

online seit 10.03.2004

Chaucer and the Discourse of German Philology: An Addendum

Richard Utz

In the spring of 2002, several months before putting the finishing touches to the “Annotated Bibliography” of German and Austrian Chaucer criticism between 1793 and 1948 for *Chaucer and the Discourse of German Philology* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), I chanced upon a short reference indicating an article on Chaucer by Walter F. Schirmer. Unfortunately, the reference lacked exact bibliographic information. I contacted Karl Heinz Göller, my own thesis advisor and one of Schirmer’s students, and asked for assistance, but he could not find any information then and there. It was only recently that he found and kindly sent me the full essay title and bibliographic information. I hasten to publish it here as an addendum to my bibliography and, hence, according to the format of that bibliography:

Schirmer, Walter F. “Das Bild Chaucers in der Forschung der letzten Jahre.” *Die Neueren Sprachen*, 36 (1928), 24-35.

A review essay on: D. D. Griffith, *A Bibliography of Chaucer 1908-24* (1926); J. M. Manly, *Some New Light on Chaucer* (1926); Ikuzo Ikjima, *Langland and Chaucer. A Study of the Two Types of Genius in English Poetry* (1925); Aage Brusendorff, *The Chaucer Tradition* (1925); M. B. Ruud, *Thomas Chaucer* (1926); R. K. Root, ed., *Geoffrey Chaucer. The Book of Troilus and Criseyde* (1926).

This review essay provides a revealing glimpse into the state of German Chaucer criticism between the end of World War I and 1933. While Hugo Lange and Victor Langhans were engaged – mainly in the 1920s – in an undignified and unproductive duel about the priority of the “F” or the “G”-Version of the “Prologue” to the *Legend of Good Women*, and while John Koch – most prolific reviewer of Chauceriana since the 1880s worldwide – was lashing out against the newfangledness of practically all American Chaucer studies, Schirmer attempts to reconnect German scholars with their international colleagues. Because of the German scholars’ strict insistence on the narrowly philological approach to literature and biting critique of any scholarship not following their preferred paradigms, American and British scholars had abandoned contact with their German counterparts during and immediately after the “Great War.” They stopped sending review copies of their own publications to the German journals and reduced the purchasing and reviewing of German monographs to the absolute minimum, thereby also preparing the way for the increasing *translatio* of Chaucer study from Europe to the United States, a development signaled most formidably by the publication of F. N. Robinson’s first edition of *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* in 1933.

Schirmer, by reviewing three studies published in the United States, one study published in Britain, one in Britain and Denmark, but none in Germany, acknowledges the growing importance of U.S. Chauceriana and, moreover, demonstrates a much more nuanced relationship to Chauceriana from the New World than the continuously

Perspicuitas.

INTERNET-PERIODICUM FÜR MEDIÄVISTISCHE SPRACH-, LITERATUR- UND KULTURWISSENSCHAFT.

<http://www.perspicuitas.uni-essen.de>

online seit 10.03.2004

negative *ceterum (re)censeo* in John Koch's numerous reviews. Although he gladly mentions that – according to Griffith's bibliography – Germany, and not the United States, still dominates the area of stylistic investigations of Chaucer's texts (p. 28), and stresses the role of Ewald Flügel in preparing the *Chaucer Concordance* (after Flügel's untimely death taken over and finished by J. S. P. Tatlock and A. G. Kennedy in 1926, but not yet available to Schirmer for his review; p. 25), his discussion of Griffith's bibliography and Manly's interpretive reading mixes much praise with only a few points of critique. Not surprisingly, he contrasts Ikjima's essayistic literary appreciation with Brusendorff's ("vgl. die formidablen Fußnoten!" p. 33), Ruud's, and Root's detailed and academic work. However, instead of recognizing Ruud's sedulous source study – as we might expect from a scholar educated within the curriculum of philological exactitude – with the formulaic vocabulary of German reviews (there is no mention of "gewissenhaft," "peinlich genau," "philologisch," etc.), he opines that the unexciting nature of Ruud's archival sources ("ödeste[r] Dokumente," p. 30) has had a detrimental effect on the style of his writing ("...leider auch in der Darstellung Spuren des Archivstaubs merken lassen." p. 30).

Thus, Schirmer recognizes the signs of the time: He compliments American scholars for leading the way in an effort to review medieval culture from a fresh perspective ("neue[r] Erfassung des Mittelalters," p. 33) and for providing the academic space for such new work with the founding of *Speculum*, the journal of the Medieval Academy of America (since 1926). More importantly, he balances John Koch's often all too tendentious *pro-domo* reviews with a critical voice based on non-national scholarly criteria.

Richard Utz
 Department of English Language & Literature
 University of Northern Iowa
 Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0502
 utz@uni.edu

Perspicuitas.

INTERNET-PERIODICUM FÜR MEDIÄVISTISCHE SPRACH-, LITERATUR- UND KULTURWISSENSCHAFT.

<http://www.perspicuitas.uni-essen.de>