DENNIS GREEN

Dennis Howard Green

26 June 1922 – 5 December 2008

elected Fellow of the British Academy 1992

by

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Summary. Dennis Green, who published as D.H. Green, was for nearly fifty years at the forefront of scholarship in medieval German studies. In nine books which appeared between 1965 and 2009 he contributed decisively to our understanding of a range of linguistic and literary topics: language change as the record of cultural change in early Germanic and German societies; irony, narrative technique, and fictionality in courtly romance; the relationship between the written word and its oral mediation in medieval culture; the significant involvement of women in vernacular literacy and literature. At Cambridge for almost his entire career (Professor of Modern Languages from 1966; Schröder Professor of German from 1979 until retirement in 1989; Fellow of Trinity College), he became through his work an internationally recognised authority.

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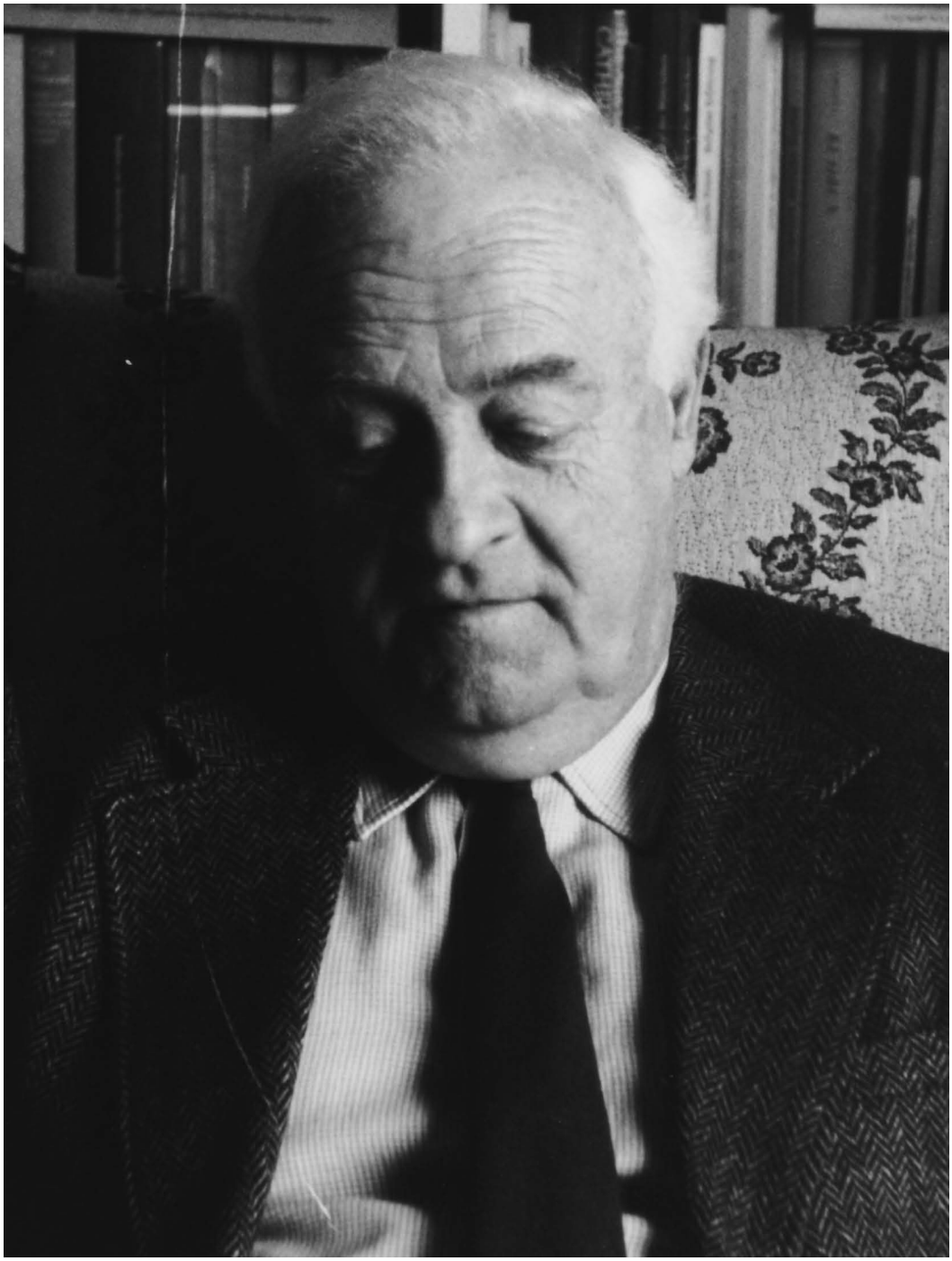

DH Green

During one of our regular after-lunch conversations in the Fellows' Parlour of Trinity College, Dennis Green and I somehow got onto the topic of hoarding papers. To my confession that I belonged in the camp of throwers-out Dennis reacted with a smile and the observation that anyone intending to write his biography wouldn't find much material. The evident glee that the thought of making life difficult for a future biographer inspired in him revealed something characteristic: a sense of mischief and, at the same time, a wish to keep his own person out of the spotlight. For all his vivaciousness in company – others have remarked on the quick wit, the delight in verbal ribbing and sparring – Dennis Green was a deeply private person who could almost never be made to talk about himself.[1] As far as the factual details that constitute the course of a life were concerned, all that anyone needed to know was already in his *Who's Who* entry, and I think he meant for it to stay that way.[2]

A rare occasion on which Dennis was compelled to talk about himself was after the dinner held in college to honour his 80th birthday in June 2002. In the customary speech delivered over wine and dessert, he reflected on the determinative role that chance had played at several turning points in his life. It was by chance, he said, that he became a Modern Linguist during his schooldays at Latymer Upper School in London in the 1930s; the story is worth retelling in his own words, because they bring to life the public persona, with its flashes of humour and self-irony, better than any description can:

> While still in the Lower Fourth three of us were unexpectedly summoned just before Christmas to appear before the Headmaster and we went in fear and trembling, wondering what crimes of ours he had uncovered. Instead, he told us that we had been making such good progress that in the New Year we were to be upgraded to the Upper Fourth and he wanted to know on the spot what we wanted to begin specialising in, science or humanities. Up to then I had been keenly interested in chemistry and had vaguely seen my future there, but we were taken aback by the suddenness of his request. As we were lined up in front of his desk I had sought safety in taking up the middle position, so that the boy on my right was the first to be asked and he replied, saying 'Modern Languages, Sir'. When my turn came I sought safety in company and said likewise 'Modern Languages, Sir'.[3]

[1] Cf. Roger Paulin, obituary, 'Professor Dennis Green', *The Independent*, 18 December 2008; Nigel Palmer, address given at the memorial service for Dennis Green in the chapel of Trinity College Cambridge, 9 May 2009, *Trinity College Cambridge Annual Record 2008–2009*, pp. 119–25, downloadable from https://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/alumni/publications/annual-record/

[2] 'Green, Prof. Dennis Howard', *Who's Who 2025 & Who Was Who*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ww/9780199540884.13.U18001

[3] 'A speech presented by Professor Dennis Green at a dinner in honour of his 80th birthday on Friday 28 June 2002 in the College Hall', reproduced for a Memorial Service on 9 May 2009 in the Trinity College Chapel.

Specialising in Modern Languages meant taking German, and up to this point Dennis had been taught Latin and Greek and French but no German at all. The remedy was simple: the German master handed him the textbook, pointed to the lesson that the class would have reached by the time the new term came around, and instructed him to work through the preceding chapters by himself over the Christmas vacation. No doubt the master, looking over and correcting the exercises, would have noted his new pupil's facility for learning languages; it was a facility that Dennis enjoyed putting to use throughout his life. I recall his complaint a few months before the Internationale Vereinigung für Germanistik was to hold its quinquennial congress in Tokyo in 1990: 'I keep mixing up my katakana with my kanji.' Very probably the interference arose from his knowledge of Chinese, an interest awakened early and which he maintained as an intellectual pastime during active war service with the help of the only reading-matter he could lay hands on in wartime London, a translation of the New Testament purchased from the bookshop of the British and Foreign Bible Society. Interference from Chinese or no, participants in the Tokyo congress reported that he had acquired enough Japanese to translate restaurant menus for them and stop them from boarding buses headed in the wrong direction. As for European languages, opportunities for expanding his repertoire regularly presented themselves in the postwar years when he was head of the Cambridge Department of Other Languages, the institutional repository for everything that didn't fall within the purview of the 'Big Six' (as they were at the time) of French, German, Italian, Spanish, Slavonic and Scandinavian. International students from, say, Romania were surprised and delighted to be addressed by a professor of German in their own language.

Chance intervened on two further occasions with life-shaping consequences. Because the two Modern Languages teachers at Latymer with whom Dennis had closest contact happened to be Cambridge graduates and alumni of Trinity College, he made up his mind to apply for university entry there; when he went up to read French and German for the Modern and Medieval Languages Tripos in Michaelmas Term 1940, it was the beginning of an association with the college that would, with a few intermissions, continue to the end of his life. And after the war, when he returned to Cambridge to complete his undergraduate degree, it was a chance meeting in a bookshop one Saturday afternoon with Robert Auty, then University Lecturer in German, that gave rise to a discussion about his future and the decision – hitherto not crystallised – to go on to do research in medieval German, the field to which he would devote a lifetime's scholarship.[4]

[4] On Auty, who subsequently moved on from German to Slavonic philology and chairs in London and Oxford, see Leonard Forster, 'Robert Auty, 1914–1978', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 67 (1982), 339–55.

Postgraduate study turned out to be the second of three callings that took him away from Cambridge and Trinity College for periods of time in the 1940s. The first of these was the war. After completing Part I of the Modern and Medieval Languages Tripos in 1941, Dennis joined the Royal Armoured Corps as an officer cadet. An opportunity to put his German to use at Bletchley Park was dismissed: the prospect was dangled before him during his training, but the terms in which it was described were so vague and the work made to sound so humdrum that, in his own words, 'I said that I was not interested, having joined the Army for what I was pleased to call a "proper war", not a civilian job'.[5] Active combat is what he got as an officer in the tanks of the 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards as they fought from autumn 1944 through Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany to finish in Bremerhaven on VE Day in 1945. He never talked much about these experiences, except to say that they influenced his choice of research topic in ways that he came to realise only in retrospect. It must have been the experience of war, he believed, that led him again and again to explore military themes: militarisation and demilitarisation in the Old High German vocabulary of lordship, crusading warfare in early Middle High German literature, and knightly homicide in the courtly romance of the early 13th century. Only from the 1970s, as his focus moved on to questions such as irony, narration, and the interplay of orality and literacy in vernacular literature, did he succeed, in his own phrase, 'in getting my wartime experiences out of my system'.[6]

In fact, it took time for what he called 'the unconscious memory of war'[7] to surface in his scholarship, because his first sustained piece of research was on the aesthetics of courtly romance. After sitting Part II of the Modern and Medieval Languages Tripos in 1947, Dennis spent the next two years in Basel, where he wrote his doctoral thesis, a stylistic comparison of two classic authors of German courtly literature, Gottfried von Strassburg and Konrad von Würzburg.[8] His supervisor was Friedrich Ranke, a great-nephew of the historian Leopold von Ranke and next to Auty the figure who exerted the strongest personal influence on his career; if it were not for Ranke and Auty, he reflected, he would never have become a medievalist.[9] Although there are considerable differences between them in style and approach, Dennis was a scholar in Ranke's mould in the sense that, for him as for his teacher, to be a medieval philologist meant competence in linguistic as well as literary studies (the two have long since become technically so specialised as to constitute separate disciplines), and to be a medieval Germanist meant knowing not just Old and Middle High German but all the early Germanic languages. Ranke, probably

[5] 'A speech', p. 2.
[6] Autobiographical note for the British Academy, 12 August 1992.
[7] 'A speech', p. 4.
[8] Dennis Howard Green, 'Konrads *Trojanerkrieg* und Gottfrieds *Tristan*. Vorstudien zum gotischen Stil in der Dichtung', PhD thesis (Basel, 1949).
[9] Autobiographical note.

remembered nowadays primarily for his edition and studies of Gottfried von Strassburg's romance *Tristan und Isold*, was also the author of the introduction to Old Norse language standardly used in German universities;[10] Dennis would never edit a text or write a grammar, but his research interests and publications ranged like Ranke's from courtly romance to comparative Germanic philology.

After finishing doctoral research, Dennis went to St Andrews where, in the last of his three career stations away from Cambridge, he held his first academic post as a lecturer in German from 1949 to 1950. The return to Cambridge came with his appointment to a University Lectureship there in 1950, which simultaneously enabled him to take up in person the Junior Research Fellowship at Trinity College to which he had been elected, on the strength of his Basel thesis, in 1949 and which he held in absentia during the year at St Andrews. From 1950 on, his career would be firmly based in Cambridge and at Trinity: Teaching Fellow of the college in 1952; Professorial Fellow, coinciding with his election to the newly established Chair in Modern Languages, in 1966; Schröder Professor of German from 1979 until retirement in 1989; thereafter Emeritus Professor and 'Title E' (life) Fellow of the college. Yet although Dennis was in many respects entirely 'Cambridge' – he wouldn't publish and very possibly couldn't imagine publishing his major monographs anywhere except with Cambridge University Press, for instance – his reputation and his activities reached far into the world outside. From the mid 1960s through to the late 1990s visiting professorships and fellowships – in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and the Netherlands – came thick and fast;[11] as well as serving two five-year terms on the committee of the Internationale Vereinigung für Germanistik from 1985 to 1995, he was President of the Modern Humanities Research Association in 1997.[12]

[10] For Ranke's academic biography and publications see Hartmut Freytag, 'Ranke, Friedrich', in *Internationales Germanistenlexikon, 1800–1950*, vol. 3 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), pp. 1460–2. His *Altnordisches Elementarbuch* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1937), revised by Dietrich Hoffmann, went into its fifth edition in 1988.

[11] In addition to the visiting positions listed in *Who's Who* (note 2 above), it is worth mentioning regular periods as a guest of the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel during the late 1970s and 1980s.

[12] Membership of the IVG committee is recorded in its conference proceedings; for the periods in question see Albrecht Schöne (ed.), *Akten des VII. Internationalen Germanisten-Kongresses Göttingen 1985. Kontroversen, alte und neue* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986), vol. 1, pp. 156–7; Eijirō Iwasaki (ed.), *Akten des VIII. Internationalen Germanisten-Kongresses Tokyo 1990. Begegnung mit dem 'Fremden': Grenzen – Traditionen – Vergleiche* (Munich: iudicium, 1991), vol. 1, p. 175. For the MHRA, see D.H. Green, 'From Germania to Europe: The Evidence of Language and History' (The Presidential Address of the Modern Humanities Research Association read at University College London, on 11 January 1997), *The Modern Language Review*, 92 (1997), xxix-xxxviii.

At the root of this recognition and distinction was a prolific scholarly output: nine books, more than sixty essays, and countless book reviews.[13] And while it may have been chance that made Dennis Green a Germanist and a medievalist, anyone reading his published writings will have the impression of a style of scholarship in which nothing was left to chance. Scholarship was for him a collective enterprise; it meant assimilating the work of predecessors and extending it, whether by filling in gaps, transferring methods and approaches to objects not yet treated, or cautiously advancing the frontiers of an already established terrain. Hence the qualities that defined his writing: comprehensive thoroughness, systematically marshalled arguments, a positivistic preference for the concretely demonstrable. The very same qualities were also immediately impressed upon anyone who experienced his teaching. The famous undergraduate seminars stood out from the standard fare on offer to Cambridge Modern Linguists for their two to three hours' duration; they demanded not only stamina but also commitment from participants. You were inducted into an edifice of facts and knowledge about the facts that was bigger than you or any individual; your role was to adapt yourself to it and not the other way round. Not long before Dennis's retirement, the three students who stayed the course of a series of seminars on what would become the book *Medieval Listening and Reading* discovered one week that they had all, for one reason or another and without knowing at the time, been absent from the previous session; when Dennis launched straight into the present week's topic according to the programme (there was always a programme), one of the three summoned up the courage to ask if they could cover the missed topic instead. No, came the reply, that was not going to happen, because 'I covered it last week when none of you were here, and anyhow Otfrid von Weissenburg is too good to be subjected to the whims of mere undergraduates'.

If 'mere undergraduates' experienced the teaching as illuminating rather than as a weekly crushing beneath a juggernaut of erudition, that was because they were presented with the results of live research: the seminars were trial runs for whatever book Dennis happened to be writing. Books were always the focus of his scholarly energies; essays and articles, though important, were ancillary. The first of what he regarded as his nine 'real' books (he never included his Basel dissertation in the tally) was *The Carolingian Lord*, published in 1965.[14] Its goal is defined modestly as an 'inquiry into the semantic history of four OHG words for "lord"' (p. ix), but there is much more to it than that. Through its reconstruction of the history of the Old High German words *balder*, *frô*, *truhtin* and *hêrro*, the book offers a cultural history of the making of the Middle Ages,

[13] The most comprehensive bibliography is that of the *Regesta Imperii* website: https://opac.regesta-imperii.de/lang_en/autoren.php?name=Green%2C+Dennis+Howard. It includes books, edited volumes, journal articles and book chapters but not book reviews.

[14] D.H. Green, *The Carolingian Lord. Semantic Studies on Four Old High German Words: balder, frô, truhtin, hêrro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

for the story of the words' waxing and waning and changes of meaning reveals a process of momentous transition in continental Germanic societies: from pagan tribes ruled by a warrior elite – the original lords – to Christianised realms subject to feudal lords and over them a single lord in heaven. The method was 'semantic analysis': an attempt to get past the conscious intentions of the writers of the sources – almost invariably churchmen influenced by their beliefs and education – to reach the inert meanings sedimented in the words and transported by them. This stratum of unconscious collective meaning could be reached by tracking frequencies and distributions of vocabulary in time and space, and by considering words not in isolation but as related to each other in 'word fields' – the inspiration here was the 'Wortfeldtheorie' of the linguist and etymologist Jost Trier[15] – in which a semantic territory was covered by a set of terms whose boundaries were overlapping and mobile. Registering fine recalibrations in the scope and meaning of words in the field of lordship and authority could, the book sought to demonstrate, give access to changes in the collective life of social institutions not directly described in the historical record.

The Carolingian Lord was followed one year later by *The Millstätter Exodus*.[16] Here not a field of words but a single text is brought into view: an early 12th-century Middle High German verse retelling of key events from the book of Exodus. The central thesis, that the *Exodus* belongs to the 'immediate prehistory' of the 'genre' of crusading epic in German (p. vii), has not stood the test of time: the existence of such a genre, with a narratable history and prehistory, is a contentious construct, and the modern consensus is that the generic character of the *Exodus* is more accurately captured in the context of a tradition of 11th- and 12th-century vernacular bible epics whose choice of topic was filtered through late Latin models such as Avitus of Vienne's *De spiritualis historiae gestibus*.[17] The more successful aspect of the study, which gives it enduring value, lies in the teasing out of the layers of symbolism in a work that does not spell out its intended significance but weaves exegetical and liturgical associations into the story of the

[15] On him see Alexander Nebrig, 'Trier, Jost', in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 26 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2016), 415–17, online: https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118623907.html#ndbcontent. Trier's seminal statement of 'Wortfeldtheorie' was his Marburg habilitation thesis, published as *Der deutsche Wortschatz im Sinnbezirk des Verstandes. Die Geschichte eines sprachlichen Feldes* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1931).

[16] D.H. Green, *The Millstätter Exodus: A Crusading Epic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966).

[17] See Ursula Hennig, 'Altdt. Exodus', in Kurt Ruh *et al.* (eds), *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*, vol. 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978), cols 276–9; Dieter Kartschoke, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im frühen Mittelalter* (Munich: dtv, 1990), pp. 284–306; Gisela Vollmann-Profe, *Wiederbeginn volkssprachiger Schriftlichkeit im hohen Mittelalter* (vol. 1, pt 2 of *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn der Neuzeit*, ed. Joachim Heinzle), 2nd edn (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1995), pp. 63–79; Mark Chinca & Christopher Young, 'German', in Chinca & Young (eds), *Literary Beginnings in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 179–202 at 183.

Israelites' passage through the Red Sea and the confounding of Pharaoh's army. For anyone wishing to interpret the *Exodus* as a multivalent narrative full of resonance for its likely intended audience of lay aristocrats – an interpretation still to be written – the materials are laid out there.

By the time the next cluster of books appeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the focus had switched completely to the period around 1200 and to the courtly romance. The centrepiece was *Irony in the Medieval Romance*.[18] The book was written against the view, now consigned to the necropolis of beliefs medievalists no longer hold but influential at the time, that the courtly romance was a predominantly didactic or identity-bolstering genre and accordingly had no use for irony; the corollary to this was the belief that interpretations in which irony figured prominently said more about the interpreter's ingenuity than they did about the medieval work and the way in which its original audience would have understood it. Discussing examples from French, Occitan and English as well as German literature, and anatomising irony into its several modes and areas of manifestation, the book dispatched this orthodoxy for good. It established that irony was a constitutive feature of the romance genre from the very beginning, and it highlighted the social, cultural, and medial conditions that were conducive to ironic discourse: the clerical background of the authors, whose education fostered an attitude of detachment from their courtly milieu; the inherently indirect nature of courtly speech conventions; the existence of at least a segment of the courtly public who valued literary sophistication; the 'writerliness' of the romance genre – both in the sense that it was composed and transmitted in writing, and also in the sense that it defined itself as a literate tradition – which afforded scope for greater intellectual distance and reflection than did the spontaneity of oral poetry. At the time of publication, *Irony* introduced a distinctively 'Anglo-Saxon' voice into a subject which, especially in German-language scholarship, was dominated by the sociological and ideologising approach of medievalists such as Erich Köhler and Gerd Kaiser;[19] although Köhler and Kaiser feature in the references, it is revealing that the critical touchstones for *Irony* are North American luminaries such as Wayne C. Booth and E.D. Hirsch.[20]

Irony was flanked chronologically by studies of one romance author. *Approaches to Wolfram von Eschenbach* was a collection of five essays,[21] two of them by Peter Johnson,

[18] D.H. Green, *Irony in the Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
[19] Erich Köhler, *Ideal und Wirklichkeit in der höfischen Epik. Studien zur Form der frühen Artus- und Graldichtung* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1956; 2nd edn, 1970); Gert Kaiser, *Textauslegung und gesellschaftliche Selbstdeutung. Aspekte einer sozialgeschichtlichen Interpretation von Hartmanns Artusepen* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1973; 2nd edn, 1978).
[20] See especially the 'Introduction' and the section 'Conclusions', *Irony*, pp. 1–13, 389–93.
[21] D.H. Green & L.P. Johnson, *Approaches to Wolfram von Eschenbach: Five Essays* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1978).

for many years Dennis's medievalist colleague in the Cambridge German Department.[22] The first of the three essays contributed by Dennis, on knightly homicide in Wolfram's grail romance *Parzival*, can be regarded as the final spasm of the unconscious working out of his war experiences, and the second, on the concept of adventure, deployed once again the meticulous analysis of a word in its semantic field; the third, however, broke new ground with its exploration of the tension in the romance genre between a literate-clerical mode of poetic composition and a no less literate mode aimed at creating an effect of orality. It was a theme (also touched on in *Irony*) that would preoccupy Dennis for the next ten years and beyond. Before then, though, *The Art of Recognition in Wolfram's 'Parzival'* offered a sustained study of the narrative technique in this densest and most multifaceted of German romances of the high courtly period.[23] Although his name is nowhere mentioned, the book is on one level a treatment of Gérard Genette's categories of 'narration' and 'focalisation': the act of enunciating a story and the perspectival and perceptual mediation of the story-world respectively.[24] If neither the terminology nor its inventor is invoked, this may be because the ultimate interest is not narratological but ethical; the study seeks to explain how Wolfram's audience was to implement the author's injunction to *erdenken* – think to the bottom of – the meaning of the story (p. 1). By tracing almost in real time the progressive revealing and also withholding of information from the audience, the book went beyond established interpretations of *Parzival* as the narrative of its protagonist's subjective growth; it argued that Wolfram's romance was also a vehicle for promoting cognitive growth in the audience, who must learn to recognise the bigger picture that lies behind the individual details they encounter and are expected to retain in memory. The intricate analyses of *The Art of Recognition* anticipated full-blown studies of narrative intertextuality in *Parzival*,[25] and their ethical purpose raised questions – of personal and social identity, of the possibility of human perfectibility – that continue to preoccupy Wolfram scholarship.[26]

[22] On Peter Johnson see https://www.pem.cam.ac.uk/college/news/dr-peter-johnson–1930–2016

[23] D.H. Green, *The Art of Recognition in Wolfram's 'Parzival'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[24] Gérard Genette, 'Le discours du récit', in *Figures III* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), pp. 67–273 at 203–67.

[25] For example, Ulrike Draesner, *Wege durch erzählte Welten. Intertextuelle Verweise als Mittel der Bedeutungskonstitution in Wolframs 'Parzival'* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993).

[26] See for example the very different approaches to these questions by Joachim Bumke, *Die Blutstropfen im Schnee. Über Wahrnehmung und Erkenntnis im 'Parzival' Wolframs von Eschenbach* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001) and Shami Ghosh & Martin H. Jones, 'Parzival's Growth, God's Grace, and the Meaning of the Grail Kingship in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*, 153 (2024), 3–45.

Retirement in 1989 gave Dennis the leisure to complete a project whose germ lay in his work on courtly romance, but whose scope and significance extended beyond a single genre and the relatively limited period of the decades immediately before and after 1200. *Medieval Listening and Reading* is concerned with the primary reception of German literature – not just the 'literary' genres of epic, romance and lyric, but all of vernacular textual production – in the five centuries that separate the earliest recorded writings in German *c.* 800 from the waning of the courtly tradition at the turn of the 14th century.[27] By 'primary reception' is meant the mode in which works written in the vernacular were intended to reach, or in fact did reach, the audiences for whom they were composed: whether by reading or listening or both. These different modes are established or made plausible through a characteristically thorough analysis of the words used by vernacular works to describe their envisaged reception, but the lexical investigation is only a starting point: what matters is the cultural world to which the vocabulary gives access. It is a world of literary communication where written texts existed actually or potentially as words to be spoken, not just because of limited literacy among laypeople, but also because of the value attached to public recital as a social institution. Stressing the distinctively medieval symbiosis of the written and the spoken word, *Medieval Listening and Reading* offered a complete mapping of a literary culture in which language, medium, genre and social context all interact. Of all the books Dennis had published up to this point, this was the one whose reception spread furthest beyond German studies; a decade after its publication, experts in medieval English, French, and Occitan literatures acknowledged its influence on their respective fields in a volume of essays dedicated to him.[28]

Over the next fifteen years four more books would appear. *Language and History in the Early Germanic World* may appear to represent a return to the concerns of *The Carolingian Lord* after an interval of more than three decades, but the appearance is misleading.[29] In fact, Dennis never abandoned his interest in language as a route into cultural history, either in his teaching or in his research. Between 1966 and 1984 he repeatedly gave a three-year cycle of undergraduate lectures on 'Semantic evidence for Germanic civilisation', and well into his retirement he kept abreast of developments in the history, archaeology and ethnography of the early Germanic-speaking peoples, especially through participation in the conferences of the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Social Stress under the direction of Giorgio Ausenda at San Marino. Some

[27] D.H. Green, *Medieval Listening and Reading: The Primary Reception of German Literature 800–1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
[28] Mark Chinca & Christopher Young (eds), *Orality and Literacy in the Middle Ages: Essays on a Conjunction and its Consequences in Honour of D. H. Green* (Turnout: Brepols, 2005).
[29] D.H. Green, *Language and History in the Early Germanic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

of his published papers from those conferences found their way into *Language and History*,[30] but the book draws mainly on the undergraduate lectures – indeed it explicitly presents itself as a resource for students, providing them 'with a broad survey that they could not be expected to map out for themselves' (p. ix). The breadth is temporal (the period covered runs from *c.* 300 BCE to *c.* 900 CE), linguistic (Common Germanic as well as the separately attested languages of East, West and North Germanic), thematic (institutions of early Germanic society; contacts with the non-Germanic world; contact with Christianity), and above all disciplinary. There is an insistence throughout on the need to co-ordinate linguistic data with the findings of archaeologists and historians; the picture that emerges from this interdisciplinary approach is one of societies caught up in transformation and transition – there is no pristine world of pure Germanic culture to be retrieved from the linguistic record – from the time of their prehistorical existence all the way to the threshold of the Middle Ages.

Three last books offer broad syntheses while at the same time extending earlier work on courtly romance and medieval reading and listening. The fictional poetics of romance – whether indeed the Middle Ages had anything approximating to our modern notion of literary fiction – had been the subject of intense debate and controversy in German studies. The trailblazer was the publication in 1985 of Walter Haug's *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter*, later translated – in part at Dennis's instigation – into English as *Vernacular Literary Theory in the Middle Ages*.[31] Dennis's own statement on the topic, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance: Fact and Fiction*,[32] is a tour d'horizon of the field, informed by the deep acquaintance with the genre that already impressed reviewers of *Irony*.[33] And as with *Irony*, it introduced an anglophone perspective otherwise absent from German-language debates: the working definition of fiction as 'make-believe' is owed to Kendall Walton and Gregory Currie.[34] The treatment is both genetic and

[30] D.H. Green, 'The Rise of Germania in the Light of Linguistic Evidence', in Giorgio Ausenda (ed.), *After Empire: Towards an Ethnology of Europe's Barbarians* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), pp. 143–62; 'The Influence of the Merovingian Franks on the Christian Vocabulary of German', in Ian N. Wood (ed.), *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), pp. 343–70; 'Linguistic Evidence for the Early Migrations of the Goths', in Peter J. Heather (ed.), *The Visigoths from the Migration Period to the Seventh Century: An Ethnographic Perspective* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), pp. 11–42.

[31] Walter Haug, *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985; 2nd edn, 1992); *Vernacular Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: The German Tradition, 800–1300, in its European Context*, trans. Joanna M. Catling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[32] D.H. Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance: Fact and Fiction, 1150–1220* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[33] See especially the review of *Irony in the Medieval Romance* by Morton W. Bloomfield in *Speculum*, 57:2 (1982), 377–8.

[34] Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance*, pp. 4, 11–17; cf. Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press,

practical, asking not only how fiction arose but also how authors exploited what would nowadays be called fiction's 'affordances': the opportunities it offers for the play of invention, imagination, creativity. Taking its examples from early romances in German, Latin, French, and Anglo-Norman, the study presents the rise of romance fiction as a process of finding and expanding 'Freiräume' – spaces offering freedom for the encouragement of make-believe – in the predominantly truth-oriented traditions of medieval narrative. Thus, and in opposition to Haug's view, there was no once-and-for-all 'discovery' of fiction constituting an epochal break with factual narration;[35] instead, the argument ran, we must accustom ourselves to thinking of medieval fiction as existing in a constant relation to historical truth and as the fluctuating exploitation of opportunities presented by gaps in the factual record.

After the return to romance, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages* revisited the ground of *Medieval Listening and Reading* but with a gendered focus.[36] The purpose was to show the important role played by literate women in extending literacy from the religious life to the lay world, in domesticating it there, and in vernacularising it. Written in 'the conviction that medieval studies cannot be monoglot' (p. 1), the book draws on Latin and vernacular sources from Germany, France and England in the period 700–1500. After an introductory survey of what was understood by reading and the extent to which women had access to the range of activities that the verb *legere* comprised, the discussion moves on to identify different categories of women readers (laywomen, nuns and canonesses, recluses, semireligious women, heretics) based on the surviving evidence of book ownership, historical testimony, literary and visual sources. Finally, the book turns to the subject of women's engagement with literature: as scribes, dedicatees, sponsors and authors. One of the reviewers of *Women Readers* remarked that it would become 'a first place to return whenever future projects inspired by it are undertaken', and that another of its uses would be in 'reconceptualizing and reorienting our way of thinking about the problems explored in defining and distinguishing the multiple relationships medieval women entertained with the written word'.[37] These predictions came true: in the introduction to their monumental survey *Women and Medieval Literary Culture*, Corinne Saunders and Diane Watt give a prominent place to the groundwork laid by *Women Readers*.[38]

1990); Gregory Currie, *The Nature of Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). German-language discussions of medieval fiction typically drew on the phenomenological tradition represented by Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss and, going further back, on the Neo-Kantianism of Hans Vaihinger.

[35] Cf. Haug, *Literaturtheorie* (2nd edn), 105.

[36] D.H. Green, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[37] Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, in *Modern Philology*, 108:4 (2011), E221–4 at E221.

[38] Corinne Saunders & Diane Watt (eds), *Women and Medieval Literary Culture: From the Early Middle Ages to the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 2–3.

Already while working on *Women Readers*, Dennis envisaged a further volume intended to supplement the survey of women's involvement in literacy and literature with a more interpretative treatment of the ways in which male authors of courtly romances sought to appeal to their female audiences. *Women and Marriage in German Medieval Romance* was in the press when he died; it appeared posthumously.[39] Like its companion volume, it is to some extent a work of synthesis, made possible by wide reading over many years. The interpretations of Arthurian, Grail and Tristan romances by Thomas of Britain, Chrétien de Troyes, Eilhart von Oberge, Hartmann von Aue, Gottfried von Strassburg and Wolfram von Eschenbach are preceded by background surveys of medieval attitudes to women, marriage, and love. The interpretations themselves focus on the undermining and questioning of misogynist topoi by male authors as a device for challenging attitudes and catching the interest of women readers and listeners. The view of romance that emerges overall is, however, one of moderation: any critique of feudal and patriarchal norms offered by the authors is implicit and aimed at inculcating awareness of problems; what women in the audience made of the critique must, the argument emphasises, remain speculation. It is a book that displays the signature qualities of Dennis's scholarship – the deep familiarity with primary sources and secondary literature in several languages, the rounded judgment, the reluctance to be drawn into theorising or speculation – and the particular strengths that those qualities represent. At the time of his death, he was working on a tenth book about concepts of authorship in medieval literature. Chapters were already drafted in his small neat handwriting – he never graduated to the typewriter, let alone the computer – on foolscap-size Cambridge examination script paper: he had helped himself to several reams of the stuff in the 1960s when, walking past the examination rooms late one afternoon in the height of the Tripos season, he chanced upon the custodians unloading a fresh supply for the next day's candidates. It would have amused him to think about what the University might have to say to the irregular use of its property.

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[39] D.H. Green, *Women and Marriage in German Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).