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Bebel, Heinrich.

***Facetiae: Jokes and Funny Stories from the Sixteenth Century.* Ed. and trans. Sebastian Coxon.**

Renaissance and Reformation Texts in Translation 16. Toronto: Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2022. Pp. 250 + 10 ill. ISBN 978-0-7727-2216-4 (paperback) \$39.95.

Facetiae, collections and anthologies of anecdotes, humorous and satirical tales, proverbs, sayings, and witty jokes, are treasure troves of literary, cultural, and social information. The first English-language edition of a collection of *Facetiae* by Heinrich Bebel (1472–1518), a major figure in German humanism, therefore is more than welcome. Bebel served as professor of poetry and rhetoric at the University of Tübingen beginning in 1496 and became poet laureate in 1501.

Bebel authored three books of *Facetiae* in Latin, containing 107, 151, and 182 tales, respectively. As Coxon explains in his introduction, Books I and II were likely drafted in 1506 and 1507 and printed as part of his *Opusula nova* by Johannes Grüninger in Strasbourg in 1508, and again in 1509. Book III was included in the third printing under the title *Opuscula nova et adolescentiae labores*, issued by Matthias Schürer, also in Strasbourg, in 1512, and again with slight modifications in 1514, the last edition supervised by Bebel himself. Coxon uses this 1514 edition as the basis for his translation, listing notable variants at the end (227–29). Coxon notes that Book III was published as a separate entity in the editions of 1512 and 1514 and that we should not see all three books “as constituting a single uninterrupted body of material” (34). This is important as Book III has its own cluster of paratexts that set it apart from Books I–II; Coxon includes all of them in his translation.

Coxon’s substantive introduction gives a good overview of Bebel’s life and his works. It also discusses the history of Bebel’s *Facetiae*, the contents of the collection, literary models, the reception of the collection, and concludes with notes on the translation. He identifies the *Liber facetiarum* by the papal secretary Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1454), first printed around 1470, as the definitive textual model. In a German context, Bebel also could draw on collections by Heinrich Steinhöwel (1410/11–1479), Rutger Sycamber (1456–c. 1517), and Augustin Tünger (1455–1507/10) (18–22).

According to Coxon, a humanist agenda, promoting education and proficiency in Latin, is central to Bebel’s *Facetiae*, frequently mocking bad

grammar, superficial education, and particularly the ignorance of priests and monks. Like many German humanists, Bebel was a staunch supporter of the empire, and specifically of Emperor Maximilian I, while showing contempt for the Swiss and the French. Many *facetiae* were directed against questionable religious types, while others served anti-Jewish tropes.

From the various personal references in the *Facetiae* and the paratexts, Coxon reconstructs a professional network in southwestern Germany, and particularly in Tübingen. Two figures would have been worthy of further discussion. Coxon uses seven woodcuts from Sebastian Brant's (1458–1521) *Narrenschiff* (*Ship of Fools*, 1494), without explanation. Coxon states that Bebel likely met Brant in Basel in 1495 (9), yet does not further elaborate on Brant's influence. The second person is Philesius, who is mentioned by Bebel several times and is identified by Coxon as Martin Ringmann, a Grüninger employee in Strasbourg (15). This likely is the humanist scholar and cosmographer Matthias Ringmann (1482–1511), also known as Philesius Vogesigena, who was a key collaborator of the cartographer Martin Waldseemüller (c. 1470–1520). Further exploring Bebel's connection with this influential Strasbourg network would have been worthwhile.

Coxon's translation is eminently readable while at the same time giving the reader a realistic and appropriate sense of the original text. Coxon faces a number of issues when translating this text corpus. Many *facetiae* include text in the vernacular to stress vulgar sexual or scatological references, to emphasize lacking Latin skills of some individuals, or to highlight a word play that only works in the vernacular. Coxon marks these passages by setting them in italics to help the reader understand the linguistic complexity of the text. Coxon uses square brackets to supply nouns and verbs elided by Bebel. Coxon also notes that it is impossible to render Bebel's preference of Classical over Medieval Latin, a standard humanist practice (35).

There is one translation practice this reviewer does not agree with. In some *facetiae* Bebel added a comment or explanation, which was common in storytelling at the time. Coxon in his translation puts these textual elements in round parentheses due to the "subordinate character of many of these utterances" (35). Parentheses should be used only if they are present in the Latin original, which is the case in some but certainly not all stories. In early modern texts story-telling is part of the story, and the narrative voice is an integral part of both the story and the text. Putting these textual elements in

parentheses, therefore, introduces an unnecessary hierarchy that is not present in the original.

However, these minor points do not detract from the immense value of this translation. Coxon provides an eminently readable yet faithful translation that provides access to one of the most important German humanist intellectuals for a broader audience and that deepens our insight into a humanist culture as it was putting down roots in Germany. Bebel's *Facetiae* not only give us an understanding of humanist humour and satire but also open a window to topics and themes deemed relevant at the time.

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