

Old books, new beginnings: Recovering lost pages in Bangor's early modern printed books

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Old books, new beginnings: Recovering lost pages in Bangor's early modern printed books

Early modern printed books were routinely 'reshaped in the process of transmission', and, as a result, there might be many different 'starting point[s]' in the social lives of those objects, including, but also extending beyond, the originary scene of their manufacture and distribution.¹ After all, early modern printers 'don't print books', but '*sheets*', meaning that the 'final form' a printed book might take was not fixed in the print shop, and nor was it necessarily fixed with the book binder.² 'Good reading' protocols were 'defined by what you did to a text', meaning that printed books of the hand-press period can bear witness to any number of user-generated 'transitions', serving now as 'archaeological site[s]' that tell us something about the contexts of their 'first appearance in the world', but also about their 'subsequent life history' as objects to be borrowed, passed down and gifted, reworked, carefully stashed away, or even discarded.³

This is particularly true of early modern Protestant bibles and prayer books, which are the types of print products most likely to find their way into early modern homes, into early modern hands, and under early modern pens. 'Devotional reading structured the day of people in the period', and, in turn, those readers restructured printed forms, often in materially self-conscious and 'embodied' ways.⁴ Pen trials, signatures, and ownership marks might jostle against snatches of transcribed sermons, or commonplace passages from other religious books. Pious

¹ Robert Darnton, *The Case for Books: Past, Present, and Future* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009), p. 29; Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), p. 3.

² James N. Green, 'Bound/Unbound', *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 16:4 (2018), 614-20 (p. 614); Stephen Orgel, *The Reader in the Book: A Study of Spaces and Traces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 10.

³ Leah Price, *What we Talk about when we Talk about Books* (New York: Basic Books, 2019), p.45; Bert Tops, 'The Quest for the Early Modern Bible Reader: The Dutch Vorsterman Bible (1533-1534), its Readers and Users', *Journal of Early Modern Christianity*, 6:2 (2019), 185-222 (p. 191); Green, p. 620.

⁴ Femke Molekamp, *Women and the Bible in Early Modern England: Religious Reading and Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 11; Helen Smith, '*Grossly Material Things*': *Women and Book Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 13.

forms of referencing, annotation, and self-accounting might sit alongside recipes for ink or playful child doodles.⁵ The spatial dimensions of bibles and prayer books were habitually folded into affective family histories, with material beginnings, including flyleaves and the reverse side of title-pages, serving as archives into which births and baptisms could be recorded, while material endings, including empty back pages, might be redeployed as a space to register deaths.⁶ Readers also worked at perfecting their religious printed book objects, whether because they were prompted to do so by an errata list, or because those objects had ‘outlived the contexts for which they were originally produced’.⁷

Since Protestant bibles and prayer books were subject to ‘compulsive rereading’, they were susceptible not only to manuscript accretions and amendments, but also to loss.⁸ Anyone who has spent even a little time with such objects will have encountered missing pages, especially missing title-pages, which are often victims of the fact that, as the first thing a reader might handle in the book, they were the first thing to go. It is not uncommon, however, to find that those damaged books have undergone ‘sophistication’, as former owners repaired damage to the physical integrity of their books, by binding and re-binding them, but also by patching torn printed leaves, or by creating their own manuscript substitutes for leaves that have, because of extensive use, been torn away.⁹ Early modern readers “‘made up’” new books by lovingly reproducing the *mise-en-page* arrangement of missing pages, and they sometimes laboured to produce their own bespoke manuscript title-pages, offering up new paratextual starting points in the face of lost ones.¹⁰

⁵ For a recent survey of such practices and our interpretations of them, see *Early Modern English Marginalia*, ed. by Katherine Acheson (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018).

⁶ On family inscriptions in early modern printed books, see David Pearson, *Provenance Research in Book History: A Handbook* (Oxford: The Bodleian Library, 2019), pp. 39-42.

⁷ William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 92.

⁸ Stephen Colclough, *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities, 1695-1870* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2007), p. 30.

⁹ A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475-1640* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1976-91), II, p. 68.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

In what follows, I turn to four printed books within Bangor University's Archives and Special Collections—two copies of the Welsh Book of Common Prayer (1664), a copy of the King James, or Authorised, Bible (1611), and a copy of the third edition of the 'Cranmer' or Great Bible (1540)—which contain the traces of users' attempts to patch-up and mend, and sometimes to emulate by hand the design of torn or missing printed pages. Homespun, idiosyncratic, and sometimes a little weird, I argue that these copy-specific restorative labours can tell us what former owners thought was important about their printed books, both in terms of material form and content, and that they also highlight how books could become something other in users' hands, even if their interventions were designed to recover rather than to augment.¹¹ Splicing the hand and the press, and suspended somewhere between loss and survival, my examples raise questions about intention (were such interventions driven by a desire to simply sustain a book's utility and functionality?), and interpretation (might these acts of textual recovery speak to devotional concerns, or other literary possibilities?). As objects that have lost bits and pieces as they moved, but that moved owners to mend them in turn, they will also invite us to think about early modern printed books as mobile things, which got mixed up with the lives and preoccupations of people who, for practical, but sometimes for other, more equivocal reasons, set out to give their old books new beginnings, facilitating their survival on meandering journeys that have ended, for now, in a small archive in Gwynedd, North Wales.

A missing title-page

Bangor's small folio copy of the 1664 Welsh-translation of the Book of Common Prayer, or the *Llyfr Gweddi Gyffredin, a Gweinidogaeth y Sacramentau, a Chynneddfau a Ceremoniau ereill yr Eghwys, yn ol*

¹¹ The examples offered here fall short of the more professional restorative practices deployed by the likes of Eliza Dennis Denyer (1765/6-1824), and examined by Sonja Drimmer, although Drimmer's account of Denyer's 'conservationist methodology' has given me a language to take my own examples seriously. The 'restitution of the past' of the printed page, writes Drimmer, could be a 'creative and individualistic' endeavour, and, as we shall see, even the clumsiest of attempts to 'compensate for [textual] loss' might betray forms of bibliographical literacy on behalf of the reader. See Drimmer, 'A Medieval Psalter "Perfected": Eighteenth-Century Conservationism and an Early (Female) Restorer of Rare Books and Manuscripts', *British Library Journal*, 3 (2013), 1-38 (p. 11; p. 27; p. 10).

arfer Eglwys Loegr, ynghyd a'r Psalmyr neu Psalman Dafydd (X/EI90 LLY), has, like so many other rare printed books from this period, lost its title-page.¹² In this example, however, the title-page has been replaced by a manuscript substitute, which features the names of four individuals who appear to be members of the same family: Owen, Gwen, Evan, and Morris Jones, whose signature loiters on the periphery of the page (Figure 1).

Together, they have reproduced a truncated version of the text's original title, and there has been an attempt to centre that title on the page: 'LLYFR | GWEDDI, | Gyffredin a Gweinidogaeth | y | SACRAMENTAU: a chynneddfau | a Ceremoniau eraill yr Eglwys, | yn ol arfer Eglwys Lorgr.' They have mocked the horizontal rules familiar to printed title-pages of the period, using them to separate their title from an imprint—'Argraphwyd [published] yn Llundain tros Edward Fowkes MDCLXIV.'—and a collaborative inscription, which serves as another kind of imprint, one that ceremoniously, even quasi-legally, witnesses the book's shifting claims to ownership: 'Owen Jones and Gwen Jones | is the[?] true Owner of this Book | Soe I say Evan Jones the three and | twentieth day of may anno dom | 1712'. Their manuscript title-page draws to a close with a triangle standing on its point, a shape that might nostalgically allude to the tapered text design characteristic of incunabula, or one that stands in for the typographical 'cul-de-lampe' ornaments that, throughout the medieval and early modern periods, were used to visually demarcate the ends of sections in manuscript and printed books.

Owen, Gwen, Evan, and Morris do not appear to have been in possession of a perfect copy of the 1664 title-page that their manuscript substitute was designed to replace. The title-page that originally accompanied their copy of the *Llyfr Gweddi Gyffredin* would have been framed by a scrolled strapwork cartouche design (Figure 2). Furthermore, its original imprint implicated a fuller sociology of agents in that text's making: the *Llyfr Gweddi Gyffredin* was 'Printiwyd yn Llundain' by 'S[imon]. Dover' for 'Ffowks' and another publisher called 'Pheter [or Peter]

¹² This was the third revision of the Welsh Prayer Book (it was preceded by revisions in 1567 and 1621). The revised translation of 1664 was based on the new English version of 1662. See Geraint H. Jenkins, *Literature, Religion and Society in Wales, 1660-1730* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1978), esp. pp. 66-74.

Bodwel [or Bodvel, or Bodfel]'. What they actually assimilated was the separate title-page, and separate imprint, that accompanies the Psalter, or Psalms of David—*Y Psallmyr neu Psalman Dafydd*—which was published alongside the 1664 *Llyfr Gweddi Gyffredin*. It is from this separate title-page, which remains intact within the Jones's Prayer Book, that they got an imprint formulation—'Argraphwyd yn *Llundain*, tros *Edward Fowkes*, MDCLXIV.'—and that page has also served as a model for the design conventions of their 1712 substitute.

Inscribed onto the back of the book's manuscript title-page is a memoranda, which marks out beginnings in the lives of nine children born to Evan, of Cymo Deuparth, and Alys, of the parish of Corwen, who were 'maryed together on Saturday 11th of November [...] 1676', at a church in 'Llansanffraid in [G]lyndyfrdwy', a parish in the Edeirnion region of Denbighshire:

Roger Jones was Born the 20 day of
september the year 1677:
Owen Jones was Baptized on Saturday the
8th of november the year 1679:
Lewis Jones was Baptized on Sunday the
16 day of october the year 1681
Elizabeth Jones was Baptized the 11th: of march 1683
Humphrey Jones was Baptized the 12 day
of december year 1686
Gwen Jones was Baptized 6 day of
march the year 1689
Margaret Jones was Baptized
march the year 1692
Morrice Jones was Born the 15 day of
november and was Baptized the 17th of y^e same month
the year 1695
Catherine Jones was born y^e 17th of february and
was Baptised y^e 18 of y^e same moth the year 1698.

If we assume that the 'Owen', 'Gwen', and 'Morrice' identified here are the same people who signed their names on the recto side of the leaf, then that would make Owen at least thirty-three years old in 1712, Gwen would have been about twenty-three, and Morris (or 'Morrice') would have been seventeen, or nearing that age.

What prompted these individuals to go back to this 1664 Prayer Book in 1712, and what impelled them to then set about creating a manuscript replacement for the lost past of its missing title-page? The book clearly had important associations for this family. At the top of the manuscript title-page, a note on provenance, signed by Gwen and Evan, tells us that this ‘Common Prayar [sic] Booke’ was ‘Given’ to the family ‘by the parishioners of Bryn Eglwys [i.e. Church]’, in Cymo Deuparth. That gift was not much older than Roger, the eldest Jones child, and it was likely passed around between the Jones siblings as they learned the Welsh of the Welsh Prayer Book, and as they began to write and read in that language, and in English, too. The long-held emotive pull of this book object is indicated by a series of mathematical calculations inscribed beneath the list of births and baptisms, which together imply that Morris kept returning to this do-it-yourself title-page, seemingly as a site of temporal reflection. He calculated what age he was at the time he and his siblings made up that title-page in 1712, subtracting that date from his date of birth (1695), and in 1759, at the age of about sixty-four, Morris appears to have returned again to mark out the passage of time since he was born and baptised.¹³

Literacy was ‘inseparable’ from piety in early modern cultures of Protestant devotion, and the bibles and prayer books that children encountered in their early years served as important sources of ‘nostalgia’ in adult life.¹⁴ Henry Vaughan’s (1621-1695) beautifully evocative ‘To the Holy Bible’ emphasises the formative power of early scripture reading, and it is a poem that, right at the end of his second *Silex Scintillans* (1655), takes the reader back to the beginning: to the active, and regenerative, ‘*Effects*’ that religious books perpetually exert upon the lives of those who, as children, took them ‘in [...] hand’, and so subsequently ‘learnt to read’.¹⁵ In 1712,

¹³ Different forms of dating and mathematical calculations are a typical characteristic of readers’ marks in the early modern period, particularly within bibles and prayer books. See Sherman, p. 83.

¹⁴ Kevin Killeen and Smith, ‘Introduction’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, c. 1530-1700*, ed. by Killeen, Smith, and Rachel Willie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 1-18 (p. 14); Matthew Prineas, ‘The Dream of the Book and the Poetry of Failure in Henry Vaughan’s *Silex Scintillans*’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 26:2 (1996), 333-55 (p. 343).

¹⁵ Henry Vaughan, *Silex Scintillans: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (London: Henry Crips, 1655), pp. 81-82.

this 1664 copy of the *Llyfr Gweddî Gyffredin* brought its users back to the beginning of that book, specifically to the lost site of its title-page, and words and reading also mattered to them. The provenance note at the top of their manuscript title-page reminds the reader to ‘take notice of the words of God and Read the Commandments and give ~~thang~~ thancks [sic] unto him all ways’, but this collaborative act of regeneration signals the book’s personal associations not only as a text to be ‘Read’ but as a material object to be handled, and one that, through intervention, could continue to ‘anchor’ the lives of its users in a ‘shared past’.¹⁶

Alongside these readings, we have to bear in mind that their logics and motives may have also been pragmatic. If the book were to find itself moving amongst a wider circle of readers beyond the Jones family, it was in their interests to ensure that it had a protective covering, and one that specified the Jones’s collective ownership so that they could get it back. But if this manuscript title-page was purely functional, this would eliminate the need to track down and copy out a version of the book’s imprint. That imprint details have been inscribed onto the manuscript title-page suggests that their work of recovery was also driven by a sense of the book as being somehow insufficient, or incomplete, without such cues; indeed, the implication is that those cues, which look back to the contexts of the book’s 1664 production, were considered to be an important part of this book’s ongoing meanings and identity.

We might link this to David McKitterick’s work on the rise of bibliophilia in the eighteenth century, where he gestures towards an ‘anxiety at completeness in printed books’, which engendered, he says, a range of conservationist methods geared towards ‘textual recovery’.¹⁷ Antiquarian booksellers and rare-book collectors—the primary agents of McKitterick’s study—regularly compensated for an old book’s imperfections by producing calligraphic facsimiles of missing printed pages, including title-pages. The manuscript title-page

¹⁶ Jason Scott-Warren, *Shakespeare’s First Reader: The Paper Trails of Richard Stonley* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), p. 6.

¹⁷ David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order, 1450-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 144; p. 145.

in Figure 1 is a ragged understudy to the market-driven and more proficient ‘facsimile work’ that McKitterick examines, yet we may still spot overlapping impulses: a desire, for example, to simulate the paratextual architecture of the book, which has been cast adrift by wear and tear, and with this, a sense that ‘completeness’ is part and parcel of the book’s value.¹⁸ In this context, the 1712 manuscript title-page might well be understood in terms of utility, but, following McKitterick, it might also attest to the users’ attitudes and attachments to the book as material object, and, specifically to its title-page, which, far from being one of the most ‘disposable bits’ of a printed text, conceptually ‘separated’ out from the text proper, emerges as an interactive interface where nostalgic, hands-on, and restorative activities might begin.¹⁹

This would at least be consistent with current thinking about the meaning-making potentials of early modern printed title-pages. We know that the early modern title-page was printed separately from the main body of a text and added towards the end of the printing process. This ‘physical and temporal separation’ means that title-pages of this period are often ‘highly self-reflexive’ and ‘participatory sites’: paratextual beginnings that deliver commercial content, but that also reflect on what happened during production and comment on what’s to come, implementing, in turn, the blurring of distinctions between material insides and outsides, between physical surfaces and metaphysical depths.²⁰ We can take the engraved strapwork cartouche that framed the title-page to the 1664 *Llyfr Gweddî Gyffredin* as an example: it visually enhanced the page, telling us about the contexts of its production, but it also formed an architectural entranceway, or ‘threshold’, to use Gérard Genette’s term, that invited its readers to conceptualise the book as a spatial object that must be entered rather than passively received.²¹

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹⁹ Tiffany Stern, *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 62.

²⁰ Smith and Louise Wilson, ‘Introduction’, in *Renaissance Paratexts*, ed. by Smith and Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1-14 (p. 3); Lucy Razzall, “‘Like to a title leafe’: Surface, Face, and Material Text in Early Modern England”, *Journal of the Northern Renaissance*, 8 (2017) <<https://www.northernrenaissance.org/like-to-a-title-leafe-surface-face-and-material-text-in-early-modern-england/>> [accessed 26 April 2020] (para. 25 of 25).

²¹ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Back in 1588, the same cartouche frame was used by Christopher Barker's (c. 1529-1599) deputies to structure the title-page to the first Welsh translation of the complete Bible and Apocrypha.²² Consequently, its redeployment on the title-page of the 1664 *Llyfr Gweddi Gyffredin* also generates an impression of visible continuity between Protestant book objects across time and space,²³ a correspondence that is slightly complicated by the presence of a pasted-in cancel slip, used to overlay the Stuart coat of arms upon the arms of the vanished Tudor dynasty, which simultaneously marks out that book's making in terms of transience and impermanence.²⁴

That early modern consumers were responsive to the spatial and temporal complexities of the printed title-page might be best underscored by the fact that some readers, like Owen, Gwen, Evan, and Morris, sought to recover those beginnings when they got torn away. For them, the title-page clearly mattered, whether because it protected the book, nostalgically reasserted its origin, its collective ownership, or because its recovery satisfied some other aesthetically- or bibliographically-driven desire for 'completeness'. The paradox is that these processes of recovery have produced something that never really existed, since Owen, Gwen, Evan, and Morris extrapolated the appearance of the main 1664 title-page from the separate title-page that accompanied the Psalter.

This doesn't seem to have mattered much to the Jones siblings, although for my own purposes it does help to underscore the constantly moving picture of the book itself. The manuscript title-page of 1712 makes the labours of the book's mediation and remediation especially visible, right from the start. Like the paste-in slip on the 1664 title-page, it is a conspicuous sign of the conditional terms of the book's making. In their attempts to recover a

²² The National Library of Wales has digitised their copy of *Y Beibl Cyssegr-lan sef Yr Hen Destament, a'r Newydd* (1588, Col. 8340), and its title-page can be viewed here: <<https://www.library.wales/digital-exhibitions-space/digital-exhibitions/europeana-rise-of-literacy/religious-publications/y-beibl-cyssegr-lan-sef-yr-hen-destament-ar-newydd#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-886%2C-1%2C4734%2C4026>> [accessed 15 June 2020].

²³ As Brian Cummings argues, this sense of tradition and continuity was also instilled by having that later text printed in blackletter, which was, by the 1660s, a self-consciously 'old-fashioned' fount. See Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. lxii-lxiii.

²⁴ For more on the early modern 'cancel slip' and our readings of them, see Adam Smyth, *Material Texts in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 114-28.

lost printed title-page, Owen, Gwen, Evan, and Morris marked out that page as a key part of the experience of interacting with the text, and by signing and re-dating it 1712, they involved themselves as agents in ongoing processes of material making that began, but did not end with, ‘Edward Fowkes’ and his collaborators in 1664.

Like a glove?

This section turns to another of Bangor’s 1664 Welsh-language Prayer Books (X/EI90 LLY): the one already referenced above, which still has its title-page (Figure 2). In this book, we find another example of an eighteenth-century reader attempting to offset material loss, not at the beginning but a little further within the main body. Although this book’s title-page contains signatures and ownership marks, they are from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and so the identity of the agent(s) responsible for this earlier work of recovery remains unknown.²⁵

A manuscript leaf has been inserted into the book as a surrogate for the two printed pages that would have made up signatures A2^{r-v}, which formed part of the public prayers designated ‘am Weddi Foreuol’, or ‘for Morning Prayer’ (Figures 3 and 4). It seems likely that this agent had a copy of the printed leaf that s/he sought to (re)produce, since there has been an attempt to replicate the structures that organised its original design and layout: for instance, to insert manuscript ornaments in places that correspond to the placements of ornaments in print. So, where in print we find decorated initials, we find decorated initials in manuscript; where in print a row of ornaments was used to structure a visual pause between the Absolution and the Lord’s Prayer, we find its approximation in manuscript. Alongside these temporal and spatial demarcations, running headers (‘Boreuawl Weddi’), and even catchwords, have been copied out, and while the agent has not attempted to imitate the blackletter fount, certain words have

²⁵ Two names appear on this title-page: ‘R. Wyn Edwards’, dated 1848, and ‘Richard Hughes’, dated 1905. As I discuss in the concluding section of this article, Hughes (of ‘Ty Hen Isaf’) was an important local benefactor to Bangor’s archives. This copy of the 1664 Welsh Prayer Book was one object within his private collections.

prompted them to have a go. On at least three occasions, across both sides of the surrogate leaf, the manuscript ‘J’ of ‘Jesu’ simulates the bold blackletter ‘J’ that was used in the printed original: that name, that letter, elicited an attempt to return to blackletter, a fount that carried its own retrospective associations, recalling the monastic scribal hands of medieval manuscript production.²⁶

This was obviously a work in progress. On the recto side of the manuscript leaf, a space remains vacant where a decorated ‘H’ was intended to go; on the verso side, the capital ‘E’ remains only partially decorated. And while this manuscript leaf pays homage to the visual dimensions of the lost printed pages, the agent responsible was clearly not bound by them. Eschewing the designs of the printed ornamental ‘Y’ that introduces the Absolution (sig. A2^r)—featuring a man holding an open book in one hand and a quill in the other, flanked by flowers and leaves (Figure 5)—and the ‘E’ that introduces the Lord’s Prayer (sig. A2^v)—featuring jugs, vines, flowers, and a heraldic shield—our agent has struck out in a different direction, decorating the manuscript ‘Y’ and ‘E’ with tightly-packed parallel lines, small dots, and little o-shaped embellishments. Where on the verso side of the printed leaf, a row of *fleur-de-lis* structured a break between sections of text, our agent has used a chevron-like zig-zag pattern of triangular patches, decked, again, with parallel lines, dots, and oes.

If, as Donald F. McKenzie argued, ‘the fine detail of typography and layout, the material signs which constitute a text, do signify’, what is being signified here?²⁷ If ‘the non-textual features that the printing house added to the page’ spoke a ‘visual vocabulary’, underscoring the ‘complex matrix of relations’ between material texts and linguistic content, are the same functions recapitulated when book users designed their own ornaments to replace those that were lost or damaged?²⁸

²⁶ On blackletter’s associations with ‘pastness’, see Pauline Reid, *Reading by Design: The Visual Interface of the English Renaissance Book* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), pp. 94-6.

²⁷ Donald F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 25.

²⁸ Claire McGann, “‘To print her discourses & hymmes’”: The Typographical Features of Anna Trapnel’s Prophecies’, *The Seventeenth Century* (2020), 1-20 (p. 14; p. 15) <<https://doi-org/10.1080/0268117X.2020.1721312>>;

The hand-drawn ornaments offer a striking deviation from the design of the printed ornaments they stand in for. Geometric but also abstract, they seem, at first, to be speaking a language that is so individuated as to be virtually unreadable. It is possible, however, that the textured effect of the dots and oes is meant to emulate the ‘*manière criblée*’ (or ‘dotted manner’) method of relief-engraving, which was in use since the fifteenth century and often used to fill in the background of woodblock ornamental letters.²⁹ Likewise, the little nets of lines, which border the manuscript ‘Y’, and that appear, running in multiple directions, within the ‘E’ and hand-drawn ornamental strip, appear to be imitating the engraved style of parallel hatching used in printmaking. By marrying dotted manner and hatching strokes, our agent marks out these salvaged pages in terms of difference rather than similitude. Recovery has offered an opportunity to transform the text in Figures 3 and 4 via a complex mingling of tones, hues, and textures, with lights and darks expressing relief, even movement, in ways that show up the printed ornaments they stand in for as being somewhat generic.

The background to the printed ornamental ‘Y’ reveals other design cues. The man at the centre of the letter (probably St John the Apostle and Evangelist, whose attributes in medieval and early modern visual arts were often an open book and quill) is framed not only by flowers and leaves, but also by parted curtains, with scalloped-shaped cloth draping taking up the ornamental space between them. This pattern reappears in the manuscript ‘E’ as a frame around the edge of the large letter, and both the manuscript ‘Y’ and ‘E’ have a fabric-like quality to them. The ‘Y’, for instance, is bordered by hatching that looks like a kind of fringe, and, given this textile context, those hand-drawn dots and o-shaped flourishes start to take on visual affinities with the metallic discs, or ‘spangles’, used to embroider the surface of early modern

Hazel Wilkinson, ‘Printers’ Ornaments and Flowers’, in *Book Parts*, ed. by Dennis Duncan and Smyth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 109-22 (p. 112); Marjorie Rubright, *Doppelgänger Dilemmas: Anglo-Dutch Relations in Early Modern English* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), p. 113.

²⁹ For the material processes of making printed designs in the ‘dotted manner’, see ‘Dotted Print’, in *The Grove Encyclopedia of Materials and Techniques in Art*, ed. by Gerald W.R. Ward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 155-56.

textiles, including gloves.³⁰ Conveniently, a luxury glove in Bangor’s collections (c. 1640s)—a left-handed glove for a woman (Figure 6)—highlights the intricacies of such forms of embroidery: blue threads and silver metal wires twist in and around motifs resembling flower petals and leaves, and glimmering metallic spangles punctuate the webbing designs. In the right hands, these details might seem to resemble the dots and o-shaped marks left behind in Figures 3 and 4. At the very least, they invite us to speculate as to what it was about the iconography of fabrics that caught this agent’s attention, and informed their creative approach.

Early modern devotional writers and their first readers regularly thought across the boundary between texts and textiles, anticipating postmodernist understandings of the ‘woven state’ and ‘texture’ of material forms.³¹ In his paratextual ‘Apology’ to the first part of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678), John Bunyan (1628-1688) compared the materialisation of his writing to the pulling of flax from a distaff: he spun his words just as Clotho of the Three Fates tradition spun the threads of life itself.³² Earlier in the century, George Herbert (1593-1633) marshalled textile metaphors to approach the ‘seamless weave’ of the Bible, adopting a poetic mode that tightly interlaced his own words with the Word of Scripture.³³ At the manufacturing end of literary making, printers used ornaments that resembled the patterns used to manufacture lace products, and stitching, cutting, binding, as well as pressing, were central to both printing and professional tailoring.³⁴ Old printed books and manuscripts were regularly sacrificed to structure the physical support for new books³⁵—evidence of this can be seen in Figure 1, where a scrap of

³⁰ I’ve been inspired here by McGann’s illuminating examination of the visual typography deployed in Anna Trapnel’s Fifth Monarchist prophecies. McGann also turns to the spangled design of gloves to think through the ‘visual affinity between decorated textile and textual typography’, an argument that has set the scene for my own considerations here. See McGann, p. 13.

³¹ McKenzie, p. 13.

³² John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, ed. by W. R. Owens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 3.

³³ Alison Knight, ‘“This Verse Marks That”: George Herbert’s *The Temple* and Scripture in Context’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible*, ed. by Killeen, Smith, and Willie, pp. 518-32 (p. 521).

³⁴ On the ‘lacy’ qualities of print typography, see Juliet Fleming, *Cultural Graphology: Writing after Derrida* (Chicago: The Chicago University of Press, 2016), pp. 69-70. On the connections between printing and tailoring, see Michael Durrant, ‘Henry Hills and the Tailor’s Wife: Adultery and Hypocrisy in the Archive’, in *Forms of Hypocrisy in Early Modern England*, ed. by Lucia Nigri and Naya Tsentourou (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 138-56 (esp. pp. 147-48).

³⁵ See Smyth, pp. 137-74.

printed paper is peeping out from the binding—but recycled text was also used to provide inner linings to garments, a practice that might be exemplified by Bangor’s seventeenth-century glove, which has been lined with manuscript.³⁶ We know, too, that printed books (especially bibles and prayer books) were themselves bound with embroidered textiles, fabrics that served ‘as an extension of [...] the inscriptive surfaces and semantic contents of the book.’³⁷

The linkages between text and textile are active in the printed ornamental ‘Y’, where drawn-back curtains reveal St John clutching a quill in readiness to pen down the Word. As Anna Bücheler points out, evangelist portraits in medieval manuscript ornaments often featured parted curtains, signifying ‘the veil that lay over the Old Testament but was taken away from the New’, and she identifies this ‘textile medium as a metaphor for the spiritual sense of scripture that readers are asked to detect beneath the literal sense of the words.’³⁸ These revelatory associations appear to have migrated into the printed ornamental ‘Y’ used in the 1664 *Llyfr Gweddî Gyffredin*, and, when our agent reproduced that ornament, and the others, by hand, the iconography of fabrics (already mediated through technologies of scraping and filleting out a woodblock) appear to have migrated into their creative vision. It is possible that this remediation reflects an act of interpretation, a creative reworking that evokes textiles and, in doing so, invites us to read for devotional meaning in those textile patterns. Prompted by the image of drawn-back curtains, they might have been designed to serve as aids for contemplation: as visual reminders, for example, of the promises of spiritual revelation through the performance of prayer.³⁹

³⁶ The manuscript lining could be paper waste, although since embroidered gloves were often given as gifts in the period, it could also be a note from a gift-giver. Either way, the presence of writing within the glove underscores how closely connected texts and textiles could be in early modern material cultures.

³⁷ Claire Canavan, ‘Reading Materials: Textile Surfaces and Early Modern Books’, *Journal of the Northern Renaissance*, 8 (2017) <<http://www.northernrenaissance.org/reading-materials-textile-surfaces-and-early-modern-books/>> [accessed 15 May 2020] (para. 12 of 36).

³⁸ Anna Bücheler, ‘Clothing Sacred Scripture: Textile Pages in Two Medieval Gospel Books (Trier, Dombibliothek, Ms. 138 and 139), in *Clothing Sacred Scriptures: Book Art and Book Religion in Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Culture*, ed. by David Ganz and Barbara Schellewald (Berlin and Boston, MA: de Gruyter, 2019), pp. 123-40 (pp. 129-30).

³⁹ On the multivalent meanings attached to curtains in the early modern period, see Nathalie Rivere de Carles, ‘Performing Materiality: Curtains on the Early Modern Stage’, in *Shakespeare’s Theatres and the Effects of Performance*, ed. by Farah Karim-Cooper and Stern (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 51-72.

But of course, curtains can conceal as well as reveal. As Jeffrey Masten suggests, the ‘meaning production’ offered by decorative ornaments is always fraught, whether hand-drawn or printed.⁴⁰ His illuminating exploration of the homoerotic potentialities of ornamental woodcut initials featuring naked boys, which appear with regular frequency in early modern bibles—including, as Masten points out, in the letter ‘I’ of Genesis’s ‘In the beginnyng’ in the Coverdale Bible (1537)—raises vital questions about intention.⁴¹ These ‘boy letters’, as Masten defines them, may well make legible historically-specific ‘modes of [...] eroticism’, articulating, in turn, ‘implied or intended connections’ between decorative initials and ‘the texts they introduce’; however, these correspondences are always haunted by the fact that they might be ‘accidental’, or a projection of the desires of the ‘modern reader’.⁴² The tantalising indeterminacy of these boy letters reminds us that, while the ‘visual field’ of the early modern material text demands, and incites, interpretation, our interpretations are, to quote Juliet Fleming, staged against the backdrop of the ‘mystery of the printed page’: a site of ‘support for our intellectual and affective projections’, but also a site of ‘oddity’, where originary meanings and intentions of print-shop labour can recede into, just as easily as they seem to emerge out of, paper’s inky depths.⁴³

Anecdotal evidence related to the making of the 1664 *Llyfr Gweddi Gyffredin* offers a striking backstory to the ‘mystery’ of its printed pages. A fly-leaf at the beginning of a copy of *Llyfr Gweddi Gyffredin* held at The National Library of Wales (NLW) contains a 1717 manuscript memoranda in the hand of one ‘Moses Williams’, and in that note Williams has a few things to say about the design of the book. He singles out its publisher, Bodfel—a Welsh-born, London-based stationer who, after the Great Fire of 1666, relocated to Chester—as a scurrilous individual, and one whose own designs on the design of *Llyfr Gweddi Gyffredin* seemed to have been, at best, swaggeringly eccentric. Williams claims that ‘Bodvel’, the ‘Undertaker of this

⁴⁰ Jeffrey Masten, *Queer Philologies: Sex, Language, and Affect in Shakespeare’s Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p. 140.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 140; p. 142; p. 145.

⁴³ Fleming, p. 131.

Book’, was ‘a Presbyterian’, and that he ‘often bragg’d of comparing [Charles II] to an Owl the Royal Family to Cranes & the Clergy & their Followers to Apes’. Bodfel ‘bragg’d’, we are told, but he also appears to have practiced what he preached, since Williams alleges that he used the pages of *Llyfr Gweddi Gyffredin* to give material form to his rebellious talk, deploying ornamental ‘Capitals’ featuring owls, cranes, and apes ‘at the Beginning’ of the text’s ‘Morning & Evening’ prayers.⁴⁴ Thus, according to this 1717 memoranda, Bodfel’s interventions were calculated to ensure that the book’s users would begin, and end, their prayerful days of Anglican devotions with beasts.

Animal letters, then, rather than Masten’s naked boy letters, but it’s a menagerie of ornaments that might similarly be made to speak in unpredictable, even subversive, ways. At least, that is, in Williams’s telling. Williams’s story is a good one, but it’s not necessarily true, and we might question whose desires or projections were actually being marked out in the memoranda at the beginning of the NLW’s copy of the 1664 *Llyfr Gweddi Gyffredin*.⁴⁵ Similar concerns are reiterated when we look at the manuscript interventions in Figures 3 and 4—whose desires, whose impulses, are being marked out there? We are not in the world of owls, cranes, or apes; nor are we in the presence of John and his book; these user-generated embellishments visually relocate us in a world made up of textiles. By imitating the scalloped-shaped cloth hanging in the upper part of the printed ‘Y’, there is a sense of a reader reading, and interpreting, the ornamental features of the lost printed page, teasing out and exploiting its visible codes and cues. What was background in Figure 5 is foreground in Figures 3 and 4: suddenly, textile matters are the organisational principle of the manuscript leaf’s *mise-en-page*, with fabric-like drawings cladding the morning’s Absolution, the Lord’s Prayer, and the liminal space in between. Using his or her imagination, he or she has found a space for him- or herself within the text,

⁴⁴ *Llyfr Gweddi Gyffredin* (1664, NLW MS 13254D).

⁴⁵ On Bodfel’s shifting commercial and politico-religious allegiances, see Philip Henry Jones, ‘Wales and the Stationers’ Company’, in *The Stationers’ Company and the Book Trade, 1550-1990*, ed. by Robin Myers and Michael Harris (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 1997), pp. 185-202 (p. 195).

fashioning adornments that would be difficult to render in print, that are difficult to describe in words, but that appear to restage our visual encounter with the paper leaf in terms of other materials, including cloth, curtains, and maybe gloves.

In the Beginning

Bangor's folio copy of the King James, or Authorised, Bible (X/EC1 1611) is missing all of its preliminary printed materials: Cornelis Boel's (c. 1576-c. 1621) engraved title-page, depicting the Apostles and patriarchs, has been lost, as well as its 'Epistle Dedicatorie', its address 'To the Reader', its 'Calendar', its 'names and order of all the Bookes', its 'Genealogies of [the] Holy Scriptures', its 'Alphabetical Table', and its map of Canaan. It is also missing the first printed leaf and the first two pages of 'The First Booke of Moses, called Genesis' (sigs. A1^{r-v}); however, at some point in the eighteenth century a conscientious scribe has replaced that lost leaf with a manuscript reproduction (Figure 7). No attempt has been made to manually recover the absent title-page or any other preliminary paratexts—those mediating book parts that provided 'multiple points of entry into the scriptures'—but it was clearly important for this agent to ensure that the 'First Booke' of the bible began at the beginning rather than in a 'voyd' (Genesis 1.2).⁴⁶

This was a rather delicate operation. The agent's labours have, for instance, introduced error—there's a word missing in Genesis 1.3, which was afterwards inserted ('And God^{said} Let there be Light')—and there also appears to have been a problem related to spacing. On the recto side of the manuscript leaf, this agent has produced generous spacing between lines, seemingly as a means by which the layout of manuscript text can spatially emulate the layout of the lost printed page. (So, the first seven verses of 'The First Booke of Moses' are, in both the manuscript substitute and on the printed page, situated in the left column, with the right column

⁴⁶ Katrin Ettenhuber, "'A comely gate to so rich and glorious a citie':" The Paratextual Architecture of the Rheims New Testament and the King James Bible', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible*, ed. by Killeen, Smith, and Willie, pp. 54-70 (p. 55).

beginning with the eighth verse.)⁴⁷ But these attempts to ape the formal aspects of the text's layout in print come under pressure. Over on the verso side of the manuscript leaf, the spacing between the lines have had to become much tighter and more compact. There's simply too much text and not enough space. It is a little moment of drama and risk, as the agent's lines edge closer to the first surviving printed leaf within the book (sigs. A2^{r-v}). And it is a reminder that even the most perfunctory attempts to compensate for lost printed pages would require the conservator to think as early modern printers usually do: to imagine words and letters as material things that occupy space, and to conceive of the page itself as a physical environment of possibility as well as limits. All it takes is one slip, one error of judgement, to send the hand, and the text, shooting off the margins.

While this agent's labours demonstrate an attempt to adhere to, and assimilate, the design and layout conventions of the absent printed leaf, it also deviates from them. This is the result of a spatial miscalculation, but it could also have something to do with choice. The agent has reproduced the layout of text in double columns, for example, and an attempt has also been made to produce the foliate design of the eight-line unframed decorative 'I' of 'In the beginning'; however, the agent has eschewed the thistles and roses of the printed 'I' for something more discreet. Likewise, there has been no attempt to reproduce the archaic spelling or the black-letter font, or the decorated headpiece, or to copy out the running headers—'The creation | Chap.j. | of the world' (recto) and 'The creation of man. | Genesis. | The first Sabbath' (verso)—that would have accompanied the original printed leaf. The marginal cross-references to other biblical passages (designated by an asterisk) and glosses of Hebrew words (designated by an obelisk) have also been side-lined, as have the scribal pilcrow marks that were used to designate the beginnings of each paragraph. Although the agent has created space to reproduce the short

⁴⁷ For comparison, the first printed page (sig. A1^r) of 'The First Booke of Moses' in *The Holy Bible* can be viewed by using the Folger Shakespeare Library's 'LUNA: Folger Digital Image Collections' platform: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/detail/FOLGERCM1~6~6~518005~137882:Bible--English--Authorized-?qvq=q:The%20First%20Booke%20of%20Moses&mi=0&trs=1> [accessed 15 June 2020].

précis of contents that heads each chapter of the King James Bible, the précis has itself been précised. On the printed page, the summary of contents that heads ‘CHAP.I.’, for instance, condenses ten verses of ‘The First Booke of Moses’ (1, 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29), but in the manuscript reproduction, this agent has reduced that summary to only three: ‘I. The creation of heaven and Earth, 26. of man in the image of God, 29. the Appointment of food.’

This is, in other words, an act of copying that is also an act of abridgment. While hewing close to the double-column layout, and alluding to the decorative ‘T’, the agent’s methodological approach is one of simplification, stripping away a number of the printed pages’ paratextual apparatus, including running headers, pilcrow, marginal cross-references and glosses. Thus ‘the more austere *mise-en-page*’ of the King James Bible, which, unlike the Geneva Bible (1560) and the Bishops’ Bible (1568) before it, avoided illustrations and interpretive marginalia, is, in this agent’s hands, pushed further into the realms of visual unadornment.⁴⁸ This work of (re)creation and refinement spills into the manuscript précis that heads ‘CHAP.I.’, which has been similarly thinned out, pruned, or, perhaps more appropriately given the emphasis on ‘food’, digested.⁴⁹

There may have been purely practical motives behind these discriminations. As a pulpit bible intended for use in a parish church, and from which worshippers would have heard passages from the Old and New Testament read aloud every Sunday, the book needed to be at least serviceable.⁵⁰ It’s not too hard to imagine that our agent was a member of the clergy, working to recover structural loss so that the book could remain a useful object in public worship. This would not necessarily have to entail the reproduction of the title-page or other paratexts, or even cross-references and glosses, especially if the agent had a good working

⁴⁸ John N. King and Aaron T. Pratt, ‘The Materiality of English Bibles from the Tyndale New Testament to the King James Bible’, in *The King James Bible after 400 Years: Literary, Linguistic, and Cultural Influences*, ed. by Hannibal Hamlin and Norman W. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 61-99 (p. 87).

⁴⁹ On digestion as a metaphor for embodied and assimilating practices of early modern reading, see Michael Schoenfeldt, ‘Reading Bodies’, in *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. by Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 215-43 (esp. pp. 215-221).

⁵⁰ On the use of the King James Version in church, see Hamlin, Judith Maltby, and Helen Moore, ‘The 1611 King James Bible and its Cultural Politics’, in *Manifold Greatness: The Making of the King James Bible*, ed. by Moore and Julian Reid (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2011), pp. 117-38 (esp. pp. 134-36).

knowledge of the book at hand. However, it is not altogether certain whether our agent was a religious conformer. Before this bible passed into the care of Bangor's archives in the 1960s, it belonged to the Independent College in Bala, Merionethshire, which was later known as the Bala-Bangor College, a Welsh nonconformist seminary originally founded in 1841 by the Calvinist Methodist, Michael Jones (1787-1853), and later led by his son, Michael D. Jones (1822-1898), who established the first Welsh settlement ('Y Wladfa', or 'The Colony') in Argentine Patagonia. We do not know how or when this book came into the possession of the Independent College in Bala, although the possibility that the repair work was carried out by someone running in North Walian nonconformist circles remains active, and potentially suggestive, providing a more knotty confessional context for our scribe's pared-back approach to the text's layout and design, and an ecumenical twist to the book's provenance.

There are other lost pages in this book, beyond its missing preliminary paratexts. Everything that follows I John 4.12—'No man hath scene God at any time' (sig. Z1^v)—has been torn away. Attempts were made to replace those pages, too, perhaps by the agent who worked on replacing the first two pages of 'The First Booke of Moses'. If that is the case, the conservatory methods deployed at the back of the book differ from those adopted at the beginning. Here, recycled printed pages from a small-format version of the New Testament, printed not in black-letter but in roman type, have simply been pasted into the book. The intention may have been to use these printed pages as exemplars for a bigger restorative project that echoed the work carried out at the beginning of 'The First Booke of Moses'; maybe the agent sought to save time by deploying a less labour-intensive practice, involving cutting and pasting rather than copying. Then again, the 'theological and historical importance' of 'The First Booke of Moses', which unfurls the 'origin of all life', may have cued our agent to adopt a more labour-intensive technique.⁵¹

⁵¹ Tops, p. 199.

In Genesis 1, ‘God speaks the universe into being’, turning ‘rude conceptions’, to quote Lucy Hutchinson (1620-1681), ‘into forms’, and here at ‘the Beginning’ of all things, someone has entered into the book in an effort to (re)create a ‘likenesse’ (Genesis 1.26) of the lost printed leaf, a materially interventionist undertaking that distantly echoes the generative agency playing out in the text of Genesis itself.⁵² Figure 7 makes us doubly aware of the six-day Creation as an inaugurating but also as an ongoing activity: ‘the Beginning’ begins all over again, as those words emanate in imperfect and hesitant gestures from an eighteenth century pen. As a result, that first familiar phrase of the bible takes on a dynamic energy in its (re)production: *the* Creation and *this* creation are implicated in each other, capturing an animated sense of haptic busyness as our agent worked to recover the (book’s) ‘Beginning’ by making themselves a part of it.

Paper scraps

Figure 8 shows the battered spine that precariously holds together Bangor’s copy of ‘THE BYBLE / CRANMER VERSION’ (X/EC1 1540), otherwise known as the Great Bible—‘Great’ because of its size; ‘Cranmer’ because Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury (1489-1556), wrote a prologue to the second edition, which then appeared in all subsequent editions.⁵³ As its exposed sewing structure might indicate, this book is an absolute mess, bearing traces of reading, circulation, and reworking for well over four centuries.

These traces exist in the form of inscriptions and signatures, ink spills, rogue hairs, the cracked shells of nuts, a number of pins, as well as hundreds of unattached paper scraps, a few of which can also be seen in Figure 8. Some of these paper scraps have commonplace passages from sermons written onto them, numbers and calculations, names and dates, and some are

⁵² Hamlin, ‘The Noblest Composition in the Universe or Fit for the Flames?: The Literary Style of the KJB’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible*, ed. by Killeen, Smith, and Willie, pp. 469-82 (p. 472); Lucy Hutchinson, *Order and Disorder*, ed. by David Norbrook (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 1. p. 29.

⁵³ This bible was printed by Richard Grafton (*d.* 1572) in London in July 1540; it is one survivor amongst 9000 Great or Cranmer Bibles printed before 1541. The English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) lists 16 extant copies of this particular edition, although Bangor’s copy is not listed.

blank. Most look as if they were being used as bookmarks; however, others contain shards of biblical text. These scraps appear to be remnants from a larger recovery project, in which handwritten supplements were used like plasters to dress wounded pages. This involved a cautious alignment of hand and press, and a sense on that agent's behalf of the text as a kind of frenetic jigsaw, one that could easily fall apart, but also be put back together again using scissors, glue, and paper.

Many paper scraps are still floating freely within Bangor's Cranmer Bible, which are sometimes off-cuts of an attempt to mend a printed page, or remnants of a recovery attempt that failed to take place. The effect is that the book feels alive with meaning and potential, but also that it is dangerously close to collapse and disappearance. Over time, extensive use has reduced it to material stuff, which it continues to shed every time the book (if that's not too monolithic a term) is opened. For this very reason, archivists recently placed Bangor's Cranmer Bible inside a cardboard box for its own safety, lined with cushions. A copy of the main printed title-page (which this object actually lacks) has been downloaded from Early English Books Online (EEBO) and affixed to that box, a sign of what is, and what is not in fact, inside.

It's a curious end for a book that has had a very active social life. As part of the research for another article I am working on, I have traced a few of this book's former owners. So far, this narrative has me moving from one 'merdlle [i.e. Myrtle?] Paston'—baptised '[t]he [13th] day of december in the 31st] yeare of the reiygn of kinge Henry the eyghtt'—through to a husband and wife team, Benjamin and Susanna Rogers, of Rowington, in Warwickshire, who are active in its margins between 1710 and 1743, and who were jointly responsible for the patchwork repairs discussed above. As far as I can tell, the book then moved south into Gloucestershire, where, according to a nineteenth-century bookseller's note, this 'Bible was [...] found built in a wall in a chest room at a Farm House at Saintbury' by one 'Rev J[ohn] T[heodosius] Jones' (c. 1786-1851), a 'Vicar of Saintbury' and former Master of the Grammar School of King Edward VI, Stratford-upon-Avon. The book then came into the hands of Richard Hughes (1837-1930), an Anglesey-

based farm labourer who, late in life, came into money via a surprise inheritance, which he used to collect rare books, gifting 3000 of them, including this Cranmer Bible, to Bangor University in 1930.⁵⁴

This short provenance narrative might suggest that I'm currently in the grips of Jacques Derrida's 'archive fever': 'the desire', to quote Carolyn Steedman, 'to recover moments of inception: to find and possess all sorts of beginnings.'⁵⁵ I must confess a preoccupation with nostalgically getting back to the identities behind the marks in books, but with this is a sense my own belatedness. Taking Bangor's Cranmer Bible out of its new box is like entering into a conversation that has already petered out. Paper scraps linger within its pages as signs of incompleteness, of recovery processes that have been cut short. Patched pages stand in for what is not there as much as what is: there's really no going back. What is there is a humbling sense that I'm not the first: many people have been into this book before me, and what they did to it back then means that I can handle it now. Its value lies less in a sense of handling an authentic original than in handling an object that foregrounds the archivally- and geographically-specific labours that precede and support my writing, and that enable this book to be read. It is a hugely involving object for that very reason: I can only read its materiality by way of (amongst others) the labourer Hughes, whose generous donation of 3000 old books to Bangor in 1930 marked the beginnings of the archive in which this dishevelled object, and all the others I've been discussing, are now housed.

But then there's this: a manuscript note, affixed to the left board and overlaid with a stamp belonging to Hughes, which physically describes this Cranmer Bible as 'imperfect', since it is missing a number of pages. '[B]eginning at Gen XIX', it says, before remarking that material damage due to sustained reading has otherwise rendered it 'worn and damaged'. It's a lexicon that marks this object out in terms of lack and want, but it could easily be (re)characterized in

⁵⁴ The following year, Hughes's rags-to-riches story was unpacked in the *Welsh Outlook: A Monthly Journal of National Social Progress*, 18:4 (April, 1931), 88-89.

⁵⁵ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 5.

opposite terms. Turn over its battered left board and you will find a book that is somehow in excess of itself, marked by overspill and remnants. It's almost too much rather than not enough, a book that's bursting at the seams of its own material limits.

The word 'imperfect' just doesn't do justice to this book's exciting, decaying disarray, and neither would it be comfortably attached to all the other material modifications examined in this article. To quote Joshua Calhoun, each of those examples hint towards a 'duplicitous media preservation strategy', which mingles desires to repair books back into a state of completion—to reinstate, for example, imprints and ornamental capitals—with a sense of books as transformative spaces into which stuff can be added, as well as revealed.⁵⁶ (A missing title-page became an opportunity to assert multiple ownerships, identities, shared pasts, and new beginnings; elsewhere, copying out printed ornaments exposed devotionally pertinent links between printing and embroidery.) Half undone by use and half made over, pivoting between copying and creation, possessing and processing, my examples encourage us to think about books and people in imaginative process together, and to recognise that earlier reading communities were comfortable with a sense of the book as an accumulative form, whose endurance through time was predicated upon its openness to material change. Indeed, the loss and damage accrued by book use prompted book users to not only recover those losses, but to also reflect on what printed books are, and what they could be. Acknowledging the interpretive potential modelled in repaired and modified pages is, therefore, a good place to begin as we take an 'imperfect' old book down from its shelf, or out of its box.

⁵⁶ Joshua Calhoun, *The Nature of the Page: Poetry, Papermaking, and the Ecology of Texts in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), p. 150.