



European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages

Ernst Robert Curtius , Willard R. Trask (Translator)

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In this "magnificent book" (T.S. Eliot), Ernst Robert Curtius (1886-1956), one of the foremost literary scholars of this century, examines the continuity of European literature from Homer to Goethe, with particular emphasis on the Latin Middle Ages. In an extensive new epilogue, drawing on hitherto unpublished material, Peter Godman, Professor of Medieval Latin at the University of Tübingen, analyzes the intellectual and political context and character of Curtius's ideas.

European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages Details

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From Reader Review European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages for online ebook

B. Hawk says

At the heart of this project, Curtius establishes three main currents: first, to demonstrate the centrality of the Middle Ages to European literature and culture; second, to establish the importance and study of medieval Latin literature; and, third, underlying the other two, to "[attack] the barbarization of education and the nationalistic frenzy... of the Nazi regime" (Curtius's "Forward to the English Translation," vii). In all of these, Curtius achieves his goals. While Latin rhetoric rests at the heart of the study--which much of the book revolving around this controlling principle--the details span a deep understanding of medieval culture, and the individual sections provide wonderful examinations still worthy of reference.

Especially relevant for all medievalists (and all readers in general) are the first two chapters, "European Literature" and "The Latin Middle Ages." In their close titular associations, these chapters unsurprisingly establish the bases for the rest of Curtius's work, discussing the culture of the Middle Ages generally, the historiography of medieval studies, and how these issues fit into the wider realm of European culture and scholarship. The following two chapters also present basic foundations, discussing "Literature and Education" and "Rhetoric." For the rest of the chapters, Curtius mainly traces specific themes throughout various literatures, both creating and demonstrating a methodology of topological study. In all of these, the most important and lasting contribution to scholarship is the synthesis of topics: Curtius draws together many threads from medieval literature to weave a great single piece of art.

Importantly, Curtius's work is both very accessible and still relevant for anyone interested in medieval studies: it is still cited and discussed, and (despite some datedness) remains a monument for both the general and particular arguments made. It is recommend it for students of European literature, medieval studies, and general interest.

David Bird says

This book is an incredibly learned one, such that one hesitates to criticize, and yet, I have basic qualms about the premise that the most important part of literature is proving that no idea is new, that there was always somebody earlier who had it.

Matthew Dambro says

The seminal work on Latin philology in the mid-20th Century. Incredibly detailed and learned survey of the use of language from late Antiquity through the 18th Century. Although done in the German style of *Geschichte*, Curtius was in fact a Francophile. During the Hitler era he was forced to move back to medieval studies to avoid the attention of the Gestapo. His thesis is somewhat dated; that all medieval literature is a continuation of Roman topos. It was at the forefront of research in the earl 1950s. My teacher, Norman Cantor, spent a great deal of energy refuting Curtius, but always granting his brilliance and new kind of historical research. This is a must read for anyone interested in European cultural history.

Will says

"As we have already indicated, no stretch of European literary history is so little known and frequented as the Latin literature of the early and high Middle Ages. And yet the historical view of Europe makes it clear that precisely this stretch occupies a key situation as the connecting link between declining Antiquity and the Western world which was so very slowly taking shape. But it is cultivated - under the name of 'medieval Latin philology' - by a very small number of specialists. In Europe there might be a dozen of them. For the rest, the Middle Ages is divided between the Catholic philosophers (i.e., the representatives of the history of dogma in the faculties of Catholic theology) and the representatives of medieval history at our universities. Both groups have to deal with manuscript sources and texts - hence with literature. The medieval Latinists, the historians of Scholasticism, and the political historians, however, have little contact with one another. The same is true of the modern philologists. These also work on the Middle Ages, but they usually remain aloof from Medieval Latin philology as they do from general literary, political, and cultural history. Thus the Middle Ages is dismembered into specialties which have no contact. There is no general discipline of the Middle Ages - a further impediment to the study of European literature. Troeltsch could rightly say in 1922: 'The culture of the Middle Ages still awaits presentation' (*Der Historismus*, 767). That is still true today. The culture of the Middle Ages cannot yet be presented, because its Latin literature has as yet been incompletely studied. In this sense the Middle Ages is still as dark today as it - wrongly - appeared to the Italian Humanists. For that reason a historical consideration of European literature must begin at its darkest point. The present study is therefore entitled *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, and we hope that this title will justify its purport with increasing evidence from chapter to chapter."

Fred R says

Like Auerbach's *Mimesis*, an impossibly learned history of Western literature from a German horrified at the continent's mid-20th century convulsions. This would have benefited from some stronger organizing principle than a basic desire to demonstrate the cultural unity and continuity of the 'nordic-mediterranean' west.

I was surprised to see that France, rather than Germany, receives the strongest criticisms for its cultural imperialism.

Isabel Su says

After read this book, believe it's rightly for me to study comparative literature.

Ak Hauck says

An almost perfect book! The breadth and width of literary history is stunning. A must read for those interested in classical and/or medieval literature. This is one I will read again and again.

sasha says

this was one of the most important books when I studied.

AlexWatson says

Good first step in the study of romance languages.

Michael Stapleton says

I don't think anyone could be educated well enough today to write a book like this.

Elizabeth Pyjov says

literature is “a reservoir of spiritual energies through which we can flavour and ennoble our present-day life”
