To accompany Karine Crouzas in her discovery of the workshops of Erasmus’ printers at the beginning of the sixteenth century is to pursue an increasingly enthralling account of the relationship between Erasmus and print. Writing while still a doctoral student at Lausanne University, Crouzas offers an Erasmus who was a man of his day: not only a writer bound by the new techniques of print but also a witty, clever, and polemical author who played with the prospects offered by this new typographical tool. A preface by Jean-François Gilmont, a leading authority on the history of the book, provides a brief and clear introduction to the problematics of the work. With Erasmus’ correspondence serving as its main source, this is a study that sets out to discover what Erasmus thought of print and how he estimated and evaluated the power of a new medium.

The first part of the book, “L’imprimerie, un outil parfaitement maîtrisé,” is divided into six chapters and opens with an examination of the contacts between Erasmus and the printers of his time. If chapter one introduces nothing new, it must be said to its credit that it usefully locates Erasmus within the chronology of his century, providing details of his biography, including his travels throughout Europe. Not only does it bring into focus Erasmus’ connections with printers—Thierry Martens in Louvain, Aldus Manutius in Venice, Johann Froben in Basel—but it also draws attention to the absence of other connections. For instance, there is no trace of a link between Erasmus and Parisian printer Antoine Denidel, who printed Erasmus’ first poems in 1495.

In the second chapter, Crouzas considers the recipients of Erasmus’ printed works and notes that the humanist wanted to achieve the widest possible distribution for them—geographical but also socio-cultural and temporal. Erasmus was extremely concerned with his fame in the present but even more so for the centuries to come. In pursuit of “la gloire” (p. 36), he deployed the instruments of typography with enthusiasm. In a brief but stimulating third chapter, Crouzas deftly studies Erasmus’ typographical concerns, which she classifies under two headings: the accuracy of the text and its aesthetic quality. Erasmus is revealed as someone who is worried that these concerns be addressed and who, rather than leave Froben’s printing house, chooses as early as 1522 to give up the benefits of an imperial allowance. Any author concerned with the correction of his texts had no choice but to live near his printer (p. 42).
Erasmus’ financial arrangements with his printers, including contracts, advertising, circulation, and the importance of the book fair at Frankfurt, are dealt with in chapter four. Here Crouzas offers a fascinating picture of Erasmus making the business of publishing his business. He was fully aware, for example, that the name “Erasmus” was itself a selling-point (p. 60), and, as a result, he would speculate on it in the course of making financial arrangements with his printers. The humanist was also fully acquainted with the marketing of books. Even if he did not earn a great amount of money from the sale of his books, Erasmus managed to secure gifts of cloth from Froben, who was also obliged to put a house at his disposal and even to buy him a garden.

This exciting chapter tells us much about the importance of the Frankfurt fair in the rhythm of the writing and printing of the Erasmian book. In 1525, for instance, Erasmus obtained a copy of Luther’s De servo arbitrio and wrote a response in record time, compelling Froben to print his first Hyperaspistes some ten days before the opening of the Frankfurt fair in the summer of 1526. Well aware of commercial laws, Erasmus strategized about the printing of not only his books but also his pamphlets, 132 of which against conservative Catholics, Lutherans and Ciceronians were published under his alert eye between 1517 and 1536. Sometimes, on the other hand, Erasmus allowed some of his texts to circulate in a handwritten form for a more limited readership.

If the first half of this book introduces an Erasmus who was fully aware of the power that print gave him and who could therefore manipulate it, the second part, “Le contrôle des livres,” is more fascinating still as it reveals how quickly Erasmus came to understand the dangers of the typographical medium and tried to limit them. Crouzas takes the reader to the very heart of the questions raised by print: questions of intellectual property, of brutal competition between printers with no business training and no professional organization, and of censorship. Erasmus often raised these questions himself and in a rather disillusioned tone. Protective of his publications, he could not abide their being plagiarized or abbreviated, and he was among the first authors to advocate a legal deposit for books.

According to Crouzas, Erasmus had “une conscience très aiguë de la propriété intellectuelle” (p. 99). Extremely concerned by his present and future reputation, he often appealed to the authorities for the prohibition of publications that he regarded as defamatory. Depending on the places where his works were printed, he addressed his complaints to local authorities in Zurich, Basel, Strasbourg, the Swiss Confederation, as well as the dukes of Saxony and Milan, the Parliament of Paris, King Francis I of France, the Holy Roman Emperor, and a succession of popes. Vengeful in his protests, Erasmus