

History

CARDANO'S COSMOS: *The Worlds and Works of a Renaissance Astrologer.*

By Anthony Grafton. Harvard Univ. Press. 284 pp. \$35

Today, Girolamo Cardano (1501–76) is known, if at all, as a physician, mathematician, and natural philosopher. Grafton, however, concentrates on Cardano the astrologer. Like a growing number of scholars, Grafton, a Princeton University historian and the author of *The Footnote* (1997), argues that astrology in the Renaissance was a rational science, not some quasi-mystical, irrational manifestation of the “dark side,” and certainly nothing akin to the facile fortunetelling in today’s newspapers. Through Cardano’s voluminous writings on nature, the stars, and (above all) himself, Grafton establishes his subject’s astrology at the heart of all of those activities we consider central to the Renaissance: politics, print culture, the recovery of antiquity, the marketplace, and the practice of collecting wonders and curiosities.

Cardano hit upon the popular device of publishing an ever-expanding collection of “celebrity” horoscopes (or, as Grafton more properly terms them, genitures), together with gossipy commentaries explaining how the stars were affecting their subjects’ lives. The collection earned Cardano a Nuremberg publisher (the same Petreius who brought out Copernicus) and thereby a share of the lucrative northern European, Lutheran market for astrological literature. Astrology also gave Cardano entrée into the corridors of power and brought him into contact with luminaries in France and England, including John Dee and the young King Edward, for whom he cast an extravagant horoscope.

A not-always-successful student of the Renaissance art of self-promotion, Cardano made enemies, too. He explained his proclivity “to say exactly what will offend my listeners” as a product not simply of heavenly influences, but also of the astrologer’s professional duty to tell the truth. And, with some cagey exceptions, this truth-telling extended to Cardano’s minute published dissections of himself, including the star-laced autobiography he wrote in the months before his death, while under house arrest imposed by the Inquisition.

“In an age conversant with Latin,” writes Grafton, “his curious and uncanny autobiography attracted many readers until late in the 19th century.” Historian Jacob Burkhardt, in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), cited Cardano’s memoir as an example of the self-reflection that made the Italian Renaissance the birthplace of modernity.

Grafton’s methodology, a combination of old-fashioned intellectual history and the newer discipline of the history of books and readers (what he calls the perspectives of “the parachutist and the truffle-hunter”), makes this book more than just an examination of Cardano. Through wonderfully vivid prose, the reader enters Cardano’s cosmos—a place no more unreasonable or contradictory, the author points out, than a world in which scholars “use computers to write and fax machines to submit the conference papers in which they unmask all of modern science as a social product.”

—Laura Ackerman Smoller

TRIALS OF INTIMACY: *Love and Loss in the Beecher-Tilton Scandal.*

By Richard Wightman Fox.
Univ. of Chicago Press. 419 pp. \$30

In making emotional sense out of one of the most perplexing events of late Victorian America, Fox has succeeded where many have failed. For seven months in 1875, America was riveted by a civil trial in Brooklyn in which one of the country’s most famous and beloved ministers, the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher (brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe), defended himself against adultery charges brought by his onetime best friend and parishioner, Theodore Tilton. The trial ended with a hung jury, but many commentators since have imagined that they could resolve what the jurors could not. Fox, a professor of history at the University of Southern California, wisely forgoes that quest and takes us in new directions.

Without quite meaning to do so, Beecher, Tilton, and Tilton’s saintly appearing and highly religious wife, Elizabeth, were pioneering new forms of intimacy, pushing at the conventional boundaries both of marital love and intense friendship. Beecher and his much

younger disciple Tilton initially shared an exhilarating soul love, a type of male bond neither unknown nor unacceptable to their sentimental age. But when Tilton's enthusiasm for religion waned, Beecher transferred his powerful affections to Elizabeth, who welcomed the older man's attentions. Rapturous but nonsexual love between the sexes was uncharted and dangerous territory in the 1870s, and the two evidently struggled with the difference between a permissible spiritual affinity and impermissible worldly desires.

Jealousy on multiple levels finally brought matters to a head, but, fearing publicity, the three managed to reach a private understanding about their complicated relationships. Eventually, public exposure forced Tilton's hand, and he sought to assuage his wounded honor through the old-fashioned remedy of a lawsuit. In court, Beecher and Mrs. Tilton denied a sexual relationship. Then, three years later, she emerged from a self-imposed silence for one brief moment to confess to adultery.

Fox organizes his book around the concept of narrative and storytelling. He notes that the players' accounts shifted over time, and he does not attempt to choose one version as the simple truth. Perhaps the most striking feature of the book is that Fox tells the tale backwards, underscoring his theme that narratives are constructs. After a pictorial prologue recapitulates the main outlines of the scandal, the text opens with the deaths of the three protagonists, then moves back in time, from late-life retellings, through Mrs. Tilton's confession in 1878, to

the civil trial of 1875, to the church investigation that exonerated Beecher. A remarkable chapter toward the end reprints some 30 love letters exchanged between the Tiltons in the late 1860s, on the eve of the crisis. By excavating the competing stories in reverse chronological order, Fox permits a much deeper reading of these letters, which provide an amazing window into a different culture of love from our own. All in all, *Trials of Intimacy* is an absorbing if demanding read and an extraordinary achievement.

—Patricia Cline Cohen

**LOST REVOLUTIONS:
*The South in the 1950s.***

By Pete Daniel. Univ. of North Carolina Press. 392 pp. \$45 hardcover, \$19.95 paper

**A LIFE IS MORE
THAN A MOMENT:
*The Desegregation of
Little Rock's Central High.***

Text and photos by Will Counts. Introduction by Will Campbell. Essays by Ernest Dumas and Robert S. McCord. Indiana Univ. Press. 96 pp. \$29.95

On September 25, 1957, federal troops armed with rifles and bayonets escorted nine black students into Little Rock's Central High School. White resistance to school desegregation, which had mounted in the three years since *Brown v. Board of Education*, suffered its first defeat. The Eisenhower administration, however reluctantly, was enforcing federal law.

Two months later, the entire student body of Wake Forest College, a Baptist-supported institution in Raleigh, North Carolina, marched out of chapel services to protest the school's ban on dancing. At a local snack shop, the students spent an hour "protest dancing" to "Wake Up Little Susie" and other hits of the day. Later, some students bunny-hopped across campus while others burned in effigy the church official responsible for the dance ban.

The South of the 1950s combined the civil rights struggle, teenage rebellion, and all the other forces that were transforming the nation. It was a place of rigid racial divisions and oppression, of white supremacy and antiblack violence. But it was also a place where black and white cultures intermingled and cross-fertilized, from the countryside to the city, pro-

