively easy to order a book bound with a blank leaf (or, less commonly, two blank leaves) following every printed leaf, so that for every page of text there was a blank page facing to accommodate the reader's notes. In some cases publishers anticipated demand and offered books in an interleaved format, or with extra blank pages at the back of the book. In 1787, for example, the publishers of a guidebook entitled *A Supplement to the Tour of Great-Britain, Containing a Catalogue of the Antiquities, Plantations, Scenes, and Situations, in England and Wales . . . by the Late Mr. Gray* solicited readers' corrections and improvements by adding a set of pages with printed headings (for example, "Bedfordshire"; "Antiquities"; "Scenes and Situations") at the end. The work itself had been based, as the title indicates, on Gray's *Catalogue*, which in turn was based on Gray's interleaved annotated copy of Thomas Kitchin's *New Geographical Description of England and Wales*. So strategic interleaving contributed to the advancement of knowledge and the book trade.

There is something premeditated about this convenient arrangement, however, that is at odds with the spirit of impulsive marginalizing, and I have found few examples in which interleaved pages are not used for work-related purposes such as authorial revision, editing, or lecturing. Richard Woodhouse's two Keats books, mentioned earlier for their front matter, may be among the exceptions to this general rule. Both were interleaved to take Woodhouse's notes, and it is instructive to discover what that ideally sympathetic contemporary reader thought that he or others might want to know about Keats's verse. He supplies some variant readings based on the collation of manuscripts; offers relevant biographical details; provides definitions for unusual words like "ouzel," but also for colloquialisms like "peer about"; and quotes literary sources or parallels. It is not clear whether he was actually contemplating an edition or whether, as seems more likely, these volumes were simply part of the collection of papers and scrapbooks that he assembled as a custodian of Keats's reputation. In any case, Woodhouse contracted tuberculosis and died in 1834 without having published his commentary. Nor is it by any means systematic or complete. The interleaved pages are far from full. In fact it is my impression that interleaved volumes often go this way: annotators begin enthusiastically, but after a while the prospect becomes discouraging—all those blank leaves still to fill—and unless the book is very important to them, or the task quite imperative, they give up.

Interleaving seems to have been routine for students, especially in the professions. Interleaved textbooks and lecture outlines or syllabi are a potentially valuable resource for the history of science, medicine, or law, or for the history of education in those subjects, for they make it possible to compare a published statement with the actual content of the lecture series. William Wollaston's *Plan of a Course of Chemical Lectures* (1794), for example, announces the subject of "The bulk and specific gravity of a mixture of sulphuric acid with water" (p. 9), but the student's note on the facing interleaf reads, "a flask filld with water ½ pourd out the same quantity of Sul[phuri]c acid pourd into the flask does not fill it"; thus we find out by what demonstration Wollaston proved his point.

Outside the lecture halls, readers also made up study guides for themselves. The genteel vogue for botanizing that began in the eighteenth century must have generated many fascinating cases like the British Library's interleaved copy of Samuel Saunders's *Short and Easy Introduction to Scientific and Philosophic Botany* (1792)—one of many presentations of Linnaean botany in the period—interleaved to take the notes of a contemporary reader, almost certainly a woman. The text itself is only lightly marked, with a little underlining and a few notes. Most of the annotation is on the interleaved pages. Given the two folding plates bound in at the back, consisting of watercolor illustrations with manuscript text, the volume technically counts as extra-illustrated, but the notes are the reader's more important contribution. (The subject of extra-illustration will be discussed at length in Chapter Six.) The notes add information and explanations; they appear not to have been copied from other books, but to be the annotator's own words. They offer a mixture of contemporary science and popular plant lore. On the leaf facing page 73, where the class "Polyandria (*many males*)" is introduced, the annotator observes,

> The plants belonging to this class are usually of a poisonous nature. When the nectarium or honey cup is distinct from the petals or flower leaves the plant is always poisonous.

At the more basic level, when the author writes generally of leaves as "the most useful and ornamental parts of plants" (p. 17), the notes provide a glimpse of contemporary housekeeping as well as of the mindset of the amateur botanist:

> A branch of a tree may be kept alive for some time, provided two or three of its leaves are suffer'd to be under water. Hence if you wish to preserve flowers for ornament you should never strip the stem of its leaves.
>
> Plants should never be water'd but in the Evening. If the water be not of the cleanest, so much the better.
>
> The upper surface of a leaf is always darker than the under in consequence of the action of light upon it.

Interleaving is a practical solution to the physical constraint of margins. For a methodical owner like this one, it provides an opportunity to turn a single volume into a tailor-made compendium. Reference books are often interleaved.

For readers who do not have the means, or the forethought, to interleave their books especially to take their marginal notes, accidental spaces within the text are naturally a blessing. These too have their conventional uses. The space at the start of a new chapter or section invites the annotator to summarize the contents; the space at the end, to express a general view of the section, as opposed to responses to specific statements. In Chapter 5 of his *Biographical Sketch of the Life of William B. Ide* (1880), Simeon Ide tells the story of the capture of the garrison of Sonoma, and of the following month in 1846 when California became a republic under the Bear Flag. His narrative relies heavily on quotations from a letter by W. M. Boggs, who had known several of the participants. Boggs's own copy uses the margins to reinforce the witness of the letter with such assertions as, "I have heard more than a dozen of the Bear Party relate these facts" (p. 54). He uses the space at the end of the chapter for a solemn testimonial: "I wrote the foregoing pages for Mr. Simeon Ide Author of this Book and I vouch for the Truthfulness of his Narrative of his Brother W. B. Ides History in California in 1846–7. Wdl Boggs | Napa | March 11th 1883." Boggs's situation is unusual, no doubt, but his instinct about where properly to place his notes is in conformity with common usage.

If the last page of a chapter is the right location for general remarks about the chapter, the last page of a book, especially when it declares "Finis" or "The End," might seem to be the obvious spot for an assessment of the work as a whole. Readers do sometimes make use of the space for that purpose; and in that case, if there is no room on the page itself, they will turn to the verso or to the facing flyleaf—the nearest possible blank space—instead. A typical example is Johnson's friend Hester Lynch Piozzi (known to him as Mrs. Thrale), who loyally wrote, following "The End" of a copy of his philosophical tale *Rasselas*, "—of a Book unrivalled in Excellence of Intention, in Elegance of Diction; in minute Knowlege of human Life—& Sublime Expression of Oriental



Imagery" (p. 184). There's also Leigh Hunt's response to the coda of his copy of the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, "depart, therefore, contented, and in good humour; for, he is propitious and kind, who dismisses you." Hunt courteously adds, "Thanks, and love to you, excellent Antoninus. L. H. Feb. 7th. 1853. His second regular perusal."

The practice of writing at the end in this way had been recommended by Michel de Montaigne in an influential essay on books. He engagingly admits that he adopted it after finding that he often picked up a book as new to him, only to find the margins full of his own notes. By writing a summary note at the back of the book when the experience was still fresh in his mind, he could spare himself the trouble of rereading.[16] But it is much more common for the general assessment to appear where we have already seen it, with the front matter. That prominent position makes it more likely to be useful as a guide to future reading, whether by the original annotator or not. And besides, the back flyleaves and paste-down of a book are usually reserved for another purpose—the reader's index.

Like the published index, the reader's manuscript index by tradition appears at the back of the book. (I had a chemistry teacher once whose favorite dictum was, "All chemicals are white except the ones that aren't." What he meant was that this held for the overwhelming majority and that if we had to guess, say on the final examination, we should guess white. The same logic holds true for the manuscript index. I do know of one book, an early edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, where the index appears at the front, but any reader would be surprised to find it there. Of course, it is quite a bit more likely that a reader's index will be at the front than that the published one will.)

"Index" is a rather grand term, usually, for what I am describing—the list of subject headings with corresponding page numbers that the reader scribbles on the back endpapers. In its humblest form, it consists of page numbers only. A list of page numbers is the quickest and simplest form of reference because it entails minimal interruption of the reading process, but it is the least efficient in the long run because when you consult it later you have to page through the book to find out which number, if any, will enable you to locate the passage you are seeking. The conventional practice is for readers to write down, as they come

upon them (therefore normally in page order from beginning to end and not in the alphabetical order of the published index), the page reference and a word or two to indicate the subject of the passage noted. To an observant, informed, and dedicated later reader, these simple memoranda can be quite revealing. The total number of notes may be an indication of the degree of the earlier reader's interest. The order of page references may reflect the order of reading—was the book read through, or dipped into?—and the number of readings. The selection of topics gives an impression of the kind of thing the reader was looking for, or arrested by. If you know enough about the annotator, you may be able to tell whether the list was made for private or for professional purposes—for example, as a set of materials to be used in an anthology, a review, or a memoir. Some readers group topics in separate areas on the endpapers rather than making a single list; anything with more system to it than a list is evidence of habits of mind strong enough to override conventional usage. The subject headings are usually very basic and the path of least resistance is to use the words of the original author; annotators who put things in their own words are unusual and noteworthy.

The flamboyant and eccentric William Beckford (1759–1844) adapted the conventional reader's index in a quite distinctive way. I shall be returning to him again later, but a few examples from among his books at this point will serve to establish his customary practice and to illustrate the value of the reader's index and its customary placement.

Beckford was born to great wealth, and was educated privately. From 1777 until 1792 he spent a great deal of time abroad, mostly in Paris and Switzerland. As a very young man, he tossed off the decadently erotic "Oriental" tale *Vathek*, which he wrote and eventually published in French; an unauthorized English translation appeared in 1784. In 1796, he settled down on the family estate at Fonthill and embarked on a ruinous program of building and collecting. He was obliged to sell Fonthill in 1822, but he took many books and the best of his pictures with him into retirement. A major sale of books took place in 1882–83; there had been lesser sales earlier, in 1804, 1808, 1817, and 1823.[17]

Beckford was a well-known collector and a well-known annotator, so purchasers tended to record the provenance of books from his library,



and there are hundreds and hundreds of them still extant. They are—uniformly, in my experience—remarkably beautiful: Beckford employed excellent binders. It may have been partly out of fastidiousness that he developed his personal method of annotation, which preserves the pages of the text unmarked and keeps the notes confined to the flyleaves. He seems generally to have annotated a book as soon as he got it, before it was bound; the binder took care to preserve the notes from cropping by folding in the relevant pages. (Other binders, less elegantly, would slit the page above and below a note and fold in just the flap containing it.) Beckford ordinarily used pencil. He started his note-taking at the front of the book but would continue to the back if he ran out of space. His handwriting is small, fine, and clear. The notes are presented in an orderly way, with a page number at the left followed by an indented block of words. To this extent, Beckford conforms to the standard method of "indexing," though his list comes at the beginning rather than at the end of the book. His innovation is in the length of the entries. Some are, in the ordinary way, brief subject headings. Most, however, are several lines long, for they typically consist of actual extracts from the text. These are by no means neutral or impersonal. The selection itself implies judgment—Beckford chooses passages that he likes or dislikes. Furthermore, he tends to edit and paraphrase as he goes, changing the original to emphasize the qualities that appealed to him in it. Now and again he expresses an opinion of his own.

Richard Garnett, in the entry on Beckford for the British *Dictionary of National Biography*, where he concludes that Beckford's was, "on the whole, a wasted life," describes the library as follows: "A large proportion of the volumes contained copious notes in his handwriting, more frequently evincing whimsical prejudice than discriminating criticism." Without knowing what volumes Garnett had access to, it is not easy to challenge this harsh judgment. Beckford's overtly critical notes are forcefully expressed; they do not affect the balanced air of "discriminating criticism." Of the poet laureate Robert Southey's little volume of ballads, *All for Love; and The Pilgrim to Compostella* (1829), for instance, he remarks, "All for pelf rather than all for Love in this breathing world—Nothing but the desire of adding to his stock of pence, and the

laudable view of presenting his little friends, sweet listening dears,—with comfits & sugar-plumbs, could have induced the Laureate to put forth such a doodlesome publication." But hardly any of Beckford's notes *are* explicitly critical. For the most part, they consist of quotations or a blend of quotation and précis. (The intent must have been to enable Beckford, when he took the book off his shelf later on, to recapture the experience of the first reading. The index is a retrieval device.)

Garnett's irritated statement might perhaps be defended, however, by a careful study of the patterns of selection. Beckford was struck by salacious details and by ludicrous, especially pompous, phrasing; his selection and light editing of passages from the books he read testify to his love of the ridiculous and to his mocking, irreverent spirit. To take a very modest example, his copy of a collection of biographies of central figures in the French Revolution, Stewarton's *Revolutionary Plutarch* (1806), has notes in only the first of three volumes, and they refer to fewer than a hundred pages of text. Beckford's notes fill half a page, as follows:

179 Murdering en masse at Toulon by Brutus Buonaparte Citizen Sans-culotte

183 Barras & his entourage

260 Angereau for one night put 16 young Nuns into requisition for himself & his staff—

261 delightful Fète given by this gallant general in the principal Church of Bologna . . . described in a work printed at Verona 1799 called les Crimes des Republicains en Italie—

The first and second entries are taken verbatim from the text, the first from a footnote—so Beckford was reading attentively. The third is presented by the author as a particularly abhorrent act, but Beckford appears to have enjoyed the incongruity of the military term "requisition" in this context, and perhaps the sadistic titillation of the report. In the fourth entry, Beckford draws on the wording of the text but ironizes it, "delightful Fète" and "gallant" being phrasing of his own for what Stewarton had described as "inhuman and sacrilegious abominations."



It is understandable that a reader like Garnett should have objected to the frivolity of the annotator's attitude. Though Beckford is not making a direct critical comment, criticism is implicit in his selection and modification of quotations.

An amusing and instructive copy of another book with Beckford's notes is Robert Southey's poem *A Vision of Judgement* (1821) now at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. In this work, Southey used his position as poet laureate to make a ferocious attack on Lord Byron and "the Satanic School" of poetry. Byron successfully counterattacked with a parody, *The Vision of Judgement*, in 1822, so that Southey's poem is now known only as the occasion of Byron's. The Morgan copy once belonged to Byron. It contains a transcription, in ink, not necessarily made in Byron's lifetime, of Beckford's satirical but defensive annotations to the work. This transcription is significant for two reasons. In the first place, it indicates that the notes had a wider circulation than Beckford's own copy—that is, that they were valued enough to be duplicated in manuscript. (George Whalley, the founding editor of the Coleridge marginalia, coined the phrase "ms facsimile" for this phenomenon, which is a boon to an editor if it preserves the annotations after the original has been lost, but a trial when it leads, as it sometimes does, to mistaken attributions.) But the second unusual feature of this copy is that the transcription is not in fact an exact facsimile, for the notes have been copied onto the relevant pages of the text rather than being kept to the flyleaves. In a few cases, when Beckford's note is a direct critical remark, this procedure may work; but when—as is more often the case—his note is simply an echo of the text, it doesn't. "Firm in his Father's steps hath the Regent trod, was the answer" does not provide much illumination for "Right in his Father's steps hath the Regent trod, was the answer: / Firm hath he prov'd and wise" in the text. These are properly "index" notes. They don't belong in the margins.

A tour of the annotated book from front to back, whether we consider conventional use or idiosyncratic variations, reveals that our customs and expectations, constant over time, are based on the conventional format of the book itself. In more ways than one, marginalia *mirror* the texts they supplement. Considered from another perspective, the distri-

bution of marginalia also represents a progressive distancing from the text. Both processes are aspects of assimilation: by the first, readers accommodate themselves to the work and identify with it, adopting the author's train of thought and the structure by which it is mediated; by the second, they gradually separate themselves from it. The notes that are in the closest physical proximity to the text are the interlinear glosses that traditionally move word by word, as readers' aids, translating or defining or paraphrasing the original. These are, as we paradoxically say, the same but different: the words have changed, but the meaning is as nearly identical as we can make it. Marks and commentary in the margin of the same page, however, express a distinct position pro or con, or offer supplementary material from an external source, such as literary parallels or additional evidence. The index at the back extracts from the whole text just those passages that the reader might want to refer to again, and the summary judgment at the front or back formulates an opinion that is decidedly the reader's and not the author's. The psychological sequence works not so much from front to back, then, as from the inside out. The process of withdrawal can be traced farther as readers pass from writing in the pages of the book to writing in a notebook or commonplace book, and from articulating views in immediate response to a printed text, to reformulating and reorganizing those views in their own compositions. And "farther" in this case is not just a metaphor, for as long as the physical link is maintained—while the words of the annotator are on the same page or between the same covers as the words that prompted them—author and reader act visually as checks on one another, but once it is broken that is no longer so. For this reason, marginal notes are particularly well calculated for minute criticism and "close" reading.

Before leaving the subject of typical physical features of marginalia, I'd like very briefly to mention other physical issues that are worth bearing in mind when marginalia are examined. One of the great dividers of kinds is the medium used: are the notes in pencil, or in ink? In one color, or more than one? Are they by one hand only, or by more than one? If there are two annotators, what appears to be the relationship between them—does the later annotator ignore the first, or is she or he drawn to passages the other has marked? If they are by one hand, are they the



product of one reading, or of more than one? Do repeat readers return to their own notes, and comment on them? Are all sections of the book evenly marked? Are the notes dated? Are they signed or initialed? Are they in the same language as the text? Is the annotation roughly contemporary with the text, or not? And in all these cases, *why so?*

The answers to this last question may be not at all obvious. For example, we might assume that a note in ink was intended to be public and permanent, whereas a note in pencil was intended to be private and temporary since it could be easily erased. But readers use pen or pencil for various reasons. Beckford was probably mindful of the beauty of his books, and perhaps of the indiscretion of his notes. Coleridge generally used ink, but he made a point of choosing pencil for a book "lent to me by a friend who had himself borrowed it," and he had to use pencil for some of his German books because the paper was so spongy that ink soaked through it and writing became illegible.[18] The student who marked up Fletcher's *Situation Ethics* probably used a pen because it was there, without thinking about whether she wanted her notes to be with the book forever or not. Sometimes, even into this century, notes that were written in pencil came to be overtraced in ink later. Was it by the same hand or by another? On what occasion? These questions have to be addressed case by case, with as much knowledge of the historical and personal context as we can muster.