INTELLECTA DESIGN
PRESENTS

TITIVILVS

TITIVILVS AND THE PRINTER'S DEVIL

Titivillus, sometimes spelled Tutivillus, is a demon, said to work on behalf of Belphegor, Lucifer or Satan in the Middle Ages, to introduce errors into the work of a scribe. He has also been described as collecting idle chat that occurs during church service, and mispronounced, mumbled or skipped words of the service itself, to take to Hell to be counted against the offender. He has been called the "patron demon of scribes," as Titivillus provides an easy excuse for the errors that are bound to creep into manuscripts. The first reference to Titivillus by name occurred in Tractatus de Penitentia, c. 1285 by John of Wales. According to "Medieval Calligraphy: Its history and technique" by Marc Drogin, "for the past half-century every edition of The Oxford English Dictionary has listed an incorrect page reference for, of all things, a footnote on the earliest mention of Titivillus."

Titivillus plays an antagonistic role in the Medieval English play Mankind. In an anonymous fifteenth-century devotional treatise, Myroure of Oure Ladye, Titivillus introduced himself thus (I.xx.54): "I am a poure dyuel, and my name ys Tytyvyllus ... I muste eche day ... brynge my master a thousande pokes full of faylynges, and of neglygences in syllables and wordes."

Printer's devil

A printer's devil was an apprentice in a printing establishment who performed a number of tasks, such as mixing tubs of ink and fetching type. A number of famous men served as printer's devils in their youth, including Ambrose Bierce, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Warren Harding, John Kellogg, Lyndon Johnson, Joseph Lyons, and Lázaro Cárdenas.

The origin of printer's devil is not definitively known. Various competing theories of the phrase's origin follow.

Printer's devil has been ascribed to the fact that printer's apprentices would inevitably have parts of their skin stained black by the ink used in printing. As black was associated with the "black arts," the apprentice came to be called a devil. Another origin is linked to the fanciful belief among printers that a special devil haunted every print shop, performing mischief such as inverting type, misspelling words or removing entire lines of completed type. The apprentice became a substitute source of blame and came to be called a printer's devil by association.

A third source involves a business partner of Johann Gutenberg, Johann Fust, who sold several of Gutenberg's Bibles to King Louis XI of France and his court officials, representing the bibles as hand-copied manuscripts. When it was discovered that individual letters were identical in appearance, Fust was accused of witchcraft—the red ink text was said to have been written in blood, and Fust was imprisoned. Though Fust was later freed after the bibles' origins were revealed, many still believed he was in league with Satan, thus the phrase.

Another possible origin is ascribed to Aldus Manutius, a well known Venetian printer of the renaissance, and founder of the Aldine Press, who was denounced by detractors for practicing the black arts (early printing was long associated with devilry). The assistant to Manutius was a young boy of African descent who was accused of being the embodiment of Satan and dubbed the printer's devil.

One likely source stems from the fact that worn and broken lead type is thrown into a hellbox, which the printer's devil must take to the furnace for melting and recasting.

Finally, English tradition links the origin of printer's devil to the assistant of the first English printer and book publisher, William Caxton. Caxton's assistant was named "Deville" which evolved to "devil" over time, as that name was used to describe other printers' apprentices.

(From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

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