

William H. Sherman

THE READER'S EYE

The past, as they say, is a foreign country. But until recently, working on old books felt less like travelling to a different culture than discovering a deserted village. Despite the fact that texts are made by and for people, modern bibliography tended to give us a textual world that was not only inanimate but even un-peopled. This is to some extent an inescapable condition: The older the book, the more likely we are to encounter it at a distance from the bodies, actions and contexts that first gave it life – not only physical being but also personal meaning and social value. But this is also a matter of methodological choices, cultural assumptions and personal biases: These conspired, throughout the course of the 20th century, to produce a strong emphasis on ›production‹ and ›distribution‹, seen in technological rather than social terms.¹

In the 1980s things began to shift, and developments in a number of emerging fields prompted us to consider what the title of this conference calls the *Biography of Books*. If it now no longer seems strange to think of books as having lives, it is thanks above all to two essay collections on the interaction of objects and people, both produced in 1986. The first of these was Arjun Appadurai's *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective*, which explored the idea ›that commodities, like persons, have social lives.«² As Appadurai argued in his introduction, ›things have no meanings apart from those that human transactions, attributions, and motivations endow them with« and to study that »we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories [...] it is the ›things-in-motion‹ that illuminate their human and social context.«³

While this Marxist, materialist cultural history was taking shape, Robert Darnton, Roger Chartier, and others were calling for a new approach to the history of ›reading‹, one in which attention to new forms of evidence might give us a more nuanced sense of the place of books in the social, intellectual

1 See William H. Sherman: The social life of books, in: The Oxford history of popular print culture, ed. by Joad Raymond, Oxford 2011, pp. 164-171.

2 The Social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective, ed. by Arjun Appadurai, Cambridge 1986, p. 3.

3 Ibid., p. 5.

and spiritual lives of readers. *The social life of things* found its bibliographical counterpart in the 1986-87 Clark Lectures, edited by Nicolas Barker under the title, *A potencie of life: books in society*.⁴ It contained a now famous discussion of Robert Darnton's so-called »Communications Circuit«, beginning with the interaction of author and publisher and then moving through printers, shippers, and booksellers before reaching readers (who usually interact with binders and sometimes with authors and publishers, beginning the circuit anew).

By the late 1980s, historians of reading were turning in earnest to ›marginalia« and other readers' marks; and in that ›annus mirabilis« of 1986 I arrived in Cambridge, where I soon started my graduate study under the supervision of Lisa Jardine – who, along with Anthony Grafton in Princeton, was just finishing what would become the landmark essay in the field, ››Studied for action‹: How Gabriel Harvey read his Livy.«⁵ This was the essay that used Harvey's multi-layered marginalia in a copy of Livy to reconstruct a network of texts and contexts for which Jardine and Grafton invoked the now-familiar image of the bookwheel. Ever since then, I have been following in the footsteps of readers like Harvey, and scholars like Jardine and Grafton, first in my study of books from the library of the great Elizabethan polymath John Dee⁶ and then in a series of broader surveys of annotated books from the invention of printing to 1700 (including a comprehensive examination of every early modern book in the Huntington Library).

That work culminated in *Used books* (2008), my study of the traces left behind by Renaissance readers in the volumes that passed through their hands.⁷ I found that marginalia and other marks of ownership, reading and customization could help us to recover a culture in which annotations provided readers with some of their most powerful tools for making sense of texts and applying them to their present or future needs. Every copy, seen from the user's rather than producer's perspective, is different from every other copy; and every book contains mysterious marks that can help us to create if not a full biography at least some important episodes in its life.

It was only after I published *Used books* that I came to see how my own approach to marginalia was marked by assumptions and biases: Like others

4 *A potencie of life: Books in society*. The 1986-87 Clark lectures, ed. by Nicolas Barker, London 1993.

5 Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton: ›Studied for action‹. How Gabriel Harvey read his Livy, in: *Past and Present* 129, November 1990, pp. 3-51.

6 William H. Sherman: *John Dee*. The politics of reading and writing in the English Renaissance, Amherst 1995.

7 William H. Sherman: *Used books*. Marking readers in Renaissance England, Philadelphia 2008.

working in this field, I saw annotations as words next to other words – as a fundamentally verbal phenomenon, that is, rather than a visual one. I am now working on a new book called *The Reader's Eye* and it asks what I (and others) have been overlooking. What happens if we think of reading as a ›visual‹ rather than verbal mode, and see marginalia as part of a ›graphic‹ culture in which images played a central role in the interpretations and imaginations of readers? This general question prompts us to ask a series of other questions that set an agenda for the book and for the related work being carried out by other scholars:

- Are people who mark their books good readers or bad readers?
- Are drawings, doodles and scribbles signs of attention or inattention, strokes of spontaneity or sites of meditation?
- What work do these marks do? And who do they do it for?
- What can marginal marks teach us about the spatial protocols of the page?
- In what ways did Renaissance readers see reading as an embodied act; and how did the eye (alongside the hand) serve as the instrument of apprehension?
- Finally, are the eyes of Renaissance readers different from those of medieval readers (or for that matter modern ones) and if so in which ways?

I posed some of these questions in my chapter on manicules, the pointing hands that litter the margins of so many books and manuscripts between the 13th and 18th centuries; but I subsumed them under the general heading of ›non-verbal‹ marks without considering them as fully ›visual‹, and nowhere did I discuss in any detail the surprisingly complex ways in which readers used images as well as words to make their books meaningful, beautiful, or indeed useful. In my desire to restore the sense of ›manual work‹ to the field of reading, I went so far as to claim that Renaissance readers took up their texts with a more acute awareness of the symbolic and instrumental power of the fingers than ever before or since. But in doing so, I clearly emphasized the hand at the expense of the eye and lost sight of sight itself.

The Renaissance reader who pointed out the error of my ways was none other than Bernardo Bembo, the Venetian humanist and civil servant whose ostentatious manicule [hand-with-pointing-finger] graced the very cover of my book, lifted from this typical page in his remarkable commonplace book at the British Library.

In January 2008, less than one month after *Used Books* was published, I stumbled across a volume at Stanford University that turned out to be one of the most important lost books from the Bembo family's long-since dispersed

library. I was sitting at a table in the rare book reading room, killing time before giving a talk on marginalia; on my left I had a copy of *Used Books*, and on the right was a pile of books that the librarian had pulled for use in my class because he knew they contained marginalia. And when I opened the third or fourth volume, an edition of Pliny the Younger's letters printed in 1483, I nearly fell off my seat.⁸ Such is the power of manicules to imprint themselves in the memory, and to stand in for the body of a specific reader, that my ›nerves‹ knew this book was Bembo's even before my brain had a chance to think about it. As I made my way through the rest of the volume, I found a whole theatre of gesturing hands that captured Bembo's unmistakable techniques for marking the text, testifying to his gift for what might be described (with pun intended) as ›drawing attention‹.

What caught my own eye immediately were the distinctive hands and fingers that allowed me at a flash to identify the book as Bembo's. But alongside the manicules I was startled to find what I'm tempted to call ›opticules‹ staring in at the text from the margins, sometimes jostling for space with the pointing fingers: what at first glance looked like inscrutable squiggles turned out to be the uncanny profiles of eyes, complete with lids, lashes and expressive brows. The whole ensemble brings back to life a long-dead reader who not only ›drew‹ eyes but might be said to have ›developed‹ an eye (cf. plate I, p. 434).

Bembo drew pictures, as it happens, in the margins of his Pliny. There is a head at the head of the first letter in Pliny's third book, which describes a visit to a 77-year-old senator named Spurina, who had retired from his distinguished career. Since he was still enjoying good health, regular study and excellent conversation, Bembo described it as an old age worthy of emulation and noted that »OLD AGE HAS BROUGHT HIM NOTHING BUT PRUDENCE« – not only copying the sentence into a lozenge or shield but sketching an evocative profile of the admirable Spurina, at the head of what was evidently one of his favourite letters (cf. plate II, p. 435).⁹

Perhaps the most eye-catching opening in the book – and certainly the one that architectural historians will find most exciting – is the beginning of Book 2, Letter 17, in which Pliny gives Clusinius Gallus such a detailed account of his villa at Laurentum that it has enabled scholars to reconstruct the

8 Pliny the Younger: *Epistolarum libri IX*, Treviso [Ioannes Vercellius] 1483; Stanford University Library shelf-mark KA1483.P49 CB. For more on this volume and Bembo's marginalia see William H. Sherman: ›Nota Bembe‹. How Bembo the Elder read his Pliny the Younger, in: Pietro Bembo e le arti, ed. by Guido Beltramini, Howard Burns and Davide Gasparotti, Venice 2013, pp. 119–133.

9 Pliny the Younger, *Epistolarum libri IX*, Book 3, Letter 1 (sig. d1r-v).

layout of the entire estate (cf. plate III, p. 436). Bembo clearly used as a blueprint for his own beloved villa he called the *Nonianum*, the country estate that he developed outside Padua, one of the very first examples of a northern Italian humanist consciously re-creating the classical life-world. While there are no pictures on these pages, we could hardly ask for a more graphic example of the ligature between an ancient Latin life and a modern humanist life; and the phrase that winds around the margin to summarise the letter applies both to Pliny's letter and to Bembo's annotations, to their attitudes toward places for reading and to their appreciation of the ekphrastic art of painting through words: »LAURENTUM SUUM GRAFICE PINGIT [His Laurentum graphically painted].«

It is fitting that Bernardo did not here draw an image, but styled his letters to give them a shape that would invoke both an architectural form and the textual form – known as the ›paraph‹ – used to mark out sections for easy retention. As in other annotated humanist books, we find an array of epigraphic, mnemonic and iconic inscriptions that capture aspects of the classical world and bring them (living and speaking) into the present – cultivating a graphic style that did work of a kind that we have barely begun to see, much less study, and for which (I would suggest) we are poorly served by both methodology and terminology.

After all, I am by no means alone in having overlooked the extent to which the visual and the verbal worked and played together (during the Renaissance and beyond) in the margins of books and in the minds of readers. This blind spot is built into our disciplinary divisions: there has been until recently very little dialogue between historians of reading and historians of art and architecture. It is also bound up with some of our deepest narratives about periods and media – including the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and the transition from manuscripts to printed books.

According to the standard accounts, indeed, the Renaissance was precisely the moment in Western history when the long-standing relationship between word and image broke down, and the ancient link between vision and cognition was well and truly severed. For Aristotle, after all, the eyes had been not just the chief organ of perception but the ultimate source of all clear and lasting knowledge. In the opening paragraph of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle observed that »... we prefer sight, generally speaking, to all the other senses. The reason of this is that of all the senses sight best helps us to know things, and reveals many distinctions.«¹⁰ And the *De Anima* offered what may well serve as the ›cognitive archetype‹ for all ancient and medieval psychology.

10 Aristotle: *Metaphysics*, ed. by W.D.Ross, Oxford 1924, p. 21.

According to Mary Carruthers, all sensory input (including words on a page) ends up in the form of mental pictures, ›phantasmata‹ or »a kind of ›icon‹«, that can be ›seen‹ by the mind's eye.¹¹ But »if vision was the noblest of the senses from Plato to Descartes«, as Martin Jay suggested in *Downcast eyes*, »the last century of its reign was troubled by a succession crisis«; in the words of James Knapp,

We witness an attempt to separate the reasoned, stable, and implicitly verbal world of morality from the unstable, emotional realm of visual experience in [the 16th century]. [...] Michael Camille attributes the increasing effort to bring the visual image under the control of the word to the breakdown of established truths in the Renaissance, fueled in part by Reformation thought: »A great rift opens up between words and images. [...] Language is now in a separate realm, written in discrete boxes or in fields hanging in the picture space.«¹²

In this account, the conventions of print put an end to the experiments in mixed media that were so common in medieval culture, separating word and image into their proper places and banishing from the book altogether much of the visual play that Camille captured in his brilliant study of grotesque illumination, *Image on the edge*.¹³ Two influential books – Joseph Leo Koerner's *The reformation of the image* and Stuart Clark's *Vanities of the eye* – have added force and nuance to this historical picture, encouraging us to see how quickly and thoroughly the Renaissance relationship with vision turned sour.¹⁴ The Protestant Reformation brings a new iconoclastic spirit that purges the idolatrous image in favor of a purified word, replacing ›eye-service‹ with ›ear-service‹. And the Scientific Revolution offers a new model of the eye itself that is not only passive rather than active but far less reliable as an instrument of perception than the telescope, microscope and camera obscura. All in all, to borrow Stuart Clark's felicitous phrase, this is the moment when European culture can be said to have »lost its optical nerve.«¹⁵

So what, then, are we to make of the annotations preserved in almost every surviving copy of what may be the most beautiful and enigmatic book ever

11 Mary Carruthers: *The book of memory. A study of memory in medieval culture*, Cambridge 1990, p. 17.

12 James A. Knapp: *Image ethics in Shakespeare and Spenser*, New York 2011, p. 33; also quoting Martin Jay: *Downcast eyes. The denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought*, Berkeley 1993.

13 Michael Camille: *Image on the edge. The margins of medieval art*, London 1992.

14 Joseph Leo Koerner: *The reformation of the image*, Chicago 2004; Stuart Clark: *Vanities of the eye. Vision in early modern European culture*, Oxford 2007.

15 Clark (fn. 14), p. 2.

printed, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (printed by Aldus Manutius in 1499)? The printed words offer a dream vision within a dream vision, and the narrative often pauses to offer extended descriptions accompanied by all kinds of illustrations, in and around the text, including buildings, ruins and gardens strewn with epigraphic fragments. But readers, as James Russell has shown, went to great lengths to work out their own sense of the structures built up in the text, both verbal and visual, with the text guiding and licensing the readers' architectural, mathematical and even alchemical sensibilities.¹⁶ This looks increasingly like one of those books that seem to ›require‹ the active work of the eye and the pen to bring the printed words to life.

The same might be said, in fact, of a surprising number and range of texts – including Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Aesop's *Fables*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Livy's great history of Rome (i.e. *History of Rome/Ab Urbe Condita*). And if there are certain books that seem to license the practice of marginal drawing, there are some disciplines that absolutely depend upon it. There is now an enormous body of literature devoted to what might be called the visual culture of science in early modern Europe, with fields from geometry to botany drawing heavily on diagrams, illustrations and emblems. And recent work on Alberti, Leonardo and Michelangelo has found in their lives and works a set of fundamental and far-reaching connections between verbal and visual, textual and artistic practice. In *Michelangelo: A life on paper*, Leonard Barkan argues that ›we cannot understand Michelangelo without a radical sense of the way that pictures and words entangled themselves within his creative imagination.«¹⁷

I want to suggest in this essay that there is ample evidence for this radical entanglement within the covers of all kinds of books, even where we would not expect to find them. Between medieval illuminations and modern illustrations, there turn out to be many cases of marginal visualizations, and countless traces of reading as a visual mode – from isolated doodles to fully-fledged ornamental or pictorial schemes.

The best person to help us see this may be the so-called ›Prince of Humanists‹, Desiderius Erasmus. Now, at first glance, this argument may seem odd if not downright perverse. Erasmus shared with many of the more ardent Protestant reformers a deep suspicion of the power of images; and while he never went in for wholesale iconoclasm, he certainly associated the visible

16 James Charles Russell: ›Many other things worthy of knowledge and memory‹. The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and its annotators, 1499-1700, PhD Thesis, Durham University, 2014.

17 Leonard Barkan: *Michelangelo. A life on paper*, Princeton 2010, p. ix.

world with the fallen one and warned his readers to resist its seductions. In his *Enchiridion militis christiani* (first written in 1503 and published in revised form in 1518), Erasmus provided an extended gloss on the Augustinian distinction between the inner and outer man, possessing two sets of eyes (sometimes cast as eye and heart), one to perceive visible signs and another to take us toward invisible grace. He observed that the body (being itself visible) takes pleasure in visible things, but the soul (with its heavenly origins) »despises those things that are seen, for it knows that they are transitory [...]«. ¹⁸ He went further in the subsequent section on »the Rules of True Christianity«, defining »perfect piety [as] the attempt to progress always from visible things [...] to invisible [...]. Since we are but pilgrims in the visible world, we should never make it our fixed abode.« ¹⁹ But he saved his most vehemently anti-visual comments for a scathing critique of the veneration of relics that leaves little room for doubt about his preference for »scriptura« over »pictura«:

If you venerate mute and dead ashes and ignore [Paul's] living image still speaking and breathing, as it were, in his writings, is not your religion utterly absurd? You worship the bones of Paul preserved in a relic casket, but do not worship the mind of Paul hidden away in his writings? You make much of a piece of his body visible through a glass covering, and you do not marvel at the whole mind of Paul shining through his writings? [...] You give homage to an image of Christ's countenance represented in stone or wood or depicted in colour. With how much more religious feeling should you render homage to the image of his mind, which has been reproduced in the Gospels through the artistry of the Holy Spirit.²⁰

So, for a study exploring the relationship between reading, seeing and drawing, Erasmus looks like a singularly poor choice.

But Erasmus, as Erwin Panofsky objected in his classic article on »Erasmus and the visual arts«, »was not an iconoclast.« ²¹ He cites as evidence a typically balanced passage from the *Modus orandi* [or *Manner of Prayer*] of 1525:

not all images are to be banished from the churches but the people have to be taught in what way to use them. [...] there are images which provoke us to

18 Erasmus: *Enchiridion militis christiani*, in: *The collected works of Erasmus*, vol. 66, ed. by John W. O'Malley, trans. by Charles Fantazzi, Toronto 1988, p. 41.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 72.

21 Erwin Panofsky: Erasmus and the visual arts, in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 32 (1969), pp. 200-227.

lasciviousness rather than to piety. Yet, even these we tolerate because we see more harm in eliminating (>in tollendo<) than in tolerating (>in tolerando<).²²

In his *De amabili ecclesiae concordia*, likewise, Erasmus acknowledged that »Idolatry, that is the cult of images, is a horrible crime« but immediately went on to remind his readers that »since the arts of sculpture and painting were once counted among the liberal arts, this >silent poetry< can at times have a stronger effect on human emotions than a man, even an eloquent one, could ever achieve by words.«²³ The first part of this passage places Erasmus firmly within Reformist discourse on images, aligning him closely with the iconophobia of Calvin and Zwingli; but the rest of the passage betrays his deep grounding in classical aesthetic theory, invoking Horace's doctrine of »ut pictura poesis« – »as in painting, so in poetry«. As his fellow humanists would have spotted, Erasmus is here quoting the pro-painting half of Plutarch's early formulation of what would (much later) come to be called the Sister Arts: »painting is silent poetry, poetry a speaking picture.«²⁴

Moreover, if art (even in these religious writings) peeks through as a surprisingly common subject for Erasmus, Erasmus stands out as a surprisingly common subject for art – generating enough images in different media to fill a thick catalogue (published in 2008) called *Images of Erasmus*.²⁵ A famous drawing by Hans Holbein the Younger captures the ghostly gaze and disembodied hand of the great Dutch humanist, and it served as a study for the much more famous painting of Erasmus in his study, one of two portraits of the bookish Erasmus that he painted in 1523. Within a couple of years Holbein had produced yet another iconic image of his friend and patron, placing him within the kind of architectural frame he had long been designing for the title-pages of Erasmus's books; and Dürer would add his own engraving of a scholar all but surrounded by the tools of his trade. A few years earlier, a third major artist – Quentin Massys – took Erasmus as his subject for one of the period's finest portrait medals. As Brian Cummings has justly observed, Erasmus was one of the few authors in the period (and possibly the first in the new culture of print) who was instantly recognizable via their visual image.

We are thus confronted with a tension, if not an outright paradox, at the heart of Erasmus's relationship with the image: the author who warned readers time and again not to make the visible world our fixed abode felt equally

22 Cit. Panofsky, p. 211.

23 Ibid.

24 Plutarch, *Moralia*, 18A. On the renaissance afterlife of this classical trope see Leonard Barkan: *Mute poetry, speaking pictures*, Princeton 2012, passim.

25 Peter van der Coelen: *Images of Erasmus*, Rotterdam 2008.

at home in the scholar's study and the artist's studio. There is an irony, for many modern scholars, in the fact that as the iconoclastic project picked up steam around him, Erasmus became more open to the power of images. But Luther himself followed a similar course; and the Reformation debates served to highlight for Protestants and Catholics alike the inescapable (if problematic) role of vision in perception and cognition. Embedded within the worries about a Mass that mocked the eye and a Eucharist that deceived the senses was what Stuart Clark describes as »the matter of images themselves – not just their relationship to the other ingredients of worship [...] but their relationship to their originals, the question of *imaging*, and the nature and limits of [...] representation.«²⁶ And these questions were, for Erasmus, by no means new: they had occupied him and his fellow humanists as a pedagogical project long before they became a religious problem.

When we turn to Erasmus's educational works from the 1490s onward, we quickly discover the extent to which ›images‹ were already playing a crucial role in the humanist textual programme as he received and reshaped it. In his early work on the instruction of young pupils, *De pueris instituendis*, Erasmus acknowledged that »Children learn their stories and fables with greater enthusiasm and remember them more easily if the contents are displayed before their eyes by means of skilful illustration, and if every story is presented through pictures.«²⁷ This had long been a commonplace in writing about how we find our way through word and world, and it lies behind the special place of illustrations in the history of children's literature. One of the richest examples is the history of Aesop's *Fables*, and this charming copy of the 1708 edition by Roger L'Estrange (now held by the V&A) is particularly suggestive. The margins of this copy have been heavily illustrated by a rural apothecary for the edification of his children – in ways that look back past the lavish printed illustrations of the great 17th-century editions and also forward to the modern graphic novel and artist's book (cf. plate IV, p. 437).²⁸

Such strategies for effective learning were not restricted to children, and they had their roots in the ancient Greek idea of ›enargeia‹, usually translated into Latin as ›evidentia‹ and English as ›vividness‹. Erasmus himself provides the period's best definition, from one of the most famous passages in his best-selling rhetorical handbook, *De Copia*:

26 Clark (fn. 14), p. 162.

27 Cit. Peter van der Coelen (fn. 25), p. 39.

28 *Fables of Aesop and other eminent mythologists*, ed. by Roger L'Estrange, London 1708; Victoria and Albert Museum, National Art Library Pressmark Safe 6.A.10. For an account of the illustrator and a selection of his drawings, see <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/tenterden-aesop/> (accessed 23.9.2016).

We employ [enargeia] whenever, for the sake of amplifying or decorating our passage, or giving pleasure to our readers, instead of setting out the subject in bare simplicity, we fill in the colours and set it up like a picture to look at, so that we seem to have painted the scene rather than described it, and the reader seems to have seen rather than read. [...] We can take an action which is either in process or completed, and instead of presenting it in bare and insubstantial outline, bring it before the eyes with all the colours filled in, so that our hearer or reader is carried away and seems to be in the audience at a theatre.²⁹

There are countless examples of Erasmus's own deployment of this technique in his works, particularly in the ever-evolving proto-essays on sententious themes, the *Adagia*.

This quintessentially Renaissance approach to representation has its roots in ancient Greece – where from the outset there were, in fact, two words for parallels or similitudes, »parabole« and »icon«. As Marsh McCall explains in his Loeb guide to *Ancient rhetorical theories of simile and comparison*,

At least two words, εικων and παραβολη, are current as technical terms of comparison before Aristotle. [...] εικων far exceeds the others in frequency of use. The sense most consistently fitting the contexts of these terms is perhaps »illustrative comparison« or »comparative illustration« [...].³⁰

In the *De Copia* Erasmus praised Homer above all as the source of portable comparisons; but for many humanists it was Dante who supplied an inexhaustible encyclopedia of similes, and the *Divine Comedy* is another text that has a special power to engage the visual faculties (and active pens) of its readers. Early manuscripts are lavishly illustrated, and early printed editions often followed suit. But readers also add drawings of their own to make the text's images visible and memorable: a spectacular example is the great 1481 edition of a long and learned commentary by Cristoforo Landino.³¹ The book has 19 printed images based on Botticelli; and a copy now at the Biblioteca Vallicelliana in Rome has hundreds of marginal drawings executed by a pair of unusually accomplished Italian artists.³² The drawings in the margins

29 See Gerald Sharpling: *The role of the image in the prose writings of Erasmus, Rabelais, Marguerite de Navarre and Montaigne*, Lewiston 2003, Ch. 2.

30 Marsh H. McCall, Jr.: *Ancient rhetorical theories of simile and comparison*, Cambridge 1969, pp. 17-18.

31 Dante: *La Commedia*, Florence [Nicolaus Laurentius 1481] and Rome, Biblioteca Vallicelliana Shelf-mark Z.79.A.

32 In a book-length article from 1955 that remains the only substantial discussion of the illustrations in this volume, Bernhard Degenhart argued that they were largely

capture two striking features: 1) they suggest how, in the age of print, the printed text could serve a dynamic 3D space, with objects appearing and disappearing behind it; and 2) they show how important similes were in theories of production and reception since – with only one or two exceptions – all of the drawings here illustrate Dante’s similes. We never see Dante himself; rather we look through his eyes and see what Dante compares things to when he’s describing them.

Erasmus spent much of his own time as a reader combing ancient texts for metaphors and similes, and published them in the ready-made sourcebook he called *Parabolae*. But it’s clear that he also wished young students to develop these skills for themselves and construct their own ›storehouses‹ to equip them throughout their lives. In an oft-quoted passage from his *De ratione studii* (or *On the Method of Study*), Erasmus prescribes an active mode of reading with pen in hand, to pick out important words and passages with special marks. And here he suggests that in the construction of a storehouse or thesaurus of useful material, the »memory is aided by both ›places‹ and the ›images‹ that represent them.« And he suggests that »things which it is necessary but rather difficult to remember« might be »hung up on the walls of a room where they are generally conspicuous,« or inscribed »at the beginning and at the end of your books,« or engraved »on rings or drinking cups,« or »painted on doors and walls or even in the glass of a window so that what may aid learning is constantly before the eye.«³³

In England, these ideas would find their most influential formulation in Sir Thomas Elyot’s *Boke named the governour* of 1531, a widely read textbook on the education of young noblemen. In Elyot we find an explicit programme for training the reader’s eye in which learning to draw becomes part and parcel of learning to read. In his chapter on portraiture (by which he means visual representation in general), he begins with the commonplace that words come across more clearly when they are accompanied by pictures. He goes on to recommend that as the young student learns to read, he should also be taught to draw so he can enter those memorable images for himself:

And he that is perfectly instructed in portrayture, and hapneth to rede any noble and excellent historie, whereby his courage is inflamed to the imitation of vertue, he forth with taketh his penne or pensill, and with a graue and substantiall studie, gatherynge to him all the partes of imagination, endeuoreth

the work of Giuliano and Antonio da Sangallo, cf. BD: Dante, Leonardo und Sangallo, in: *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 3 (1955), pp. 101-292.

33 Erasmus: *De ratione studii*, in: *Collected works of Erasmus*, vol. 24, ed. by Craig R. Thompson, trans. by Brian McGregor, Toronto 1978, p. 671.

him selfe to expresse liuely, and (as I mought say) actually in portrayture, nat only the faict or affaire, but also the sondry affections of euey personage in the historie [...].³⁴

To get a sense of what this might look like in practice, we could do worse than open the covers of a hefty volume now at the National Gallery in Washington, DC.³⁵ It's a 1549 edition of Livy's great history of Rome, a central text in Renaissance humanism's curriculum for the reading of history and the one that (thanks to Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton) now has a special place in the history of reading. In 2000, the English rare book dealer Maggs Bros. offered for sale a very special copy of Livy's big book, with annotations and illustrations by an English reader. Most of the words in the margins offer the kind of treatment familiar from other notes in learned books from the period – including the usual running tags for major events, names and dates of key figures, glosses of difficult terms, and brief summaries of the lessons learned on everything from eloquence to governance.

These lessons would have been exceptionally pressing for English readers at the very moment this book was published: 1549 was a year which saw an intensification of economic hardship, social unrest and religious schism under the fragile coalition holding the reins for the 11 year-old King Edward VI. But what really brought Livy to life for this reader – and explains why the volume was bought by an art museum rather than a library – were the 114 pen-and-ink drawings that run down the edge of the text and sometimes spill over into the top and bottom margin, when sieges or beheadings required. The sale catalogue described them as follows:

The drawings are by a mature, but untrained English artist, who has chosen to depict all the characters dressed in contemporary mid-16th century English costumes [...]. The kings are dressed in long coats trimmed with fur, the consuls and tribunes as lawyers, theologians or scholars in long robes or fur-trimmed coats, the patrician men in fashionable breeches, slashed doublets and feathered bonnets[;] the women have long dresses and the soldiers have modern armour and weapons including cannons and take part in battles that could appear straight out of a Tudor tournament book. [...] All the drawings

34 Thomas Elyot: *The boke named the governour*, London [Thomas Berthelet 1531], Sig. D1v-D2r.

35 Livy: *Latinae historiae principis Decades tres*, Basle [Ioannes Hervagius 1549], National Gallery, Washington, DC, Shelf-mark Rare PA6452.A2 1549 fol.

relate closely to the text but none seem to derive from earlier illustrated editions of Livy.³⁶

And there were many models to draw on: perhaps no other classical text supplied the subject matter for so much visual representation in the Renaissance – within the covers of books, in free-standing paintings, and on a wide range of decorative objects.

If we go through the book page by page we find not a visual guide to the running narrative (as you might find in an illustrated medieval chronicle) but rather a pageant of isolated emblems, triggered by the text but serving as discrete tableaux or dumbshows, dramatic scenes of exemplary ancient lives presented in modern dress on a paper stage. We see the tragic death of Lucrece, its stark lines heightened with a dash of red ink (cf. plate V, p. 437). And we see the decisive confrontation between Coriolanus and his family: the great leader runs with joy to meet them but his mother stops him in his tracks, sternly refusing to embrace him until he has agreed to spare the city of Rome and make peace with his enemies (cf. plate VI, p. 438). In the well-chosen words of the Maggs Bros. sale catalogue, »[the style] gives the figures the air of actors in a play.«³⁷

Sadly, there is no comparable evidence that Erasmus himself practiced what he preached and read in this fashion, but he did have a hand in orchestrating my final example – and what may well be the single most famous example of a reader-illustrated book in the entire early modern period. It brings together one of his most famous texts – titled *Moriae Encomium* in Greek, *Stultitiae Laus* in Latin, and *In Praise of Folly* in English – with the artist to whom he was closest, Hans Holbein the Younger. The text was written in 1509 during his journey from Italy to England. The text was first printed in 1511 and reprinted by Froben in Basle in 1515. This edition was surrounded by learned marginal notes from the hand of a doctor and Greek scholar named Listrius, using material supplied by Erasmus himself. And a special exemplar (now at the Basel Kunstmuseum) was customised by hand by at least two men who also moved in the circle of Erasmus. The first was a schoolmaster named Myconius, who was responsible for most of the handwritten marginalia in brown and red ink throughout the volume. Among this teacher's notes is this particularly interesting visual scheme delineating the chief virtues to be

36 Books and readers in early modern Britain (1510-1815) (catalogue no. 1293), London 2000.

37 Ibid.

gathered in reading the book: a reading of Erasmus using Erasmus's own prescribed methods, it includes *sententiae*, metaphors, similes, and ›images‹. Once again, these images are both figurative and literal, since Myconius also arranged for a gifted young artist – the 17 year-old Hans Holbein the Younger – to add no fewer than 80 pen-and-ink drawings to the margins of the book. A note by Holbein records that the drawings were executed in ten days: and they now constitute his earliest surviving work.

The project was clearly intended, at least in part, as a personal tribute to Erasmus; and his note on Holbein's flattering portrait led to an affectionate rebuke in Erasmus's own hand (to the effect that if he really looked that good he would find a wife at once). This may in turn have led to another portrait, at the base of a much earlier page, in which an older and more foolish Erasmus is shown walking through a market and being so distracted by the sight of a pretty woman that he steps into a basket of eggs. But Erasmus is not the only target of Holbein's satirical eye: there is the cruel schoolmaster, the mathematician, poet and philosopher. And the starring role in this cast of characters is given, of course, to the motley fool himself.

In a perceptive early article on this volume, Fritz Saxl argued that Holbein's drawings are perfectly poised between medieval and Renaissance modes of representation, and the same might be said of the whole multi-layered *mise-en-page*, which is astonishingly complex, nowhere more so than in the opening page of the text proper, which plays with a number of textual, spatial, and rhetorical protocols.³⁸

While this is already true of Erasmus's words, it is even more true of Holbein's images as they interact with the text. They are rarely as straightforward or as subordinate as our traditional term ›illustration‹ implies, and they are often at odds with the message implied by Erasmus's text.³⁹

I would like to draw things to a close by underlining the way in which words and images continued to work together as part of the period's emphasis on teachable rhetorical strategies. The examples I have presented here may be exceptional, and my treatment of them superficial; but they give us enough to sense a new mode of interacting with books, one which draws in many ways on the medieval models studied by Mary Carruthers, Michael Camille and others, but which also seems to participate in the new culture of print and the humanist project of ›commerce with the classics‹ (to borrow Anthony

38 Fritz Saxl: Holbein's illustrations to the ›Praise of Folly‹ by Erasmus, in: Burlington magazine 83:488, November 1943, pp. 274-79.

39 Sharpling (fn. 29), Ch. 4; cf. Jeanne Nuechterlein: Translating nature into art: Holbein, the reformation, and renaissance rhetoric, University Park 2011, pp. 93-98.

Grafton's useful phrase),⁴⁰ with its reinvented models of visual/verbal cognition, its active use of texts to make what is absent present and to direct the words of the past to the actions of the future.

I would not want to give the impression that all books from the period are full of evidence for visual modes of reading. But as I have been suggesting, we only see things when our eyes are open to them; and there are clearly many important examples out there that we have long been overlooking. These examples will no doubt lead us to other ones, and even the crudest will give us a sharper image of what Michael Baxandall liked to call the »period eye«.⁴¹ They may also shed light on the Renaissance period's take on the sibling rivalry between the so-called Sister Arts, which W.J.T. Mitchell has described as »the dominant model for the interdisciplinary study of [...] representation« over the last century. He argues that we need instead to focus on the material relations of what he calls the »imagetext«, concluding that »the interaction of pictures and texts is constitutive of representation as such: all media are mixed media [...].«⁴² The evidence I have reviewed for the reader's eye and the material culture they produced suggest that Mitchell's position may not be so much postmodern as pre-modern.

I have a renewed sense of excitement, at any rate, about marginalia's power to pose puzzles, the pursuit of which (when we are patient and lucky) can help us challenge some of the easy oppositions we have inherited – medieval and Renaissance, manuscript and print, text and margin, and now word and image. And like great art, good marginalia have a peculiar power to deliver intimate glimpses of Renaissance lives. And this sense of intimacy is, in the end, the most striking feature in these visual modes of reading I have started to sketch today. In *Used Books* I described the feeling of working on the words and other traces left behind by Renaissance readers as being allowed to look over the shoulders at the hands of long-dead people; with this new book project, it's beginning to feel as if we might even be able to see the world through their eyes.

40 Anthony Grafton: *Commerce with the classics. Ancient books and renaissance readers*, Ann Arbor 1997.

41 Michael Baxandall: *Painting and experience in fifteenth-century Italy. A primer in the social history of pictorial style*, 2nd ed., Oxford 1988, Section 2.

42 W.J.T. Mitchell: *Picture theory. Essays on verbal and visual representation*, Chicago 1994, pp. 84 and 89.