



The Problematic Nature of the So-Called Paradigm Shift in Cultural-Historical Terms: The Staying Power of Medieval Literature until Today

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As much as we have used the notion of the paradigm shift since Thomas Kuhn had coined that phrase in 1962, it has also hampered us in many ways to understand cultural continuities, traditions, literary patterns, and the staying power of the book markets and public tastes throughout the centuries. One of those major paradigm shifts was the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, or the early modern age, and we have happily lived by the notion that by ca. 1500 profound changes in literary tastes, world views, themes, and narrative topics occurred, leading to the ultimate death of medieval culture and literature. Undoubtedly, the invention of the printing press by Johann Gutenberg in ca. 1450 meant a major transformation in the way how texts were disseminated, but recent research has begun to indicate that this did not mean at all the end of all those texts written and published prior to the late fifteenth century, whether as manuscripts or as incunabula/early modern prints. This study will illustrate this phenomenon in light of a number of specific cases (literary, philosophical, religious, etc.) that prove the existence of a tremendous stream of texts that continued to appeal to readers far into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The situation on the early modern book market changed, of course, but not at all as dramatically as the traditional concept of the paradigm shift has implied. And we can also identify specific cases where the essential ideas developed in the Middle Ages carried on well into the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, if not until today.

When Europeans suddenly learned of the existence of America, this triggered a shattering of all of their geographic notions and forced yet another paradigm shift after a series of other major changes in the history of mentality. In fact, we could easily claim that much of human history has been determined by the constant break-up of traditional worldviews, by upheavals in the political arena, and by revolutions in the sciences and medicine (Classen, ed., 2019). Both the Enlightenment and the subsequent American (1786) and

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then the French Revolution (1789) rang in new epochs after which everything looked differently. Technical inventions, whether the use of electricity or the computer, whether the internet or space explorations, have transformed human life tremendously all over the world. We just don't know what the next paradigm, the next epoch will hold for us, whereas it is most certain that the current situation will surely change either rapidly or slowly (for the global discussion of paradigm shifts, especially Thomas Kuhn's fundamental contribution, see Classen, ed., 2019, esp. xxii–xxviii; Cohen 2015; Wooten 2015, etc.).

However, all that should also not blind us to the opposite phenomenon which is really the topic of my paper. Irrespective of the postmodern mode of communication with smartphones, laptops, or other electronic gadgets, human interactions continue to be fraught with many problems, and fundamental issues concerning love, death, and God remain deeply challenging. We have become almost used to rapid changes in our world that uproot everything we thought would be firm and stable in material terms. Consequently, we tend to project that notion of rapid transformations as a near norm also into the past, and we forget by the same token the huge impact of tradition, continuity, and deep culture.

For a very long time now, we have lived by the existence of literary histories and other reference works for philosophy, the arts, history, and other disciplines that have painted for us convenient images of clearly marked periods which then were replaced by other periods. Those emerged and then faded away again because of paradigm shifts, so the common wisdom goes. Globally speaking, there is much truth to this general idea, especially if we consider the differences between antiquity and the Middle Ages, then the rise of the Baroque era, Enlightenment, Romanticism and Classicism, etc.

However, below the assumed paradigm shifts we can regularly observe continuous streams of reception, adaptations, translations, imitations, and copying. Heuristically speaking, the concept of the paradigm shift proves to be quite useful, but it can also be rather misleading and deceptive. This paper will offer a number of significant examples confirming this observation.

The Turn of the Century: 1500

Let us first take into view the notion that the world profoundly transformed since the late fifteenth century. Indeed, if we consider some of the major events that occurred during that period, then we have good reasons to accept the idea that by ca. 1500 the Middle Ages came to an end and gave way to the Renaissance and the age of the Protestant Reformation. In 1453, the Ottomans conquered Constantinople and thus brought finally to an end to the Eastern Roman Empire. In ca. 1450, Gutenberg invented the printing press, which revolutionized within a few decades the entire book production and book markets.

In 1492, Columbus sailed across the Atlantic and discovered for himself and the rest of Europe that there was another continent, America. In the same year, the Spanish Reconquista concluded its centuries-old effort to oust the Muslim Arabs with the defeat of Granada, their last fortress. The Spanish crown then immediately enforced the expulsion of all Jews from Spain, causing enormous human suffering. In 1497–1498, Vasco de Gama discovered the way around the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa and thus the sea passage to India. And in 1517, Martin Luther allegedly nailed his 99 theses at the church door in Wittenberg, which ultimately brought the Catholic Church down on its knees. Of course, the other side did not sit by idly, and when the Jesuit Order was founded in 1540, the Counter-Reformation was initiated. In short, from a historical, religious, military, and economic perspective, around 1500, a true paradigm shift occurred, and literary historians have mostly followed that lead in their discussions (Lazzarini 2021; see also the contributions to Frank, Fuchs, and Herweg, ed. 2021). But was that truly the case?

It has been a favorite idea by many, scholars and lay people alike, that the late fifteenth century indeed witnessed a major transformation in the production of texts, both in terms of genre and content, as triggered by the printing press. This notion, however, needs to be seriously questioned, as I have already demonstrated

in light of the tradition of the *Melusine* novel (first by Jean d'Arras in 1393, then by Couldrette ca. 1400, and finally by Thüring von Ringoltingen, 1456) and the collection of jest narratives focused on the comic figure of Till *Eulenspiegel* (Classen, "The Continuation of the Middle Ages," 2022). The first example has a long pedigree, going back to literary and art historical roots in the twelfth century, if not earlier; the latter was printed for the first time in ca. 1510, but it must have been composed as early as in the fourteenth century. Both texts greatly appealed to their audiences throughout the next two centuries, and once they were rediscovered in the late eighteenth century, their reception has continued until today.

Melusine* and Till *Eulenspiegel

The reasons for this enormous popularity are obvious considering the intriguing contents of both works. In the case of *Melusine*, we are confronted with the archetypal motif of the hybrid woman, part fairy/snake and part human who changes back into her hybrid form every Saturday when she takes a bath. Once her husband, Reymund, has discovered this secret and then revealed it even publicly as a result of his deep grief over the fact that one of his sons has killed a brother, along with an entire community of monks by setting fire to their monastery, she is forced to leave him, her family, and human society for good to wait until the Day of Judgment for her return, which makes her husband mourn so badly that he dies soon thereafter (see the contributions to Urban, Kemmis, and Ridley Elmes, ed., 2017; Zeldenrust 2020).

In the case of Till *Eulenspiegel*, the issue focuses on the jests and jokes by this hilarious character who is completely disrespectful of any authority figure since his youth and until his death, who ridicules people's language and actions, exposes his contemporaries to the disgusting features of the human body by resorting to all kinds of scatological strategies, and constantly triumphs over his opponents through words and gestures. Audiences have laughed about his pranks ever since the first publication, as documented by ever new prints, translations, illustrations, and even sculptures.

There are virtually no indications in any of the ninety-six tales that would signal a fundamental change in the social, political, economic, and religious framework presented in any of them. Although *Eulenspiegel* regularly ridicules representative of the Church, anticlericalism appears here only in a rather subdued fashion, so we cannot even discover any specific traits indicating the rise of the Protestant Reformation (for the history of anticlericalism, though without references to *Eulenspiegel*, see the contributions to Dykema and Oberman, ed., 1993). The feudal structures as indicated in some of the tales are not remarkably different than those that determined the Middle Ages. The world of burgers, especially of the craftsmen, by contrast, is certainly much more profiled than ever before in medieval literature, but this does not mean at all that Herman Bote, if he was the anonymous author (Blume 2009), would have envisioned a new social-economic structure.

Granted, we observe an increased emphasis on urban life, but this shift in material, political, and literary terms can be traced hundreds of years earlier and cannot be associated with any paradigm shift (see the contributions to Classen, ed., 2009). The author introduces many different situations of social interactions, pertaining, for instance, to peasants, Jews, tradeswomen, clergy, and aristocrats, but the author's interest, as far as we can observe, rests only in the presentation of general contexts typical of the late Middle Ages (McDonald 2001).

Sixteenth-century readers did not seem to care about the increasingly outdated historical and material background, as the continuous series of reprints and translations indicates. Bodo Gotzkowsky lists twenty-eight new printings of the same text until 1594 (Gotzkowsky 1991, 468–88). Jan van Doesborch printed an English translation in Antwerp in 1520; he was followed by William Copland in London with his issues in 1547 and 1568 (Hill-Zenk 2011). The flood of further versions cannot be traced here, but we know that the work's popularity gained considerably in the nineteenth century when the Belgian author Charles De Coster published his novel *La légende et les aventures héroïques joyeuses et glorieuses d'Ulenspiegel et de Lamme Goedzak au pays des Flandres et ailleurs* in 1867 and the French writer Alfred Jarry created his *Gestes et opinions du Docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien* in 1911.

Most influential also proved to be Richard Strauss's tone poem, *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*, Op. 28, in 1894–1895, and we could add a long list of modern art works, compositions, sculptures, short stories, novels, and dramas continuing with this tradition, most recently the novel by David Kehlmann, *Tyll* (2017; for an excellent website with full listings of *Eulenspiegel* movies, plays, sculptures, pictures, etc., a solid bibliography, and also images, see https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Till_Eulenspiegel#Rezeption). Indeed, since the middle of the eighteenth century, we witness an enormous revival of medieval literature through editions, translations, adaptations, and imitations, which cannot be discussed here in detail (Grosse and Rautenberg 1989).

Granted, those works do not lend themselves for the specific discussion of the continuation of medieval literature beyond the so-called paradigm shift in ca. 1500. They underscore, however, the extent to which medieval themes and materials proved to be deeply appealing and did not simply disappear during the early modern age, as illustrated, for instance, by the various Shrovetide plays based on *Eulenspiegel* from the pen of the profligate Nuremberg cobbler poet Hans Sachs (1498–1576) and by the Baroque poet Michael Moscherosch in his *Gesichte Philanders von Sittenwaldt* from 1650 (Lindow 1966, 273–80). Georg Daniel Speer (1636–1707) even created a musical piece based on this trickster figure with his *Musikalisch-türkischer Eulenspiegel* (1688). Each generation until today appears to have appropriated this famous jester character for its own purposes, and today, *Eulenspiegel* often appears in children's literature, but strongly bowdlerized to 'clean' the texts of their scatological dimensions (McDonald 2001). In light of that phenomenon we would have great difficulties to draw a chronological line and separate medieval from early modern literature. Although a profound paradigm shift seems to separate the world after 1500 from the Middle Ages, the closer analysis reveals considerable problems with that notion, especially if we consider the period until the beginning of Absolutism first in France, then in Italy, Spain, and Germany, or until the start of the Thirty-Years' War in 1618.

John of Salisbury and Marsilius of Padua

John of Salisbury

To expand on these observations, let us also consider some non-literary examples. John of Salisbury, as a high-ranking member of the Church, serving both in England and in France, is best known to us today for his famous treatise *Policraticus, sive de nugis curialium et de vestigiis philosophorum*, around 1159. Here we encounter the first medieval reflections on the dangers of a violent, irresponsible, and abusive ruler who would deserve to suffer his death (Nederman 2005). Although John did not explicitly call for tyrannicide, he strongly suggested that in extreme cases that might be a necessity (Nederman, trans., 2005). Posterity viewed this extensive study, which draws richly from classical literature, the Bible, and philosophy, in very positive terms, as demonstrated by the manuscript tradition and many commentaries by his contemporaries and successors (Guglielmetti 2005, for the medieval period; Lachaud 2015, for the post-medieval period), and with the invention of the printing press in ca. 1450, his *Policraticus* continued to be a popular item on the early modern book market. According to the online bibliography *WorldCat*, early printed versions of his work appeared already in 1474, 1479, 1480, and 1481, then in 1513, in 1595, in 1639, in 1664, in 1677, and probably many times thereafter. In other words, for the early modern readers, it did not matter that John had composed his learned and sophisticated text already in the twelfth century. The political ideas expressed by him continued to influence many generations after him.

The same phenomenon can be observed in the case of the political author Marsilius of Padua (ca. 1275/1290–1342/1343) who left behind a massive treatise, his *Defensor pacis* (1324), which proved to be a powerful attack both against the papacy and tyrannical rulers or kings and which then enjoyed significant popularity far into the early modern age.

Huon de Bordeaux

From early on, medieval and then also early modern readers greatly enjoyed learning about magic, fantasy, and imagination in order to gain some simple pleasures from the literary performance (Classen, ed., 2020).

This need for and interest in the magical or fantastical found excellent expression in the late medieval French “chanson de geste,” *Huon de Bordeaux*, or *Les Prouesses et faitz du noble Huon de Bordeaux*, was a thirteenth-century French chanson de geste which has survived in only a handful of testimonies: 1. Bibliothèque Municipale de Tours 936 (M), which was edited by Pierre Ruelle in 1960; 2. Bibliothèque nationale français 22555 (P), Paris; and 3. Turin, National Library, L-II-14 (T; partly destroyed in a fire from 1904). There is also a fragment housed in the Historical Society of Massachusetts, Boston (Jones and Kibler, trans., 2021, xxii).

In the fifteenth century, yet another rhymed version in alexandrines appeared (1454), and a prose version (no manuscript copy extant), the latter of which became the basis for numerous sixteenth-century prints, the first of which appeared in 1513 (https://www.arlima.net/ad/cycle_de_huon_de_bordeaux.html). Versions for a stage performance were produced as early as in 1557 (Confrères de la Passion) and in 1660–1661 (Molière). In 1778, the Count of Tressan published a new edition in the *Bibliothèque universelle des romans*, and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed numerous adaptations for adult readers and also for children, then only emphasizing, of course, the magical and fairy-tale elements. In 1533, John Bourchier, Lord Berners, produced an English translation which is often said to have been the source of inspiration for William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* with the appearance of the king of fairies, *Oberon* (1595–1596). But Shakespeare’s play is otherwise far removed from the original Old French version.

In 1601, the London publisher Purfoot produced *The ancient history of Huon of Bordeaux*. In 1780, the German Enlightenment poet Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813) created his epic poem *Oberon*, based both on *Huon de Bordeaux* and on Shakespeare’s *Midsummer’s Night’s Dream*, but it reached its final version only after seven rewrites in 1796, surprisingly maintaining many of the medieval narrative features. *Oberon* in turn deeply impacted Friedrich Schiller’s *Don Carlos*, Goethe’s *Faust: The Second Part of the Tragedy*, and Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, as well as on the Portuguese Romantic poet Francisco Manoel de Nascimento with his *Contos*. Henry Purcell (*The Fairy Queen*, 1692) and Benjamin Britten (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, premiered in 1960) based their libretti on Shakespeare’s play, and thus also on the Old French version. In 1826, the German composer Carl Maria von Weber published his last opera, *Oberon*, directly based on Wieland’s work, that is, once again on the Old French chanson de geste (cf. Koch 1880). The centrally shared motif is always the appearance of the king of fairies, Auberon, or *Oberon*, hence the world of secrets, incomprehensible to human beings, but certainly existing either to support or harm them.

The line of connections between the Old French verse narrative and Shakespeare’s play is most obvious, but the original text continued to influence many other writers, artists, and composers until today. We can hence not argue at all that *Huon de Bordeaux* was a typically medieval work without any impact on later generations and centuries. Whereas we normally observe that medieval literature sort of disappeared from public view since the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, until it was rediscovered in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, here we recognize a significant line of tradition, and this for very specific reasons. Those pertain to the treatment of the miraculous and magical, the appearance of non-human forces, the fortunate outcome of dangerous situations because of the intervention of non-natural creatures, and hence the transformation of the individual lucky enough to gain the support of those fairy-tale forces. All this is very much the case with *Melusine* as well, but we find it also in the prose novel of *Fortunatus* (printed in Augsburg in 1509). Much of that was possible only because of the hybridization of the literary genres, which became a strong feature of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century literature (Kibler 1982). And it was also possible because of universal archetypal features of the human subconsciousness shared throughout history by people across the world. Late medieval European literature thus can often be identified as the critical juncture between the medieval and the early modern period, and this irrespective of the deep impact of the new printing press.

Straparola – Looking Backward

Examining the highly popular collection of short stories, *Le piacevoli notti*, by Gian or Giovanni Francesco Straparola from 1550 and 1553, by then in two volumes (Pirovano, ed., 2000), allows us the opportunity to examine the issue from the reverse perspective, looking into the past and probing what sources this famous Venetian author might have consulted. It goes without saying that he had clearly Boccaccio's *Decameron* from ca. 1350 in mind, both in terms of the narrative framework and in terms of specific tales that he transformed for his own purposes. In the prologue to the fifth story told in the twelfth night, for instance, the narrator even explicitly refers to his great Italian predecessor: "although the novella that I intend to tell was written by Giovanni Boccaccio in his *Decameron*, it is not however, told there in the way that you will hear it now" (Magnanini, trans., 2015, 427). Of course, this does not come as a surprise at all; virtually all writers or poets throughout time have learned from their predecessors, adapted their material, and developed it further for their own purposes. Sometimes they admitted this process openly, sometimes they alluded to their sources only indirectly. Even if we might not hear anything specific about the elements of inspiration, in many cases we have been able to detect clear traces confirming that the later text was influenced by an earlier one.

A dramatic example demonstrating without any doubt the extent to which medieval literature continued to be alive and well was the enormous popularity of the *Tristan and Isolde* (*Tristan et Yseut*) material, which was obviously well known to Straparola as well, though medieval scholarship has not paid any attention to this phenomenon (Stein 2001; but see Classen, "The *Tristan*-and-*Isolde*-Motif," 2006, for an exception in this case). In the second story told in the fourth night, Straparola directly drew inspiration from the *Tristan* tradition and retold the account very closely to the original source, whatever (language) version it might have been. The poet does not provide any hint as to the medieval narrative employed and skillfully hides the direct connection with the medieval romance by situating his story in Athens sometime in the past, and not in Ireland and Cornwall as in the original texts. The rich and old Messer Erminione Glauco takes as his wife the young woman Filenia and immediately feels jealousy, fearing that she would attract a lover because he might be impotent. Consequently, he 'imprisons' her in a tall tower to keep her out of sight from the public, a common trope in medieval literature, such as in the *lai* "Guigemar" by Marie de France (ca. 1190; Waters, ed. and trans., 2018, no. 1).

The young lady had long been loved by the young and wealthy student Ippolito, who, having come back from a visit to Candia, feels deeply chagrined about the development hurting his feelings of love and immediately sets up a plan to meet his lady and to sleep with her in secret, obviously in the unquestioned assumption that she loves him back. He has two identical chests made and then asks Erminione, whom he has deceptively befriended, to keep one of them for him during his absence, allegedly filled with his treasures. In reality, he places himself in the second chest, which is then carried to Filenia's bedroom, and when Erminione is gone on a business trip for several days, Ippolito slips out of the chest and enjoys nights of pleasure with his beloved.

Later, the chest is carried back, and the adultery seems to be a well-hidden secret, except that Erminione discovers a spit high up on the wall of his bedroom which could not have come from him since he is lacking the strength to spit all the way up to that spot – certainly a sexual allusion to ejaculation by another man. So, he then publicly accuses his wife of having committed adultery, though he has no other evidence available but the spit and could not explain at all how this might have been possible since the circumstances remain a secret for him.

He would have liked to kill her without delay, but fearing dangerous consequences for himself, he brings the charge of her adultery to the city magistrate, where they decide to submit Filenia to an ordeal, exactly as was virtually always the case in the *Tristan* story. Straparola changes the setting slightly, and instead of being forced to carry a red-hot iron on her naked palm, the accused woman has to place her hand in a snake's mouth. According to tradition, in case of guilt, the snake would bite off the hand; otherwise, the accused person would be regarded as innocent.

Closely following the narrative model in Gottfried's romance, or similar ones from the French or Italian tradition (Stein 2001; Dallapiazza, ed., 2003), the poor woman is now in a terrible plight because she knows that she is entirely guilty of the charge. But then her lover comes to her rescue, having dressed up as a madman "so that she would not be caught in the snare of an ignominious death" (185). When Filenia is led to the palace where the snake is waiting for her, a massive crowd has assembled to witness the dramatic, if not sensational scene, but at that moment Ippolito pushes his way through the throng with all of his might, then approaches the accused and forcefully kisses her. We are not told explicitly whether she herself had arranged this plan, as Isolde did in Gottfried's text, or whether her lover was the initiator of this strategy, but the narrator clearly indicates: "The young woman, who was clever and very wise, boldly swore that no one had ever touched her, save for her husband and that madman who was present" (185). This is certainly true, and hence the snake does not bite her, which frees her from all charges. Of course, no one recognizes the madman's true identity, and so they do not understand the deliberate ambivalence of her oath, but love seems to justify all, and so this cheating as well.

Both her friends and relatives, angry about this 'false' accusation, as now 'proven' through the inaction by the snake, then furiously demand that Erminione be punished for his foul allegation against his wife. He is not burned alive, but thrown into prison, where he then dies soon after. Subsequently, Ippolito can marry Filenia, and both lead a happy life until their death (186). Our Venetian poet hence approached the source material with some irony and even black humor, highlighting the lover's intelligent strategy to see his lady in private without the husband ever learning the full truth about that affair.

The parallels to the medieval *Tristan* story are evident, though Straparola changed some of the external circumstances, situating the events in Athens, and not in Cornwall, and offering a good outcome for the lovers, with the old man suffering his miserable death in prison. Whereas the medieval narratives are located within the social sphere of the royal court, in this Italian version the focus rests on urban life and urban citizens. Most curiously, but certainly being a clear hint at Straparola's use of a medieval source, proves to be the employment of the theme of the ordeal, which had actually been banned by the Church already at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and which witnessed an afterlife only over the next one hundred of years or so (Bartlett 1986; Ziegler 2004). From a legal, or judicial point of view, this story would no longer have made sense in the sixteenth century, but since the poet drew from an unspecified medieval source, here deliberately adapted in the external setting, he did not feel any constraints to utilize this motif in his version.

We are far removed from courtly culture, but the essential narrative elements are still present, with a young man in love with an unhappily married woman, who detests her old and rich husband. The lovers then commit adultery, but they can hide it despite the official charge raised by the husband. Straparola did not reveal with even one word where he drew his material from, but our comparison makes it crystal-clear that he worked with some medieval source and adapted it for his purposes, that is, with one of the many *Tristan* versions that still circulated in the sixteenth century. Undoubtedly, Straparola had drawn very skillfully from a medieval source, that is, one of the many *Tristan* versions, but he transformed the narrative account into a melodrama, removing the tragic edges and projecting a happy end, at least for the lovers, whereas the old husband dies a miserable death while lingering in the prison. Fitting for the entire volume, drastic humor, biting satire, and strongly erotic elements characterize the text, so when Erminione then dies, no one is supposed to feel any pity. Granted, in the medieval tradition, King Mark also never cut a good figure, but he was also not characterized as a condemnable fool (see, for instance, Karg, 1994; Miyashiro, 2005) and did not face complete opposition from his wife's family, which was not even present, living far away in Ireland.

Conclusion

Altogether, we can thus observe that a real paradigm shift did not occur, although the dissemination of texts of many different kinds (theological, medical, scientific, pragmatic, literary, culinary, didactic, etc.) accelerated considerably (Neddermeyer 1998, vol. 1, 553–56). The Middle Ages continued through many

different channels, especially because a good number of significant texts appealed also to early modern audiences. While they were no longer copied down by hand – here disregarding the extraordinary situation with the *Ambraser Heldenbuch* – they certainly proved to have a solid staying power, either because the political, philosophical, and religious messages contained in them did not lose in significance, or because the literary themes appealed also to early modern audiences, as the case with Shakespeare (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1595 or 1596) illustrates impressively.

The entire concept of the paradigm shift thus needs to be revisited because it proves to be more complex and at times even contradictory than we might have assumed so far (cf. the contributions to Rehm, ed., 2018). To return to our initial reflections, in the spur of a moment, catchwords such as “Zeitenwende” attract much attention and seem to relay truly a radical transformation. But true changes that also affect the political, economic, or military power take much time, unless a true revolution takes place. In the current political jargon, it seems convenient to display publicly evidence that a paradigm shift has occurred, that climate change is now truly endangering our lives, or that the west has truly cut its ties with Russia in response to the war against Ukraine. In reality, however, tradition, habits, or customs demonstrate a deep staying power, and real paradigm shifts normally require much time, extensive restructuring of mentality, social conditions, and especially a belief system. The Protestant Reformation changed many formal matters, transformed also the personal relationship between the individual faithful and God, but it did not affect the fundamental Christian belief system. The same phenomenon could be observed in the case of other world religions. And art historians have recently also revolted against the strict periodization, highlighting the problematics of binary oppositions between, say, late Gothic and the Renaissance (Farago 2017). There is no question that a paradigm shift took place, affecting many different aspects of late medieval culture, philosophy, politics, religion, and sciences/medicine. However, this does not mean at all that traditional elements in literature and the arts simply disappeared, that values and ideals as advocated before the turn of the century were suddenly no longer relevant, or that the social structure witnessed a radical transformation.

The essential point here is not to dismiss the concept of the paradigm shift, but to contextualize it more reasonably and to open our eyes to the strong elements of tradition, reception, imitation, translation, and adaptation. We would do a grave disservice to the study of the works by Hans Sachs and William Shakespeare if we examined them only within a historical-literary vacuum. Many technical, material, and scientific things changed, but many intellectual, mental, artistic, literary, or ideological things continued to have a deep impact on the new texts.

Geoffrey Chaucer, for example, enjoyed highest respect not only throughout the fifteenth century; instead, he was greatly admired, his works (including many falsely attributed to him) were reprinted numerous times throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and he enjoyed major fame also ever since. Sir Philip Sidney, in his *Defence of Poesy* (1580–1581), expressed great astonishment that Chaucer was so far ahead of his own generation: “in that misty time could see so clearly,” and Edmund Spenser, in Book 4 of his *Faerie Queene* (1590), attempted to continue Chaucer’s “Squire’s Tale,” being a complete devotee of this great late medieval poet. John Dryden, in his *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1700), praised Chaucer as the ‘father of the English language.’ In other words, Chaucer never disappeared from public awareness and view and continuously enjoyed highest status in literary and other cultured circles (see now Lawton, ed., 2019; particularly the chapter “The Chaucer Tradition [to 1900], 34–43). We might wonder, hence, whether a real paradigm shift happened, or whether it would be more appropriate to focus on traditions, transformations, and adaptations as the more relevant markers of the historical and social process.

These reflections on the history of late medieval and early modern literature and philosophy allow us, I believe, to comprehend more in depth the actual cultural conditions, people’s mentality, the social framework, and the development of the literary process. Even though Shakespeare’s plays or those by Molière and Racine really belong to a new age, it would be absurd to claim that they were completely divorced from the literary past. In order to do justice to the phenomenon we are dealing with, we can still acknowledge the

usefulness of the concept of the paradigm shift, but we would have to modify it carefully and adjust it to the reality on the ground, that is, to the one on the book market, in the private households, and personal libraries.

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