A New History
of German Literature

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acter from facial features. His boast about being a chaste scholar, immune to female charms, entices the queen to seduce him by flashing her legs. As the instantly converted "slave of love," the philosopher allows the queen to ride him like a horse for all to see.

In the second major form, the court play, which makes up one-fifth of the repertory, plaintiffs bring complaints before judge and jury, who give the accused a chance to defend themselves. Court cases make good theater in all societies. Most of the complaints the court hears concern adultery. The accused are nearly always husbands who invent fabulous excuses. Like most medieval writers, Rosenplüt is fond of allegory. In two court plays (Keller 72, 73), the personified figures of Carnival and Lent are cited to the bar. Sometimes judges are asked to decide a question, such as if and when a young man should marry (Keller 41). The answers are not very helpful. This goes for all verdicts judges render after asking jurors to state their views. In many cases, the judge simply postpones the case. Many verdicts are no less grotesque than the complaints. At times, the court sentences men to supply judge and jurors with food and wine in carnivalesque quantities. Here Rosenplüt may be taking a stab at corruption in Nuremberg courts and their habits of postponing cases to maximize fees. But he actually attacks legal and social injustices much more vehemently in his historical and didactic *Sprüche*.

More than half the plays attributed to Rosenplüt conform to a type known as "revue" *(Reihenspiel)*. In the simplest form, one speaker after another, mostly peasants passing in "revue," tells the spectators why he is dressed in a funny way or how he succeeded or failed in sexual escapades (Keller 45). The revue can take the form of a contest, as when ten lovers compete for an apple awarded to him (shades of Aristotle), whom love led to act most foolishly (Keller 14). In the third subtype, speakers address a central figure. Various suitors—a knight, a peasant, a preacher, an artisan—court a young woman who chooses to marry the scribe—clerks have soft hands and a way with words (Keller 70).

Carnival celebrates the body. The dominant themes in Rosenplüt's plays are love and sex. A stock character is the comic peasant, dating back to Neidhart (d. ca. 1240) as a literary figure. He is addicted to bodily functions, not only to sex, but to eating, drinking, and defecating, and he personifies the carnival fool. Nuremberg carnival revelers often ran through the streets disguised as peasants, perhaps expressing the city dweller's disdain for the country bumpkin. In his didactic poems, Rosenplüt tends to praise the peasant as a righteous tiller of the soil. For the verbal theater, Rosenplüt and his colleagues invented a vast array of images and metaphors for bodily functions—especially for the sexual organs and how they interconnect—drawn from the worlds of manual labor, commerce, food, farming, and music.

Carnival revelers, no doubt, put on sketches before Rosenplüt arrived in Nuremberg in 1426. Visits to fellow citizens' homes to perform plays is first attested to as a Christmas custom. Christmas plays from the town of Constance and the province of Styria show that this practice was flourishing by 1420.

Nuremberg did not invent carnival plays. They existed as early as 1370 when chance copies of two plays were made (the St. Paul Neidhart play from Swabia and a north German farce [Keller 122]) about seven women lusting after the same man, a comic take on Isaiah 4:1). Subsidy, permit, and infraction notices from municipal records give testimony to the staging of carnival plays on marketplace scaffolds in several towns before Nuremberg: Arnhem on the Lower Rhine (starting in 1395), Butzbach, Hessen (1417), Hall in Tyrol (1426), Lübeck (1430), Baden in Switzerland (1432).

Rosenplüt took a carnival custom, perhaps unscripted, and raised it to the level of literature. He did the same with two other traditional Nuremberg literary forms. One was a short, witty epigramlike poem called "Priamel" (Preamble), which became synonymous with Rosenplüt (about 140 were ascribed to him), although he probably wrote only the most literate and clever of them. The other was a New Year's custom similar to the "Knock, knock, who is there?" routine. Going from house to house, young people knocked on doors to prompt the house owner to respond to a question. Such *Klopf-ansprüche* (knock demands) are also unique to Rosenplüt. By converting unscripted popular customs to literature, Rosenplüt succeeded in reaching less educated townspeople who normally did not (or could not afford to) read. Starting about 1455, the carnival plays Rosenplüt and his associates wrote for staging enter handwritten books as reading texts. This explains why about 110 pre-1500 carnival plays from Nuremberg, including the Rosenplüt repertory, survive while almost none from the other forty or so towns where carnival plays were staged have come down to us.

See also 1260, 1400, 1500 (Eulenspiegel)

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Eckehard Simon

♌ 1457

Gutenberg publishes the Mainz Psalter, the first work printed with movable type

An Information Revolution

Johannes Gensfleisch, better known as Johann Gutenberg, was a tinkerer. Before he invented a practical and profitable method of printing with movable type, he successfully marketed other inventions. One was a little mirror he sold to the thousands of pilgrims who came to Aachen for the periodic display of Charlemagne's great relics collection, in the belief that viewing the articles imparted grace. The crowds gathering on those days were so large that actually catching a glimpse of the precious objects was very difficult, and so Gutenberg's mirror came in handy. Pilgrims could hold the mirror above the

crowd to deflect the images of the relics onto their own eyes and hearts and so share in the blessing. Gutenberg's little gadget had one aspect in common with his epoch-making invention of printing: something exclusive and difficult to access—in one case an intangible experience, in the other a written manuscript—was multiplied by technical means to bring its benefits within reach of more people. Of course, the premise was mistaken. Just as grace ceased to be grace if manufactured and replicated at will, so the written medium, once rare and expensive, was cheapened when mass production made it available, in principle at least, to everyone.

Mass printing also had unexpected consequences. In the 16th century, King Philip II of Spain ordered fifteen thousand breviaries from printers in Antwerp with the official text—recently approved by the Council of Trent—of offices and prayers for the canonical hours. The king intended to have the breviaries distributed to the entire clergy in his enormous realm, so they could fulfill their obligation of saying the prayers in exactly the same way. Through printing it was possible to standardize their daily approach to God, whose agent, in this case, was the absolutist state. Standardized texts could help bring about standardization of practices in various areas and give governments and other authorities greater control over the most private spheres, even a person's relationship with God.

The time was ripe for Gutenberg's innovation. Interest in written documents had risen sharply in the 15th century. For rulers, administrators, merchants, and tradesmen, writing was an almost indispensable instrument in their work. As literacy increased, particularly in cities, the demand for affordable manuscripts grew. For centuries, the clergy had been the custodian of written knowledge and erudition, but now lay people too were in need of written materials—instructions for the practice of crafts and trades, reading material for entertainment, and missals for private devotions were in high demand. Expensive, ornate manuscripts lost ground to simpler documents often intended for the writer's own use. Availability of cheaper materials also helped to reduce costs. In 15th-century Germany, writing paper was imported mostly from Italy or Spain, but by the end of the century paper mills sprang up in northern Europe as well in response to the rapidly growing demand. Paper is better suited than parchment for printing, as it is more elastic and absorbent, but even before Gutenberg, parchment was already being replaced by paper.

A relatively efficient production method had long been in use at universities, where portions of a text used for instruction were distributed to several scribes. In addition, commercial writing firms *(scriptoria)* flourished. Although proprietors still accepted commissions, they also tried to keep popular titles in stock. In addition, they maintained a crew of scribes who copied different parts of one text. While the traditional method had one monk copy an entire manuscript, the process was now speeded up and the output standardized. In absolute terms, however, the output was still extremely small, and single copies remained very expensive. Individual commissions to professional scribes continued to predominate. The documented cost of a Bible commentary for a

wealthy cleric in Hamburg shows that long books were luxury items whose cost was equal to the annual earnings of people in most professions. Gradually a market developed for shorter texts, but the output was limited, and the demand for some items—such as blank forms for indulgences, official proclamations, and the like—still outstripped supply.

Attempts were made before Gutenberg to mechanize writing. The most significant invention had been wood-block printing, developed in China and the Arab countries. At first this technique was employed in Europe mainly for decorative cloth prints, but later it came to be used for making playing cards and Christian devotional images. The oldest surviving block prints are one-sided and depict the lives of Jesus and the saints. Less often they bear nonreligious images, frequently accompanied by a short explanatory text. The prints were sold to pilgrims, to churchgoers, at fairs, and from house to house. From 1430 or 1440 on, the process was used to make books by pasting two wood-block prints together to create a page. However, because the printing process made indentations on the paper, a sheet could not be printed on both sides. Surviving block-print books depict the dance of death, the *Ars moriendi,* and the *Biblia pauperum*. Such books continued to be produced after the invention of printed type. Their disadvantage was that two entire blocks had to be carved for each double-sided page, which Gutenberg's invention overcame by reassembling single letters over and over again.

The inventor of movable type was born Johannes Gensfleisch sometime between 1400 and 1403 in the city of Mainz. No details of his education are known, nor where he spent his early years. He was well versed in Latin and may have attended the university at Erfurt, in the territory ruled by the Elector of Mainz. In any event, he was also skilled in metalworking. In 1434 Gutenberg lived in Strasbourg, where he engaged in several enterprises of an unclear nature, but for which he developed ideas and others supplied the money—albeit with only mixed success. He may have been working on a printing process in the late 1430s, although no printed work from his time in Strasbourg is known to have survived. At some point between 1444 and 1448, he returned to Mainz, where he opened a print shop at the address from which he borrowed the name Gutenberg, by which he is known today.

In 1450, he tried to get a loan by demonstrating a technique for reproducing text on paper and parchment. The oldest prints that can be precisely dated are from 1454. The process was fully developed by 1457, when the Mainz Psalter was printed. The entire process consisted of type design, production of the type by pouring molten metal into forms, setting of single pages, and three-color printing in black, red, and blue. This procedure created three new professions: typecasters, typesetters, and printers, who continued to work in more or less the same manner until 1800. In principle, it had become possible to create printed materials in any quantity and quality desired.

The first type designs imitated the form of letters in manuscripts, which varied depending on their position in a word, and included marks for abbreviations, connecting strokes, and strokes over the letters *m* and *n* (like tildes) to
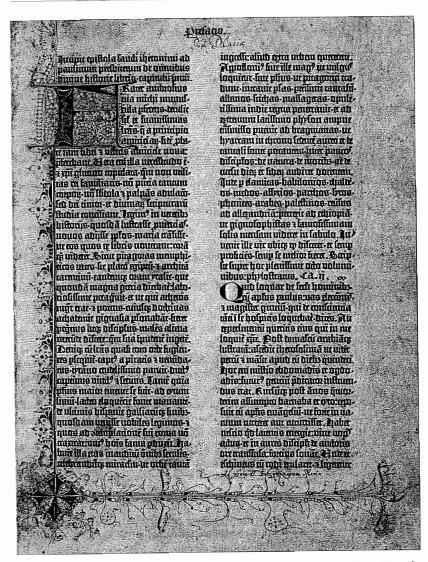
indicate that they should be read as doubles. This meant that at first several hundred separate casts were required. Printing was originally referred to as "a new form of writing," since the term "artificial [= artful] writing" was already in use for the special calligraphy taught by writing masters. The first type-casters used particularly attractive manuscripts as their models. They copied large ornate initials and other decorative elements as well as ordinary letters. In the early years, parchment was still used frequently to make a printed book last as long as a high-quality manuscript. The practice of noting the origin and date of a work was also taken over from manuscripts.

Gutenberg's most famous achievement was his 42-line printed Bible. The type design was copied from a manuscript in a particularly beautiful hand. Forty-five thousand letters and three typesetters were required to complete the task, as well as twenty workmen, some of whom later became printers in their own right. Work on the Bible began in the early 1450s and lasted three years. It is estimated that some 180 copies were made in all, of which 30 or 35 were made on parchment and the rest on paper. The skins of five thousand calves were need for the parchment copies. Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II) reported in a letter from Frankfurt in 1455 that he had seen some of the printed Bibles in the autumn of 1454 and that the printing quickly sold out. The first printed Bible was, nevertheless, a luxury item.

Like much of manuscript production before, printing was at first supported by public commissions. In addition to works for which manuscript copies had been in demand—such as Bibles and liturgical, theological, and canonical texts, for which regular demand could be expected to continue—polemical works, such as the *Turkish Calendar* and blank forms for indulgences, were also printed.

Promoting the new technology proved difficult. Soon disagreements arose among the inventor, his employees, organizers, and financial backers. Gutenberg quarreled with Johann Fust, a Mainz merchant to whom he owed large sums of money. Fust won a lawsuit in 1455 and took possession of the equipment Gutenberg had offered as collateral for the loan: the presses, the type, and perhaps also some of the printed Psalters. Gutenberg ended his association with Fust and borrowed more money elsewhere. His plans to mechanize further collapsed for lack of money. Gutenberg continued printing, mainly small items; his few larger projects included Hieronymus Balbi's *Catholicon* and the 36-line Bible. His financial situation remained precarious; he lost more of his possessions and appears to have been working at someone else's printing shop in Eltville in the 1460s. He died in Mainz in 1468.

Johann Fust and Peter Schöffer, Gutenberg's former journeyman, on the other hand, achieved great commercial success. They concentrated on providing books chiefly for high-ranking members of the clergy in Central Europe and farther East. Soon others outside their original circle began setting up shop as printers. The first printed works in the vernacular were made in Bamberg. In 1461, Albrecht Pfister, former secretary of the bishop there, brought out an edition of the *Ackermann aus Böhmen (The Plowman from Bohe-*

Page from a Gutenberg Bible. (Harry Elkins Widener Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library)

mia) and Boner's collection of fables, *Der Edelstein (The Jewel)*. Otherwise, the oldest printing presses were located mainly in the Rhine area, but others soon sprang up in commercial centers like Augsburg (1468) and Nuremberg (1470). Most printers working abroad at the time were Germans.

From about 1473 on, printing spread rapidly throughout Europe. In about 1481, printers were working in the Netherlands, southwestern Germany, and northern Italy. By 1500 the most important centers had shifted to Venice and also Paris, where the first press was established in 1470. By that time about 60 print shops operated in Germany, mostly in the southwestern region, and more than 250 in all of Europe. It has been estimated that about 20 million books had been produced by the end of the 15th century. The Protestant Reformation shifted the concentration of printers to central and northern Germany, so that by the middle of the 16th century Frankfurt had overtaken Augsburg and Strasbourg as the printing and bookselling capital.

Besides religious texts that were traditionally in demand, other kinds of books gained in popularity: schoolbooks, books for private devotions, works on law, how-to books for cooking, distilling, and making herbal medicines. Instruction books appeared for various trades and crafts and for entertainment, in addition to newspapers, political and religious proclamations, and calendars. The early folios were replaced by smaller and more convenient formats, like the octavo volumes produced by Aldus Manutius in Venice.

The reproduction of text by technical means was immediately recognized as a significant innovation with far-reaching implications. In dedicatory letters and colophons, printing was celebrated as a gift from God, an invention that elevated the contemporary world above the ancient world and Germans above other nations. Writers praised the speed of production, the low cost, and the proliferation of written materials, which made important works widely available and improved communication among scholars. Printing also guaranteed that branches of art and science falling into disuse would be preserved.

From the start, book printing required the investment of large amounts of capital, and its rise was connected with the development of a new economic order. The importance of universities as centers of manuscript production declined. Although some university towns became centers of printing, others lacked printing shops for a long time, and presses flourished in towns that had no universities. In the early years, many monasteries added printing shops to their scriptoria, but their capacity remained small.

As a rule, the printing trade was not integrated into the prevailing medieval guild system, which was focused on protecting the livelihood of its members. Printers were thus not subject to guild regulations. The first printers came from various professions; few of them had previously worked as scribes or copyists. They tended to come from the better-paid crafts related to book decoration. Many had been goldsmiths, since technical skills were needed. Some were merchants, and many were members of the clergy or university faculties. The predominance of men with a university education ceased in the second generation. The investors were often physicians, patricians, and wealthy

clerics. Print shops were family businesses; 62 percent of printers were related to other families in the same trade or to scholars, teachers, and later to preachers. As in other trades, marriage within the group was common, and the businesses changed hands as often through the remarriage of a printer's widow as through inheritance by sons.

Even the most impressive output from famous copyist workshops, like that of Vespasiano da Bisticci in Florence, could not match the numbers of a single print edition. The leading printers of the 1480s in Augsburg were among the wealthiest men in the city, although others barely eked out an existence. It seems that at first, they tended to err on the side of caution in the size of their print runs; Gutenberg's Bible quickly sold out, for instance. But soon overproduction became a problem, and many businesses failed. Sometimes different printers published the same titles, producing an oversupply. In the case of expensive works, like the Bible, a miscalculation could mean ruin.

Information about the size of print runs is inconclusive, as it is based on scattered accounts that happened to survive. From the 1480s on, print runs of one thousand and even two thousand copies are reported, and with the coming of the Reformation, the print runs increased further. Luther's *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* appeared in a first edition of four thousand copies and was reprinted several times. As early as 1468–1470, publishers began to advertise, printing up their programs or lists of books in stock, including those of other printers. In the 16th century, they shifted to catalogues in book form.

Although the first printers imitated the highest-quality manuscripts in format, ornamentation, and binding, they could produce far more cheaply than the scriptoria. According to Elizabeth Eisenstein, in 1483 the Ripoli Press in Florence charged 3 florins per *quinternio* for printing Marsilio Ficino's translation of Plato's *Dialogues*. A scribe might charge 1 florin for the same work. The difference is that the scribe produced one copy, whereas the Ripoli Press produced 1,025. Nevertheless, longer books still remained unaffordable for most people. Prices for single copies are hard to determine, since the price given does not indicate whether the book in question was bound or unbound, provided with more expensive red headings, or illustrated. The low price for books when compared to manuscripts in the early days has probably been exaggerated. However, we do know that by about 1470, books cost between 50 to 80 percent less than manuscripts, and prices continued to fall, dropping by half again between 1470 and 1490. Competition kept prices down, and drove many printers into bankruptcy. Tax lists document that sometimes a printer was ruined by a single project. Furthermore, at the start of the 16th century, the trade suffered a general crisis that led to the collapse of many businesses.

New sales networks were created, and finally regular book fairs (Frankfurt) were organized. Venice owed its preeminent position to a well-developed trading network in the writings of classical authors and Humanists. Usually the people who produced books also sold them, often along with other commercial goods. One press might turn out a book under another firm's imprint; the

second firm might then take charge of sales in its own region. Frequently publishers employed printers in other towns. And publishers appear to have produced different editions for local and distant markets—as in the case of early prints from the town of Ulm.

The original investment required was enormous, but so were the profit margins once a shop was established. This explains the publishers' interest in secrecy and the bitter lawsuits. After Fust and Schöffer had repossessed Gutenberg's best equipment with the help of the courts, they were able to supplant him in the marketplace. No effective patent protection existed, and protection from pirated editions was also insufficient. Licensing was possible for a particular book or a typeface, for a manufacturing process, or for such special areas as musical scores and materials in non-European languages. But licensing protected the printer, not the author. Enforcement depended on the effectiveness of the licensing authority. In many cases, if local officials were lax, licenses were simply counterfeited.

Specialization eventually provided a certain degree of protection. In the early years, between 1470 and 1490, the leading printers offered a wide selection of works in both German and Latin. Even at that time, however, they tended to emphasize particular categories. Thus in the imperial cities of Augsburg, Nuremberg, and Ulm in the South, the output was mainly in the German vernacular, while Cologne specialized in traditional literature for universities, and Basel in humanistic literature in Latin. Somewhat later Wittenberg became a center for the theological texts of the Reformation. Early modern narrative works came chiefly from Strasbourg and Augsburg until Frankfurt took their place in the mid-16th century.

During the early decades, printed books changed their appearance considerably. Mechanical and manual processes—for initials, rubrics (headings in red ink), and illustrations—existed side by side until even the last were mechanized, usually in the form of printed type and woodcuts. Up to the early 16th century, customers often chose their own more or less costly ornamentations and bindings. The belief that the upper classes, the traditional supporters of manuscript production, rejected printed books can thus be regarded as a legend. All the same, printing did not immediately replace other methods of text production, for copying was a pious work, and doing the writing oneself was certainly cheaper than buying a book. There are thus numerous surviving examples of hand-written copies of printed books from the 15th and 16th centuries.

Although title pages and page numbers were lacking in the beginning, they soon became the norm. And gradually the appearance of books became standardized in format, page size, number of lines, typefaces, orthography, punctuation, abbreviations, and front- and backmatter, such as a table of contents and index. Manuscripts from university copyist workshops often served as models. Printers like Aldus Manutius pointed proudly to improvements in their books' appearance. The varieties of type were reduced to upper- and lowercase letters and a few special characters. In manuscripts, the use of abbreviations and liga-

tures had saved space and money; now they were too expensive, since they made it necessary to stock several forms of each letter. Planning was difficult in any event, for printers were as yet unaware of the statistical frequency of letters. They had to invent techniques for keeping margins even, filling lines, and for hyphenation, and the various stages of the printing process had to be coordinated.

Not infrequently printers solved technical difficulties by altering text. Contemporaries found this unreliability all the more vexing since mechanical production had been expected to reduce the number of errors and variations between copies. The fact that all texts printed from one mold were exactly identical first filled people with amazement. When the Bishop of Brixen, Nicholas of Cusa, demanded uniform wording for the celebration of the Mass and prohibited the alteration of missals and texts for other church services under pain of excommunication, he could hope at best to suppress intentional alterations, for unintentional deviations that crept in during the copying process could not be controlled. The advent of printing changed this in a way that contemporaries found uncanny. Surviving records show that clerics in Regensburg were paid to go through the text of the new printed missal (1485) copy by copy to check for errors. They discovered, to their great surprise, that every copy was exactly the same and precisely matched the model—a miracle!

However, uniformity also created new pitfalls. In 1505, Erasmus of Rotterdam complained in his edition of Lorenzo Valla's *Adnotationes* to the New Testament that while scribes could make errors, they made them only one at a time, whereas print multiplied a single mistake many times. On the other hand, print errors could be corrected at a central location, while a copyist was limited to emending the single text in front of him. The more ambitious print shops hired scholars as proofreaders, like the jurist Sebastian Brant in Basel. A proofreader's tasks resembled those of an editor. Authors were not normally asked to read proofs of their own works. Errata lists were added to books and could be referred to for later editions. The new medium permitted the development of textual criticism, making it possible to conceive the idea of an original text that stood behind all its material representations. Classical philology was born.

In Germany, the most important by-product of increased uniformity was the development of standard German. The regional differences noticeable in the language of early printed works were evened out in the 16th century. The relationship between the sounds of German and their written form became standardized as well. Spelling rules developed, and publishers brought out German-language textbooks to teach elementary reading, writing, and grammar. In the 16th century, the spread of the Protestant Reformation from Wittenberg had a further standardizing effect on the written language in central Germany, in competition with southern or high German usage (as practiced by the imperial chancellery, for example). The dominance of the southern and central German book market accelerated the decline and disappearance of low German (northern German dialect) in print.

In contrast to scribes, who prepared a single manuscript for one purchaser, printers had to appeal to as large an audience as possible. The prefaces and dedications of very early printed works praise them as generally instructive or entertaining, or suggest they will be useful to people working in a variety of professions. Early printed works addressed a readership with diffuse interests, ready to consume anything and everything on the market. Much extraneous material was often included at first but dropped from later editions. From the point of view of consumers, distinctions between genres or eras, such as fiction and nonfiction, or modern and ancient authors, were of secondary importance. A romance about the Trojan War was considered as much a part of world history as a chronicle of contemporary events, and as instructive as a political tract. Narratives of all kinds were listed under the heading *historia,* independent of their particular form and function and the degree to which they dealt with real events, for histories, containing the experiences of other people, were deemed useful to readers in their own lives.

The advent of printing brought fundamental changes to the organization of knowledge, public communication, and the social role of writing, as some critics of printing recognized early on. On the one hand, it became possible to collect successive stages of traditional knowledge and to compare and contrast them; the entire body of lore handed down on a subject could be surveyed as a whole. A process began of accumulating information in a given field, fixing it in print, and seeing the boundaries of knowledge expand. The fact that information could become out of date ceased to be an argument against the utility of having it appear in writing. On the other hand, a printer's desire to make a profit often determined what information would become available. Commercialization was sometimes achieved at the expense of craftsmanship. The most significant development, however, was a shift of power in society. The privileged few who had been in charge of the craft of writing for centuries lost control of it. Writing ceased to be the exclusive domain of scholars and frequently fell into the hands of unscholarly, and thus, it was felt, illicit, users. The authorities responded by prohibiting access to written works—particularly the Bible—by the laity.

The development of book printing was accompanied by the implementation of stricter censorship. In 1485, in one of the earliest edicts on the subject, the Bishop of Mainz decreed that anyone caught printing German translations of biblical and liturgical books would have his press confiscated and be excommunicated. The German language could not express the subtle shades of meaning in Latin and Greek theological works, he declared, and laymen, the unschooled, and women were incapable of grasping the correct meaning. Translations of any work must, therefore, be submitted to scholars at the university in either Mainz or Erfurt for pre-censorship before being published. The Papacy had already created institutions within the Church to oversee censorship (Cologne 1479). They often dealt with single works, such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's 900 theses, which was banned by Innocent VIII. The

intent was usually protection of Church monopoly on doctrinal teaching and interpreting Scriptures.

Opposition to this doctrine arose a few decades after the bishop's edict, when the leaders of the Reformation demanded universal access to the Bible—in translation, of course. Censorship also became an important instrument in the battle between denominations. A list of banned books *(index librorum prohibitorum)* was announced for Catholic territories for the first time in 1559.

Even before 1500, some had proposed using printed books for religious instruction of common people. Those who could read would use them directly, and the illiterate would listen as they were read aloud. Before publication of Luther's Bible translation in 1534, 156 printed versions of the Bible in Latin and 17 in German were in existence. When the Reformation made education of the laity one of its goals, the art of printing appeared as a God-given vehicle for promoting Church reform. The priesthood of the faithful, based on private ownership of the Holy Scriptures, was conceivable only if the Scriptures were universally available. Despite later attempts by the orthodoxy to regulate ownership, personal study of the Bible remained at the core of Protestant piety. With the publication of Luther's translation of the New Testament in Wittenberg in September 1522, the foundation of the Protestant faith became accessible to the general public. It appeared in large editions, but the first—consisting of four thousand copies, with twenty-one illustrations by Lukas Cranach—had sold out by December. Twelve more editions followed before publication of Luther's complete Bible translation in 1534. By 1523, his New Testament had been printed twelve times in other cities, seven times in Basel alone. There were ten printings of his complete Bible with 117 woodcuts before the appearance of the 1546 edition, the last to be published in Luther's lifetime. It has been estimated that between 1522 and 1546 altogether 380 different printings of either the entire Bible or portions of it were made; some of them were Catholic versions based on Luther's translation. A total of three hundred thousand copies are thought to have been printed of the thirty works Luther wrote between 1517 and 1520. A mass movement developed, unimaginable in scope at the time of earlier reformers like Jan Hus and John Wycliffe. Without the public resonance made possible by the invention of printing, Luther's posting of his ninety-five theses in 1517 would have remained a local event connected with the start of a new term at the university in Wittenberg. Many of his works—*On Secular Authority, An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility, On Trade and Usury, To the Councilors of All German Cities*—took the form of letters supposedly written to individuals, but in fact addressed to the public, like pamphlets expressly written to influence the denominational struggle. Some of them were presented as face-to-face conversations even though the message was intended for a disparate audience. By creating a public interested in and supportive of the aims of the Reformation, the new medium revolutionized medieval society and the culture of information.

Printing also led to profound changes in other sectors of culture. The arcane knowledge of the Renaissance can be understood as a reaction to the vulgarization of knowledge. Cabbala, hieroglyphics, *corpus hermeticum,* secret writing (cf. *Steganographia* by John Trithemius), and even popular narratives about magic, such as the tale of Faust, represent attempts to protect an exclusive zone of secrecy in the face of so much knowledge that had become available to all. Sebastian Brant's lament in *The Ship of Fools* about the glut of writing was anticipated in the Hebrew Bible: "Of making many books there is no end" (Ecclesiastes 12:12). By his time, however, Brant was protesting against a spread of information that had in fact become unstoppable.

See also 1027, 1401, 1492, 1500 (Dürer), 1523, 1596

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☙ 1478

Jakob Fugger takes over his family's banking business as world trade expands from the Far East to the New World

Fortunatus Maps the World and Himself

Published in 1509 and written by an unidentified author, most probably a writer living in southern Germany, the prose narrative *Fortunatus* enjoyed bestseller status in its time and in the centuries that followed. Its success was due not only to its plot, which resonated with a new reading audience of wealthy merchants and bankers, but to its grand geographical sweep across the far reaches of the known world—from Ireland to Indonesia. By 1500 the towns of southern Germany were in the forefront of economic activity, and Augsburg, the city in which *Fortunatus* was published, was a major center of trade and commerce. At the time when Jakob Fugger assumed direction of his family's banking house there in 1478, European commerce was rapidly expanding toward both the West and the East. Between 1467 and 1540, the accumulated wealth in Augsburg alone grew twentyfold. In the course of forty years, the Fuggers, originally a family of weavers, increased their capital by a factor of seventy—an achievement that afforded them a life of luxury and enabled them to become the financiers of emperors. The Welsers, another prominent Augsburg merchant family, acquired massive riches, only to lose all within three generations. The author of *Fortunatus* captures this transience of

wealth, and the magical, even demonic power of money in the symbolic structure of his tale.

In this early prose novel various socio-economic and cultural discourses are woven together: issues of capitalism and mercantilism, of travel and discovery as well as a new conception of the individual—what might be called "the experiencing self"—imbued with all the anxieties and insecurities of the emergent merchant class. These themes are developed through two narrative strategies. First, the protagonist's fortunes are mapped across a topographical grid that spans from West to East, with the West representing the socio-economic world and the East the realm of fantasy. Second, the geographic metaphor is anchored in two salient symbols—a magic purse, which Fortunatus acquires from Lady Luck, and an enchanted hat, which he steals from the Sultan of Egypt—both of which correlate with the novel's geographical and psychological space.

The novel's eponymous protagonist is an impoverished patrician's son from Cyprus, whose quest for wealth, knowledge, and esteem takes him to the limits of the known world. While the range of Fortunatus's travels is perhaps not surprising for a narrative written during a period of expanding trade and exploration, one wonders why, in a text written by a German author and based most probably on German sources, the main character is a Cypriot. And why does the story locate key moments—the beginning, midway point, and ending—on the isle of Cyprus? Although some scholars have speculated on links between Cyprus and possible patrons of the novel, or between the island and the cities of Augsburg and Nuremberg, no convincing evidence for these hypotheses has been found. The result of the narrative's focus on Cyprus, however, is the creation of a neutral, domestic space situated between West and East. From this starting point, Fortunatus undertakes two journeys: first he traverses Europe and then explores the Orient.

The isle of Cyprus is introduced in the very first line of the preface. In fact, it is the island, not the protagonist, that is the subject of the first three sentences of the narrative. Though the island's culture is Christian, it is bordered on three sides by Islamic areas, and is thus a point of interface of two religions. In economic terms, the narrative recognizes the island's importance as a crossroads for traders and pilgrims. However, its location on the contemporary world map is also significant for the novel's narrative architecture, organization, and plot development as well as thematic and symbolic structure. The East-West dichotomy is delineated geographically by Fortunatus's itinerary and by the character himself, who sees the world not so much in terms of "us" and "them" but "das halbe tayl" and "das ander tayl"—the one half and the other.

Throughout his journeys, Fortunatus is always a stranger in foreign lands. His experience of alienation is the theme that links the scattered stations of his adventures. By locating the protagonist's origins in Cyprus, the narrator creates an objective observer whose position is neither entirely western nor entirely eastern, and whose point of view is solely that of the *Kaufmann,* or merchant. Fortunatus is as much an observer of otherness in the British Isles as he is in India. Unlike the protagonists of other travel literature from this period,