Jonathan Green. *Printing and Prophecy: Prognostication and Media Change, 1450–1550.*

Cultures of Knowledge in the Early Modern World. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012. xiii + 266 pp. $70. ISBN: 978–0–472–11783–3.

In this contribution to early print history, Jonathan Green surveys traditions and texts of prophecy and astrology during the first century of printing. His focus is largely on Germany with sidewise glances at Italy and England. Attention to this century and to Germany are appropriate, he argues, because prophetic texts were central to Gutenberg's publishing program, and during the 1540s Christian Egenolff, printer in Frankfurt, established the prophetic canon that was to be influential for the next centuries. *Sybil's Prophecy* (1552, 1553) was in fact the first book Gutenberg printed (in German), a devotional reading of current events within the larger scope of sacred history. This was followed by a virtual torrent of

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treatises of prophecy. These prognostications, Green thinks, were a metaphor for print literacy: representing a "screen on which original words could appear without flaw" (32), just as God's heavens could be read like a book.

Green traces the development of the genre's bestsellers through Johannes Lichtenberger's *Prognosticatio* (1488), which fully integrated astrology and prophecy, to those Lichtenberger influenced, including Joseph Grunpeck's *Speculum* (1508) and Johann Carion's *Interpretation and Revelation* (1526). One chapter deals with the way printers, authors, editors, woodblock artists, and compositors together constructed these literary creations. Another focuses on the use of images — the responsibility of printers, not authors — and shows they often provided a visual footnoting, adding authority here, or proposing structure or inviting interpretation there. Images were, Green avers, more potent than words. And paratexts constructed prophetic authorship (55).

Running as a subtheme through several chapters, and the focus of chapter 3, "Prophets and Their Readers," is an account of the delicate balance printers needed to achieve in piquing readers' interest and quieting their (and the authorities') fears. On the one hand, printed books diminished the role readers played. Green notes in earlier prophecy manuscripts readers were to lend the books and spread their message; Lichtenberger wanted passive readers. Now prophecy was to be for experts. But printing could work in the other direction as well. Later in the 1520s, worries about coming disasters were effectively fanned by books. An "epistemological crisis of print" (Green's term) meant, among other things, that the barriers to prognostication were lowered "from specialized academic training to nothing more than book ownership" (136).

Not surprisingly, Green argues that printers (and authors) sought to negotiate these fears by largely reinforcing existing social hierarchies. While there was a growing anxiety about society and the stability of its institutions, prophetic texts acknowledged the anxieties even as they promoted existing social estates. Even prefatory dedications, Green notes, "reaffirmed the place of both author and reader in the existing social order" (126), leading him to conclude that the print history of prophetic texts is "largely the story of the printing press as an agent of the status quo" (69). Readers of these texts were encouraged to pray that God, who ruled the stars, would intervene and protect; meanwhile they were called to repentance and obedience.

The author gathers an impressive array of textual references (an appendix provides a complete listing of prophetic works and practicas in German until 1550), providing a textual focus that is both a strength and weakness. Though the discussion of prophetic and astrological works will be satisfying to the specialist of early print history, outside of general references to instability and contemporary anxieties, the author does little to situate the discussion in the larger cultural context — humanism, the Turkish menace, civil strife, and the multiple reform movements (even the Reformation itself) are given little attention. Around 1500, he notes a spike in prophetic practica, but relates this to limited survival and classification of books, rather than to the widespread apocalyptic concerns and

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recurrences of the plague. While the subtitle evokes media change there is really no substantial discussion of the significance of printing as a medium (Walter Ong and Ruth Finnegan make no appearance). He refers more than once to the epistemological crisis caused by printing, but does not develop this. The picture that emerges is more modest: printing (and prophecy) participated in the larger struggle for a new social order.

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