Reading in Early Modern England: Contexts and Problems

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The history of reading in early modern England is elusive and teasing – offering glimpses of readers but rarely a detailed view of how they read; posing more questions than answers. In part this is because the history of reading is still a relatively new field of enquiry, and our knowledge of reading practices in the period is slowly accruing piece by piece. In the last two decades especially, the history of books and reading has undergone a transformation: reading practices have increasingly been located in terms of their cultural specificity; particular readers, reading acts, and libraries in early modern England have been brought to light; the material histories of books and the ‘sociology of texts’ have inspired new directions in bibliography, while research into manuscript culture has revealed specific readers and annotators at work.¹ As Robert Darnton suggests, the history of books and reading is not so much a field of study as ‘a tropical rain forest. The explorer can hardly make his way across it’, criss-crossing tracks between academic disciplines and different caches of evidence.² Sources relating to readers, reading acts, and reading practices in early modern England are vast and disparate, scattered across a myriad of genres, fields, and disciplines – from fiction to the documents of social history; from written texts to physical artefacts; from the literary to the non-literary; from print to manuscript. The sheer range and inconclusivity of much of this material demands that we make careful distinctions between sources for a history of reading, and confront the methodological challenges they pose. This special issue on

Reading in Early Modern England stems out of a Shakespeare Association of America seminar in 1999 on the topic.³ In this short essay I do not attempt to provide an introduction to the history of reading in early modern England, but instead to voice issues raised by the seminar in relation to three key areas: women's reading, social differentiation, and textual transmission.

Even given the constraints of literacy, early modern readers are a stunningly heterogeneous group of men and women differentiated by sex and social status, profession, religious and political affiliation, region, and age (as Gabriel Harvey, for instance, remarked in his copy of Speght's *Chaucer*, 'the younger sort take much delight in Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis; but his Lucrece, and his tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke, have it in them to please the wiser sort').⁴ An awareness of reader diversity was axiomatic in the period; 'almost a condition of authorship in the expanding market for print', argues John Kerrigan.⁵ Prefatory addresses to the reader printed in literary texts articulate different models of the reader – gentle, common, professional, recreational, scornful, courteous, careful, indifferent, critical, indulgent, virtuous, perverse – and writers explicitly address the variety of responses which they expect from readers. That diversity is fashioned according to gender with distinctions being made between male and female readers and readerships, and the books and genres that they read. As Mary Ellen Lamb, Margaret Ferguson, and Jacqueline Pearson among others have noted, orthodox patriarchal rhetoric fashioned the woman reader as vulnerable, tempted to the pleasures of the text – a less capable and critical reader than her University-educated male counterparts.⁶ Lyly's *Eupheus and His England* (1580), for example, distinguishes between 'the Ladies and Gentlewomen of England' and 'the Gentlemen Readers': he invites women to sport with his book in their laps while playing with their lapdogs – and in so doing constructs women's reading as merely recreational – but expects men to engage with the text far more astutely, actively, and authoritatively: 'faultes escaped in the Printing, correcte with your pennes'.⁷ By contrast to educated men, women readers were typically identified with a restricted range of texts: works deemed to meet ideological imperatives for feminine

chastity – pious and theological volumes, conduct literature and instruction manuals – and the more risqué matter of romances, love poetry, and ‘light’ fiction, often trivialised as recreational and indulgent or sensationalised as dangerous to sexual honour when they were read by women.⁸

Yet within this broader picture the traces of women reading and women readers tell a much more complex and interesting story. On the one hand, examples can be found of women’s reading conforming to, or women feeling constrained by, orthodox expectations. Many women’s libraries are more restricted in scope than those belonging to men. Lady More’s collection of books in her closet at Loseley Hall in 1556 is a case in point: while her husband, Sir William More, housed in his closet an extensive personal library of books in English, French, Italian and Latin, Lady More’s collection ran to only five volumes: ‘a boke de partu mulieris’ and four prayer books.⁹ Lady Anne Merricke’s complaint in 1638 that ‘I must content my selfe here with the studie of Shackspeare, and the historie of woemen, all my countrie librarie’, bears witness to the limited library of even a well-to-do country gentlewoman, and points more widely to women’s lack of economic independence in the literary marketplace by comparison with men.¹⁰ Turning to women’s reading practices, Heidi Brayman Hackel has observed that volumes belonging to women were much less frequently annotated than volumes belonging to men, perhaps as a consequence of the trivialisation of women’s secular reading; in addition women, unlike men, were not formally trained in humanist reading practices of commentary, analysis, and annotation.¹¹ Active reading, however, does not necessitate a written record, so we should not assume from the infrequency of marginalia by women that women necessarily read less intensively than men.

On the other hand, there are numerous examples that complicate the restrictive, proscriptive account of women’s reading promulgated in conduct literature. Research into women as readers has revealed how women played an active role in local literary cultures and negotiated ideological constraints in their reading.¹² The books that women read ranged far beyond the genres typically associated with them. Some women’s libraries are surprisingly extensive,

thanks in part to the practice of borrowing, donating, and inheriting books. Consider the contrasting libraries of Frances Wolfreston (1607–77) and Lady Anne Southwell (1573–1636) in the mid-seventeenth century. Wolfreston's library, which she assembled at her marital home of Statfold Hall, Staffordshire, extended to over 100 volumes.¹³ Nearly half of these were literary texts (including plays by Fletcher, Heywood, Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Shirley, and poems by Donne, Drayton, and Wither); a quarter of her library comprised of theological volumes, and the remainder was made up of volumes on history, current affairs, medicine, advice literature, chapbooks, and a handful of Latin and French works. Lady Anne Southwell's library, however, contained only a handful of literary texts (including 'Orlando Furioso in folio', 'Spensers Fayrie Queene in folio', 'Dr Donnes Poems in Quarto', and 'The Swagging Damsell a Comedie in quarto') and was instead dominated by non-fiction: theological treatises and meditations, travel narratives, tracts on current affairs, reference books, classical texts and, intriguingly, conduct books for men and treatises on military strategy (such as 'The Souldiers Grammer').¹⁴ The contrasting libraries of these two women are a pertinent reminder that we should not underestimate the differences between women's reading interests and conditions, or treat women readers as a single, undifferentiated group. In addition, the ways in which women read are often a far cry from the trope of the passive, recreational woman reader; like women's writing, women's reading may be challenging and oppositional, active and appropriative, or transformational. Ramona Wray's essay in this volume, for instance, examines how Mary Rich appropriates and transforms her reading matter, using the tropes of romance to frame her own autobiography and in so doing adopt the role of a strong heroine for herself.

One overlooked yet crucial arena of women's oppositional and transformational reading is that of religion. It is not enough to characterise women's reading of religious texts as conventionally pious and conformist: the complexities of religious change, sectarianism, and conflict in the early modern period require a much more nuanced approach, sensitive to the ways in which women and men contested religious works and authority, and to the importance of

religion in the construction of subjectivity. Consider the case of Catholic women readers in the period: as Frances E. Dolan has suggested, their reading of stories of Catholic saints' lives was in many respects oppositional, anti-national.¹⁵ Nor should we lose sight of the varieties of Protestantism. Mary Ellen Lamb has demonstrated how Margaret Hoby – often cited as a model of the conventionally pious woman reader – was far more searching in her reading practices than has sometimes been presumed. Hoby's reading not only allowed her to command a position of authority within her household and local community; she maintained an 'intensely intellectual' reading relationship with her chaplain Richard Rhodes, questioning, for instance, the Church of England's official position on predestination in the 1590s.¹⁶ Hoby's diary is also an instructive reminder of the variety of reading practices in the period beyond the solitary, silent practice of reading that we are so familiar with today.¹⁷ Reading in early modern England was often *relational* in nature; that is conducted in the context of personal relationships which sometimes crossed lines of gender, generation, and even social status. For instance, the Shakespeare Ladies Club operating in the early eighteenth century and studied by Katherine West-Scheil in this volume, brought together a network of women readers from diverse social backgrounds: 'it bonded both aristocratic and working women'.¹⁸ While the differences between men's and women's reading are rightly stressed, we should not lose sight of the points of connection between male and female readers – as companionate readers, exchanging texts, accessing personal libraries, purchasing books. Even so, the historical record of women's reading remains frustrating in its silences: Hoby's diary is extremely rare in providing a sustained account of how one woman read her books; more often than not it is impossible to pursue the detail of either women's or men's reading acts, let alone how a book or library may have formed or transformed a woman's life.

Gaps and absences also puncture the historical record of 'common' readers in the period. Shaped by the vagaries of creation and survival, written documents concerning reading and readers, book ownership and distribution, are inevitably – though not entirely –

skewed towards the elite. How then do we move beyond the elite in our analysis of early modern reading? One approach might be to turn to the production and consumption of cheap, printed matter, since there was a diverse and expanding range of ephemeral literature available in the seventeenth century for the price of a few pennies.¹⁹ As Naomi Liebler shows in her study of the extensive output of Richard Johnson, authors and stationers alike constructed and cultivated middle-class, citizen, and artisan readerships, and while levels of literacy in the period remain contested by historians, it seems clear that by the late-sixteenth century ‘popular’ readerships were significant enough to be capitalised upon by agents in the book trade.²⁰ Nor is it imperative to restrict the study of ‘common’ readers to commercial print culture: legal records, for instance, record libellous verses invented, written down by hand, and read aloud in local communities.²¹ It is not simply the historical record that has held back research into ‘popular’ readerships: much of the material directed at a non-gentry (if aspirational) readership – including how-to manuals, ballads, almanacs, pamphlets, and prose fiction – remains non-canonical in the field of Renaissance English Literature and their authors often pigeonholed as second-rate. With more research into the less well-trodden paths of English writing and publication, we may begin to build a more detailed picture of socially diverse readerships. At the same time, it is important to recognise that price, genre, and format are not consistent markers of class (or gender for that matter), and that books crossed social groupings and generations. As T. A. Birrell argues, seventeenth-century ‘reading habits [were] not stratified into peasant, bourgeois and gentry – gentry reading tastes were inclusive, and included the tastes of the peasants and the bourgeois’.²² In short, we need to *complicate* the categories of ‘popular’ and ‘elite’ literature and readerships. ‘Elite’, like the expression ‘popular’, functions as an umbrella-term: far from being monolithic, there are many distinctions to be drawn within the elite not least on social, political, religious, and regional grounds.

Regional difference has been underplayed as a form of social differentiation in early modern England – at least within the discipline of English Literature it has become all too tempting to assume

a notional metropolitan literary culture for early modern England. While London (and even more specifically, St. Paul's Churchyard) was at the centre of the early modern English book trade, there were many thousands of readers who obtained their reading from other sources: provincial stationers and booksellers, travelling chapmen, friends and family. Frances Wolfreston, for instance, might have acquired her books while visiting London, but she could equally have bought them from booksellers nearby, such as John Brooke in Coventry or Thomas Simmons in Birmingham.²³ Lorna Weatherill's research into women's consumer behaviour in England 1675–1725 is instructive in this context: she shows that women's ownership of books varied considerably between London, Kent, Cambridgeshire, Staffordshire, Durham, Cumbria and South Lancashire, revealing different attitudes towards women's education in the South East and Northern regions of England.²⁴ Although records do not always allow us to locate readers and reading acts, or the provenance of books, we should, nonetheless, remain alert to the possibilities and varieties of regional and local difference – even at the level of the household.

As Roger Chartier has argued, 'readers, in fact, never confront abstract, idealized texts detached from any materiality. They hold in their hands or perceive objects and forms whose structures and modalities govern their reading or hearing, and consequently the possible comprehension of the text read or heard'.²⁵ Even the size of a volume could shape how it was read and used: a Folio edition was expensive and prestigious, awkward to handle on account of its size and weight and typically the preserve of reference works; quarto publication, the format most often used for English drama and poetry, was far more ephemeral, while octavos had the advantage of being easily bound and portable.²⁶ In turn, the textual apparatus and presentation of early modern books shaped the reading process: marginal glosses, titles and title-pages, and prefatory material construct pathways for the reader to approach the text. The printed marginal glosses to the 1616 edition of Shakespeare's *Lucrece*, for instance, make clear the proper interpretation of the text: to cast not an iota of doubt upon Lucrece's chastity or culpability.²⁷ Ian Frederick Moulton's essay in this volume demonstrates how successive

editions of *The Crafty Whore* gave Aretino's *Dialogues* a prurient, moralising framework (though as is often the case, this prefatory material is also ambivalent in tone). In turn, Moulton's study raises a wider issue: the importance of reprints and reissues for following through histories of reading and signalling (if not conclusively confirming) the popularity of particular works in the period.²⁸ In the context of early modern readers' libraries – made up as they often were of reprints and reissues complete with printer's errors and emendments – an attachment to notions of textual authority enshrined in one authoritative text would seem anachronistic.

How far can we deduce readerships from the prefatory material of a volume? Direct addresses to a specific reader or a generic group of anticipated readers for the volume can function as markers of gender, class, education, and profession. However, prefatory material is also rhetorical: if, on the one hand, addresses to the reader distinguish a type of reader for the volume, on the other hand, they are a marketing device, aiming to maximise a readership. This is blatantly the case in Heminge and Condell's address 'to the great Variety of Readers' in the First Folio of Shakespeare's *Works* (1623): 'read, and censure. Do so, but buy it first ... Iudge your sixe-pen'orth, your shillings worth, your fiue shillings worth at a time, or higher, so you rise to the iust rates, and welcome. But, what euer you do, Buy'.²⁹ Heminge and Condell envisage an inclusive readership, 'from the most able, to him that can but spell' – optimistic perhaps, given the comparatively high price of a Folio edition (about fifteen shillings for an unbound copy).³⁰ Claims for an exclusive, aristocratic, or 'gentle' readership also require caution: their appeal may largely be aspirational, a subtle hook for men and women of lower social standing. In the final analysis readerships defined by prefatory material represent only a general guide on the part of the author or stationer; in practice, we need to remember that books might circulate widely across different social groupings and generations, and so find surprising readers (Lady Anne Southwell's copy of 'The Souldiers Grammer' in the 1630s is perhaps a case in point).

Printed books, of course, are not the whole story: manuscript culture represents a vibrant, extensive, and significant means of

textual transmission in the period, as Harold Love's helpful phrase 'scribal publication' makes clear.³¹ The work of readers in manuscript – especially marginalia annotated in printed books and the compilation of manuscript volumes – is thus vitally important to histories of early modern reading. In very broad terms, marginalia reveals readers actively engaging with the text and sometimes treating it as a 'groundplot' of their own invention: highlighting specific passages, correcting printer's errors, making emendments of their own, providing topical headings for passages for quick reference, cross-referencing passages to other texts, commenting and glossing passages, and adding observations, applications, and creative writing (particularly verse) of their own.³² In the case of prolific annotators like John Dee and Gabriel Harvey much can be learnt about how they manipulated and used books, sifting and sorting the text for specific purposes, as William Sherman, Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton have shown.³³ However, Dee and Harvey are exceptional examples: as Sherman admits, Dee's annotations 'amount to an information-processing system that cannot have been equaled by more than a handful of sixteenth-century readers'.³⁴ Elsewhere marginalia can present intractable problems of interpretation. Nonverbal notations (such as underlines, asterisks, or hands with a finger pointing to specific lines in the text) rarely make explicit why a particular passage was of interest to the reader; topical headings provide only a cursory indication of how a reader might contextualise a passage; emendments are usually unexplained and (like the text itself) require interpretation; marginal commentary on the text, where it exists, is partial – extremely unlikely to represent all of a reader's thinking on a text. In addition, annotators often remain anonymous in volumes whose provenance is unknown: they may tell us something of reading acts, but not much about specific readers.

Similarly, manuscript volumes both provide clues about how texts were used and pose problems of interpretation that cannot be conclusively resolved. Seventeenth-century verse miscellanies, for instance, reveal the popularity of particular authors for transcription (Donne, for instance, is much more heavily represented than Shakespeare); the practice of readers emending and elaborating

upon the text in hand; the extraction of quotations under specific subject headings or *common places*; and the creativity of readers in composing their own verses.³⁵ Those reading acts, however, cannot always be contextualised: the reasons and processes behind the inclusion and citation of specific texts are rarely made clear; the precise uses and readers of many manuscript volumes are hidden from history; often scribes remain anonymous while named inscriptions cannot always be traced to known men and women, and the provenance of many volumes remains obscure (like printed books, they may have journeyed through several readers). However, despite the interpretive difficulties they present, marginalia and manuscript volumes represent a crucial and unique, if currently under-utilised, source for the history of reading in early modern England, providing us with insight into readers at work. This applies to scribal culture more widely – letters, for instance, provide important clues into reading relations and the vagaries of interpretation, as Eve Sanders shows in her essay in this volume on the dramatisation of letter and book reading in the period.

The limitations of sources for the history of reading are manifold: the historical record is fragmented, fissured with gaps, incomplete. By way of conclusion, I want to briefly focus on three methodological difficulties that confront the history of reading in early modern England: reconstructing acts of interpretation; arguing from the case study to common practices; and tracing patterns of historical change. Perhaps one of the most pressing gaps in the historical record of reading is that between the *consumption* and *interpretation* of books. Even where it may be possible to trace the consumption of books through a variety of sources – such as household records and inventories, or publication histories – these sources rarely reveal specific reading acts: how a book was actually used and interpreted by its readers. Inventories may provide invaluable information about the ownership, storage, and location of books at a specific point in time, but often they do not disclose whether those books were ever read by their owner, accessed by other readers, or moved about the house – let alone how they were interpreted (nor might inventories include texts that a reader might want to keep private from the eye of the inventory-maker or

reader). Practices of interpretation tend to remain the great unknown in histories of early modern reading. All is not lost, however, for even if in many cases we may not be able to recover reading *events* or reading *acts*, we can go some way to reconstructing possible reading *strategies* in the period: the ways in which a text made available, encouraged, or bears witness to particular readings, and the ways in which a reader might have responded to the text.³⁶ In short, we need to risk asking questions and pursuing lines of enquiry even where a conclusive answer may not be forthcoming.

To what extent can the history of early modern reading be more than anecdotal? Given that histories of reading are constituted by the study of particular examples of reading practices, readers, and their books, how do we argue from the case study to larger trends? There are three points I want to make here. Firstly, quantitative analysis can help to reveal patterns across a broad range of material as Weatherill's research into women's consumer culture demonstrates, although the vagaries of samples and statistics also need to be taken into account. Secondly, what the case study offers which quantitative analysis cannot is a detailed picture – a qualitative account – of specific readers, reading acts, and texts. Case studies are the building bricks of cultural history; only through the case study can we begin to reconstruct histories of reading with intimacy and precision. Nor do they exist in isolation. Examination of a range or series of case studies can help to reveal emerging patterns – for instance, verse miscellanies from the 1630s associated with the Universities and Inns of Court often compile similar material and show similar traits.³⁷ Thirdly, we need not shy away from drawing generalisations altogether, providing that we exercise caution in the claims we might want to make about histories of reading.

This final point is relevant to the issue of historical change. Tracing patterns of historical change in the history of reading is difficult beyond very broad generalisations. In the case of women's reading, for instance, women's participation in literary culture, both as readers and writers, became increasingly visible towards the end of the seventeenth century – paving the way for formalised networks of women readers in the eighteenth century, such as the Shakespeare

Ladies Club. In terms of social differentiation, we might point to how print culture – and with it reading – became a highly politicised field of contestation by and during the civil wars. In the case of textual transmission we can observe the emergence of particular forms in particular generations, such as the genre of the ‘collected works’ of English dramatists in the first half of the seventeenth century (aided by the work of enterprising stationers in the 1630s–50s such as Humphrey Moseley). But generalisations of such a broad nature can always be countered by local variety, and require qualification. In addition we should remember that change also takes place at the level of the individual reader: age and the passing of time can have a profound effect upon the books a reader might read and how they interpret them, and their reading might perform different functions at different times.

The gaps and limitations in the history of early modern reading point, perhaps above all, to the need for further research. With further research we may begin to reveal the work of more women readers; uncover the traces of multiple (sometimes conflicting) readerships, reading networks and subcultures, and the relation of reading communities to the formation of political, religious, and ideological debates and groupings; penetrate the reading practices and strategies engendered by texts and performed by readers. A healthy scepticism regarding the limitations of sources should not, then, suffocate the search for more information. The history, or perhaps more suggestively, the *archaeology* of early modern reading is crucial to a more nuanced understanding of literary culture at large: the production of literature is intimately bound up in the reception of literature; texts have meaning only through their readers.³⁸ In short, the diversity and complexity of early modern reading cannot be ignored.

Notes

1. The history of reading and books is a rapidly expanding field of study. For surveys of the history of early modern reading see, for instance, James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor eds, *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Roger Chartier, ‘The Practical Impact of Writing’, in *A History of Private Life*, vol. 3: *Passions of the Renaissance*, ed Roger Chartier, trans. Arthur

Goldhammer (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 1989): 111–59; Roger Chartier ed, *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989); Eugene R. Kintgen, *Reading in Tudor England* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996); H. S. Bennett, *English Books and Readers, 1558–1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); and Heidi Brayman Hackel, “‘The Great Variety of Readers’ and Early Modern Reading Practices’ in *A Companion to Shakespeare* ed David Scott Kastan (Oxford and Malden, Ma: Blackwell, 1999), 139–57.

2. Robert Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette. Reflections in Cultural History* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1990), 110.

3. ‘Reading and the Consumption of Literature in Early Modern England’, Shakespeare Association of America seminar at the Annual Meeting 1999. The seminar participants were Rebecca Bushnell, Frances E. Dolan, Heidi Brayman Hackel, Mary Ellen Lamb, Naomi Liebler, Lynne Magnusson, Ian Frederick Moulton, Richelle Munkhoff, Sasha Roberts (seminar leader), Eve Sanders, Katherine West-Scheil, Ramona Wray, and Steven Zwicker.

4. Gabriel Harvey, c.1598–1600, cited in *The Shakspeare Allusion-Book*, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), 1: 56.

5. John Kerrigan, ‘The Editor as Reader: Constructing Renaissance Texts’, in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* eds James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 102–24, 112.

6. Mary Ellen Lamb, ‘Constructions of Women Readers’, *Teaching Options for Early Modern Women* eds Margaret Hannay and Susanne Woods (forthcoming from the MLA); Margaret Ferguson, ‘A Room Not Their Own: Renaissance Women as Readers and Writers’, *The Comparative Perspective on Literature: Approaches to Theory and Practice* eds Clayton Koelb and Susan Nokes (London: Cornell University Press, 1988): 93–116; Jacqueline Pearce, ‘Women as Readers’, *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500–1700* ed Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 80–99.

7. Cited by Kerrigan, ‘The Editor as Reader’, 113. On the construction of readers and reading in prefaces to literary texts see also Debra Belt, ‘The Poetics of Hostile Response, 1575–1610’, *Criticism* 33 (1991): 419–59; and Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

8. I examine the trope of the eroticised woman reader, supposedly aroused to illicit thoughts and acts as a result of her reading, in ‘Shakespeare “creepes into the womens closets about bedtime”: Women Reading in a Room of Their Own’, in *Renaissance Configurations: Voices/Bodies/Spaces, 1580–1690* (London: Macmillan, 1998): 30–63.

9. John Evans, ed ‘Extracts from the Private Account Book of Sir William More’, *Archaeologia* 36 (1855): 290–93. On the contrasts between Sir William’s and Lady More’s closets, see Alan Stewart, ‘The Early Modern Closet Discovered’, *Representations* 50 (Spring 1995): 76–99, 82–3.

10. Lady Anne Merrick to Mrs Lydall, 21 January 1638, *Calendar of State Papers*, Conway Papers 142. I discuss the implications of Merrick’s remarks in ‘Women Reading Shakespeare in the Seventeenth Century’, unpublished article.

11. Heidi Brayman Hackel, 'Boasting of Silence: Women Readers in Early Modern England', Shakespeare Association of America seminar paper, 1999. For a case study of humanist reading practices see Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, "'Studied for Action": How Gabriel Harvey Read his Livy', *Past and Present* 129 (November 1990): 30–78.

12. See, for instance, Mary Ellen Lamb, 'The Agency of the Split Subject: Lady Anne Clifford and the Uses of Reading', *ELR* 22:3 (1992): 347–68; Mary Erler, 'The Books and Lives of Three Tudor Women' in *Privileging Gender in Early Modern England*, ed Jean Brink, vol. XXIII of *Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies* (1993): 5–17; Gary F. Waller, 'The Countess of Pembroke and Gendered Reading' in *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990); Frances E. Dolan, 'Reading, Writing, and Other Crimes' in *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects* eds Valerie Traub, Kindsay Kaplan and Dymphna Callaghan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 142–67; and Louise Schleiner's discussion of women's household reading formations in *Tudor and Stuart Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994): 1–29.

13. See Paul Morgan, 'Frances Wolfreton and 'Hor Bouks': A Seventeenth-Century Woman Book-Collector', *The Library*, 6th ser., XI: 3 (September 1989): 197–219.

14. 'A List of my Bookes', The Commonplace Book of Lady Anne Southwell (c.1631), Folger Library MS V.b.198, fol.65. Southwell's commonplace book has recently been transcribed: see Jean Klene ed, *The Southwell-Sipthorpe Commonplace Book. Folger Ms V.b.198* (Tempe, Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), volume 147 of the series *Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies*.

15. Frances E. Dolan, 'Reading Miracles: The Stories of Catholic Women's Lives in Post-Reformation England', Shakespeare Association of America seminar paper, 1999. Frances Dolan develops these issues further in *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth Century English Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

16. See Mary Ellen Lamb's essay in this volume.

17. Reading practices in the period were diverse and included silent reading, reading aloud, aural reading (listening and responding to a text being read aloud, not necessarily a passive experience as is sometimes assumed), companionate reading, and participating in a network of readers exchanging texts in print and manuscript. Reading practices were also shaped by the *habitus* or environment of reading, ranging from the comfort of the private closet to communal household chambers, from indoors to outdoors, from community spaces (such as the church or tavern) to institutional settings (such as the Inns of Court), from the grammar school to the uncomfortable environment of the University Library. Different reading methods included intensive reading (careful, close reading of a specific text or passage, or more widely of a restricted range of texts), applied reading (applying what was read to life at large), and goal-led reading (reading for specific purposes), all of which might be aided by the use of marginalia and manuscript commonplace books; extensive reading of a wide number of texts, sometimes considered an eighteenth-century development, is also evident in the period.

18. See Katherine West-Scheil's essay in this volume.

19. See for instance Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Bernard Capp, 'Popular Literature', in *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* ed Barry Reay (London: Croom Helm, 1985): 198–243; and Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1935).

20. On literacy see for instance Keith Thomas, 'The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England' in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition* ed Gerd Baumann (Oxford, 1986): 97–131, and Wyn Ford, 'The Problem of Literacy in Early Modern England', *History* 78 (1993): 22–37.

21. See Adam Fox, 'Popular Verses and their Reading in the Early Seventeenth Century' in *The Practice and Representation of Reading*, eds Raven, Small and Tadmor: 125–37.

22. T. A. Birrell, 'Reading as Pastime: the place of light literature in some gentlemen's libraries of the 17th century', *Property of a Gentleman: The Formation, Organisation and Dispersal of the Private Library 1620–1920* (Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies, 1991): 113–31, 113; see also Roger Chartier, General Introduction to *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe* ed Roger Chartier (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989), 4.

23. See Morgan, 'Frances Wolfreston and "Hor Bouks"', 208–9.

24. 'A possession of one's own: women and consumer behavior in England, 1660–1740', *Journal of British Studies* 25 (April 1986): 131–56, 140. While in London, for instance, 36% of women's inventories included entries for books as compared with 28% of men's, in Cumbria only 8% of women's inventories list books as compared with 18% of men's (140). David Cressy has argued that in terms of literacy 'the later Stuart period saw a dramatic divergence between the experience of women in London and women in country districts', with 'an education revolution among late Stuart and early Hanoverian women in the metropolis' (*Literacy and the Social Order. Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980): 145–7). There remain remarkably few studies of regional developments in the book trade, but see Robin Myers and Michael Harris eds, *Spreading the Word: The Distribution Networks of Print, 1550–1850* (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1990).

25. Roger Chartier, 'Labourers and Voyagers: From the Text to the Reader', *Diacritics* 22 (summer 1992): 49–61, 50.

26. See T. A. Birrell, 'The Influence of Seventeenth-Century Publishers on the Presentation of English Literature', in *Historical and Editorial Studies in Medieval and Early Modern England* eds Mary-Jo Arn and Hanneke Wirtjes (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1985), 163–73: 166.

27. I discuss the impact of editorial apparatus on interpretation in 'Editing Narrative, Sexuality, and Authorship: The Altered Texts of *Lucrece*' in *Texts and Cultural Change* eds Cedric Brown and Arthur Marotti (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

28. Assessing the popularity of a book by the number of editions is not a straightforward matter: not only must differences of genre, format, decade, and location be taken into account, but the possibility of variant print runs for different editions.

29. *The Norton Facsimile of The First Folio of Shakespeare* ed Charles Hinman (London, New York, Sydney, and Toronto: Paul Hamlyn, 1968), sig. A3.

30. Peter W. M. Blayney, *The First Folio of Shakespeare* (Washington, D. C.: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1991), 26. On book prices see also Francis Johnson, 'Notes on English Retail Book Prices, 1550–1640', *The Library*, 5rth ser., V:2 (September 1950): 83–112, and Marjorie Plant, *The English Book Trade. An Economic History of the Making and Sale of Books* (first published 1939; London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1974), 240–5. There are many difficulties in establishing contemporary bookprices: comprehensive information is scarce and it is not always clear whether a particular price is for a bound or unbound copy, or for a new or second-hand copy.

31. Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); see also Arthur Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), and H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts, 1558–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

32. The use of cross-references were common among scholarly readers, and would seem to indicate an intertextual approach to reading. Corrections to printing errors (as Lyly advised his gentleman readers to carry out) and emendments to the text (in which readers substituted their own readings in place of the printed version) suggest how readers did not necessarily regard the printed text as a sacrosanct object but instead acted as their own editors and, sometimes, authors.

33. William Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995): 79–100, and Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, "'Studied for Action": How Gabriel Harvey Read his Livy', *Past and Present* 129 (November 1990): 30–78.

34. Sherman, *John Dee*, 80.

35. For studies of seventeenth-century verse miscellanies see, for instance, Mary Hobbs, 'Early Seventeenth-Century Verse Miscellanies and Their Value for Textual Editors', *English Manuscript Studies, 1100–1700* 1 (1989): 182–210; and Arthur Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric*, esp 135–208.

36. Eugene R. Kintgen makes this distinction in 'Reconstructing Elizabethan Reading', *Studies in English Literature* 30:1 (Winter 1990), 1–18.

37. See, for instance, Arthur Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric*, 30–7.

38. As Michel de Certeau puts it: 'Whether it is a newspaper or Proust, the text has a meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them; it is ordered in accordance with codes of perception that it does not control' (*The Practice of Everyday Life*, cited by Chartier, 'Labourers and Voyagers', 50). I develop some of the issues raised in this essay – in particular tropes and practices of reading, and textual transmission in print and manuscript – in *Reading Shakespeare's Poems in Early Modern England* (forthcoming from Macmillan).