

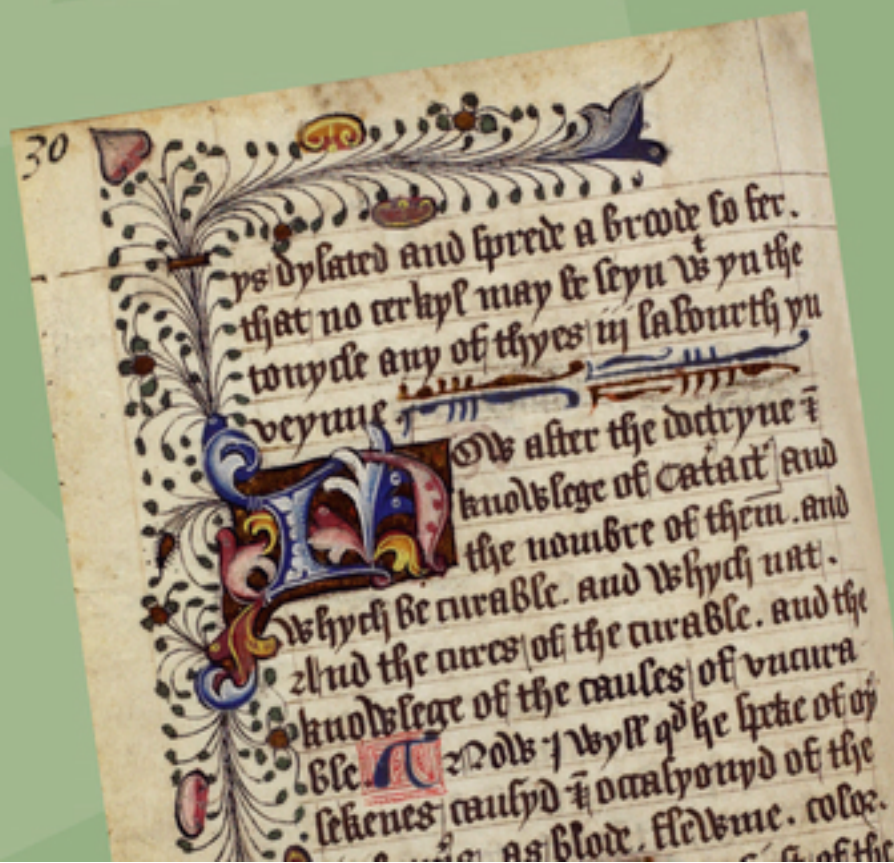
Antonio Miranda-García  
Santiago González Fernández-Corugedo

# Benvenuto Grassus' On the well-proven art of the eye

*Practica oculorum &*

*De probatissima arte oculorum*

Synoptic Edition and Philological Studies



## Prologue

The inaugural book in this series, *Benvenutus Grassus' On the well-proven art of the eye* (*Practica oculorum* & *De probatissima arte oculorum*), is a comprehensive study and edition of a Late Middle English medical treatise on Ophthalmology whose Latin or Provençal origins are attributed to Benvenutus Grassus (a “composite author” who may be placed in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century), and whose catalogue titles have a certain variation (Marqués/Miranda/González 2008).

That is why we have decided, after long discussions (not necessarily fruitful most of the times), to settle with a comprehensive (and long) title such as *On the well-proven art of the eye*, rendering the Latin *Practica oculorum* and *De probatissima arte oculorum* into the modern English vernacular. The importance of the Late Middle English Grassus's works for the history of medicine is well known, as it was one of the most widely used scientific texts in the period between the 14th and the 16th centuries. It is also a significant group of texts for the study of Late Middle English scientific prose (Taavitsainen/Pahta 2004).

We have indeed chosen the Hunterian collection manuscripts numbered 503 and 513 (as David Moreno explains in his Foreword to the synoptic edition) because Laurence Eldredge has documented in his thorough review and study of the Grassus MSS sources, together with the University of Glasgow's accessibility to its library collections and remarkable digitizing facilities, which already resulted in the previous edition of MS Hunter 513 (Marqués/Miranda/González 2008). We truly acknowledge the spirit of the University of Glasgow's staff and curators as, in quite a different mood and mode from other rather narrow-minded Anglo-Saxon examples, but much in line with the opinion of other Scottish institutions, wish to preserve the legacy of their cultural

artifacts by facilitating access to their singular collections without overcharge and with a free spirit.

The reasons why we have centred on these Late Middle English versions of Grassus's treatises are justified and expounded in the Foreword, and then by the very nature of the specific studies on the palaeography of both manuscripts by Javier Calle and punctuation by Teresa Marqués, Antonio Miranda's quantitative scrutiny of the morphology and lexicon, Alejandro Alcaraz's textual analyses, and then further by Laura Esteban's panorama of the MSS's relatives and negation.

The book as a whole is a tentative answer to a still ongoing problem posed (among others) by A. Houseman back in 1921:

There is no science in which it is more necessary to take precautions against error arising from internal causes. Those who follow the physical sciences enjoy the great advantage that they can constantly bring their opinions to the test of fact, and verify or falsify their theories by experiment. Our conclusions regarding the truth or falsehood of a manuscript reading can never be confirmed or corrected by an equally decisive test, for the only equally decisive test would be the production of the author's autograph. It is therefore a matter of common prudence and common decency that we should neglect no safeguard lying within our reach; that we should look sharp after ourselves; that we should narrowly scrutinise our own proceedings and rigorously analyse our springs of action.

Since the advenement of the personal computer in the 1980's, the possibility of accessing networks via hypertextual interfaces in the 1990's and the extensive and almost universal access to the Internet in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – all in less than 30 years – the changes in Textual Criticism, Textual Analysis, Ecdotics and what one is still tempted to call Philology, have also been revolutionary inasmuch as technological approaches are concerned. But I dare say not that much in what Houseman called “common prudence and common decency”. What we have acquired is the possibility of reproducing (virtually) with extreme accuracy, comfort, and economy all the artifacts of times past, because, among other machines, digital photography today is only hindered (in the case of manuscripts and similar items) by their curators' zeal and the protectionist (even mercantile) regulations of

many traditionally-minded repositories, libraries, archives and other seats of learning. The expensive and elitist late 19<sup>th</sup> century facsimiles, either photographic or otherwise, have been completely superseded by today's electronic editions in their various filing formats, although their former price is comparatively similar to fees charged today by different institutions, which also turn access to such items a comparatively expensive luxury for the select minority of acquisition officers of University and Research Institutions Libraries.

As to the nature and contents of digital and electronic editions in 2010, one wonders what the Modern Languages Association Committee for Scholarly editions would say today of the previous Committee's recommendations of 1976:

Whatever additional materials are included, however, the CSE considers the following essential for a scholarly edition:

1. A textual essay, which sets forth the history of the text and its physical forms, describes or reports the authoritative or significant texts, explains how the text of the edition has been constructed or represented, gives the rationale for all decisions affecting its construction or representation, and discusses the verbal composition of the text as well as its punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.
2. An appropriate textual apparatus or notes or both, which (1) records alterations and emendations in the basic text(s), (2) discusses problematical readings (if not treated in the textual essay), (3) reports variant substantive readings from all versions of the text that might carry authority, and (4) indicates how the new edition treats ambiguously divided compounds (if any) in the basic text as well as which end-of-line hyphens in the new edition should be retained in quoting from the text. These four kinds of information need not be presented in any specific arrangement, and not all obtain in every situation, but the CSE requires that, when applicable, they should be either in each volume bearing the "Approved Edition" emblem or otherwise available at the time of publication.
3. A proofreading plan that provides for meticulous proofreading at every stage of production so that the accuracy of the text, the textual essay, and the textual apparatus is not compromised.<sup>1</sup>

Because several remarkable authors such as for instance Richard Finneran were already adapted to the changing paradigm twenty years later (1996):

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1     <<http://www.iupui.edu/~peirce/writings/cse.htm>>.

The development of digital technology and its widespread availability on the personal computer are bringing about a fundamental paradigm shift in the ways that literary texts are created, preserved, disseminated, and studied – a revolution that many scholars have argued is as profound as that created by Gutenberg’s invention of movable type. At the same time, a major shift in textual theory – away from the notion of a “Definitive Edition” and toward a recognition of the integrity of discrete versions – has highlighted the fundamental limitations of the printed book. The *Literary Text in the Digital Age* addresses these developments from a wide range of perspectives. The essays discuss topics from the history of electronic editions to problems in encoding to the relationship between contemporary literary theory and the capabilities of digital technology... Individually and together the contributions show how these projects will go beyond the “electronic book” and exploit the full potential of the new medium.

Further developments in the concept of the new types of electronic editions have taken place since Peter Robinson, one of the first scholars who revolutionised the core concepts of the apparatus of textual studies with his 1990 thesis on Icelandic texts by writing *Collate*, said in 2005:

§ 30 Throughout this article, I have expressed what I think should be our aim: that some time quite soon scholars wishing to make scholarly editions will naturally choose the electronic form. It follows then that all major series of scholarly editions, including those now published by the major academic presses, also will become digital. There will be exceptions: there always will be a place for a printed “reader’s edition” or similar. But we should expect that for most of the purposes for which we now use editions, the editions we use will be electronic. We should do this not just to keep up with the rest of the world, but because indeed electronic editions make possible kinds of reading and research never before available and offer valuable insights into and approaches to the texts they cover.

§ 31 But this will not happen simply because we will it, or because this conclusion is obvious. We need some things we do not yet have: software that does not exist and established online publication systems that have yet to be created. Let us not wait too long.

Martin Foys, in a quite interesting summary of the evolution of computing and technologies applied to the Humanities and in our case, to Textual Criticism, while emphasizing the uneven changes in the concepts of progress, referring to the seminal concept of Robinson’s general extension of the electronic edition, told us in 2008:

§5. Until very recently, this technological illiteracy has been excusable: humanities researchers and students, quite properly, concerned themselves primarily with their disciplinary work. The early Humanities Computing experts were working on topics, such as statistical analysis, the production of concordances, and building the back-ends for dictionaries, that were of no real interest to those who intended simply to access the final results of this work. Even after the personal computer replaced the typewriter, there was no real need for humanities scholars to understand technical details beyond such basics as turning a computer on and off and starting up their word-processor. The principal format for exchange and storage of scholarly information remained paper and the few areas where paper was superseded – such as in the use of email to replace the memo – the technology involved was so widely used, so robust, and above all so useful and so well supported that there was no need to learn anything about it: if your email and word-processor weren't set up at the store when you bought a computer, you could expect this work to be done for you by the technicians at your place of employment or over the phone by the Help Desk at your Internet Service Provider: nothing about humanities scholars' use of the technology required special treatment or distinguished them from the University President, a lawyer in a one-person law office... or their grandparents.

§6. In the last half-decade, this situation has changed dramatically. The principal exchange format for humanities research is no longer paper but the digital byte – albeit admittedly as represented in PDF and word-processor formats (which are intended ultimately for printing or uses similar to that for which we print documents). State agencies are beginning to require open digital access to publicly-funded research. At humanities conferences, an increasing number of sessions focus on digital project reports and the application. And as Peter Robinson has recently argued, it is rare to discover a new major humanities project that does not include a significant digital component as part of its plans (Robinson 2005). Indeed some of the most interesting and exciting work in many fields is taking advantage of technology such as GIS, digit.<sup>2</sup>

One may not fully agree with all the nuances that Robinson and Foys mention (although my presentation is biased and partial by the very nature of what a scholarly edition should be, and by my basic adscription to what they state), but there are sound reasons for that. When, back in 1990, and after several years of the typical training in the use of

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2 Stuart D. Lee was one of the pioneers of the PDF format for scholarly editions. His 1999 online edition of *Ælfric's Homilies on Judith, Esther, and the Maccabees* was among the very first to help establish a trend that has become extended only 10 years later.