



## The Marginalia Issue

Annual BSANZ conference “Marginalia: Bibliography at the Margins” Brisbane, Australia  
28-30 November 2018

Ahead of the conference, members have been turning their minds to marginal matters, and this issue of the *Broadsheet* features a number of these lucubrations.



It is not only with text that annotators can create a dialogue. In the case of a copy of Eliza Haywood’s *La Belle Assemblée* (1736–38) marginalia attaches to, and even invades, the frontispiece. *La Belle Assemblée* is Haywood’s translation of a French work, *Les Journées Amusantes* (1722–31) by Madeleine Angélique Poisson de Gomez and uses the same allegorical frontispiece depicting a female author in classical attire with untitled tomes at her feet. In the French version, this image seems to celebrate Madame Gomez, the author; but an owner of the Haywood translation intervened to reallocate the allegorical reference. The reader, one Katherine Lewis, inscribed her name and dated the four volumes of her set of *La Belle Assemblée* on 25 February 1741, and went on to modify the frontispiece image that adorns the first volume of this set. First, she wrote in a neat hand below the illustration “Mrs Eliza Haywood” to identify the personage in the picture, and then labelled two of the books depicted at the foot of this figure with the title of Haywood’s first success, “Love in Excess.” With this annotation, Lewis transferred to Haywood the symbols celebrating Gomez’s prolific writing and success as a bestselling author.

It is unclear whether, in supplying her caption, Lewis demonstrates a genuinely mistaken interpretation of the image as an allegorical representation of Haywood or whether she makes the identification, despite recognising that the image represents Gomez. To some extent the image was available for appropriation

since the translation was issued anonymously. In fact, none of the editions bore Haywood's name, and it was not until 1742 that she was unambiguously revealed as the translator. Nor did any of the publisher's advertising of the book associate the elaborate frontispiece with either Gomez or Haywood.

Lewis's titling of both the volumes in the picture "Love in Excess" is curious given that since that successful book published in 1719–20 Haywood had authored over fifty further works in a variety of genres. The annotator thus looks back to a work more than twenty years old. However, in doing so she anticipates modern criticism which likewise emphasizes the significance of *Love in Excess* in Haywood's oeuvre.

Although we know nothing about Lewis, her annotations offer valuable and intriguing, if enigmatic, glimpses into the mind of a contemporary reader.

Patrick Spedding

### Marginalia—Numerically Speaking

The BSANZ conference theme, "Marginalia: Bibliography at the Margins," no doubt had some presenters wondering, in the course of editing their papers, whether the word *marginalia* should be regarded as a plural or collective noun. Should we say, for instance, *marginalia is a fascinating phenomenon* or *marginalia are fascinating phenomena*? And what should we do if the text has only one annotation?

The word *marginalia* is a plural form, and it has been construed with a plural verb since the first evidence (1819) given in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. It is a very "late" borrowing from late Latin—a noun formed from the neuter plural of the adjective *marginalis* "marginal" (where the *-al/-alis* suffix has the sense "of the kind of, relating to"), in turn derived from the classical Latin *margo* "an edge."

When the plural noun *marginalia* was created at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it did not have a singular form. Under the influence of Latin plurals in English that take *-um* as a singular, such as *referenda*, *fora*, *media*, and *data*, would *marginalia* go the same way with *marginalium*? There is no evidence of this in the first edition of the *OED* (the letter M was published in 1908). In the revised online edition (2000) there is one citation for a *marginalium*, dated 1990. The *OED* labels it "irregular," explaining it as "an inferred singular, after e.g. MEMORANDUM *n.*, DATUM *n.*"

No more common is the form *marginale*, proposed by Jeremy Butterfield in the fourth edition of Fowler's *Modern English Usage* (2015): "Should a singular ever be needed, to refer to a single marginal note, it is *marginale*, not *marginalium*." *Marginale* has the virtue of etymological purity in forming the English singular noun from a singular neuter form of the Latin adjective, but there is no evidence that *marginale* has taken off.

Consensus among modern dictionaries today is unequivocal. They are firmly of the opinion that *marginalia* is a plural noun, and as the *OED* says, "with *plural* concord." But can we also regard *marginalia* as a collective noun that can take either a plural or singular verb?

*Paraphernalia* is a very similar word, and in the sense "the miscellaneous items needed for or associated with a particular activity" (*OED*) there is plenty of evidence for both singular and plural concord. The word *paraphernalia* is no doubt partly responsible for the generation of the recent terms *kitchenalia* and *gardenalia*, where *-alia* is established as a productive suffix in the sense "things associated with."

These words are similar to familiar collective nouns such as *family*, *committee*, and *staff*, that can take either singular or plural verbs, depending on whether the context refers to the noun as a unit (*the family is going on holiday*) or a group of separate entities (*the family are arguing*).

It seems likely that *marginalia* is moving in the same direction, although the dictionaries do not yet recognise it. The sentence *marginalia is a fascinating phenomenon* sounds as valid as *marginalia are fascinating phenomena*.

*Postscript:* At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was an available synonym that had perfectly regular singular and plural forms—*apostil* (or *apostille*) "a marginal note, comment, or annotation" (*OED*) with its plural *apostils* (or *apostilles*). So if you couldn't say *I've found this amazing marginalium*, you could at least say *I've found this amazing apostil*. Sadly, *apostil* went the way of the dodo.

Julia Robinson

## Sociable Marginalia

“People do not annotate newspapers.” H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* p.14.

Well, it depends who the people are. Print is a sociable thing, not in itself but through the uses that people make of it, and it *circulates*. Margaret Oliphant’s 1890 historical novel *Kirsteen*, set in the early nineteenth century, describes “a Glasgow paper, posted by its first reader the day after publication to a gentleman on Loch Long, then forwarded by him to Inveralton, thence to Drumcarro. Mr Pyper at the Manse got it fourth hand.”\* In “Remailed,” Henry Lawson records a more annotative form of grapho-sociability in his portrayal of Australian newspapers accreting marginalia as they convey taciturn arguments back and forth between bush chums.

There were points, of course, upon which Bill and Jim couldn’t agree—subjects upon which they argued long and loud and often in the old days; and it sometimes happens that, say, Bill comes across an article or a paragraph which agrees with and sort of barracks for a pet theory of his as against one held by Jim; and Bill marks it with a chuckle and four crosses at the corners—and an extra one at each side perhaps—and sends it on to Jim; he reckons it’ll rather corner old Jim. The crosses are not over ornamental nor artistic, but very distinct; Jim sees them from the reverse side of the sheet first, maybe, and turns it over with interest to see what it is. He grins a good-humored grin as he reads—poor old Bill is just as thick-headed and obstinate as ever.... Jim will wait till he comes across a paragraph in another paper which barracks for his side of the argument, and, in his opinion; rather knocks the stuffing out of Bill; then he marks it with crosses and a grin, and sends it along to Bill.

Paul Eggert

\*Cited by Leah Marcus in *How to Do Things with Books*, p. 261.

## Subsumed Marginalia

When working on Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*, I encountered what one might call “subsumed marginalia” in one of the Dickens letters, as edited by Walter Dexter and published by Nonesuch in 1937–38. (The volumes of this lavish edition were kept under lock and key in a glass-fronted bookcase in the office of the UWA Librarian, Leonard Jolley, a foundation member of BSANZ).

In this edition, in an 1854 letter from Dickens to Gaskell (*Letters* ii. 582) one short sentence made very odd reading. When I obtained from the John Rylands Library by post a xerox of the MS, it showed that the odd sentence was actually a marginal note. The Librarian and Keeper of MSS at John Rylands, Dr Frank Taylor, confirmed that the note was indeed in Gaskell’s hand. Its exasperated burden: ‘I’ve not a notion what he means.’\*

Despite this Nonesuch glitch, publishers are usually aware of marginalia and its discontents. Judith Butcher, for example, in *Copy-Editing: the Cambridge Handbook [...]*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (1992) p. 215, recommends: “If an author wants to retain marginal notes, consult the designer or production department.”

Dorothy Collin

\*See my “The Composition of Mrs. Gaskell’s *North and South*”, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 54.1 (1971): 67–93.

On 14 September 2017, Merriam Webster’s email *Word of the Day* was “marginalia”. This is how the great dictionary defined it in the email:

1. marginal notes or embellishments (such as in a book)
2. nonessential items



At some time in the second half of the eighteenth century (or perhaps even later) John Fletcher, apparently a schoolboy of Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, was given a copy of the eighth edition (1762) of John Holmes’s *A New Grammar of the Latin Tongue*. While he scrupulously avoided inserting marginalia into the central part of the book, he used the endpapers exuberantly for writing practice, mostly of his name, but also some Latin words, his “native place” and his claim of ownership, “John Fletcher His Book.” This copy strongly reminds us that while the archetypal *apostil* (*vide supra*) might be a reaction to or commentary on the text, annotations on the end papers of books served a much wider range of functions from declaring ownership to recording family births and deaths, and even to drafting legal affidavits.\*

Bill Krebs

\* See Stephen Orgel, *The Reader in the Book: A Study of Spaces and Traces*, pp. 20-23.

### Australasian Rare Book School 2019

The next Australasian Rare Book School will be jointly hosted by Victoria University and the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington (New Zealand) 28 January–1 February 2019. There are two five-day courses on offer, “The World of Altered Books,” taught by Paul Thompson, and “Exploring Digital Humanities: A Hands-on Introduction to Data-Driven Research,” taught by Thomas Koentges. The interests and credentials of the two presenters are listed in the School’s brochure which can be seen by clicking [here](#). To enquire or register email [rbss@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:rbss@vuw.ac.nz).

BSANZ will be offering one fee-remission bursary in 2019 for a member of BSANZ attending the School. If you wish to be considered for this bursary, mention it to the convenor when you apply.

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