

Revised Script

Saturday, February 8, 2020 1:03 PM

I headed to 16th century Europe for my Digital Humanities project. During the 1560s and 1570s, a group of men living in Geneva with Protestant reformer John Calvin worked together on an ambitious project: to create a translation and commentary of the Bible in English for the average person to read. Thus, the Geneva Bible was born.

By improving the quality, functionality, accessibility, and user experience of the Geneva Bible, today's readers will be better equipped to understand and engage with the work from a scholarly perspective.

Is it worthwhile to spend the time and energy to make a better version? Here's why. During the Protestant Reformation, various groups experienced persecution and lacked the freedom to practice what they believed. Many Puritans, including those who founded the Massachusetts Bay colony, used this special edition of the Bible.

Not only does the book represent an act of religious freedom, but the text itself also argues for more political and civil rights. Reformed writers like John Calvin and the authors of the Geneva Bible believed that a shift toward democracy would be better for the people and the country. In fact, Cromwell's soldiers who fought for a republic during the English Civil War received pocket Bibles that were near copies of the Geneva Bible.

Even though the authors had mostly good things to say about Queen Elizabeth, the seditious tone of this Bible made English royalty very uncomfortable. One of the most famous Bible translations, the King James Version, was created to be less radical option for English people to read. But the Geneva Bible didn't disappear.

Scholars estimate that about 19% of the content of the King James Bible comes from Geneva Bible manuscripts.

I remember having difficulty finding a good copy of the Geneva Bible when I was working on a project for English 120 my freshman year. I wanted to take another look at my go-to academic databases and digital resources to see what they had to offer. Early English Books Online seemed like a good place to start.

They have several different PDFs of various manuscripts, but

most look like this. The image hasn't been converted to text. You just have to zoom in and out of the image to view it. There's also no hyperlinking, search, or other useful features.

The version on the Internet Archive is similar to the E-E-B-O content. I think it's the best version I've found, but the annotations are still difficult to read and the image hasn't been converted to text.

Here's a website literally called "The Geneva Bible." However, you have to pay for access for anything besides one portion of the manuscript. It's text-based thankfully, but it's very simplistic and lacks a lot of features that could be useful.

Site note: It looks like that this organization was trying to create a robust version back in 2013. However, I think the project failed due to a lack of funding.

After examining the current situation of the digital manuscripts, I propose several improvements using D-H principles to make a better copy.

First of all, a critical edition of the text should include historical and social context. This will help explain the factors that impacted the translation process from Hebrew and Greek.

For example, James 2:6 includes the phrase "by tyranny", a phrase that's not in the King James Version or in any other translations.

John Calvin incorporated his concerns about the government into his various writings. Knowing about the political climate of the mid 1500s matters for positioning the work with the other literature and philosophies of its time.

Secondly, a better version should focus on improving user experience through digital techniques. Hyperlinking and improving the integration of the commentary into the main text would be a good place to begin.

Since the Bible often makes intertextual references, incorporating links to and from the various appearances of a phrase could facilitate a smoother navigational flow.

Next, a textual analysis program could be applied to the work. Overall, Geneva Bible authors Whittingham and Anthony agreed with Calvin's teachings. However, it would be insightful to see the similarities and differences between their opinions through quantitative textual analysis. You could also make a comparison between the manuscript with other texts, such as the KJV Bible or John Calvin's personal writings.

While textual analysis programs excel at finding large-scale patterns, we should still examine the indicated patterns to decide if they're significant.

Out of the methodologies that could be applied to the Geneva Bible, I have to say that I would be most excited for a sentiment analysis program.

While academics have already observed the insurgent tone of the work, D-H tools like sentiment analysis could be used to find the specific sentences that fit into this broader theme. Running a sentiment analysis on the body text would result a more quantitative perspective that may be possible manually.

When people perform sentiment analysis manually, they only agree on the nature of the sentiment about 60 to 65 percent of the time.

Perhaps an opinion mining program could be useful in standardizing criteria for a sentiment. However, such a program could also obscure the diversity of interpretations on a text. Recognizing these factors are important to ensuring the analysis creates a valid and reliable output.

Finally, we ought to find a way to capture the material features of the original without sacrificing readability and accessibility. While using modern, digital-friendly fonts make reading easier, there is something to be said about the look and feel of the original version that places the work more firmly within its historical context.

Since the format in which a message is delivered impacts its meaning, having the option to toggle between an easy-to-read and a more authentic page design might be useful.

By using digital humanities techniques, we can create a more integrated, navigable, and research-friendly version of the Geneva Bible. The features that make the text unique and valuable will be easier to observe, analyze, and interpret. A richer version created with users in mind could improve how we think about this work and how it impacted important moments in Western history.

