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‘Cleansing’ the Discipline: Ernst Robert Curtius and His Medievalist Turn

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openness of the liturgical space where there is room for both Thomas and Henry (and anyone) regardless of differences and enmities. The presentation of this thought leads into the singing of the trope d apostolic creed as it was sung during the New Year’s celebration in Sens, the so-called Feast of Fools, on which I have drawn for a number of liturgical items used in my music drama. This feast of the circumcision a week after Jesus’ birth was known under many names, also festa asterias (the feast of the donkey). It was one of the clerical feasts, belonging to the subdeacons, the lowest of the clerical orders, not even always considered to be a holy order at the time.

Thomas Becket fought for the rights of the minor clerics such as John of Norwich and thus it seems appropriate to end the opera with a glimpse of the feast as celebrated in Sens – where the archbishop could well have attended it during his exile.

The austere Gregorian Church did know of role playing and of both liturgical and other ways of promoting individual clerical groups and politico-religious demands. Such matters would at times – as in the case of the Feast of Fools – be done with inventiveness and playfulness as well as seriousness, as Arlt and Fassler have demonstrated.

After the creed from the New Year’s office, where I have trope some of the tropes by setting them – in my own style – for four voices, follows a clarinet solo as the participants leave the stage of the church in procession.

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‘CLEANSING’ THE DISCIPLINE: ERNST ROBERT CURTIUS AND HIS MEDIEVALIST TURN

RICHARD UTZ

1. Curtius decanonized?

In 1985, WALTER HAUG, a powerful influence on German medieval studies in the last 25 years, began his magisterial synthesis of medieval literary theory in vernacular texts with the following statement:

Medieval studies, especially in Germany, had some difficulty in assimilating the work of Ernst Robert Curtius. His work, which placed medieval literature in the wider context of the classical cultural tradition after the debacle of 1945, opened up new perspectives and directions for medieval studies which were impossible to resist. At the same time, this wide European perspective presented a challenge to medievalists which was, ultimately, bound to encounter resistance in the form of a defence of the specific characteristics of the Romance and Germanic literatures of the Middle Ages.

Haug’s book, more interested in the dialectics of historical development than in reaffirming the theories of cultural continuity so dear to medievalists in the 1940s and 1950s, implicitly questioned the kind of medieval philology practiced and institutionalized by Curtius’s famous Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter (1948). Where Curtius established what he regarded as an unbroken chain of literary tropes from classical poetic and rhetorical theory onward into the middle ages and modernity, Haug challenged the

3 Villard, ed. (1907), pp. 140–41. Tropes are most easily – and in this case sufficiently – defined as interspersed comments to the individual sentences of the creed (or whatever type of text is being troped) in both music and words (some tropes – but not in the case referred to here – may consist of either words or music). For a general introduction to the very widely used practice in the liturgy of the early and high Middle Ages see Hiley (1993), pp. 196–238.

4 See the historical introduction to Arlt (1970), Darstellungsbund, pp. 38–51.

5 Arlt (1970), Darstellungsbund, pp. 55–64, interprets the Feast of Fools through the so-called Donkey’s conduct in a reading that (partly) identifies the donkey with the subdeacon. See also the vivid descriptions of the reformed Feast of Fools in Fassler (1992), pp. 68–80. The two here mentioned preserved full offices for this feast are such reformed offices from the early 13th century.

6 Some of the ideas for this essay were first presented in my plenary address for the Twelfth International Conference on Medievalism, at Canterbury Christ Church College, England, in August 1997. I would like to acknowledge the helpful suggestions made by Kathleen Verdun (Hope College) and Joerg O. Pichet (University of Tübingen) on draft versions of this essay.

apparent weaknesses of narrowly defined philological topos inventions and focused on what he calls the "masking of conventional topos" (p. 12). He collected the material for his historical poetics of the medieval narrative from representative literary authors' own theoretical statements which are usually woven into the outwardly formulaic fabric of their programmatic prologues (and epilogues) and demonstrated convincingly how even long lists of rhetorical topos are to be seen as more than the constant elements of tradition, rather variables which may be used "both in a traditional and in an individual manner" (p. 12). Because Haug's study presented such an appealing methodological alternative to positivistic philology and flamboyant modernism alike, it was hailed as the voice which finally addressed the unresolved hermeneutical questions in the leading twentieth-century studies on this topic. One reviewer even maintained that Haug had brought about the "emancipation of the "German Middle Ages" from the "Latin Middle Ages".\footnote{See, e.g., Hans-Jürg Spitz's review in Archivien, 6 (1980), 20-22 (12).}

While one can well understand and share these scholars' enthusiasm about Haug's fine book, it is doubtful that it has had (or will have) any decisive influence on the academic reception of Curtius and the methodology which informs European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages. Indeed, the list of other well-established medievalists who have critiqued Curtius's position in the area of topos research is long. None of them, however, nor a whole host of scholars pointing an accusing finger at Curtius's political views have so far been able to challenge the Curtius mystique.\footnote{See Ernst S. Dick's review in Spiegel, 63 (1988), 679-81 (681).} His book has become a standard work which is present in every single university or college library, as is commonly referred to by the affectionate nickname, ELLMA, and has recently gone through a seventh edition in its English translation.\footnote{European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, 2nd ed. by Willard R. Trask (New York: Bollingen Foundation, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), 7th ed (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).} References in this essay will be to Europäische Literatur und Lateinische Mittelalter, 2nd edn (Beine und Munch: Francke, 1967).

1 Curtius's work at the university of Bonn made it possible for him to connect to Bonn's particular genius loci, i.e., to a famous faculty including an active and prestigious tradition of scholarship in Classical philology.\footnote{See Earl Jeffrey Richards, Modernism, Medievalism and Humanism: A Research Bibliography on the Reception of the Works of Ernst Robert Curtius, Beihete Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie, 196 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1985), and Heinrich Lausberg (a student of Curtius's), Ernst Robert Curtius (1886-1956), ed. and introd. by Arnold Acaza (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1995). In March 1998, the MLA International Bibliography listed more than 50 essay publications on Curtius since 1983.}

2 Curtius wrote his study as the result of more than 35 years of experience as a teacher and scholar. The epic dimensions of his book, its learnedness as well as its philological exactitude—most of the data Curtius had gathered and catalogued during his years of inner
emigration (c. 1935–45) — was apt to impress even those colleagues otherwise critical of his methodology.

3) Reviewers and readers interested in the general cultural and political message of Curtius’s study received it overwhelmingly positively because it represented the Zeitgeist of the post-war period like no other academic publication. If many critics from the 1960s on tended to see only its close ties with the older philological tradition, scholars like Erich Köhler acknowledged the novelty of a study which attempted to end the formerly dominant nationally-minded research paradigms.7

4) In the eyes of many medievalists Curtius transformed German positivistic philology, which evolved together with the country’s belated unification as a modern nation state and was cherished and institutionalized as a national virtue at which German scholars outshone the scholars of any other country. His specific kind of transformation, because it applied this originally nationalistic methodology to a transnational goal, a “timeless European mythology,” brought about an attractive translatio studii immediately welcomed by German professors and students alike. Harald Weinrich’s reaction is representative:

I reacted in that 1948 post-war situation not only as a young student but also as a young German who saw in this beautiful tradition and fantastic continuity between Western Literature and the Latin Middle Ages the unexpected chance to be all at once enfranchised, together with my nation, into the good old family of civilized and cultivated mankind.10

Most medievalists outside of Germany, many of whom continued to value and believe in the thoroughness and (seemingly) non-ideological character of German philological research despite the war, greeted Curtius’s monograph with similar enthusiasm.11

5) His (undeserved) reputation as an intellectual resistance fighter may have further advanced the level of acceptance among the first

10 Einheit europäischer Literatur”, Angklungan, 1.7 (1951), 177–78.


7 10th edn 1938.9


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generation of readers. Current German scholarship is leading a bitter and divisive debate about Curtius’s political opinions; medievalists outside of Germany have remained largely uninfluenced by this debate.10

6) Today, Curtius’s fame rests securely upon the positive reception of the 1940s and 1950s, and the book is still being cited far and wide. While it has lost the driving force as a post-war supersignifier, it has now taken on an almost mythical reputation as the final philological word on literary topos in medieval studies or, as Hajo J. Westra has said, “a convenient standby”, in particular for scholars outside the realm of literary studies.11 Thus, even an alternative as solid and well-argued as Walter Haug’s will do little to decanonize the book or its author.

If the causes for the study’s initial appeal and ongoing influence are clear, the beginnings of Curtius’s concatenation of Classical Antiquity with the European Middle Ages deserve more attention, especially with regard to the semantic history of the term “medievalism”.

2. Curtius’s coin “Mediaevalismus”

Although it is certainly a simplification to claim that Curtius did not produce anything “substantial” (“nichts Wesentliches”) in the area of medieval studies prior to 1938,12 it is correct that before the publication of ELMMA he was primarily famous for his publications on major modern and contemporary French, English, and Spanish authors, e.g., his Habilitationsschrift on Ferdinand Brunner (published 1914), Die literarischen Wegbereiter des neuen Frankreichs (1919), his books on Maurice Barrès (1921) and Balzac (1923), Französischer Geist im neuen Europa (1925), the short monograph on James Joyce and sein Ulysses (1929), and Die französische Kultur...
The first time Curtius published anything approaching a programmatic statement about the Middle Ages was in 1932, not in a scholarly text, but in his long political essay, *Deutscher Geist in Gefahr* (The German Spirit in Danger). The title already indicates the alarmist nature of this text with which Curtius attempted to do his share towards reestablishing the traditional humanist values in his country and its educational and academic institutions. He saw Germany equally under siege from the socialist left and the nationalist right and sided in his book with the conservative (Christian) Center Party. In addition to the Communists and Social Democrats, former Heidelberg colleagues Karl Mannheim and his ‘sociologism’ (‘Soziologismus’) became the scapegoat on the left political spectrum, and Curtius revealed anti-Semitic sentiments by his pseudo-biologicistic linking of the genesis of Mannheim’s theses to his being an agnostic Jew. Curtius’s main target, however, was the growing nationalism on the extreme political right. Here, he attacked the ultra-nationalist intellectuals in the so-called ‘Tat-circle’ (‘Tat-Kreis’) who were promoting what he considered a dangerous cultural nihilism.

If the study of contemporary literature was increasingly appropriated by nationalist (or leftist) colleagues, Curtius undoubtedly felt that the early literatures still presented areas and periods through which his own conservative, Christian, and Pan-European vision might be propagated. Unlike many of his fellow medievalists, he did not choose what Ulrich Wys毒性 has called the ‘Germanic perspective’, a research agenda in which scholars sought to claim, e.g., Carolingian/Frankish texts as documents of German (national) linguistic history or which elevated Siegfried as the universal German hero. For his purposes, he forged a union of the ‘Christian perspective’ which, for Protestant and Catholic scholars alike, centered on the attractive idea of an omnipresent system of religious belief, and the ‘Roman perspective’, perhaps first propagated by Hugo von Hofmannsthals’s vague yearning to go back somewhere behind the beginnings of a hateful modernity as represented by the Renaissance and the Reformation. Like his close friend T. S. Eliot, who defined himself as a Classicist in literature, a royalist in politics, an Anglo-Catholic in religion, and who seemed his ‘classicist’ best represented in the medieval mind of Dante, Curtius expressed his corresponding cultural program in what he terms ‘mediaevalism and a restorative spirit’ (‘Mediaevalismus und Restaurationsgesinnung’), a promised land he situated with the ‘illustrious fathers of the Occident from Augustine to Dante’ (‘die erlauchten Gründer unseres Abendlandes von Augustinus bis Dante’).

As the spelling of ‘Mediaevalismus’ suggests, Curtius gleaned the term from a British text and adapted it to an idiomaticmancratic meaning. When he proposed what he called a ‘re-encounter with the Middle Ages’ (‘Wiederbegegnung mit dem Mittelalter’, p. 31), he prescribed in fact a radical reorientation away from contemporary and medieval France and toward the one country in Europe in which ‘the idea of Rome has lived through a Renaissance since the victory of Fascism’ (‘seit dem Siege des Fascismus die Romöide eine Renaissance erlebt hat’, p. 49), i.e., Mussolini’s Italy. Curtius held that ‘the so-called Enlightenment’ (‘sogenannten Aufklärung’, p. 108) had ushered in a downward movement in the history of intellectual thought and that Germany’s belated and therefore all the more pathological nationalism had accelerated this deterioration. His strong desire to find
roots in the pre-downward (i.e., pre-modern) Middle Ages made him forget that such restorative fascination included the acceptance of the fact that the Roman faces were now carried around at the mass meetings of Italy’s Fascist leaders. If his general views about the incompatibility of nationalism and culture informed the outer frame of his thoughts, many details of his supposed alternative to nationalism coincided tragically with the German national socialism which was about to take over the country when Curtius’s book appeared.

Curtius’s neologism of ‘Medievalismus’, coined to describe his evolving plans to provide comprehensive academic proof for his political theories, did not survive the mixed reception of Deutscher Geist in Gefahr. While Curtius abandoned the term (and with it all overt political activity) soon after 1932, he continued to investigate the premises laid out in his book as purely academic and philological methodology.

3. Curtius Censor, cleansing the discipline

Many mediavists cognizant of Deutscher Geist in Gefahr tend to regard it as the manifesto announcing Curtius’s turn toward the Latin Middle Ages and topos research. Others, like Peter Dröcke, believe that Curtius’s doctoral dissertation (1924) as well as his concise monograph on Joyce’s Ulysses (1929) should be regarded as the decisive texts signalling the evolution of those mental paradigms which would come to dominate ELLMA.22 However early one would like to

22 Medievalismus’ never made its way into any German dictionaries and has, until recently been known almost exclusively to Curtius scholars. See, however, the entries ‘Medievalismus’, ‘Medievalism’ (by Heinz Bergner), and ‘Mittelalterrezension’ (by Bernd Schirmer) in Peter Dittmerbach’s Sachwörterbuch der Medievistik (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992). The first entry makes no mention of Curtius, has no text of its own, and only refers to the two others which are described as basically synonymous. On the differences between the two terms and their national traditions, see my ‘Resistance to (The New) Medievalism’, pp. 166-70. ‘Medievalismus’ has been taken up by Wyatt’s essay and Fritz Wagner’s review of the essay collection in which Wyatt’s piece appeared (Die deutschen und die Mittelalter). In Mittelalterstudien des Medievisten. Verhandlungen der Mittelalterkongreß zu Heidelberg, 11. 2 (1994), 39–42. Both literacy scholars’ spelling of ‘Medievalismus’ completes the linguistic assimilation of the British term begun by Curtius.


situate the origins of ELLMA, these theories have overlooked the missing link which conjoins his texts of 1932 with his magnum opus of 1948. On page 385 of ELLMA, in a seemingly unimportant aside of his ‘Epitope’, Curtius denounced a certain Hans H. Glinz (mentioned in footnote 3) as the representative of a ‘haphazardly working “history of ideas”’ (“leichtfertig konstruierenden “Geistesgeschichte””) and as one of those scholars responsible for the deplorable ‘decadence in academic research’ (“des wissenschaftlichen Verfalls”) he himself was trying to mend. This was not the first critical remark Curtius had made about Glinz. In 1938, he dedicated a long ‘review’ essay of 199 (!) pages to the annihilation of Glinz’s Die Literaturästhetik des lateinischen Mittelalters, and published it in the renowned Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie.

Hans Hermann Glinz was an Anglist with a solid academic record: he had studied English, German, and French languages and literatures at Frankfurt and Munich; in 1928 he received a Dr. phil. with a dissertation on Die lateinische Vorlage der westästlichen Evangelienversion aus Munich University; in 1932 he earned a PhD from Cambridge University with a dissertation on the History of the Vulgate in England from Alcuin to Roger Bacon (published with Cambridge University Press); also in 1932, as an assistant professor at Cologne university, he successfully completed his Habilitation (Divinae Literae - Textliche und literarische Geschichte der Vulgata des Evangelienaus engerischen Boden); only two years later, he received the call as Ordinarius of English literature at Frankfurt University; in addition to his work on the history of the Vulgate and his 600-page Literaturästhetik, he also published a study of the subjunctive in Old English literature as well as monographs on Early Modern topics: Shakespeare und Morus, Shakespeare’s Stout, and Der ‘Huned’ Shakespeare.”24


Based on his research on the history and influence of the Vulgate in the Middle Ages, Glantz had an ambitious intention with his *Liturgische Lehre*. He wanted to investigate the significance of poetry in medieval art; to illuminate the goals medieval authors had when writing fictional texts; and to describe the gradual development of the medieval poet-arist into the modern poet-creator.25

In Part I, entitled *Auctores* (pp. 11–97), Glantz traces the changes in the interpretation of the function of art. According to Glantz it was Alceim who first liberated the arts from their position as mere mediations between man and the Bible, and who claimed independent value for them [...]. The attitude towards the role of artistic creation is then examined as he finds it expressed in the aims of the new Latin literature around 800, in the chivalric literature of Germany and in the poetry of the minstrel and the cleric. There is also brief commentary on England in the twelfth century.

In Part II, *Dicta Poetae* (pp. 161–97), Glantz discusses the position of the Bible in the Middle Ages as a work of art. Augustinian exegetical method, he says, proceeded from the assumption that the Bible possessed a symbolic structure. In order to ascertain its meaning Augustinian exegesis estimated the assistance of the *heres*. The differing assessments of the Vulgate as a creation of God the artist are then followed, in Glantz sees them exemplified in the changing role of Biblical exegesis and in the commentary upon it, from the time of Charlemagne onwards.

Part III, *Ars Rhetorica* (pp. 201–363), is devoted partly to an account of the function of the poet as held in the Middle Ages, and partly to a description of the meanings found in art at that period. There is comment on medieval rhetoric in relation to legal language and the sermons, and on


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rhetorical practice and the homily in England. Glantz then outlines the varying attitudes toward poetry as he infers them from the works of Wolfram, Gottfried, Oino, Guillaume de Lorris, Chaucer and others. Part IV, *Poesia* (pp. 367–567), is concerned with the medieval sources of post-medieval poetry. In order to bring these to light Glantz examines the theory of Beauty in the twelfth century and after. He then investigates the development of poetry in Italy commenting extensively on the Dolce Stil Nuovo, Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio and also on *Petrarch* and *Piers Plowman*. The emancipation of the poet’s ego is seen as one of the major changes in the evolution of literature beyond the Middle Ages.26

While most reviewers of *Literarästhetik*, even those who seriously criticized Glantz’s study, praised it as an example of ‘universal learnedness’, ‘careful analysis’, ‘extraordinary research’ (Metz), ‘wide scholarship, historical perspective, and critical acumen’ (Davis), and regarded his approach as ‘a great achievement’ (Hitmair), ‘fully justified’, and ‘convincing’ (Praz), E. R. Curtius did not have a single positive remark to make.27 In addition to much justified criticism of a number of individual points, both the length and the tone of his review indicate that Curtius had more in mind than the destruction of one single example of research. In fact, he underlined that his essay served the ‘necessary cleansing of the discipline’ (‘der gebotenem Bereinigung des Arbeitsfeldes dienend’, p. 433) and had to be written in a ‘more extensive’ (‘ausführlicher’) and ‘polemical form’ (‘polemischer Form’, p. 2) because he wanted to correct Glantz’s errors by presenting the results of his own recent studies. Curtius stressed the fact that Glantz was an Anglicist, implying that someone from outside the realm of romance literature had dared tread upon Romania territory, the heartland of Curtius’s own critical efforts (pp. 1, 129–31).28 The result of such Anglicist habit is:

- ‘misleading’ (‘verfehlt’, p. 11, ‘Erfahrung’, p. 27),
- ‘deviant’ (‘abweichig’, pp. 11, 23),

28 Curtius’s reaction is similarly territorial when he catches another Anglicist, Elsa Bendit (*Dame Nature in der englischen Literatur bis hervor zu Shakespeare*, 1923), unutterably meddling with medieval Latin or Classical literature, see p. 180, note 3.)
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All in all, Glunz was accused of having "simplified" and "raided" in an "entirely unacceptable manner" ("in einer ganz unhöflichen Weise vereinfacht und vergewaltigt", p. 11) the historical substance of medieval poetry.

How did Literaturwissenschaft come to deserve such a vicious and ad hominem tirade? Why, unlike the other competent reviewers, did the paragon of philology employ such demeaning and insulting discourse? The answer is to be found in the diametrically opposed research methodologies favored by the two scholars. Glunz had attempted to stress the alterity of medieval aesthetics from Classical models, postulated the medieval period as a unity detached from earlier or later periods, and even made specific critical remarks against the traditional Toposforschung because—in his opinion—it tended to produce anachronistic readings:

The research for the origins and the influence of a motif as a poetic way of writing can encourage seeing everything in every period and to blur the characteristic differences of the times. The thought of humanity’s rebirth out of the spirit which the Italian humanists thinks to confirm, appears in late antiquity, early Christianity, the Church Fathers, the twelfth century, mysticism, the early sixteenth century; indeed, there is scarcely a century leading up to the Renaissance in which it could not be found. However, one should not discard the essential similarity of the motif from its ubiquity, believing that the appropriation and judgment of the unchangeable original motif had been only slightly modified. This is a misunderstanding which—in its partiality—overlooks that the same term must not always yield the same semantic information. Language as well as formulated thought and entire works may lend themselves to different intentions in order to be appropriated as to be entirely transformed by them and lose their original meanings in favor of new ones. The literary history which oriented after sources, plots, and motifs has used especially the plots, perceptions of art, and terminology of Classical antiquity still influencing the Middle Ages as evidence that the medieval period had mainly nourished itself from Classical materials and forms and was only a slight modification of antiquity until antiquity appears again more clearly in the Renaissance. [...] It would be a fallacy to infer from this that Classical works have changed little in the Middle Ages or the early Renaissance, that Classical mentalities live on, etc.

23 To understand the extent of Curtius’s incrimination of Glunz, it should be noted that several of the critic’s words imply entmischung and fremdländisch (“unterschlagen” and “untergeschoben”) while others—especially when repeated over and over—shed a questioning light on his colleague’s sanity ("herausgesponnen", "Abirren", "Entricht", "Abhandel“).
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Statements like this one make it clear that Glanz, writing from a pre-World War II vantage point, regarded positivism, philology, and Teupferforschung as the old, outdated tradition which needed to be overcome, an opinion shared — even after the war — by Leo Spitzer, Erich Auerbach, and many others. In fact, his proposed methodology implied and foreshadowed in various ways the theories of Mitteleuropa-Rezeption, (new) historicism, and semiotics critics would apply to literary texts from the 1960s on. Umberto Eco, e.g., while respectful of Curtius’s broad philological knowledge displayed in the ‘gran libro’, looked extensively toward Glanz’s study which he esteemed as the pioneering example of a socio-historical approach to medieval aesthetics and which he used as an elementary vademecum for his doctoral dissertation, *Il problema estetico in Tommaso d'Aquino* (1970). Another scholar quoted Literarästhetik as the study which opened medievalists’ eyes to the sign-character of medieval poetry and which was the first to demonstrate the potential as well as the limitations of poetic autonomy in the Middle Ages.

With very few exceptions, however, Curtius’s strategy of scholar ‘cleansing’ succeeded and relegated Literarästhetik to the realm of the studia non grata. Those reviewers who read Curtius’s essay before writing their own, were invariably swayed by his reputation, the force of his polemical conviction, and the seemingly overwhelming evidence he put forward. Marianne Wynn, e.g., who admitted to being influenced by Curtius’s long list of monedae for her task of evaluating the 1963 reprint of Glanz’s book, felt ‘appalled’ (i.e., because her impression contradicted Curtius’s verdict?) that ‘it would be unjust to say that it ought not to have been reprinted. It is an attempt to solve a number of important questions which persistently nag the critic of medieval literature. As an attempt it stands, has never been superseded entirely, and scholars will consult it until it is’.

To Innsbruck Anglicist Karl Hammerle the words, metaphors, and tone of Curtius’s review became so ‘indispensable’ (‘unentbehrlich’), that they reappeared in and more or less framed his entire critical text.58 To Hammerle’s zealous emulation of Curtius’s review celebrated the romance scholar for having ‘razed the rotten’ (‘riett Morschei nieder’), i.e., Glanz’s theses, on the first 50 pages of his essay in order to ‘create free ground for reconstruction’ (‘Friesen Grund für den

18 Literarästhetik, p. 570-71.
19 Literarästhetik, p. ix.

58 See the reviews listed by John, p. vii, n. 7.
61 *NRK*, 59 (1964), 152.
62 See Hammerle’s review of Literarästhetik in Archiv, 94 (1939), 85-92 (p. 91).
Neuanfang zu schaffen"; this is Hammerle's rendering of Curtius's "necessary cleansing of the discipline", on the remaining 149 pages. Indeed, as Curtius was sure he had silenced the Anglicist upstart (and with him all those even only implicitly critical of his own methodology) in the first part of his essay, he was now at leisure to unveil to his readership the anatomy of what would become his magnum opus ten years later. Thus, it is his Censor-like destruction of Literaturgeschicht in 1938 that provided him with the opportunity to make his own medievalist triumph go public in much of the information he had been diligently collecting. The bulk of his medieval research begins in 1938 and moves—through about 20 essays—directly toward the book which brought him lasting fame in Medieval and Early Modern studies.

A comparison shows that all three parts of the 1938 "trilogy" contain passages which will reappear in ELLMA almost verbatim. More importantly, the early pieces already include his theories on Toposforschung and the biologic genesis of medieval literature which scholars of the post-1945 period would so willingly accept and applaud. Already in Deutscher Geist in Gefahr Curtius had rejected theories of autonomy or reception to describe the relation between the Middle Ages and Antiquity. For him the Classical world had remained omnipresent and largely unchanged 'at all times and in all sites of our Western history' ('in allen Zeitabschnitten und auf allen Schauplätzen unserer abendländischen Geschichte'), p. 104). In the "review" essay, he expanded this picture by describing the organic translatio of forms, plots, and topoi which lead through an 'incubational period' ('Inkubationszeit', p. 129) and the "germinating" ('entkeimen') of the romance language and literatures in late Antiquity — when the 'Church and Gemanic culture already have become part of the Roman Empire' ('Kirche und Germanenreich schon in und mit dem Imperium leben') — to the (still) Latin medieval culture. Romance Philology, in his eyes, had to find its most salient and promising task in 'enlightening the historical genesis of historical growth which leads from Classical Rome to the Middle Ages' ('Aufhellung des geschichtlichen Werdens, das vom antiken Rom zum Mittelalter führt'), p. 130. The Merovingian and Carolingian translationes and renovations link the Germanic world with the universal 'Romanität', a development which finds its most impressive flowering in the Renaissance of the twelfth century but is still palpable in the

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seventeenth century Baroque." Topoi and loci comunnes, the 'improper stylistic forms' ('unpersönlichen Stilelementen', p. 139) which connect with the longer-lasting, subconscious layers of human historical experience, serve as secure signposts which assist the philologist in providing proof for these structural continuities. That the preconceived definition of this cultural goal is at least as 'prioristisch' (p. 42) as the one Curtius had accused Glunz of, never occurred to him." Like other professed philologists, he was convinced that his methodology was purely positivistic and would yield scientific categories ('Ordnungsschemata') deduced from empirical research. Toposforschung, he claimed, did not present an external system applied to the historical texts ('keine von außen herangetragene Systematik'), p. 139. Rather, topoi would 'squeeze close to' ('anschnüren') the historical substance simply because they were part of it. Topoi were never ideological; they — and with them Curtius — were always on the side of truth. Any scholar who dared disagree was engaging in 'the periodically recurring heresy to believe in an epistemological level which is superior to the historical-philological one' ('den periodisch wiederkehrenden Irrglauben an eine höhere Erkennnisform, die der historisch-philologischen überlegen sein soll'), p. 42.

Seen from the perspective of Toposforschung, the wide landscape of Medieval literature gains a new illumination. All things separated mangle into new unions; beams of light fall on dark spots; overlooked features surface and new lines become visible. And it, according to Amiel, landscape is an état d'âme, then with the illumination of this literary landscape our mental relationship to it must change. [...] One can understand a medieval text [...] only if one has investigated if it stands in the tradition of a topos. Whoever does not observe this rule, can arrive at incorrect results of [...] considerable consequence.

Die weite Landschaft der m. Literature gewinnt in der Perspektive der Topoi eine neue Bedeutung. Gerüttes schließt sich zu neuen

59 Hammerle, 91.
60 Somewhat archaologically, Curtius gives only general reference to his essays as sources in his 'Bibliographische Anmerkungen', pp. 565-66.

61 About Curtius's 'Romantic' as a context for research in comparative literature, see Peter Brooks's 'Romantica and the Winding Gyre', PMLA, 87 (1972), 7-11.
62 On the 'a priori' claims implicit in Toposforschung, see Hans Blumenberg, The Legitimacy of the Modern Age, trans. by Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1980), p. 114. 'Topoi research' belongs to the tradition of assuming edditic preformations, which begins with the ancient theories of the elements, atoms, fables, and forms and continues through the "infinite dream of forms" to dreams, archetypes, and "structures." Each time we try to resist the excessive multiplicity of a historicism of mutually incomparable facts, our history threatens to contract into the simplicity of something that is always the same, as though all that mattered was never to allow understanding to satisfy itself.
Ganzheiten zusammen; auf dankte Bildstücken fahlen Lichete; überschneide Züge treten hervor und neue Lüften zeichnen sich ab. Und wozu eine Landschaft nach Annemans Wort ein "dr de l'âme" ist, so muß sich mit der Beleuchtung jeden literarischen Zeichens auch unser seelisches Verhalten zu ihr wenden. [...] Man kann einen ma. Text [...] nur dann verstehen, wenn man untersucht hat, ob er in der Tradition eines Topos steht. Wer das nicht beachtet, kann zu Fehlschlüssen von [...] erheblicher Tragweite gelangen. (p. 140)

Such totalizing statements elicited critique even from scholars who were practitioners and defenders of Toposforschung themselves. R. Menéndez Pidal, in one of the very few direct responses to Curtius’s ‘review’ essay, underlined the general methodological value of his colleague’s text. He warned, however, that Curtius had left little room for ‘la parte inventiva’ in medieval poetry.43

More importantly, Curtius’s peculiarly unscientific rhetoric reveals that his philological postulates were an authorizing pose, that the principles which guided the selection of the linguistic and cultural phenomena and analogies inevitably depended on the preferences and predilections of the selecting individual. As much as he wanted to camouflage this lack of an objective frame by having topoi ‘snaggle close to’ texts or by employing romantic metaphors of suddenly ‘illuminated’ dark spots in scholarship, his ‘Ordnungsschemata’ as well as their evaluation had the investigating scholar as their only constant and authenticating referent. Curtius’s strategy is similar to that of the second generation of Renaissance philologists who instrumentalized the appearance of Egyptian hieroglyphs after 1419 in their Oedipal struggle to overcome Dante, Petrarcha, and Boccaccio. Marsilio Ficino, e.g., believed to have found in the pictorial hieroglyphs a form of direct signification which would help solve the fundamental problems of conventional language by avoiding the obvious gap between signifier and signified. In the semantic immediacy of the hieroglyphs (which resembled God’s immediate and unmediated knowledge of individual things), Ficino discovered a scholarly tool which raised his own methodology to a level above and beyond that of his predecessors.44 Curtius forged the topos as his tool to outshine all others. His feeling of superiority, as Peter Jahn has demonstrated in a detailed analysis, was based on a ‘synthesis of instinct and philology’, a combination of positivistic collecting and cataloguing with Curtius’s own learned subjective affinities.45 The direct connection of topos with the secularized philological God, the TEXT, and the selection of topos by the God-like, genial scholar were sufficient justification for the medieval manifesto he published in 1938.46

4. Epilogue

The area of Curtius studies is one of the most contested sites of academic medievalism because it involves each individual scholar’s views on the place and responsibility of tenure intellectuals within society. In Curtius’s case, former students and admirers tend to praise his interdisciplinary, his versatility in medieval as well as modern literatures, his heroic and humanist commitment to building a bridge between nations, and his philological thoroughness47 while critics assail his formalism, restorative conservatism, cultural elitism, anti-Semitism and philological inner emigration.48 This essay, which intended to locate the historical moment and interrograde the circumstances of Curtius’s medievalist turn, adds one facet to a still evolving picture. Here the results are clear: Deutscher Geist in Gefahr, but even more so the 199-page ‘review’ essay on Literarsthetik reveal a critic who would use his idiosyncratic cultural theories (and his formidable card catalogue) to lash out against and demonize scholars who followed different paths of thinking.49 The vicious and unscholarly inventive

43 John, p. vii-xvi.
44 Curtius shares with Troubetzkoy the idea of cultural elitism and obviously believes to be among the elect few in his own society who are creative by nature (as opposed to the inarticulate masses). See John’s excellent section on ‘Elitenideologie und Schöpfertum’, pp. xxv-xxx.
45 Cf., e.g., the recent re-evaluation by Reiss, or William Calvin’s forthcoming essay ‘Ermst Robert Curtius: The Achievement of a Humanist’, Medievalism and the Academy, ed. by Leslie J. Workman, Kathleen Vobornik, and David D. Metzger, Studies in Medievalism, EX (1997) (I am indebted to the editors for an advance copy).
47 In 1947, Curtius wrote a short but similarly virulent review of Franz Walter Müller’s Der Rosenorden und der lateinische Abenteurer des 13. Jahrhunderts für Romanische Forschungen, 60 (1947), 398-99. Here, again, he threatened that anyone who left the territory of philological Toposforschung would necessarily ‘fall prey to grave errors’ (‘verfällt man in große Irrtümer’, p. 59)). All Müller is interested in,
against Hans H. Glanz was an attempt at censoring and silencing a promising new perspective in European Medieval studies. If, as Curtius threatened, a medievalist should dare choose methodologies other than *Transformation* to investigate medieval texts, "incorrect results of considerable consequence" (p. 140) would be the inevitable punishment. As the reception history of Glanz's book demonstrates, the consequences in this case were truly far-reaching: Glanz's academic reputation was severely damaged; from 1938 on, he turned his attention to exclusively Anglo-Saxon topics, especially Shakespeare; and while Curtius's circle of friends and colleagues gloated over the Anglicist's demise by referring to the 'review' essay in their correspondence as 'Glanziade'.

Glanz was considered 'abkömmlich' (i.e., 'not vital' for the reduced programs at Frankfurt University), was drafted into the army in 1940, and died on the Eastern Front on 3 March, 1944. But even after Glanz's death Curtius would not abstain from a final, vindictive attack against the man he had styled as his scapegoat ten years earlier: In ELLMA he mentioned Glanz as the one scholar who exemplified the miserable 'failure' ('Versager', p. 385) of that streak of post-World War I literary criticism which attempted a futile and 'haphazard' ('leichtfertig') charge against an ultimately victorious Lady Philology.

Habent suo fato libelli: In 1988, Hans-Jürg Spitz wrote that Walter Haug's *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter* had finally and successfully solved the hermeneutical desiderata in the scholarship of E. R. Curtius, E. Auerbach, H. H. Glanz, J. Schwiering, R. Boesch, H. Kuhn (my italics) and others. Thus, from the historical distance of more than forty years, the two scholars' books are now seen as efforts toward a common goal. One, triumphantly and known to every medievalist in the world; the other one almost annihilated and known only to those who practice academic medievalism and, thus, critically investigate the process by which their subject evolved.

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Curtius claims, is 'ideological research and sociologism' ('ideologieforschung and Soziologismus'). In fact, Muller had dared to quote Curtius's arch enemy, Karl Mannheim, (whom he accepts as authority, 'der fuhre Anstalt ist'), but did not include reference to Curtius 'Doktorvater', Gustav Gebler.

See Neriich, 'Umesto Eko', p. 64.


THE POLITICAL USE OF CHAUCER IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA

BRITTON J. HARWOOD

THIS WILL SEEM AN odd subject. The last serious use of Shakespeare, let alone Chaucer, that I can think of in American political discourse is Senator Edward Kennedy's quotation from *Romeo and Juliet* in his eulogy for his dead brother Robert at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. But educational institutions have an essential political function, as argued most notably by Louis Althusser, and in America, at least, Chaucer is still something of an educational staple. At my own institution, for example, a public university enrolling some 16,000 undergraduates, he has a prominent place in a course that hundreds of students use annually to meet liberal-arts requirements. Increasingly, students arrive at college having already read one or more of the *Canterbury Tales* in secondary-school courses. One can say something about the political use of Chaucer at the present time, then, if one assumes the political function of education.

Every mode of production, including capitalism under its new name of 'a market economy', not only produces; it reproduces. It reproduces the forces of production, so far as machines are replaced by machines that other machines have made and so far as we as employees are fed and housed in order to return to work next day. The mode of production also reproduces the relations of production. That is, in the struggle over the surplus product, a surplus is extracted from the direct producers by different means within capitalism than within other productive modes. Capitalist relations of production are distinguished by the worker's controlling none of the productive

1 It is a special pleasure to pay tribute to Leslie Woodman. Because I was teaching in Oxford, Ohio, when he established *Studies in Medievalia*, I was a first-hand witness to the energy and resourcefulness with which he focused international attention on defining medievalism and investigating its avatars. With his wide learning, an urbane irony, and always an unpretentious willingness to set his hand to any necessary task, Leslie organized meetings and published a journal without any of the usual academic pretensions and support. So far as medievalism exists today as a subject of academic inquiry in its own right, his has been the seminal effort.


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