

Anthony Grafton. *The Culture of Correction in Renaissance Europe*.

The Panizzi Lectures 2009. London: British Library, 2011. xii +244 pp. \$45. ISBN: 978-0-7123-5845-3.

As Anthony Grafton clearly announces in the introduction to these three essays, which are based on the 2009 Panizzi Lectures the author delivered at the British Library, “this short book seeks to recreate the lost world of the press correctors who lived and worked between the middle of the fifteenth century and the end of the seventeenth” (1). Overall, this subject represents a continuation of Grafton’s numerous studies on the development of intellectual networks during the Renaissance. In this book, however, Grafton departs from the conventional portraits of humanist scholars, whom the author familiarly calls “the citizens of the international Republic of Letters” (3), to concentrate on individuals whose social and intellectual roles could be rather fluid. In fact, some of these correctors often navigated between the concrete environment of the printing house, as defined by its specific tasks, rules, and demanding deadlines, and the creative world of authors. In order to identify who these correctors were, and what they were expected to do, Grafton makes use of a wide range of primary sources, including extant printer’s copies and corrected proofs, printing-house records, manuscripts, correspondence, annotations on books, and early printed books. Researchers will appreciate the chance to engage directly with the sources under discussion; they are consistently accompanied by footnotes containing the original version, mostly in Latin.

In chapter 1, “Practice Makes Perfect,” Grafton addresses questions like the following: what exactly was the task of a corrector? According to some prescriptive narratives such as Theodor Zwinger’s *Methodus apodemica*, the corrector inserted emendations in the first and second print proofs by collating them with the original copy, which was read aloud by a lector. The third proof was then compared with the corrected second proof. However, argues Grafton, the correctors discussed in this book were hardly typical since they belonged to a small group of relatively large firms with the highest scholarly standards. Grafton is referring to prestigious publishers like the Frobens, Amerbachs, and Plantin-Moretus, where correctors intervened in the creative process. They commented on the authors’ copies, wrote blurbs, and designed reading aids like comprehensive title pages, tables of contents, chapter headings, and indexes.

Chapter 2, “The View from Inside the Shop,” is the most original of the three lectures. It includes a series of fascinating case studies that include sources fully discussed for the first time. For example, Plantin hired Johannes Isaac Levita to

revise the 1529 Hebrew lexicon by the Dominican Hebraist Santes Pagnini. The copy of the lexicon that Isaac marked up and annotated for the press, which was further supplemented with forty-four pages of manuscript notes, is held in Leiden University Library. Though Isaac converted first to Lutheranism and then to Catholicism, his notes clearly reveal that he never assimilated to Christianity linguistically and culturally. His comments are very much about the failure of Christian scholars to appreciate the centrality of a millennial tradition rooted in Jewish scribal culture.

Finally, chapter 3, “The View from the Author’s Study,” presents examples when the original work was considerably altered against the will of the author. Sometimes the corrector improved the manuscript. On other occasions, however, the author found himself miserably betrayed by correctors and printers. Willibald Pirckheimer must have fainted upon receiving the proofs of book 8 of his edition of Ptolemy’s *Geography*. It included maps — Pirckheimer was convinced that Ptolemy never drew them — and, worse still, ethnographic illustrations depicting the races from remote lands as monstrous creatures, which the printer had added in an attempt to reach a broader public.

One important omission I could detect is the absence of a mention to Alonso Víctor de Paredes’s *Institution and Origin of the Art of Printing, and General Rules for Compositors*, a Spanish printer’s manual issued in Madrid around 1680, and whose chapter 10 is devoted to the duties of the correctors. Nevertheless, this critical note should not undermine the extraordinary merits of this book, particularly as it bridges the gap that often separates bibliographers from intellectual historians. I never saw more clearly how meaning could be dramatically shaped by the new culture generated by the introduction of printing.

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