

Andrew Cambers. *Godly Reading: Print, Manuscript and Puritanism in England, 1580–1720*.

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Andrew Cambers's compelling study of how and what puritans read is strikingly structured around where they read, explicitly drawing on the recent "spatial turn" (33). Following an introductory opening chapter reviewing the historiographies of puritanism and of reading, Cambers's chapters are arranged around the different locations in which godly reading took place, moving outwards from the domestic spaces of the closet and the bedchamber to the public spaces of the coffee house and the bookshop, with the penultimate chapter (before the conclusion) focusing on reading in prison, a space paradoxically both iconic of isolation and in practice often porous enough to let written materials in and out.

However, despite the general movement of this study from interior to exterior reading spaces, one of Cambers's principal contentions is that ostensibly private and domestic kinds of reading were more public and communal than one might suppose. For example, family reading of the Bible and godly authors in the parlor or hall could include other participants from the neighborhood and potentially constitute an illicit conventicle. Cambers demonstrates that different spaces could

elicit different modes of reading from the same reader. For instance, reading while walking in the open air lent itself to a more meditative mode of engaging texts than reading the news in the coffee house. While puritans helped to create the new reading spaces of libraries and bookshops, the physical spaces of godly reading and conversation around texts helped to form individuals in godly piety, as John Rastrick recalls of being given access to his minister's study in his youth.

*Godly Reading* digests and synthesizes an impressive array of detail from primary sources and secondary studies on libraries, booksellers, and early modern households. Yet it is not a dry assemblage of data, as it provides plenty of human-interest narratives, such as the nineteen-year-old Henry Newcome's narrow escape from burning his house down when he fell asleep reading in bed by candlelight, and the reading of scripture to counter the demonic possession of the two daughters of a Yorkshire family. There is even some occasional wry humor: "The Tudor state had not appropriated the church and its lands only to let the people read for themselves that it was to be the meek who would inherit the earth" (162).

As the date range in Cambers's subtitle implies, he follows John Spurr and others in seeing puritanism as a label applicable following the Restoration, and (in Cambers's case) even past the end of the Stuart era. Generally speaking, Cambers seems to see post-Restoration puritanism as synonymous with Dissent, and aptly cites the persistent reading of early Stuart works of puritan practical divinity by post-Restoration nonconformists as evidence of this continuity. However, this equation is complicated by Cambers's observation that Rastrick's will bequeathing his books to his son on condition he continued either a conforming or nonconforming minister "sheds light on how the godly style of religiosity spanned church divides" (125). Though perhaps a topic for another monograph, it might have been helpful to have more acknowledgement of the extent to which godly styles of piety persisted among conformists as well as nonconformists.

Cambers sees puritanism as a religious culture constituted by "a series of shared self-consciously evangelical cultural practices" (13) deployed to mark out the godly as separate from their neighbors. I am inclined more to a *via media* that sees puritan practices as forming a distinctive subculture not entirely separate from the broader culture but somewhat in tension with it. My own tentative impression is that godly culture took on a more oppositional coloring at times when and in places where the godly were opposed. However, that Cambers has not laid to rest the perennial wrangling over the definition of puritanism does not detract from the excellent analysis of the varieties of puritan reading practice at the heart of this book.

This book illustrates throughout how, far from being an individualistic religion of introspection, puritanism thrived on collective reading and discussion of texts. Cambers's study significantly enriches our collective knowledge of the habits of godly reading, and it ought to be read and discussed by those working on early modern religion or the history of reading, in bedchambers, libraries, and coffeehouses alike.

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