



Editorial

Reflections on Key Issues in Human Life: Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*, Dante's *Divina Commedia*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Michael Ende's *Momo*, and Fatih Akin's *Soul Kitchen*—Manifesto in Support of the Humanities—What Truly Matters in the End?

Albrecht Classen

Department of German Studies, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721, USA; aclassen@arizona.edu

Received: 23 September 2020; Accepted: 10 October 2020; Published: 16 October 2020



Abstract: There are available by now many arguments concerning the intrinsic and endemic value of the humanities, and both from a medievalist and a modernist perspective. Similarly, there continue to be many critics who would not mind the elimination of the humanities and argue vociferously for this goal. Every critical investigation of how to defend our field thus proves to be highly valuable, but we in the humanities must also develop specific points concerning the importance of our research that will convince both students, parents, administrators, and politicians in concrete, pragmatic terms regarding the supreme relevance of college education. Fortunately, the current COVID-19 crisis has also profiled in a dramatic fashion what proves to be of fundamental importance for human life, both past and present, reminding us of the critical importance of the humanities. An existence without virtues, a completely narcissistic or egoistical concept of life, or a society entirely predicated on materialistic interests would cut us off from our own future. This article discusses several literary works and also a modern movie in which the constant quest for meaning and relevance in our lives comes to the fore and gives us direction and understanding.

Keywords: value of the humanities; relevance; meaning of human life; spirituality; transcendence; the essence of human life; purpose; dignity; meaning; Dante Alighieri; Gottfried von Strassburg; Boccaccio; Michael Ende; Fatih Akin

1. Why the Humanities?

Let us consider once again what truly matters in human life, and then let us examine what role the humanities can really play to answer this and many related questions. In order to offer convincing arguments, I will draw from three major medieval narratives, one novel for young readers from 1973, and a movie from 2009, which all strongly suggest that a close reading of their statements offers considerable opportunities to reflect on the meaning of the human experience. As different as all these works prove to be in terms of their format and genre and date of creation, they will serve us well to convince, I hope (maybe naively), even the most ardent opponents of the humanities, such as anti-intellectuals, strong religionists, or highly right-wing conservatives, that this field of study is, after all, of fundamental importance.

Philosophers, theologians, writers, sociologists, historians, anthropologists, and many others have raised this issue already countless times, and yet the humanities do not seem to be well prepared to defend themselves, particularly in times of crises, such as the recent pandemic of COVID-19 (2020; for a critical assessment of the financial woes for most universities at least in the United States, see (Carey 2020)). Once money issues become critical within academia, as they are right now, it always

seems to be a knee-jerk reaction by the administrators to tackle the “soft” disciplines, such as literature and language departments, cutting where it might be the least “painful” and where there might be little resistance, at least from the public. Universities worldwide prefer to show pictures of their scientists young and old working in high tech labs to demonstrate that top-notch research is carried out at their institution, and they tend to ignore entirely their own libraries, research produced by literary scholars, art historians, sociologists, or historians. Of course, the humanities still exist, and at numerous universities they continue to thrive strongly, but this does not diminish our need to stand up courageously in public and present in logical, effective terms who we are and why we exist.

In terms of public media, it is hip to hold up a petri dish, to look through a microscope, telescope, spectroscope, etc., and it makes a good impression to show photos of young students wearing protective glasses while working in a lab. Advertising for a university by way of presenting individuals reading medieval manuscripts, scanning book bindings, reading hefty tomes, or transcribing texts from a published source does not seem to appeal much, especially because the modern public appears to be less and less interested in reading as such. How can the humanities then uphold its own, defend its intrinsic value, and claim a central importance for all advanced studies at the post-secondary level? When visual documents, videos, computer games, or internet databases push aside the study of books, articles, and the like, why would we then still need the humanities in the traditional sense of the word, emphasizing deep reading, critical analysis of the written or published word, deciphering text, or translating literary works (cf. [Soccavo and Soriano 2008](#); [Baron 2015](#); [Pyrhönen and Kantola 2018](#); [Hilz 2019](#); [von Arnould and Klein 2019](#))? However, counter to those alarmist perspectives, those issues pertain more to the media used by the consumer/reader (printed book versus the digital copy), and not so much to the legitimacy of humanistic studies. After all, reading digitally or analyzing images on a computer screen represents only a different technological approach to our primary material, so there is no real competition in that regard. In fact, for medievalist and early modernists, above all, the digitization of manuscripts and early modern prints has been a major boon in their research, providing them direct access to the primary sources, irrespective of where they might be located, mostly free of charge ([Bickenbach 2017](#)).

The patent response to the questions regarding the value of the humanities has regularly been to point out the intrinsic value of a B.A. in English, or history, or German not only for the intellectual and cultural-historical growth of the individual, but to emphasize how much future careers in many different areas have been built on a degree in the humanities ([Beal 2020](#)). We also hear much about cultural awareness, global citizenship, communicative and analytic skills, writing abilities, and research competence acquired through a major or minor in a humanities field (for the position taken by the College of Humanities at the University of Arizona, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSJuc0q0Te4&t=10s>). Nevertheless, the current economic hardship and the scarce material and financial conditions outside academia render many of those arguments into somewhat esoteric points that sound appealing, especially for the representatives of the humanities themselves, hence the converted, but that might fail to convince anyone on the outside who is asked to pay either taxes or tuition for the university as such. Granted, the public status of universities differs from country to country, and the North American universities continue to rank as some of the finest in the world. Nevertheless, the trend toward the corporatization of universities globally cannot be overlooked, and hence also the financial threat to their existence ([Carey 2020](#)).

The mighty dollar/euro etc., knocks down many of the usual intellectual arguments defending our field, but not everything is lost, and in fact will never be lost because we are human beings and as such are determined by our own conditions, our culture, and hence our identity and have critical needs far beyond purely material confines. In short, as I would argue, our human existence will never be completely replaced by machines, robots, or computers, unless we are willing to abandon ourselves and then disappear from the face of the earth, which might already be a possibility since we live by now in the age of the Anthropocene ([Münster 2020](#)), in which the human impact on the entire globe has an increasingly negative influence and in which the digitization and robotization is rapidly moving

forward (Bridle 2018; Precht 2020). As long as we exist as a human race, we will keep struggling with fundamental issues that cannot be addressed by the sciences, or medicine, as important as those fields certainly prove to be in material terms (Classen 2020a). Of course, all this is my hope for the future, but a dystopia might await us after all, with the robots enslaving human beings, with racism coming back with a vengeance, with misogyny returning strongly, or elitism undermining all our centuries of efforts to gain a democratic, free, just, and equal society.

There is, to be sure, no medicine or no software to cope with grief over the loss of a loved one and to dismiss our feelings altogether. We cannot write computer programs that will answer the question of why we are here on Earth and what our purpose might be while we live. Patent answers for such questions do not come automatically from literary texts, movies, or paintings, but they are, along with musical compositions, sculptures, photographs, etc., crucial gateways or mediums for a critical engagement with human needs and feelings and make possible the deep exploration of the very essence of human life. We are, as people, determined by narratives, by communication, that is, by listening and speaking, reading, and writing, and all those literary or artistic works constitute the fundamental tools and strategies analyzed and discussed within the humanities.

It is impressive, indeed, and indicative of a college degree if someone with a B.A. or M.A./Ph.D. in literature, for instance, understands how to converse about nineteenth-century Russian or French realism, is able to contextualize a Gothic cathedral in light of courtly literature, can translate or read fourteenth-century Italian literature, or demonstrates significant competence in analyzing late-twentieth-century Spanish cinema, modern Taiwanese theater, or Afghan ballads. Those are valid talking points in conversations among like-minded intellectuals across the world, but do they justify the study of the humanities as such? In a world where money assumes the central position—in all likelihood, that has actually always been the case—alas, we must be able to take the proverbial bull by its horns and offer very specific arguments that are spiffy, complex, meaningful, striking, and yet fairly easy to understand also by the non-expert regarding the relevance, importance, and concrete necessity to study literature, the visual arts, music, philosophy, and languages.

At the risk of carrying the proverbial coals to Newcastle, let us review the problematic issues and delve into them more deeply, pursuing specifically moral and ethical arguments, especially within older literature. Over the past few years, I have repeatedly outlined specific strategies and analyses of how to explain the relevance of the humanities in light of medieval poetry, for instance (e.g., Classen 2017, 2018a, 2020b). Nonetheless, the challenges remain and continue to threaten our existence because there are many times that administrators are ready to put our field on the chopping block in order to find short-term and simple solutions to many of their own problems due to financial mismanagement, lavish athletic programs, overblown bureaucratic structures on the upper levels, and the general corporatization of the university, apart from general economic downturns or the government's declining interest in supporting post-secondary education.

2. Academic Freedom

As is to be expected, administrators in turn commonly face enormous pressure by political forces that regard the university as a dangerous hotbed of radicalism, liberalism, and maybe even extremism threatening the existence of traditional society, dominated by white, male, straight, and Christian Americans. There is, by now, a long list of concrete physical attacks against universities worldwide (mass shootings, bombing, personal attacks, vandalism, arson, etc., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_attacks_related_to_post-secondary_schools), but governmental campaigns against this institution or those by individual politicians or parties also have to be taken into consideration, especially because they tend to target the humanities above all (Murakami 2020).

Mutatis mutandis, this perception is also at work in other countries, East and West. Who needs, after all, liberal, radical, critical, tolerant thinking, and who would want the young generation to develop ethical values and ideals? Would not a brutal, completely liberal society with no restraints work the best, guided by the Darwinian principle of "survival of the fittest"? All this, of course,

is meant only tongue-in-cheek. However, those who consider the university nothing but a platform for the training of future employees within the economy would not mind shrinking, if not cutting, the humanities (including the fine arts, sociology, anthropology, history, i.e., the social sciences). Although then it would also be advisable to cut mathematics, philosophy, religious studies, education, psychology, and many other fields focused on fundamental research, and soon enough the university would be restructured into a vocational or polytech School, tightly controlled by the powers that be. All this sounds almost facetious, if not absurd, but public arguments somehow teeter along those lines, short-sighted and dangerous for society at large as they certainly are.

Considering that there are ever better language translation programs online, as the argument then might go, we could also forgo foreign-language departments and rely entirely on computer software and robotics. Historical awareness, cultural sensitivity, artistic skills, or rhetorical abilities would then also go out of the window, and the remaining academic skeleton would not be recognizable any longer. Financially perhaps this would be a boon for those who regard anything coming from the government as being the root of all evil, but it would be a complete disaster for society at large, which from then on would be completely dependent on specific interest groups that certainly want to control the rest of society in order to realize their own agendas opposed to democracy, equality, justice, and freedom for all.

Countless dictators or tyrants, in all party-controlled countries (socialist or fascist), have made the greatest efforts throughout time to take away academic freedom and advanced learning and to impose strict ideological rules on research, which thus would be entirely functionalized and no longer deserve to be called research (see the current case of Hong Kong, 2020). In that regard, the humanities face the same kind of challenges as the sciences. However, in order to progress, to improve our world, or even to survive the profound dangers humanity finds itself at the current moment of the Anthropocene (cf. Farrier 2019; Andersen 2020; Münster 2020; Renn 2020), we must draw on the best of our creativity, along with our scientific abilities, and combine all this with our fundamental ethical and moral principles in order to preserve human and all natural life.

3. The Conditions of Human Existence

What is this human life all about? Material conditions matter critically, of course, so food, shelter, clothing, health, security, and protection are of central concern. However, I would venture to say, once those fundamental needs have been met, immediately other needs arise, and those are of a much more esoteric, yet still highly relevant nature. Without listing them in any systematic order, we can refer to such questions as those pertaining to the end of our lives, death, to the meaning of human existence, the experience of love, the interaction of all people within a social framework, the relationship between people and the natural environment, and the question of God's existence.

Obviously, the sciences do not address those at all, and they are also not supposed to provide relevant answers for them. If we acknowledge that human existence consists of more than just material conditions, then we can easily proceed to the next step in our argument. Human beings have feelings and desires, we experience fear, hatred, and anger and we are subject to many vices and command very few virtues. We need to know why we are alive and what might be the purpose of our existence. Philosophy and theology have always addressed these issues, but poets, artists, and composers throughout times have also fundamentally contributed to those issues, as I will outline below.

We do not need to explain in any detail that there are no hard data available, no formulas, no mechanical processes, no software programs that would help us to handle all those critical issues. Even under the most ideal circumstances, such as when money is of no relevance any longer, human beings either get bored or experience conflicts with each other. Worst, but yet very common, many people in our postmodern era feel bored, depressed, lonely, and meaningless. They live alone, maybe without a partner, without having children, without contacts with their neighbors, and without tasks or duties. Why would it then matter whether one is alive or not? When death means nothing because there would be no one to remember a person, or to grieve over his/her passing-away, then life

turns into a simple, boring, banal process determined by time, without relevance or essence. Then we would do nothing but ingest, digest, egest, process, and then pass away without any impact on this world, on other people, without having left a footprint, and without having justified our short-term existence here on earth (see the discussion of Michael Ende's *Momo* below for a literary reflection of these phenomena).

Maybe all this might be enough for some, but most people live because they aim for more and deeply rely on the hope that we are part of a greater whole, a community, or a society based on a certain set of ideals. The humanities simply focus on the additional aspect, the dimension beyond the simple materialistic part of life. However, that "little" addition is not only the dot on the 'i', but it can be identified as the *ultima ratio* of our being here on earth. Everyone who is facing impending death, either his/her own or that of a loved one, is confronted with the fundamental question, why? Who are we, why are we here, and where do we go after our death? What is the purpose, if any, of death? How do the living engage with death? There is no life without death, and there is no death without life, a beautiful but also fundamental chiasmus, which was expressed perhaps most powerfully by Dante Alighieri in his *Divina Commedia* (completed ca. 1320; see my discussion below), and the German poet Johann von Tepl in his famous debate narrative, *Der Ackermann* (trans. as *The Plowman*, ca. 1400; cf. (Classen 2014b)).

Emotional and social cohesion transforms us into people and citizens, and that cohesion requires constant study and examination because of its fragility. Of course, we would quickly fall into a dangerous maelstrom if we questioned all and everything in our lives, we would never figure out who we are and what we are supposed to do if we questioned every aspect in human existence over and over again because final answers can hardly be expected, as formulated, for instance, by the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860; Schopenhauer 1970) in many of his writings. However, if we do not include those questions in one way or the other, we would remain on the level of ignorant infants, caring only about our food intake, shelter, and clothing. Of course, all this is nothing but preaching to the converted, but humanities scholars must have the courage to face these issues on a regular basis and accept that they are challenged both from within and outside of the university system as to their own relevance, especially in times of dwindling resources.

Fortunately, we are not alone and have many allies. After all, academic disciplines both integral to the humanities and those closely related, such as religious studies, face the same challenges. On the surface, as a business or engineering major or scholar might think, religion is nothing but a matter of faith, and hence would not need to be examined in a scholarly fashion. However, religion has always played a huge role in human history and represents a major aspect of human culture. Throughout time, various religious groups have waged bitter and bloody wars against each other, and those conflicts continue to have a strong impact on us until today, both in East and West, North and South, as irrational as their respective religious sentiments might be.

Of course, we would normally argue in the modern world that religion represents a personal decision, a very intimate faith, but it has always been influenced by economic, political, and military interests as well, or those have utilized religion for their own purposes, justifying genocide, mass murder, pogroms, witch crazes, and so forth. Consequently, many scholars have formulated impressive arguments explaining the great need to study religion from an objective perspective, both on a horizontal level (comparative religion, synchronic) and in historical terms (diachronic, e.g., the history of anti-Semitism). There are virtually no cultures where religion does not play a significant role, and ignoring religion even within our seemingly secularized society would constitute a major mistake when studying human interactions, motivations, interests, feelings, sentiments, cultural needs, and perceptions of the transcendent (Hinnels 2005; Wilcox 2013; Chryssides and Gregg 2019).¹ The same

¹ See, for instance, statements by various religious studies departments at major universities in North America: <https://www.swarthmore.edu/religion/why-study-religion>; <https://www.ucdavis.edu/majors/religious-studies/what-can-i-do-with-religious-studies-major/#button>; <https://religion.arizona.edu/students/why-study-religion>; <https://religion.unc.edu/about/>

arguments apply to the study of literature, human expressions, feelings, operations, organizations, artifacts, music, and philosophy, meaning that the notion of the humanities is here defined in very broad terms (Classen 2020b).

Next, I would like to present a variety of literary and also cinematographic examples from our own time and from the Middle Ages in order to illustrate how we can pragmatically handle the confrontation with a disgruntled public and an overly cost-sensitive bureaucracy and re-situate the humanities into the center of the academic universe, where they truly belong. I have addressed these questions already before in various other studies (e.g., Classen 2012a, 2012b, 2014a, 2015, 2016, 2018a, 2018b, 2019a), and numerous colleagues have contributed to this ongoing discourse (Murdoch 2020; Münster 2020; Beal 2020), whereas here my intentions are to operate both with medieval and modern examples, including a courtly romance, a Renaissance collection of short tales, a twentieth-century novel for young readers, and a twenty-first-century movie. My critical keywords will be spirituality, transcendence, the essence of human life, purpose, dignity, and meaning. The purpose will be to illustrate in very practical terms what we can achieve when we turn to literary texts, music, movies, or other documents regularly studied in the humanities, and how the interactive engagement with the messages contained in them allows the individual student to shape, maybe even transform, his/her own identity and gain deeper insight about cultural conditions and the transcendental essence of the human being.

As I want to argue, the actually central concerns of all human existence can be contained in any of those study objects, and exposing students and the general public to them and revealing the deeper meaning hidden in their complex folds allows us to grow intellectually and spiritually, and to realize the true nature of human life. In a way, the humanities serve, we might say, as a platform for philosophical, social, ethical, and moral discourses, addressing them (in)directly and exposing our students to the ultimate questions of our existence.

4. Didactic Messages from the Past: Fables

There are not really many central points that determine culture and human identity. There is, to pick a few, love, the quest for God, the effort to cope with death, and the search for identity, meaning, and relevance. Most literary texts or cinematographic works are focused on one or a combination of those themes, often in combination. They all represent a laboratory of human actions, and they allow us to reflect on ourselves in a most critical fashion, learning about the potentials in human life, and thinking about the pitfalls, aberrations, dangers, but also opportunities and ideals. After all, we would have to admit, most people past and present have tended to display more vices than virtues because of our inborn physical weaknesses and failures as human beings.

Authors of fable literature, from Aesop to Avianus, the Anonymous Neveleti (Gualterus Anglicus?), Marie de France, Ulrich Boner(ius), Jean de la Fontaine, Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, John Gay, Lorenzo Pignotti, Félix María de Samaniego, Ignacy Krasicki, and James Thurber have consequently addressed those problems, mostly in a didactic-facetious manner, entertaining and teaching their audiences at the same time, closely following the Horatian model of *delectare et prodesse* (<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fabel>, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fable>). Even though this genre does not seem to enjoy a noteworthy popularity today, it powerfully illustrates what a critical engagement with those texts might achieve even among modern-day readers. The didactic messages are clearly formulated, but because of the use of animal figures, the direct criticism of human shortcomings and frailty is carefully and subtly blunted and mostly expressed only in indirect terms (see, e.g., Grubmüller 1977; Rourke 2011; Braccini 2018; Laid 2020, etc.). The medieval Church

why-study-religion/; <https://bulletin-archive.hds.harvard.edu/articles/summerautumn2012/why-study-religion-twenty-first-century>; etc. Religion has also been studied intensively by modern-day sociologists and political scientists, such as Karl Marx, Émile Durheim and Max Weber; see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology_of_religion#Max_Weber.

had already recognized and identified the so-called seven deadly sins, a list that continues to hold completely true today, as we notice both in politics and in personal interactions, in business and the law. In the humanities, those legal, social, moral, and ethical issues are constantly addressed, though mostly clad in sophisticated literary terms, which invite the larger audience to engage with them and confront them head-on, without any need of consulting with lawyers, theologians, psychologists, or counselors.

Both the *lais* by the famous Anglo-Norman poet Marie de France (ca. 1170–1200) and the *mæren* by the Middle High German poet Heinrich Kaufringer (fl. ca. 1400) serve as exceedingly impressive examples because their literary works easily provide an ideal narrative framework for the discursive exploration of common conflicts among people and universal troubles and strife (Classen 2019b). We are about to have available in print the English translation of the fables by the Swiss-German Dominican priest Ulrich Bonerius, his *Gemstone* (ca. 1350), which will give us deep insights into late medieval mentality, psychology, ethics, morality, and philosophy as discussed in his one hundred fables (Classen 2020c).

5. The Theme of Love: Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* (ca. 1210)

In the fifth canto of Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia* (completed ca. 1320), the pilgrim-protagonist encounters, while wandering through *Inferno*, two souls that fly through the air and can never come to a rest as a punishment for their sins. These are Paolo and Francesca, who fell in love with each other when they read the famous romance of *Lancelot* and were thus imbued with ardent feelings of love for each other: "Time and again our eyes were brought together/by the book we read; our faces flushed and paled./To the moment of one line alone we yielded" (Dante 1984; Canto V, vv. 130–32). This is the same canto where Dante encounters other famous lovers, such as Semiramis, Cleopatra, and Dido, then Achilles, Paris, and Tristan, and although he places them all in hell, the pilgrim-narrator feels so much empathy particularly for Paolo and Francesca's suffering down there as the result of their ardent love, which made them commit adultery, that he swoons and falls to the ground (see, for instance, Masciandaro 2016, ch. III). Poets and artists throughout time have responded with great enthusiasm to this short but powerful scene where we learn of the punishment of extramarital love and yet also empathize, along with Dante, with the two figures who were seduced by reading the highly erotic account about Lancelot and Guinevere (Musa, trans., in Dante 1984, pp. 117–19).

What does love do to people? What catastrophes emerge when society is opposed to their strong feelings for each other, maybe outside of the bonds of marriage? How do people respond to love and deep passion, even in face of the threat of death? What is love, and how does this force impact people? The entire Canto is determined by these questions, as illustrated by the presence of the other famous lovers, and despite being located in hell, all these lovers prove to be the central reference points in the entire history of love, at least in the western tradition. Although the poet casts them here in a rather negative light, there is no doubt that their experiences, their suffering from love, constitute the foundation and essence of the entire discourse on this feeling, of course, which certainly finds its continuation until today—in a somewhat extreme form encapsulated by Denis de Rougemont (*L'Amour et l'Occident* 1939, revised 1956 and 1972; cf. the contributions to Corbellari and Stenger 2019) and C. S. Lewis (*The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* 1936; cf. Murdoch 2020).

Certainly, we find Paolo and Francesca stuck in hell, but Dante cannot repress his desire to talk to them "with all my heart" (v. 73), and the consequent revelation about their personal experience has struck a deep chord in western art and literature until today—see the painting by Dante Gabriel Rossetti from 1855, the symphony *Francesca da Rimini* by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1876), or the sculpture "The Kiss" by Auguste Rodin (1880; [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Der_Kuss_\(Rodin\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Der_Kuss_(Rodin))), (for further examples of the modern history of reception, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francesca_da_Rimini_\(disambiguation\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francesca_da_Rimini_(disambiguation))). The love affair described here resulted in blood and pain (v. 90), but it was also, and continues to be, the most powerful sensation human beings can experience, "Love, that excuses no one loved from loving;/seized me so strongly with delight in him/that, as you see, he never leaves my side" (vv. 103–105). Does Dante condemn those lovers? In a specific way, yes, certainly, otherwise he would

not encounter them in hell. However, he created a timeless literary monument for them, evoking our pity, our sympathy, and our intrigue with their experience because love is such a universal force.

The other, actually earlier, example that deserves to be included here is Gottfried von Strassburg's famous *Tristan and Isolde* romance from ca. 1210 (von Strassburg [1960] 1967). Just as in the case of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, both scholars and general readers have responded with great enthusiasm to this text, and there is a rich body of research focused on this Middle High German version of the *Tristan* story (Chinca 1997), which continues to enjoy a high reputation even among modern readers, for which there are many good reasons (see, e.g., Hasty 2003). For our purposes here, let us focus on Gottfried's prologue only, where he identifies what he intends to achieve with his work. As he spells it out explicitly, his story represents an account about love that "will make love lovable, ennoble the mind, fortify constancy, and enrich their lives" (p. 43). As tragic as the outcome of the love story first of Tristan's parents, Blanche-flor and Rivalin, and then of himself and the Irish princess Isolde proves to be—Gottfried leaves his text (deliberately?) as a fragment, maybe because a realistic or pragmatic solution for this love affair proves to be impossible (Classen 1995)—we are invited to ingest and appreciate this account and let it transform our own selves into noble lovers (Jaeger 1999): "Affection, loyalty, constancy, honour, and many good things besides, never endear themselves anywhere so much as when someone tells a love-tale or mourns love's tender grief" (p. 43). In other words, learning about the suffering and joys of other lovers can bring about the ennobling of oneself.

The dialectics addressed here are of greatest significance and have timeless relevance, which explains in many ways the universal appeal of love as a literary theme throughout the ages and across the cultures, whether we think of the *Tale of Genji* (early eleventh century), Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809), Jane Austin's *Emma* (1815), the love story between Hans Castorp and Madam Chauchat in Thomas Mann's Noble Prize-winning novel *The Magic Mountain* (1924), or D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). Poets such as Gottfried von Strassburg or Marie de France (ca. 1200) possessed a deep understanding of the human psyche and presented their lovers as being on a quest for their self-fulfillment in their emotional relationship with the partner. Modern literature from all over the world is equally filled with love stories because the desire for erotic happiness easily proves to be one of the fundamental needs in human life, while the readers' lives tend to be less than ideal, frustrating, or, even worse, boring and irrelevant.

However, we must, together with Gottfried, distinguish carefully between banal, trivial, and mundane accounts of love relationships that regularly conclude with a happy end after some trials and tribulations, and those accounts where the entire human existence is at stake, forcing us as listeners/readers to take a stance and either to embrace the lovers as noble characters, or to turn away from love altogether because its dialectic forces threaten to destroy the protagonists and hence also the audience. As Gottfried emphasizes:

In love, joy and sorrow ever went hand in hand! With them we must win praise and honour or come to nothing without them! If the two of whom this love-story tells had not endured sorrow for the sake of joy, love's pain for its ecstasy within one heart, their name and history would never have brought such rapture so so many noble spirits (p. 44).

Of course, most of us live in rather ordinary conditions, far removed from the intensity of feelings experienced by Tristan and Isolde. Consequently, there are hardly any love stories that move along traditional tracks, with the two persons falling in love, dating each other, marrying, having children, and living a more or less happy life. Literature (or the visual arts, music, sculpture, etc.) serves as a basis upon which the reader is invited to explore the extremes of human existence, especially in terms of love, where the topic of love is placed into a unique context of life and death. Tristan and Isolde suffered deeply, as Gottfried alerts us, outlining already here in the prologue the essential features of the subsequent narrative, but this very suffering prompts the audience to comprehend and appreciate the meaning of the critical values of all human life: loyalty, honor, dedication, passion, readiness to die for the loved partner. Love injects nobility into the human heart, and love stories emerge as the critical

catalyst to transform the readers/listeners who have thus an opportunity to acquire the same nobility because, as the poet states most famously:

This is bread to all noble hearts. With this their death lives on. We read their life, we read their death, and to us it is sweet as bread.

Their life, their death are our bread. Thus lives their life, thus lives their death. Thus they live still and yet are dead, and their death is the bread of the living (p. 44).

The poet works here with the metaphor of the sourdough bread, which rises in the baking process only because of the yeast contained in the dough. This yeast, however, is the love experience, the suffering for love, and the joy of the lovers when they can be together. Thus, when we read this love-story, we ingest that bread, and the yeast in the text transforms us as the audience, instilling new energy of nobility and passion in us, as Gottfried outlines insofar as Tristan and Isolde's "life, their death, their joy, their sorrow" (p. 44) have a transformative power, as any good love story does. As much as this account deeply challenged the traditional morality and social order of feudal and aristocratic society, it enjoyed universal esteem far into the sixteenth century and then once again since its rediscovery in the late eighteenth century (first edition in 1785 by Christian Heinrich Myller; cf. Tomasek 2007, pp. 60–66; broadly, see Dallapiazza 2003; cf. Huber [2000] 2013).

We cannot forget that Gottfried had a very lofty goal in mind when he created his version of *Tristan and Isolde*. In the prologue, he specifically addresses those among his audience who can sustain sorrow and joy in their hearts and are thus empowered to develop a spiritual form of nobility, "I have another world in mind which together in one heart bears its bitter-sweet, its dear sorrow, its heart's joy, its love's pain, its dear life, its sorrowful death, its dear death, its sorrowful life" (p. 42). These dialectics of love become then the foundation upon which a noble heart can thrive, and once there exists this new form of spiritual nobility, true love can spring forth in the readers/listeners of this central medieval romance, "The more a lover's passion burns in its furnace of desire, the more ardently will he love. This sorrow is so full of joy, this ill is so inspiring that, having once been heartened by it, no noble heart will forgo it" (p. 42).

Both Gottfried von Strassburg and Dante Alighieri can thus be invoked as powerful witnesses for the universal and timeless value of true love because it transforms the individual into a member of a noble society, not in political or social terms, but as a community of those who can sustain the dialectics of love in their hearts and grow in character and spirituality when they read or hear these accounts. However, in both cases we also note the deep trouble created by this love, which undermines social stability, personal happiness, and creates also much hardship on those who are forcefully left out (the marriage partners).

6. Toleration, If not Even Tolerance

Love and eroticism also play a huge in the famous collection of prose stories, the *Decameron* (ca. 1350) by the Italian poet Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375), but my interest here rests on a very different kind of topic covered in the third story told on the first day. Already in the second story, we hear of a close friendship between a Christian (Jehannot de Chevigny) and a Jewish merchant (Abraham) in Paris. The former wants his friend to convert but does not achieve anything for a long time, which does not harm their good relationship. Finally, the Jew is ready to consider such a possible conversion but insists that he first must visit the Holy See and examine for himself how the Christian leadership is doing. Jehannot now abandons all hope to achieve his goal, the salvation of Abraham's soul, because he knows only too well of the decadence of the papal court. Nevertheless, Abraham goes on his journey, returns, and is, surprisingly, then ready to accept the Christian faith. He had clearly observed, as he relates, the total corruption and the dominance of vice everywhere in Rome, and this is contrary to all of their proclaimed religious, ethical, and moral ideals. However, as he then comments, Christianity is growing despite the best efforts of the pope and all other ecclesiastics to

destroy the Christian church, meaning that the representatives do not necessarily reflect the truth or deception of their religion. Consequently, he now believes that Christianity “has the Holy Ghost as its foundation and support” (Boccaccio [1972] 1995, p. 41), so he himself is convinced that he must convert. Opposition to Jews—not anti-Judaism, and also not anti-Semitism—is still at play here, but the narrator has no hesitation to portray both men as upright and virtuous individuals, as good friends who respect each other and who both do well as merchants, and this is well before Abraham decides to consider conversion to Christianity (Tarantino 2017; Classen 2018b).

More importantly, in the third story told on the first day, Boccaccio relates a most powerful example of how toleration, if not tolerance, could be practiced—a topic of central importance certainly today, but explored already in many different fashions during the high and late Middle Ages (Classen 2018b). Here, the Sultan Saladin tries to extort a large amount of money from the Jew Melchizedek, but since he knows that the latter is very miserly and would not grant a credit, and since he does not want to use force, he poses a most dangerous question regarding which of the three world religions, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, would be the only true one.

Already Melchizedek’s decision to respond not directly, but by way of telling a story, indicates clearly how much literature in and by itself has always served exceedingly well to explore fundamental issues pertaining to God, death, truth, love, and identity—such as the parables told by Christ in the New Testament (Grün 2019; Poorthuis and Ottenheim 2019). Humans require narratives, in virtually every life condition, and the more we focus on this phenomenon, the better people’s interaction and cooperation function. This is also the case in this story by Boccaccio, especially after the Jew has elaborated his account about the three rings. Although Melchizedek was characterized as a miser, and Saladin as a dangerous ruler, both at the end, deeply influenced by the short account, find a good compromise and can solve the conflict. The Jew freely grants a huge loan to the Sultan, and the latter returns the loan when he has the means available again, and rewards him immensely for his help, “he showered magnificent gifts upon him, made him his lifelong friend, and maintained him at his court in a state of importance and honor” (p. 44). The difference between Islam and Judaism hence does not matter at all, and instead, Saladin publicly acknowledges Melchizedek as a wise and worthy man whom he wants to have as his friend, disregarding the previous power differential.

The parable itself, however, which scholarship has discussed already many times, addresses the critical question in a most convincing fashion, revealing to the Sultan all at once that the question itself was foolish because a religion is a matter of personal preference and tradition. The Jew simply tells the story of a father who has one heirloom that all his predecessors had handed down to their favorite or only son as a sign of complete authority over all the family goods. Now, however, there is a father who loves his three sons equally, and shortly before his death he has a goldsmith create two perfect duplicates, which makes it impossible to decide which one is the authentic ring. As Melchizedek then concludes: “the same applies to the three laws which God the Father granted to His three peoples, and which formed the subject of your inquiry . . . But as with the rings, the question as to which of them is right remains in abeyance” (p. 44).

In short, there is no way of determining which is the absolutely true and only religion by means of logic, scientific methods, or philosophical ruminations. The Jew portrays God as a kind father who loves all of his sons (and daughters) and enjoys their difference and treats them all equally. Hence, there should not be any debate about religion because there cannot be any definite, ultimate answer insofar as this is a very personal matter. Several hundred years later, the German playwright Gotthold Ephraim Lessing picked up Boccaccio’s story and translated it into the famous play *Nathan der Weise* (Nathan the Wise, appeared in 1779; cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nathan_the_Wise). In essence, all the same elements appear here as well, except that at the end, the judge presiding over this case remembers the particular property of the true ring—if there ever was one—that is, that the one who wears it would be loved by people. The debate hence should be postponed by a thousand years until another judge could serve (God), who would then be able to tell which of the three sons holds the true ring, meaning that the true religion would be determined by love, and not by power, influence,

money, or force (Classen 2018b, pp. 2–10, 109–36). To be sure, we find those values to be enshrined in the Christian teaching, but Lessing has a Jew not only talking about them, but also practicing them in the way he overcomes hatred for the loss of his family and adopts a Christian orphan girl.

Boccaccio also considered a case of close friendship between a Christian nobleman and the Sultan Saladin in the ninth story of the tenth day, which involves a crusade. However, the protagonist, Messer Torello, is on the losing side, and is taken prisoner with many of his companions, all of them becoming slaves. However, before the war campaign, Saladin had toured the Christian West in order to spy on the military preparedness of his enemies and had thus met Torello by chance. The latter had immediately welcomed the stranger and his companions and treated them in a virtually princely fashion in recognition of their noble characters and worthiness, although he did not know anything about them. Later, serving Saladin as one of his slaves, he is quickly promoted to handle the Sultan's falcons, an art that only noblemen were trained to do. Eventually, however, Saladin recognizes him, immediately frees him, and both strike a close friendship. Most importantly, he provides his own magician's help to transport Torello back home in a flash, just in time to prevent another man from marrying his wife, and both men continue their friendship over the long distance. Religious differences obviously do not matter here, and we face here a fascinating opportunity to study, within a literary context, a case of toleration, if not tolerance.

If we agree that this represents an important foundation for the constructive, if not harmonious, interaction of peoples from different races, religions, and cultural systems, then the critical study of these three stories in Boccaccio's *Decameron* provides a highly meaningful gateway for reflections, discussions, and responses, particularly because we face a historical filter of ca. 650 years and can thus avoid political strife and conflict while searching for pragmatic ways of improved communication and cohabitation in an ever-shrinking world of the early twenty-first century. Of course, Boccaccio still predicated his story on the sharp conflict between Muslims and Christians as expressed by the crusade, but on a personal level, both at the beginning and at the end of the account, religion does not matter at all, whereas the noble character of all the protagonists assumes central importance. The study of Boccaccio's *Decameron* thus facilitates the in-depth analysis of toleration, if not tolerance in the modern sense of the word, and prepares the new generation of readers for a world where religious differences can be moved aside to make room for mutual respect and friendship on an individual level.

7. Time, Identity, and Meaning

From here, I would like to move to a rather unusual literary example that will allow us to explain in greater depth how important a humanistically determined study program can and should be because it can contribute so essentially to a profound understanding of oneself, one's society, and the physical framework we all live in, especially the meaning of time and our handling of this most esoteric phenomenon. Again, we face here an issue that has been studied throughout history by representatives of many different disciplines, including physics, chemistry, mathematics, astronomy, but then also theology, biology, and the arts. Questions have been asked pertaining to the essence of time, its correlation to material conditions and space, its experience, and its impact on sensuous beings. Time has been measured over thousands of years with many different instruments and by means of various concepts, but its full understanding simply eludes our intellectual grasp. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger even went so far as to identify time as the lived experience, perceiving time as a reflection of all being (Heidegger [1927] 1962, p. 425; cf. also Dowden 2018).

The essential issue was captured surprisingly and intriguingly well by a modern book for young readers, the novel *Momo: Die seltsame Geschichte von den Zeit-Dieben und von dem Kind, das den Menschen die gestohlene Zeit zurückbrachte* (1973), written by Michael Ende (1929–1995; (Ende 1973); for an online version of this novel in the original German, see (https://aclassen.faculty.arizona.edu/sites/aclassen.faculty.arizona.edu/files/Ende.Momo_.pdf); for the English translation by J. Maxwell Brownjohn, 2005–2008, see <http://www.kkoworld.com/kitablar/mixael-ende-momo-kko-eng.pdf>). It has been translated into many different languages, has been rendered into radio programs, operas, and movies,

and continues to offer profound insights into the meaning of time for people all over the world, irrespective of their cultural background. As simple as the plot appears to be, being designed primarily for younger readers, a close examination easily reveals the extent to which the author succeeded in addressing many of the critical issues concerning human life, especially in our postmodern world in which everything seems to be determined by counting, money, time management, work achievements, personal accomplishments, success, rewards, and productivity.

In essence, the agents of a time bank, the gentlemen with the grey suits, convince ever more people to save time and to deposit that time in their bank. The people do not realize this consciously, but one after the other person changes his/her lifestyle and thus becomes a slave of time pressure, which drives everyone away from what truly matters in our existence. Momo, by contrast, is a young, homeless girl who has the unique ability to listen in a profound manner to everyone, and thus she succeeds in making many friends, solving many conflicts, and bringing basic joy and harmony to all people she is in contact with. She fully embraces her own time and is not subject to any constraints, which makes her into a dangerous enemy who unintentionally threatens the world of the time operatives in their completely grey appearance.

The novel actually addresses many troublesome issues in modern life, far beyond the concern about time and time management in an efficient manner. In order to save time (and money), as we hear, architects build less and less attractive houses, and the quality of the new projects in the suburbs is increasingly reduced to save money. Artists become commercialized and lose their authentic voice or identity. The relationship between children and their parents is critically examined, especially because the latter no longer have the necessary quality time to spend with their children. The author also brings to the table the central importance of human imagination and fantasy, which are constantly in danger of being lost because of the universal time-saving plans.

Most intriguingly, of course, the very nature of time is being explored, without the novel ultimately offering a full answer because it would require extensive philosophical and physical investigations beyond the literary framework. However, Momo is ultimately invited in by Master Hora, who administers all time and assigns it to people, and from his teaching she gains at least an inkling of what time might really be. Hora (hour in Latin) points out to her: "At certain junctures in the course of existence, unique moments occur when everyone and everything, even the most distant stars, combine to bring about something that could not have happened before and will never happen again" (online).

Insofar as Momo knows how to listen, not only to people but also to nature and to the universe, she is graced with a preliminary understanding of time as a kind of music that determines all life through its accords and inner harmony. In her conversation with Hora, she learns the basics of this secret, once death has occurred, he tells her, "you will retrace your steps through time, through all the days and nights, months and years of your life, until you go out through the great, round, silver gate you entered by." However, time itself, he explains, is "[t]he home of the music you've sometimes faintly heard in the distance, but by then you'll be part of it. You yourself will be a note in its mighty harmonies."

Watching the pond with a humongous pendulum swinging back and forth, helping indescribably beautiful flowers to emerge, bloom, and fade, Momo suddenly realizes that the entire universe is in motion, creating a faint but discernible music that speaks to her directly: "The sun and moon and planets and stars were telling her their own, true names, and their names signified what they did and how they all combined to make each hour-lily flower and fade in turn."

Surprisingly, as Hora later explains to her, the words that she had heard, or rather the music, were all addressed only to her because the location was really her own heart, therefore she was able, with the Master's help, to listen to herself and understand the words in her soul. Certainly, a most esoteric, but deeply meaningful poetic image. As much as Ende seems to project nothing but fantasy, so much does the entire concept of time as music and language spoken in one's heart or soul promise to make more sense of all existence, and this also from a philosophical perspective (Alonso 2016; Ewers 2018).

The novel concludes, perhaps a bit too conveniently and unrealistically, with a victory over the gentlemen in grey suits, who disappear completely, which liberates all the time flowers that they had stolen from people. In other words, time returns to human life, and people embrace their own existence as something that they must enjoy and use to the best of their abilities, which implies acceptance of childhood, play, and happiness once again. As we learn at the end:

Doctors, too, had time to devote themselves properly to their patients, and workers of all kinds did their jobs with pride and loving care, now that they were no longer expected to turn out as much work as possible in the shortest possible time. They could take as much time as they needed and wanted, because from now on there was enough time for everyone. (Ende 1973, n.p.)

Although “only” a novel for young readers, Michael Ende’s *Momo* thus proves to be a profound reflection of many universal problems concerning humankind, such as the meaning of time, communication, the appreciation of childhood, individual happiness, pride in one’s work, authenticity, the meaning of art, community, and identity.

8. Food, Selfhood, and Culture

To round off these reflections, we can also turn to a modern movie, “Soul Kitchen” from 2009 by the German-Turkish film director, screenwriter, and producer Fatih Akin (Hake 2012; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatih_Akin), which actually pursues very much the same goals as in all previously discussed examples, though here focusing on food, eating, and culture. Both cooking and eating have always constituted essential components of culture throughout time, and there are not only many bookshelves filled with cookbooks, but also many literary treatments of these topics (for medieval examples, see Weiss Adamson 2004; Schubert 2006; Pychlau-Ezli 2018; for modern and global perspectives, see Crowther 2018; Counihan et al. 2019). One of the best-known movies addressing food from a cultural perspective is “Como Agua Para Chocolate” by the Mexican movie director Alfonso Arau from 1992 ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Like_Water_for_Chocolate_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Like_Water_for_Chocolate_(film))), based on the eponymous novel by Laura Esquivel (1989).

In “Soul Kitchen,” the German-Greek Zinos runs a shabby restaurant in a remote area of Hamburg, which suddenly becomes the target of an unscrupulous developer, his former schoolmate Thomas Neumann, who eventually swindles Zinos out of his property, but who is subsequently caught and imprisoned because of tax fraud. The movie is filled with many subplots involving various love relationships, but there is also a focus on the restaurant itself, which transforms, once Zinos has hired the Gypsy chef Shayn, unexpectedly from serving rather poor-quality food to a lower-middle-class clientele to a restaurant offering a haute-cuisine gourmet menu. We see Zinos at the beginning slapping potato salad on a plate and cooking French fries, all in a rather unappetizing and highly unhealthy, if not unhygienic manner. At the end of the movie, however, Zinos has learned from Shayn how to prepare a delicious, highly refined meal to which he has invited his new girlfriend, the Turkish-German Anna, who had previously helped him find a mysterious and brutal chiropractor, who heals his herniated disc through a torturous method ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soul_Kitchen_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soul_Kitchen_(film))). Healing of body and soul thus emerges as the central theme of the movie.

In the final scene, Zinos is cooking for himself and his new love, and he prepares the food in a caring, methodological, knowledgeable, and highly sensuous new way, as Shayn has taught him. The restaurant is closed when Anna arrives because Zinos wants to spend time with her all by themselves. It is obvious, as she, and we as spectators along with her, realizes peeking through the windows, that this restaurant, from the start called “Soul Kitchen”, has finally reached its own destiny. This is a restaurant where food is prepared and served both for the body and the soul. In the early stage, Zinos owned nothing but a mediocre, shallow, meaningless place where people simply consumed their meals and then left again without any concerns. At the end, the food that Zinos now knows how to cook has cultural value and meaning (Lillge 2008). Though the further developments

can only be imagined, it is evident that the soul has entered this place; time, space, culture, and identity have come together, and there is considerable optimism that this mutually shared festive meal during the Christmas season will help Zinos and Anna to form a couple, him of Greek, her of Turkish origin, and both having been born and living in Germany. "Soul Kitchen" thus concludes with a perspective toward a new form of sociability where the individual finds a respectable place for him/herself, as the old Greek-German sailor Sokrates learns for himself because he cannot pay the rent, but is allowed to stay due to the pure kindness of Zinos, by that time deeply transformed and having gained a sense of enlightenment.

9. The Humanities, Once again, and Now with a Punch

All the literary and cinematographic examples discussed here at first sight seem to be far apart from each other, in chronological and generic terms, and yet, the hermeneutic bridge connecting them consists of the significant, virtually parallel messages contained in all of them, appealing to their audiences in a striking manner, asking for the full attention because they all address fundamental human concerns and offer, maybe not a perfect solution, but certainly a framework for the critical discussion of those essential aspects that make human life worth living.

They all prove to be intimately interconnected with each other since the search for love proves to be basically a search for God, and in that process, the individual realizes that we are all part of human society and ought to respect and appreciate each other as far as possible. There are certainly big differences among people, but as Gottfried, Dante, Boccaccio, Ende, and Akin have expressed in a convincing fashion, society will improve, the individual will find him/herself, and happiness and love are possible, after all, when we recognize ourselves as being part of the larger universe. Time and space make possible the evolution of love, and love itself overcomes cultural, religious, political, and economic barriers and differences.

We probably would have to admit that all our examples reflect a certain sense of utopia, of hope for a future ideal (Tomasek 1985), but that is, in essence, what the humanities really strive for. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously formulated in his sermon on 28 August 1963, which could be the perfect motto for our field, "I have a dream." As Gottfried and Dante elucidated so eloquently and convincingly, those who can read and engage with texts are in danger of being enraptured, but this would not be the worst outcome at all. The experience with Boccaccio and Ende proves that we as human beings live in a huge laboratory, our world, and we all struggle to achieve the impossible, otherwise, we would not exist and dream.

As Ende and Akin underscore, one of the major strategies to recover or protect the human in humanity consists of making time slow down and embracing it as a unique gift, which makes it possible for every individual to recover, preserve, or develop one's identity and culture. Then, the moment will come when friends who follow different religions (Boccaccio) acknowledge this difference not as a threat, but as a productive challenge. Race and gender should disappear as hermeneutic categories differentiating people in political and economic terms, often in a denigrating, marginalizing, and dominating fashion in favor of white, male, and Eurocentrism. Most importantly, to conclude these reflections, once the true reading has begun, there is the enormous opportunity to join the community of those who possess a noble heart (Gottfried). It is this nobility of the mind and soul that the humanities aspire to, a fundamental concept expressed many times particularly in medieval literature. Consequently, separating and categorizing medieval and modern literature/movies etc., from each other serves only pragmatic, certainly not heuristic, purposes, and the more openly we approach the entire history of literature—or the arts—the more will we be graced with nuggets of wisdom that can serve us in our endeavor to shape our current and future life (Murdoch 2020). Humanities face, after all, urgent challenges resulting from the fact that we now live in the Anthropocene, which can be met constructively only if everyone contributes to the growth of our society and works toward the improvement of our world, both in material and in spiritual terms. Graduates from programs in the humanities, or all those willing to engage with the primary material examined in this field,

hence promise to become the true leaders in our global future when major decisions will have to be made, which only individuals with strong ethics, a deep sense of cultural history, and philosophical awareness can handle effectively. Those of us who teach and research in the humanities are at the forefront of laying the foundation for those upcoming leaders.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: I would like to express my gratitude to Jane Beal (University of La Verne, CA) and Tom Willard (University of Arizona) for their valuable comments on this paper.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Alonso, Maria Luisa. 2016. Michael Ende's Philosophy of Death, Life, and Time. In *Global Perspectives on Death in Children's Literature*. Edited by Lesley D. Clement. Children's Literature and Culture, 104. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 206–18.
- Andersen, Gregers. 2020. *Climate Fiction and Cultural Analysis: A New Perspective on Life in the Anthropocene*. Routledge Environmental Literature, Culture and Media. London and New York: Routledge.
- Baron, Naomi S. 2015. *Words Onscreen: The Fate of Reading in a Digital World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Beal, Jane. 2020. The Value of the English Major Today. *Humanities* 9: 77. [CrossRef]
- Bickenbach, Matthias. 2017. *Buch oder Bildschirm? Versuch über die Zukunft des Lesens*. Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag.
- Boccaccio, Giovanni. 1995. *The Decameron*, 2nd ed. Edited and translated by G. H. McWilliam. London: Penguin. First published 1972.
- Braccini, Tommaso. 2018. *Lupus in fabula: Fiabe, leggende e barzellette in Grecia e a Roma*. Rome: Carocci editore.
- Bridle, James. 2018. *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future*. London: Verso.
- Carey, Kevin. 2020. How to Save Higher Education: A New Deal for America's Sinking Colleges. *Washington Monthly*. September/October. Available online: https://washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/september-october-2020/how-to-save-higher-education/?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200917&instance_id=22266&nl=the-morning®i_id=50803666§ion_index=1§ion_name=big_story&segment_id=38344&te=1&user_id=c3ead5c405cd9f68163e00a00109c19b (accessed on 15 October 2020).
- Chinca, Mark. 1997. *Gottfried von Strassburg: Tristan*. Landmarks of World Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chryssides, George D., and Stephen E. Gregg, eds. 2019. *The Insider/Outsider Debate: New Perspectives in the Study of Religion*. Sheffield and Bristol: Equinox Publishing.
- Classen, Albrecht. 1995. Der Text der nie enden will. Poetologische Überlegungen zu fragmentarischen Strukturen in mittelalterlichen und modernen Texten. In *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik, Heft 99: Anfang und Ende*. Edited by Wolfgang Haubrichs. Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, pp. 83–113.
- Classen, Albrecht. 2012a. The Role of the Humanities Past and Present: Future Perspectives Based on Ancient Ideas: Reflections by a Medievalist. *Alfinge: Revista de Filología* 24: 9–30.
- Classen, Albrecht. 2012b. Humanities—To Be or Not To Be, That Is the Question. *Humanities* 1: 54–61. [CrossRef]
- Classen, Albrecht. 2014a. The Challenges of the Humanities, Past, Present, and Future: Why the Middle Ages Mean So Much for Us Today and Tomorrow. *Humanities* 3: 1–18. [CrossRef]
- Classen, Albrecht. 2014b. Mental and Physical Health, Spirituality and Religion in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: Medieval Answers for Our Future? With Special Emphasis on Spiritual Healing Through Narratives of Mourning: Johannes of Tepl and Christine de Pizan. In *Mental Health, Spirituality, and Religion in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*. Edited by Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 15. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 1–154.
- Classen, Albrecht. 2015. Medieval Studies within German Studies: *The Nibelungenlied* and Hartmann von Aue's *Der arme Heinrich*. In *Taking Stock of German Studies in the United States: The New Millennium*. Edited by Rachel Halverston and Carol Anne Costabile Heming. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture. Rochester: Camden House, pp. 52–67.
- Classen, Albrecht. 2016. The Meaning of Literature and Literature as Meaning—A Productive Challenge of Modern Times from the Middle Ages. *Humanities* 5: 24. [CrossRef]

- Classen, Albrecht. 2017. The Challenges of the Humanities, Past, Present, and Future: Why the middle Ages Mean So Much for Us Today and Tomorrow. *Thallosis* 2: 191–217.
- Classen, Albrecht. 2018a. The Human Quest for Happiness and Meaning: Old and New Perspectives: Religious, Philosophical, and Literary Reflections from the Past as a Platform for Our Future: St. Augustine, Boethius, and Gautier de Coincy. *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 5: 179–206.
- Classen, Albrecht. 2018b. *Toleration and Tolerance in Medieval and Early Modern European Literature*. Routledge Studies in Medieval Literature and Culture, 8. New York and London: Routledge.
- Classen, Albrecht. 2019a. The Principles of Honor, Virtue, Leadership, and Ethics: Medieval Epics Speak Out against the Political Malaise in the Twenty-First Century. *The Nibelungenlied and El Poema de Mío Cid. Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 79: 388–409. [CrossRef]
- Classen, Albrecht. 2019b. Das Paradox der widersprüchlichen Urteilsprechung und Weltwahrnehmung: Göttliches vs. menschliches Recht in Heinrich Kaufringers ‘Die unschuldige Mörderin’—mit paneuropäischen Ausblicken und einer neuen Quellenspur (‘La femme du roi de Portugal’). *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* CXX.II: 7–28.
- Classen, Albrecht. 2020a. The Amazon Rainforest of Pre-Modern Literature: Ethics, Values, and Ideals from the Past for our Future. With a Focus on Aristotle and Heinrich Kaufringer. *Humanities* 9: 4.
- Classen, Albrecht. 2020b. What is *Humanities Open Access* all about? Innovative Perspectives and Inclusivity as the Platform for Novel Approaches in Humanities Research. *Humanities* 9: 55. [CrossRef]
- Classen, Albrecht. 2020c. *The Fables of Ulrich Bonerius (ca. 1350): Masterwork of Late Medieval Didactic Literature*. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Corbellari, Alain, and Nicolas Stenger, eds. 2019. *Denis de Rougemont: Entre littérature, théologie et politique*. Lausanne: Université de Lausanne, Revue Études de lettres.
- Counihan, Carole, Penny Van Esterik, and Alice Julier, eds. 2019. *Food and Culture: A Reader*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Crowther, Gillian. 2018. *Eating Culture: An Anthropological Guide to Food*. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press.
- Dallapiazza, Michael, ed. 2003. *Tristano e Isotta: La fortuna di un mito europeo*. Quaderni di Hesperides. Serie Manuali, 1. Trieste: Edizione Parnaso.
- Dante, Alighieri. 1984. *The Divine Comedy. Vol. I: Inferno*. Translated by Mark Musa. London: Penguin.
- Dowden, Bradley. 2018. “Time.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available online: <https://www.iep.utm.edu/time/> (accessed on 15 October 2020).
- Ende, Michael. 1973. *Momo oder die seltsame Geschichte von den Zeit-Dieben und von dem Kind, das den Menschen die gestohlene Zeit zurückbrachte, ein Märchen-Roman*. Stuttgart: Thienemann.
- Ewers, Hans Heino. 2018. *Michael Ende neu entdecken: Was Jim Knopf, Momo und Die Unendliche Geschichte Erwachsenen zu sagen haben*. Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner.
- Farrier, David. 2019. *Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones, and Extinction*. Posthumanities, 50. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Grubmüller, Klaus. 1977. *Meister Esopus: Untersuchungen zu Geschichte und Funktion der Fabel im Mittelalter*. Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 56. Zürich and Munich: Artemis.
- Grün, Anselm. 2019. *Jesus als Therapeut: Die heilende Kraft der Gleichnisse*, 6th ed. Münsterschwarzach: Vier-Türme-Verlag.
- Hake, Sabine. 2012. *Turkish German Cinema in the New Millennium: Sites, Sounds, and Screens*. Film Europa: German Cinema in an International Context, 13. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Hasty, Will, ed. 2003. *A Companion to Gottfried von Strassburg’s “Tristan”*. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture. Rochester and Suffolk: Camden House.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. Library of Philosophy and Theology. London: SMC Press. First published 1927.
- Hilz, Helmut. 2019. *Buchgeschichte: Eine Einführung*. Bibliotheks- und Informationspraxis, 64. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter.
- Hinnels, John R., ed. 2005. *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Huber, Christoph. 2013. *Gottfried von Straßburg: Tristan*, 3rd ed. newly rev. and expanded ed. Klassiker-Lektüren, 3. Berlin: Erich Schmidt. First published 2000.

- Jaeger, C. Stephen. 1999. *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*. The Middle Ages Series; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Laïd, Baptiste. 2020. *L'élaboration du recueil de fables de Marie de France: "trover" des fables au XIIe siècle*. Nouvelle bibliothèque du Moyen âge. 128. Paris: Honoré Champion.
- Lillge, Claudia. 2008. *Interkulturelle Mahlzeiten: Kulinarische Begegnungen und Kommunikation in der Literatur*. Kultur- und Medientheorie. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Masciandro, Franco. 2016. *Dante as Dramatist: The Myth of the Earthly Paradise and Tragic Vision in the "Divine Comedy"*. The Middle Ages Series; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Münster, Reinhold. 2020. The Anthropocene, Technology and Fictional Literature. *Humanities* 9: 56. [CrossRef]
- Murakami, Kery. 2020. State Cuts Grow Deep. *Inside Higher Ed*. May 15. Available online: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/05/15/size-state-budget-cuts-becomes-clearer> (accessed on 15 October 2020).
- Murdoch, Brian. 2020. Defining and Defending the Middle Ages with C. S. Lewis. *Humanities* 9: 51. [CrossRef]
- Poorthuis, Marcel, and Eric Ottenheim. 2019. *Parables in Changing Contexts: Essays on the Study of Parables in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism*. Jewish and Christian Perspectives. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Precht, Richard David. 2020. *Künstliche Intelligenz und der Sinn des Lebens. Ein Essay*. Munich: Goldmann.
- Psychlau-Ezli, Lisa. 2018. *Essen und Trinken im Mittelalter: Der alimentäre Code in der mittelhochdeutschen Epik*. Vienna, Cologne and Weimar: Böhlau.
- Pyrhönen, Heta, and Janna Kantola, eds. 2018. *Reading Today*. Comparative Literature and Culture. London: UCL Press.
- Renn, Jürgen. 2020. *The Evolution of Knowledge: Rethinking Science for the Anthropocene*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Rourke, Lee. 2011. *A Brief History of Fables*. London: Hesperus.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur. 1970. *On the Suffering of the World*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin.
- Schubert, Ernst. 2006. *Essen und Trinken im Mittelalter*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Soccavo, Lorenzo, and Paul Soriano. 2008. *Gutenberg 2.0: Le Future du Livre; Six Siècles Après Gutenberg une Nouvelle Révolution va Changer Votre Façon de Lire*, 2nd ed. Paris: M21 Éd.
- Tarantino, Elisabetta. 2017. Boccaccio's 'spirante turbo': An Intertextual Defence of Tolerance. In *Cultural Reception, Translation and Transformation from Medieval to Modern Italy*. Edited by Guido Bonsaver, Brian Richardson and Giuseppe Stellardi. Cambridge: Legenda Books, pp. 25–39.
- Tomasek, Tomas. 1985. *Die Utopie im ›Tristan‹ Gotfrids von Straßburg*. Hermaea. Germanistische Forschungen, Neue Folge, 49. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Tomasek, Tomas. 2007. *Gottfried von Straßburg*. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam.
- von Arnould, Andreas, and Christian Klein. 2019. *Weil Bücher unsere Welt verändern: Vom Nibelungenlied bis Harry Potter*. Darmstadt: wbg Theiss.
- von Strassburg, Gottfried. 1967. *Tristan, with the Fragment of the Tristan*. Translated by A. T. Hatto. London: Penguin. First published 1960.
- Weiss Adamson, Melitta. 2004. *Food in Medieval Times*. Food Through History. Westport and London: Greenwood Press.
- Wilcox, Melissa M. 2013. *Religion in Today's World: Global Issues, Sociological Perspectives*. New York and London: Routledge.

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



© 2020 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).