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Edited by
LOTTE HELLINGA
and
J. B. TRAPP



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Literacy, books and readers

J. B. TRAPP

Much close attention is given elsewhere in this volume to the details and the specific circumstances of the commissioning of books, both manuscript and printed, to how they were acquired and collected into libraries by individuals and institutions, and to their use, potential and actual. Something more general needs nevertheless to be said, in an introductory way, about literacy and reading.¹ It is difficult, even impossible, to be precise about so slippery a concept, hard to define and compute acceptably even today. An overall growth in the ability to read *and* write English during our period is certain enough. To what precise extent the same applies to Latin literacy is less clear.

Nevertheless, the quantity of what was progressively made available in manuscript and print propels us towards assumptions which the comparative absence of reliable statistics makes difficult to validate. The attempt may perhaps carry more conviction if generalization and inference are reduced to a minimum and the enquiry is conducted on the basis of the few specific contemporary statements that exist, and some examples. There is no reason to suppose that the statements in question are utterly to be relied upon; they are, for one thing, made in the heat of controversy, or at least *à parti pris*. The rest of the evidence, besides being largely random, requires much circumspection in interpretation.

That books large and small were composed is beyond dispute. That there was a reading public for them, varying in size from one person to many, from book to book and according to means, motive and opportunity, is therefore equally certain. Who composed that public, what gender, occupation, profession, social class and so on, and what proportion of their lives, private and public, individual and institutional, was

1. An up-to-date general survey of literacy, such as is available for an earlier time in Clanchy 1993, is lacking for our period; on the general question, see Goody 1968, and therein especially Schofield 1968.

occupied by writing and reading is largely imponderable. In any case, acquaintance with and comprehension of a text, in varying degree, whether Latin, French or vernacular, need not imply that it had been really read by those who knew it. In a society where learning by rote or by heart was common, how many attendances at mass or mattins would be necessary before the attender knew the Latin or the English words more or less by heart and in some sense at least understood their import; how many times would the participant in a Lollard conventicle need to hear the preacher convey to his hearers the words of the Sermon on the Mount or, for that matter, the message of the *Lantern of Light* or *Wyclif's Wicket*? We need to know far more of the social spread of Lollardy and of the attainments of those who taught it, as well as those who heard it. Conversely, how much, other than such texts, would Sir Thomas More's 'old cunningg weuar', so apt in the corruption of others, have read or been able to comprehend?² How many of each gender were envisaged in the contemporary complaint that Wycliffe and his followers were making the Scriptures available to those lay persons, women included, who could read English but not Latin?³ What of those Scots, Irish, weavers, ploughmen or even women whom Erasmus hoped would get the New Testament by heart?⁴ To turn to a secular context, what readers are implied by the sixteenth-century practice of circulating poems in manuscript?⁵ What poem or poems is 'Chaucer' reading to his cultured, court audience in the famous illustration which precedes a manuscript of his *Troilus and Criseyde* made in the first quarter of the fifteenth century, and what is implied by the representation?⁶ The notion of oral/manuscript culture rapidly and comprehensively succeeded by print culture is impossibly crude. Such a succession is not yet complete and never will be. Was the audience for romances largely female, as is still often so widely assumed? What did the city merchant read, let alone his apprentices? Merchants wrote letters, especially the Celys, their wives and their friends, and so did some of their apprentices.⁷ All wrote in English, and the masters recorded their formal deliberations and decisions in their native language also – the Brewers from 1422, the Mercers from 1453.⁸ Such merchants' letters do not survive in the same numbers as those of the fifteenth-century gentry, the Pastons, Stonors and Plumptons in par-

2. *CWM* ix, p. 163. 3. Knighton 1995, pp. 242–5, cited from earlier edition by Adamson 1946, p. 40, and Aston 1984, p. 206. 4. *Paraclesis*; Olin 1987, p. 101.
 5. Marotti 1995; Woudhuysen 1996.
 6. Cambridge, Corpus Christi Coll., ms. 61, f. 1v; facsim. Cambridge 1978.
 7. Adamson 1946, pp. 39–40; Hanham 1975. 8. E. g. Lyell 1936.

ticalar, women and men both.⁹ The ‘English bills rhymed in part’ posted by Walter Aslak in the 1420s on various gates and doors in Norwich, threatening murder to William Paston and others, imply a readership, or at least an audience,¹⁰ as do the medical promises posted in 1558 by Thomas Luffkin.¹¹ How many more would have acquired the skill of reading in the intervening century and a half is not easy to establish. That royal proclamations were issued in printed form from 1504 may be relevant.¹² These are some of many questions, to which there are few answers. Whether one searches wills – where books are seldom mentioned, let alone particularized, unless they were especially prized or had some special association or were of some special kind (prayer-books are perhaps most frequent) – and legal instruments, probate inventories, letters, journals, surviving copies of books, library catalogues, or seeks to establish the sources used by an author, high or low, sacred or secular, precise documentation of the ability to read is scant. One is thrown back on inference, whether readers were professional, cultivated or pragmatic in their orientation.¹³

Three *ex cathedra* statements, and a comment or two, from the first half of the sixteenth century may therefore be a useful starting point; one is by a Dean of St Paul’s and educationist, two by Chancellors of the realm under Catholic monarchs, one of whom was also a bishop. When the first of these, John Colet, framed in 1512 the statutes of the school he had re-founded and which was now ready for its first boy pupils in St Paul’s Churchyard, he required that: ‘The high Maister shall admytt thes Children as they shal be offeryde fro tyme to tyme, but fyrste see theye Can theyre Catechizon and also that he can rede and write Competentlye, elles lett hym not be admyttyde in no wyse.’¹⁴ Clearly, this requirement was élitist; equally clearly, even in an élite social group, literacy was not the norm. What standard is represented by competence in reading and writing at the age of about seven years, and in what language, does not appear; nor what standard the 153 boys who made up the full complement of pupils at any one time can be judged, singly or as a group, to have attained. The list of distinguished scholarly Old Paulines is substantial, but surely represents only a small proportion of those who passed through the school. Multiply St Paul’s by the number of grammar

9. Most, if not all, the surviving letters of the Paston women were written down by amanuenses.

10. N. Davis 1971–6, I, p. 8; II, p. 506; cited from earlier edition by Adamson 1946, p. 41.

11. Jones, p. 448 below. 12. Neville-Sington, p. 580 below. 13. Parkes 1973.

14. BL, Add. ms. 6274, f. 7v.

schools that existed by the time of Elizabeth in every large town, and some small ones, some of them survivors or re-foundations from an earlier era, and you might, making due allowance for the incompetent and unqualified keepers of schools that were already the subject in May 1446 of a Privy Seal writ, have some indication of extent. Precise numbers, however, cannot be attached to any element in the equation. There are many further complications. The entrance requirements of Winchester in 1400 and Eton in 1447 were that pupils should arrive knowing their Donatus, that is to say with some knowledge of Latin grammar; in 1446, the school at Newland, Glos., was less exigent.¹⁵ What can hardly be doubted, however, is that the large increase in the number of schools in England during the fifteenth century must have led to an improved general level of literacy. Similarly, though there is debate about the precise effect of the Reformation, and particularly the Dissolution of the Monasteries and the Chantries Act of 1547, the first half of the sixteenth century must have witnessed a further increase. The Protestant ethic surely also played a part.¹⁶

Early in 1533, some twenty years later than his now-dead friend and mentor Colet, Sir Thomas More, repeating his case against scriptural translations not authorized by the Church, argues:

For the people may haue every necessary trewth of scrypture, and euery thyng necessary for them to know, concernynge the saluacyon of theyr soules, trewly taught and preched vnto theym, though the corps and bodye of the scrypture be not translated vnto them in theyr mother tonge . . . Yf the hauynge of the scrypture in englyshe be a thyng so requysyte of precise nessesyte that the peoples soules shulde nedes perysh but yf they haue it translated into theyre owne tonge, then muste there the most part perishe for all that, except the preacher make farther prouysyon besyde, that all the people shall be able to rede it when they haue yt, *of which people farre more then four partes of all the whole dyuyded into tenne, could neuer rede englysshe yet* [my italics].¹⁷

The exact meaning of ‘rede’ is far from clear: does it imply ‘read’ in our modern sense, or, at least in part, rather ‘comprehend’? More’s other statements are both more specific and less optimistic: in the same work he writes of a ‘tynker or a tylar whyche could (for some there can) rede englysshe’.¹⁸ More’s brother-in-law John Rastell, writing from the other

15. Orme 1973, pp. 69–70.

16. Moran 1985, pp. 3–20; cf. Orme 1973, pp. 11–56; 1989, *passim*; M. G. A. Vale 1976; Cressy 1980.

17. *CWM* ix, p. 13.

18. *CWM* ix, p. 163.

side and almost contemporaneously, in 1534, to Thomas Cromwell, clearly had good expectations of the size of the reading public: he was anxious that 10,000 or 20,000 of the *Book of the Charge* should be printed and ‘sparklyd abroad . . . for lernyd men themselves but also the people to be instructed in the true lernying and brought from ignorance to knowledge of the true fayth and to have no confidence in the Pope nor his laws’.¹⁹

Rather more than a decade on, Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, writing on 3 May 1547 to Edward Vaughan, Captain of Portsmouth, about the destruction of religious images in that city, expresses his indignation:

And if by reviling of stockes and stones, in which matter images be graven, the setting of the truth to be red in them of all men shal be contemned, how shal such writing continue in honor as is comprised in cloutes and pitch, wherof and wherupon our bokes be made, *such as few can skil of, and not the hundredth part of the realme? And if we, a few that can reade, because we can reade in one sorte of letters* [i.e. Latin]: so privileged as they have manye reliefs, shall pull away the bookes of the reste, and woulde have our letters only in estimation and blind al them, shall not they have just cause to mistrust what is ment [my italics]?²⁰

Whether Gardiner meant the truth to be read in English, or Latin, or both is left uncertain; probably – given his views on Scripture and the priesthood – he meant to indicate those who were *litterati* in the old, strict sense. It is clear, at all events, that he was writing about reading at an advanced and sophisticated level, and that he had in mind Gregory the Great’s dictum concerning images as the books of the illiterate.

H. S. Bennett’s characterization of these last two examples as rhetorical flourishes, not to be taken seriously as evidence – especially, perhaps, the second – is true enough as far as it goes, though it removes the dimension of urgency deriving from the context of religious reform and its suppression: both More and Gardiner find the Church’s authoritative interpretation of Scripture sufficient for every virtuous purpose.²¹ Gardiner may be doing so rather more humanely in this instance than More. Others, such as John Stokesley, Bishop of London, refusing to take his share in New Testament translation in 1534, were more vehement in their denial of translations to the people.²² Yet the primer had been avail-

19. Quoted in *CWM*, ix, pp. liii–liv.
22. Adamson 1946, p. 45.

20. Gardiner 1933, p. 274.

21. Bennett 1952, p. 28.

able in English since about 1400.²³ The problem became acute only when the heretical element had entered, and it was probably suspicion of heresy, rather than that they were reciting mattins aloud from an English primer, that caused an unspecified number of maidens to be turned out of the church of Langham, on the Essex–Suffolk borders, by a zealous sidesman on Ascension Day 1534.²⁴ By that time, both heretical Psalters and heretical primers in English, the work of Reformers such as George Joye, had been printed, first in Antwerp from 1530, and then in England, with Antwerp continuing.²⁵

Lollard proposals to parliament in 1410 for an enlargement of the number of English universities from 2 to 15, at which 15,000 ‘priests and clerks’ should be supported to study, may or may not be based on any sort of realistic estimate of available literates in various catchment areas. Inferences somewhat more reliable about literacy and a reading public of a specialized kind may, however, be drawn from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Church proceedings and royal legislation against heresy, partial and indefinite though the indications these offer may be.²⁶ The writings of Wycliffe were already cited in Gregory XI’s bull in 1377; from 1388 the dissemination of his doctrines in ‘books, booklets, schedules and quires’ which had been caused to be written in both English and Latin was the subject of Chancery documents; and already in 1388, 1397 and 1414 those under formal examination are specifically required to produce before their judges the heretical books they have written. The statute *De heretico comburendo* of 1401 mentions the making and writing of books apt to corrupt their readers, but cites none by name; the Constitutions of Archbishop Arundel, issued in 1409, are specific about Bible translation and about the dissemination of heresy by tract as well as by sermon and conventicle. On the face of it, like the fourteenth-century prohibitions and proceedings, with the exception of those of 1397, which specify books in English, all menace the *litteratus* in the clerical sense; the man who could read Latin. This is an index of the way in which the Lollard movement in its first thirty or forty years kept its learned aspirations. The prohibitions were also, however, firmly directed against readers of

23. Littlehales 1895–7. 24. Adamson 1946, p. 44; cf. Collinson 1996, esp. pp. 80–1.

25. *STC* 2370ff., 13828.4; Hume 1973, nos. 12, 14; Butterworth 1953.

26. On the question in general, see Biller and Hudson 1994, and especially the essay by Hudson, ‘Laicus litteratus’, therein; and further on fifteenth-century England in particular, Hudson 1988, esp., in the excellent chapter on Lollard education, pp. 185–6, and cf. pp. 374, 511–12; and Aston 1984, pp. 196–218 (‘Lollardy and literacy’). These fully documented studies are heavily drawn upon in the paragraphs which follow.

the vernacular, and this emphasis increases in the sixteenth century. Lollard tracts laid a duty on ‘whoso can read books in his language and so knoweth the better God’s law’ to apply that advantage to the ‘worship of God and the help of his even [i.e. fellow] Christians’. In Lollardy, the written English word, scriptural or other, became crucial. John Foxe records a story of how Robert Barnes sold new printed Testaments – Tyndale’s or Joye’s – to two merchants to replace their Lollard manuscripts, tattered from use.²⁷ Scripture had precedence, but the evidence of both length and format suggests that sermon texts were left by itinerant preachers for later reading and discussion by their audiences; and the trouble taken by some of those accused of heresy to deny that they could read, and by their accusers to establish that they could, is also telling. What none of this permits, unhappily, is a firm quantitative – or qualitative, for that matter – notion of literacy in either the clerical or the lay sense.

Nor do later Church constitutions or suppressions or royal proclamations against harmful and seditious books. The best one can say is that they recognize the danger of ‘misorder and abusio[n]’ in Church and state implicit in the ability to read. The confiscations and bonfires of books under Wolsey and Cuthbert Tunstal, Bishop of London, in the 1520s, the warnings to booksellers, the processes against De Worde, Berthelet and others in the 1520s and 1530s (even though these were concerned with technicalities of licence to print), and the rest, all imply a readership, if of indeterminate size, at least with determination to read. So do known instances of the prosecution of known individual readers. The proclamations of 1529–30 were concerned to suppress the circulation of Lollard texts, such as John Purvey’s *Compendious olde treatyse shewynge how that we ought to have the scripture in Englyshe* and *The examinacion of Master William Thorpe . . . [and] of . . . syr Ihonn Oldcastle* of 1530.²⁸ A more urgent concern was to hinder the importing into England of Lutheran heresy, ‘pupil of the Wycliffite’ in the words of Tunstal, licensing his friend More to retain and read heretical books for the purpose of refuting them.²⁹ Scripture in the vernacular, and the Lutheran–Tyndalean reduction of the sacraments to those two which were held to have their basis in Scripture itself, baptism and the Eucharist, excluding the doctrine of transubstantiation,

27. Cited in Collinson 1996, p. 81.

28. *STC* 7772, 7775; *TRP*, 122, 129; Hume 1973, nos. 16, 18. Others were inserted later; cf. *CWM* vi, p. 883; and cf., e.g., the *Lantern of Light* of about 1409–15, printed in London in about 1535 (*STC* 15225).

29. E. F. Rogers 1947, pp. 387–8.

the nature of the Church and of its priesthood, the veneration of the saints, the validity of works as well as faith, were all seen as dangers to spirituality and temporality alike.

Thomas Nix, Bishop of Norwich, is already complaining in 1530 that he cannot suppress such books and their readers, particularly since the readers invoke the support of the King: 'For divers saith openly in my diocese that the King's Grace would that they should have the said erroneous books and so maintaineth themselves of the King.' Nix's informants tell him that 'wheresoever they go, they hear say that the King's pleasure is the New Testament in English should go forth and men should have it and read it'. This, it has been convincingly suggested, is a misunderstanding of the phrase used on title-pages: 'cum privilegio regali'. Nix's impression is, however, that readership of such books is limited to merchants and those who lived near the coast: 'the gentlemen and the commonalty be not greatly infected'.³⁰ The proclamation of 1538 was intended to put an end to internal disputings in an already reformed context upon matters necessary to salvation, such as baptism and the Eucharist.³¹ In the same year, Thomas Cromwell's injunctions directed all to the pure fount of doctrine, the Bible in English, of the largest size, in the copy to be provided by every parish priest in his church, placed where the 'parishioners may most commodiously resort to the same and read it' for themselves or have it read to them.³² In that year, too, it is recorded that 'divers poor men in the town of Chelmsford in Essex' bought the New Testament in English, and sat on Sundays 'reading in the lower end of the church and many would flock about them to hear them reading'.³³ This need not imply illiteracy in all such hearers. Shortly before the time that Gardiner wrote, the Act 34-35 Henry VIII, c.1, of 1543, 'for the advancement of true religion and for the abolishment of the contrary', seems to indicate a mistrust of certain sections of an enlarged public, however. Women, artificers, apprentices, journeymen, serving-men of the rank of yeoman or under, husbandmen and labourers were forbidden to read the English Bible. Noblemen, gentlemen and merchants might read it in their own households; noblewomen and gentlewomen might read it privately, but not aloud to others.³⁴

Whether as a result of powerful centralized control, made easier by the

30. Adamson 1946, pp. 43-4; cf. Bennett 1952, p. 36; A. W. Pollard 1911, no. 20, pp. 159-61;

Christianson 1989c. 31. *STC* 7790; *TRP* 186.

32. A. W. Pollard 1911, no. 41, pp. 258-65; cf. *STC* 7793; *TRP* 200.

33. Adamson 1946, p. 44. 34. Adamson 1946, p. 146; cf. *TRP* 191.

confinement of printing to so few centres, or of English conservatism in matters of religion, especially in its royal manifestations, there is little or no sign until the late 1520s and 1530s of pamphlet warfare, certainly not on the scale and vehemence reached in Germany. England produced devotional woodcuts, many more than now survive, sometimes with a text, but nothing approximating to the Lutheran broadsheet (which was often equipped with a text of which the interpretation would have required substantial reading ability).³⁵ Diagrams figuring central doctrines of the Church, such as the Trinity, were readily available in books written or printed here and on the Continent, just as they were before the Reformation, more elaborately, in paintings on church walls.

It cannot be said that any of these sporadic testimonies disposes of our problem. Nor is a more precise index of the growth of ability to read provided by the evidence for the extended use, by those engaged in secular trades, of the simple test required to claim benefit of clergy that was available from the late fourteenth century onwards. From this time any man who could read was, whether in orders or not, for legal purposes a clerk and could plead his clergy. The privilege was extended to women under William and Mary. The Act 4 Henry VII, *c.* 13 of 1489, recognizing that, among the 'divers persons lettered emboldened' by the privilege, laymen had been figuring with increasing prominence, changed its nature by decreeing that laymen so pleading were henceforth, on a first conviction, to be branded and debarred from a second plea.³⁶

Sir Thomas More's estimate, always quoted in discussions of literacy in Britain during our period, is almost always accompanied by a questioning rider, if not worse. Modern opinion tends to find it considerably too optimistic. It is, of course, generally conceded that lay literacy is likely to have been higher and more widespread by the 1550s than a century and a half earlier, partly because of a growing independence of education from the Church or of a growing middle class, or both.³⁷ Literacy, defined as the ability to write one's name, has been put at 10 per cent for men and 1 per cent for women at the beginning of the sixteenth century;³⁸ ability to read estimated at 30 per cent in the fifteenth century and 40 per cent in 1530, though many fewer could write; and 50 per cent of London laymen as literate by the 1470s.³⁹ A guess that, in the second

35. Scribner 1981. 36. Gabel 1928-9, pp. 64-87 (on *litteratus*), 123-5.

37. Cressy 1977; Moran 1985; Hudson 1988, pp. 511-12; Aston 1984, pp. 193-217.

38. Cressy 1977.

39. Opinions quoted by Moran 1985, pp. 150-84 ('Literacy and laicization').

quarter of the sixteenth century, half the adult population of the country could, in some sense of the word, read English might not be wide of the mark. Thomas More was probably right. How far that proportion would be capable not only of reading but also of interpreting Scripture is another matter. Latin literacy is another matter again. Gardiner in 1547 may not have been so far wrong, though he gives no indication of how ability to read Latin was now a lay as well as a clerical accomplishment, and is silent on Greek.

Individual readers

Recent work on readers' marks and marginalia in surviving books has been concentrated on the lay, if learned, readership of the period rather later than that covered by the present volume.⁴⁰ Nevertheless the conclusions of Anthony Grafton, Lisa Jardine and William Sherman about the way in which the annotations of Gabriel Harvey and John Dee, for example, show them engaging with what they read have some relevance to an earlier time.⁴¹ There is naturally in such notes a common element of the merely lexical, particularly for texts in Latin: any reader is at the mercy of his or her vocabulary. A similar common factor is the sententious, not solely in those books which are intended for serious instruction, but also in those which approach more nearly to the genre that is now called literature. There is also the overarching mnemonic function of such notes.

A pair of the few examples available from an earlier period, effectively the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries, are worth a closer look. One is again Christopher Urswick, Henry VII's almoner (1448–1522). Several of his surviving books are annotated, some quite copiously, so as to evince an interest in history as *magistra vitae* or storehouse of profitable *exempla*, in the Augustinian view of the human condition, or in the religious politics and conditions of fifteenth-century Bohemia, presumably with reference to current Wycliffism in England. Several are manuscripts, some of them written specially for Urswick,

40. See Alston 1994 for a preliminary survey of annotated works in the British Library; for a curious, individual example, L. Hellinga 1988; and, for an extended set of examples, Rosenthal 1997.

41. Grafton and Jardine 1990; Sherman 1995; cf. G. K. Hunter 1951 and, in a larger context, Grafton 1981, 1985. Cf. also Grafton 1997a, b. For an insular account of the relation of reading to the reader's wit and will in a later period, see Kintgen 1996; and, for a broader consideration of how European reading and writing habits were formed and applied, Moss 1996.

seemingly to instruct the clergy in the obligations of priesthood, to combat contemporary anti-clericalism (one of these texts was printed, perhaps at Urswick's instigation, by Pynson in 1505), or to improve the moral condition in this world, or the purgatorial in the next, of the laymen to whom or to whose memory they were dedicated.⁴²

The other instance is John Colet (1467–1519), Dean of St Paul's.⁴³ The manuscript volumes of his 'collected edition' of his own works all have copious author's annotations and second thoughts. There is, however, one extensive and highly revealing testimony to his consuming interest in contemporary Florentine Neo-Platonism in the shape of a copy of the *Epistolae* of Marsilio Ficino in the first printed edition, of Venice 1495. Colet probably bought his copy in either Italy or France rather than through the English 'Latin trade'. His copious marginal annotations of it reflect an eagerness to get at, and to convert to his own use, the exact message of Ficino's encapsulations of his doctrine, particularly as relating to St Paul.⁴⁴

Like most of his contemporaries, Colet did not read for pleasure, but for edification, which could be transmitted to others.

The kings of our period, with exceptions, seem not to have been great readers. Though Henry V possessed a substantial library, there is no surviving evidence of his use of it. Of the more bookish sort, Henry VI has left no trace in the form of annotation. Edward IV was a collector, on a substantial scale, rather than a reader, it seems. Richard III, on the other hand, has recently been plausibly argued to have read or at least used all the eighteen texts in fourteen volumes that can be identified as his: a Wycliffite New Testament and books of devotion, history, romance chivalry and advice to rulers, all of them manuscripts.⁴⁵ Richard's conqueror, Henry VII seems, like Edward IV, to have been an accumulator, a converter of books-as-objects to his own use, as well as the first to appoint a royal librarian. His son Henry VIII left his mark on many surviving books and draft documents (fig. 13.1). He read and annotated assiduously, noting *sententiae* and the like which seemed to him especially relevant to his own situation and likely to be useful in improving it.⁴⁶ A case in point is his copy of the *Polyantha* of the Ligurian protonotary apostolic, poet laureate, doctor of medicine and of canon law, Domenico Annio Mirabello (Dominicus Nannius Mirabellus, fl. c. 1500–20), archpriest of the cathedral in Savona. This collection of wise sayings and *exempla* was

42. Trapp 1990.

43. Above, p. 33.

44. Jayne 1963.

45. Sutton and Visser-Fuchs 1997.

46. Birrell 1987a, pp. 7–8.

printed at least half-a-dozen times in Italy and the German-speaking lands between 1503 and 1539, and re-issued in 1604; Henry's copy, the edition of Savona 1514, is now in the British Library.⁴⁷

Henry's markings in this show him scanning the contents list for topics of interest and marking them, then, turning to the texts themselves, marking what seems to him relevant. The theological arsenal on which he drew for his *Assertio septem sacramentorum* in 1521 is not now reconstructible in copy-specific terms. It must have been considerable, whatever the labour of others such as Sir Thomas More, who characterized himself as a sorter-out and placer of the principal matters therein contained: Henry had, after all, been intended for a prelatial career until the death of Arthur made him heir apparent to the throne. Among the books he read later was Augustinus Triumphus of Ancona, *De potestate ecclesiastica*, in the edition of Cologne, 1475, where he could find and mark views on the papacy that suited his own concept of himself as head of the Church.⁴⁸ The surviving manuscript of the compilation *Collectanea satis curiosa*, justifying the royal supremacy and intended for government use, bears approving annotations by Henry.⁴⁹ It is impossible to determine precisely how much he contributed personally to it, any more than it is to characterize his part in *Gravissimae . . . totius Italiae, et Galliae Academicarum censurae; Determinations of the mooste famous and mooste excellent vniuersities of Italy and Fraunce that it is so vnlefull for a man to marie his brothers wyfe / that the pope hath no power to dispence therwith*.⁵⁰ This was the work of a royal committee. Henry underlined and annotated passages in a dozen or so other printed books, almost all – in Professor Birrell's words – theological or devotional, including the Psalter, the Biblical Wisdom books and Erasmus's *Paraphrases* of the New Testament. Erasmus's *Paraphrase* of St Luke's Gospel was dedicated to Henry in 1523, as one of his Plutarch translations had been earlier. Henry owned and read a number of texts which are important in the history of the continental Reformation, and a good amount of Lutheran pastoral literature in French. Two printed books appropriated by him as a result of the Dissolution of the Monasteries survive.⁵¹

Royal ladies come off well. Elizabeth Woodville owned a copy of the first book printed by Caxton, the *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*.⁵² From

47. Birrell 1987a, pp. 9–10. 48. GW 3051; Birrell 1987a, pp. 9–10.

49. MacCulloch 1996, pp. 54–5; Selwyn 1996.

50. *STC* 14286–7; Bedouelle and Le Gal 1987; Surtz and Murphy 1988.

51. Birrell 1987a, pp. 9–10.

52. *STC* 15375; Huntington. Cf. L. Hellinga 1991b.

Margaret of York to the grandmother of Henry VIII, Lady Margaret Beaufort, to Henry's first wife, Catherine of Aragon – for whom Joannes Ludovicus Vives was so influential – through his second, Anne Boleyn, to his last, Catherine Parr – whom he married in 1542, and whose influence on the religious settlement of Edward VI's reign is undoubted – the Tudor dynasty's women were readers. Among Catherine of Aragon's known books, works of Catholic theology and piety predominate; she also owned several works by Erasmus, Vives on women's education, and Petrarch, Dante and some Roman history in Spanish. Anne Boleyn's books show a strong reformist tendency, often mediated through France.⁵³ The court context during the 1540s of what has been characterized as an Erasmian, non-dogmatic, humanist pietism was very much Catherine Parr's creation. She wrote religious verse in French (she owned at least two New Testaments in that language); she encouraged her step-daughters in pious productions. An English translation was begun of one of Erasmus's *Paraphrases* of the New Testament, which were printed entire in 1548;⁵⁴ her own *Prayers and Meditations* were three times printed by Berthelet in 1545, and again in 1546(?), 1547 and as late as 1594;⁵⁵ and her *Lamentacion of a Sinner*, in 1547, 1548 and 1563.⁵⁶ Catherine sufficiently prized her copy of the *Canzoniere* and *Trionfi* of Petrarch, with Velutello's commentary (Venice 1544, now in the British Library), to have it bound in purple velvet embroidered in coloured silks and gold and silver thread; it bears no reader's notes.⁵⁷ Another book in Italian, an unidentified manuscript on vellum bound in silk or velvet, is recorded as having been in her possession at her demise.⁵⁸

53. On royal ladies, see Foot below, pp. 122–3. On Lady Margaret, see Jones and Underwood 1992, Powell 1998, and Erler below, p. 521; on Catherine of Aragon, Dowling 1986, esp. pp. 219–45; on Anne, Ives 1986, Holman 1991, Dowling 1991, Carley 1998; and on Catherine Parr, McConica 1965, pp. 200–24, Bennett 1952, pp. 68, 232, and Erler below, p. 507. James Carley kindly provides a reference to a post-mortem list, in Society of Antiquaries ms. 129, of some twenty books which had belonged to Catherine Parr.

54. *STC* 2854. 55. *STC* 4818–26.7. 56. *STC* 4827–9. 57. BL, C.27.c.19.

58. Society of Antiquaries, ms. 129.