

GRANTLEY MCDONALD  
(UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE)

### LAURENTIUS CORVINUS AND THE FLOWERING OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN HUMANISM<sup>1\*</sup>

Germans speak of delicate arts and sciences such as poetry and philology as *Orchideenwissenschaften*, ‘orchid sciences’: rare, demanding of intense cultivation and easily bruised, but of uncommon beauty and delight. The Silesian poet Valens Acidalius, employing a similar metaphor, described the city of Breslau (Wrocław) as the ‘sacred flower of Europe’ (*flos sacer Europæ*).<sup>2</sup> Part of the beauty of Breslau – still a flower of a city by any measure, despite the ravages of war and the strictures of modernism – was its cultivation of the arts and sciences, such that Philipp Melanchthon could write in 1558 that ‘no other community in Germany has more men learned in every kind of philosophy than Breslau. It not only has industrious craftsmen and talented citizens who

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<sup>1</sup> \* For Dariusz Rott and Piotr Wilczek, in gratitude for their hospitality in Katowice. This is an expanded and revised version of a paper given at the University of Silesia at Katowice and at the Jagiellonian University at Kraków in January 2007. Thanks to the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, for its support, both financial and institutional, during the writing of this article. Gratitude is also due to Lutz Mahuke at the Ratsschulbibliothek Zwickau, for kindly granting permission to reproduce the title woodcut of Corvinus *Carmen ... de Apolline et novem Musis*, Breslau: Baumgarten, 1503. Thanks also to Prof. Andrzej Borowski and the editorial team of *Terminus* for their invitation to contribute this paper to the journal.

<sup>2</sup> *Poematum Jani Lernuti, Jani Gulielmi, Valentis Acidali, Nova editio* (Liegnitz: Impensis Davidis Alberti, 1603), p. 265.

travel the world, but also a city council generous in supporting the arts and letters.<sup>3</sup> As early as 1521, Melanchthon had written to Laurentius Corvinus, a member of the administration of Breslau and one of the city's most prominent intellectuals, with the following words:

Greetings! Please do not ascribe it to impudence or temerity that I should write to you out of the blue like this, most honourable sir, especially since Johannes Troger, a learned and eloquent young man, wrung this letter out of me. It is remarkable how his incessant talk of you has fired me with a desire to make contact with you, for I can only marvel at a man who is reported to maintain such an intimate knowledge of good (and, more importantly, pious) letters, while administering the very weighty occupations of government. I congratulate Sarmatia because it has (as far as I know) more learned men than any other nation, not only amongst its clergy, but also amongst those whose way of life almost invariably draws them away from study. So continue to do what you are doing and foster right studies, especially those that relate to holiness. However, I do not consider the meditations of those troublesome monks, a strange breed of Christian, to be works of holiness. To speak more truly, their actions are more superstitious than holy. You may more properly draw the form of your Christianity from Christ himself than from some kind of reflected image of Him. I fear that you lay a little too much value in such human traditions. But who am I to say all this, a mere 'swine at Athens'? Yet that excellent young man Troger will testify to you my enthusiasm towards you. Farewell, most honourable sir.

Wittenberg, 19 February 1521.

Philipp Melanchthon.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Philipp Melanchthon to Duke Heinrich of Liegnitz, 1 October 1558, in Valentin Trozendorf, *Catechesis scholae Goltzpergensis* (Wittenberg: Crato, 1558), transcribed in Philipp Melanchthon, *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. C. G. Bretschneider and H. E. Bindseil (Halle-Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1834–1860) III, col. 523: '[...] non alia gens in Germania plures habeat eruditos viros in tota Philosophia, et urbs Vratislavia non solum artifices industrios habeat et ingeniosos cives peregrinatores, sed etiam Senatum munificum in iuvandis Literarum et artium studiis.' Cf. Johannes Crato in Abraham Ortelius, *Theatrum orbis terrarum* (Antwerp: Aegidius Radaeus, 1575), fol. 32r; (1595), fol. 61r: '[...] cum universae Germaniae perspectum sit, vix in ulla regione tot scholas optimarum disciplinarum doctoribus instructas reperiri, et cultura ingeniorum excellere.'

<sup>4</sup> Melanchthon to N. N., Wittenberg, 19 Feb. 1521, in *Melanchthons Briefwechsel*, ed. Heinz Scheible, Textband I, ed. Richard Wetzel (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991),

Basing his judgement on what he had been told by Breslau students in Wittenberg, particularly Johannes Troger, Melanchthon had astutely identified the salient characteristics of Corvinus' work to this point, and his role in the cultivation of piety and the 'orchid sciences'; nevertheless, with this short exhortation Melanchthon succeeded in steering Corvinus in an entirely new direction.

In the following considerations we shall try to identify what Melanchthon saw as the strengths (and weaknesses) of Corvinus' work, and then the directions Corvinus took after receiving the letter. We shall thus examine Corvinus' intellectual development as a microcosm of wider trends, of the gradual movement away from late mediaeval authorities that so typified the development of humanistic studies in the Lutheran territories of Central Europe. Yet we shall also see that, despite the rhetoric that rejected mediaeval Catholicism, much of the vigorous intellectual and spiritual property of pre-Reformation thought and devotion remained in Corvinus' work, and in Silesian humanism as a whole.

One of Corvinus' strengths was his ability to synthesise complex intellectual movements and to communicate them to a broad audience. Our examination will focus on three periods in Corvinus' inner life, during which he developed and communicated the projects of three important predecessors: Conrad Celtis, Marsilio Ficino and Martin Luther. Corvinus played an important role in the spiritual and cultural flowering of Silesia and Poland by introducing and fostering Celtis' program of humanistic studies at Kraków, Schweidnitz and Breslau; by translating Ficino's Neoplatonic Christianity into a systematic educational, cultural and religious program; and finally, by com-

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p. 257. The translation is my own. The recipient of Melanchthon's letter is not explicitly named, but Köstlin and Bauch both argue plausibly that Corvinus is the only person in Breslau whose activities correspond to Melanchthon's account; Julius Köstlin, 'Johann Heß, der Breslauer Reformator', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte und Alterthum Schlesiens* [ZVGSchlesien] 6 (1864), p. 119; Gustav Bauch, 'Laurentius Corvinus, der Breslauer Stadtschreiber und Humanist. Sein Leben und seine Schriften', *ZVGSchlesien* 17 (1883), pp. 230–302, at p. 280. On Melanchthon's influence on Silesian humanism, see Heinz Schieble, 'Melanchthons Beziehungen zu Stadt und Bistum Breslau', *Archiv für schlesische Kirchengeschichte* [ASKG] 58 (2000), pp. 143–84.

municating Luther's theology to the city council of Breslau, to his friends and to his detractors.

As Lorenz Rabe, son of Bartholomaeus of Neumarkt (Środa Śląska), Corvinus enrolled at the University of Kraków in summer semester 1484.<sup>5</sup> At this time, the university was one of the most illustrious in Europe, a centre for the study of mathematics and astronomy, a subject that would fascinate Corvinus throughout his life.<sup>6</sup> Corvinus received his BA in September 1486, and his MA in January 1489. Around Easter 1489, the 'German arch-humanist' Conrad Celtis arrived at Kraków from Italy, where he had heard a number of famous scholars, including Marsilio Ficino, Pomponio Leto and Filippo Beroaldo, and absorbed something of the spirit of antiquity that had awoken in their work. In Italy, the artefacts of antiquity lay under the feet and on the tongue, but in Celtis' homeland Germany such traces were more difficult to sense. He therefore felt that a 'transfer of learning' (*translatio studii*) from Italy over the Alps was desperately needed, and he determined to spread his message around the four corners of the wider German linguistic-cultural area.<sup>7</sup> His

<sup>5</sup> Generally on Corvinus, see Bauch (1883); J. Krókowski, 'Laurentius Corvinus und seine Beziehungen zu Polen', in *Renaissance und Humanismus in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, ed. Johannes Irmischer (Berlin: Akademie, 1962) II, pp. 153–172; Halina Sadowska, 'Wawrzyniec Korwin (ca 1465–1527). Humanista ze Środy Śląskiej', in *Studia z dziejów Środy Śląskiej, regionu i prawa Średzkiego*, ed. B. Gładkiewicz, Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis 980 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1990), pp. 117–28; Dariusz Rott, *Wawrzyniec Korwin, Wczesnorenansansony humanista Śląski* (Katowice: Wojewódzka Biblioteka Publiczna, 1997); Piotr Bering, 'Laurentius Corvinus: scriptor, orator, poeta et dispositor scaenarum', in *Mentis amore ligati: Lateinische Freundschaftsdichtung und Dichterfreundschaft in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, ed. Boris Körkel, Tino Licht and Jolanta Wiendlocha (Heidelberg: Mattes, 2001), pp. 11–18; Susanne Rau, 'Laurentius Corvinus (~1465–1527)', in *Schlesische Lebensbilder VIII* (Neustadt: Degener, 2004), pp. 39–46. I am currently preparing a biography and literary study of Corvinus, *The Muse in the Garden: Laurentius Corvinus and the Spiritual Landscape of the Central European Renaissance*, and a critical edition and English translation of his work.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview, see Ludwik Antoni Birkenmajer, *Stromata Copernicana: Studja, poszukiwania i materiały biograficzne* (Kraków: Nakładem Polskiej Akademji Umiejętności, 1924); Jan Pirożyński, 'Die Krakauer Universität in der Renaissancezeit', in *Der polnische Humanismus und die europäischen Sodalitäten*. Pirckheimer Jahrbuch 1997 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), pp. 13–38.

<sup>7</sup> See Jörg Robert, *Konrad Celtis und das Projekt der deutschen Dichtung. Studien zur humanistischen Konstitution von Poetik, Philosophie, Nation und Ich* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003).

first stop was Kraków, where he intended to perfect his knowledge of astronomy under Albert Blar and to begin his project of drawing the Muses of Italy over the Alps.<sup>8</sup>

Celtis was permitted to teach as an *extraneus* (non-faculty lecturer) at Kraków, at first on a scholastic textbook entitled *Parvulus philosophia*.<sup>9</sup> He also taught humanistic subjects in the Hungarian College. In July 1489, he began a course on the art of letter-writing, one of the humanists' favourite forms. He also gave classes on Ciceronian rhetoric, the art of memory and poetry.<sup>10</sup> It may have been Celtis who translated his student's German name Lorenz Rabe ('Raven') to its Latinate form 'Laurentius Corvinus', just as he had translated his own surname 'Bickel' ('Mattock') to 'Celtis'. In 1490, Celtis and the Italian humanist Filippo Buonaccorsi ('Callimachus') founded an informal literary society, the *Sodalitas litteraria Vistulana*, after the model of the academies in Florence and Rome. Amongst the members of Celtis' and Callimachus' sodality were Albert Blar and a group of younger enthusiasts, including Sigismund Fusilius, Johannes Rhagius Aesticampianus, Vincentius Longinus and Corvinus.

Celtis shared with his friends a startlingly fresh way of looking at life, love and learning. The stories that Celtis and Callimachus told about Ita-

<sup>8</sup> See Harold B. Segel, *Renaissance Culture in Poland: The Rise of Humanism, 1470–1543* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989), esp. pp. 83–106; for the period following immediately after Celtis' death, see Jacqueline Głomski, 'The German Role in the Reception of Italian Neo-Latin Literary Currents at Cracow (1510–1525)', in *Deutschland und Italien in ihrer wechselseitigen Beziehungen während der Renaissance*, ed. B. Guthmüller (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), pp. 31–44.

<sup>9</sup> Franz Machilek, 'Konrad Celtis und die Gelehrtensozialitäten, insbesondere in Ostmitteleuropa', in *Humanismus und Renaissance in Ostmitteleuropa vor der Reformation*, ed. Winfried Eberhard and Alfred A. Strnad (Köln: Böhlau, 1996), pp. 137–55.

<sup>10</sup> Jan Fijałek, *Studia do dziejów Uniwersytetu Krakowskiego i jego Wydziału Teologicznego w XV w.* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Akad. Umiejętności 1899), p. 24; Ignacy Chrzanoński and Stanisław Kot, *Humanizm i reforma w Polsce* (Lwów: Zakład nar. im. Ossolińskich, 1927), p. 123; Celtis, *Epigr.* I.90, V.18, in Celtis, *Fünf Bücher Epigramme*, ed. K. Hartfelder (Berlin: Calvary 1881, repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1963), pp. 20–1, 104; Kazimierz Morawski, *Histoire de L'Université de Cracovie*, 3 vols (Paris: Picard, 1900–5) III, p. 64; Krókowski (1962), p. 155.

ly, about the revival of language and culture, of the arts and the secrets of philosophy, proved irresistible to their Kraków friends, and several travelled south to witness the ‘rebirth of antiquity’ at first hand. In 1500 Longinus and Aesticampianus went on a study tour of Italy. When Corvinus’ close friend Fusilius likewise left to study in Bologna, Corvinus was wracked by conflicting feelings. Of course he was happy that his friend was travelling, and prayed that he might not fall into danger on the way. But there was also an element of envy. In a poem addressed to Fusilius on his departure, Corvinus wistfully ponders how happy he would be if he too had the chance to leave Poland for Italy, to climb over the Alps, look down over the Po valley, and visit the city of Aeneas and Romulus:

[...] Nubiferum cacumen  
 Alpium scandis, Lacias despiciens in ima  
 Degere valle gentes,  
 Tibridis Tuscam properas visere aquam, beatas  
 Aeneadumque sedes.<sup>11</sup>

On his departure, Fusilius also received a poem from Celtis on the things a ‘philosopher’ – that is, a philosophical poet – must in future know. Firstly, such a poet must know the three sacred languages, Latin, Greek and Hebrew. Secondly, the poet must know about all branches of natural philosophy, including cosmology, meteorology, geology and astronomy, as well as geography and history. Thirdly, the poet should despise the ignorant mob and associate with like minds. Finally, he should rise above the vicissitudes of fortune and strive after virtue, the only guarantee of a peaceful life. In his poem, Celtis presents an extraordinary range of experience and knowledge – historical, geographical and philosophical – available through the study of ancient languages and literature. For Celtis and his friends, knowledge of the classical world is not just cultural baggage, but a necessary first step in understanding the world.

<sup>11</sup> Corvinus, ‘Ad Sigismundum Fusilium in Italiam pergentem’, in *Carminum structura* ([Leipzig]: [Landsberg], [not before 20 August 1496]), fol. D1r-v.

Corvinus was astounded by the breadth and moral earnest of Celtis' program as it was summarised in the poem to Fusilius, and determined to contribute to its unfolding and application. Corvinus inherited from Celtis two important elements that remained in constant tension. First was the conviction that the pursuit and recovery of ancient literature and culture is a lifelong vocation with a strong ethical component. The second element, which existed in counterpoint with the first, was Celtis' love for life, for torrid love affairs, for travel and involvement in matters of state.

After receiving his master's degree, Corvinus taught a variety of scholastic and humanistic subjects at Kraków as an *extraneus*. Among Corvinus' students at Kraków were Heinrich Bebel and Nicolaus Copernicus, with whom he would enjoy an ongoing friendship. Corvinus' earliest extant poems date from his time under Celtis' tutelage. These student poems already contain features that would become characteristic of Corvinus' style.

The first group of poems treats of mythological themes. This mythological mask has a number of functions. Its imagery is immediately appealing, the honey on the lip of the medicine-cup. It also serves to identify Corvinus as a humanist, an adherent of antiquity writing for other members of this élite club. Moreover, the mythological mask allows Corvinus to present his message obliquely by exploiting the polyvalence of mythological characters. The second group of Corvinus' Kraków poems deal with political events of 1492: the death of Casimir Jagiello and the election and coronation of his successor Jan Olbracht. The third group comprises two religious poems, both treating the nativity of Christ. These poems, which may represent the remains of a Christmas exchange between Corvinus and his friends, show how Corvinus attempted to resuscitate pagan literature by applying pagan imagery to Christian salvation history.

Corvinus also contributed to the advancement of Celtis' program through a series of textbooks.<sup>12</sup> His three stylistic manuals (on Latin conversation, prose style and verse composition) were intended to restore pure Latinity,

<sup>12</sup> Apart from *Carminum structura*, these textbooks are: *Cosmographia dans manuductionem in tabulas Ptholomei* (Basel: Keßler, 1496); *Latinum ydeoma* (Leipzig: Kachelofen, c. 1498–1500); *Hortulus elegantiarum* (Kraków: Haller, 1502).

while his *Cosmographia* served as an introduction to astronomy, geography and history, in other words to the universal learning that Celtis demanded of the modern poet. In the preface to the *Cosmographia*, Corvinus points out that this humanistic program would benefit not only students of poetry, but historians, biblical scholars, natural scientists and astronomers as well.

The *Cosmographia* falls into two sections with slightly different purposes. In the first section, Corvinus gives a basic course in the mathematical and technical knowledge necessary for understanding Ptolemy's *Geography*. The second section is a compact chorography of the ancient world, imparting something of the geography and history of places that students would encounter in their reading, and about which they might themselves be expected to write. This descriptive account covers the three major regions of the earth: Africa, Europe and Asia. Corvinus took the skeleton for this part of the work from Antonio Becharia's version of the chorography of Dionysius Periegeta, fleshed out with material from other authors.<sup>13</sup> He thus departs from the tradition of the mediaeval geographers, who tended to begin with Paradise in the far east and then move west. Likewise, he treats the Holy Land, the axis around which most mediaeval maps were oriented, not as the focus of salvation history, but as just another region of the classical world, drawing his description not from the bible, but from Strabo and Solinus.<sup>14</sup>

Corvinus' most substantial additions to his ancient sources in the *Cosmographia* are three poems: 'On Poland and Kraków', 'On Silesia and Breslau', and 'On Neumarkt'. The poem on Kraków in particular echoes Celtis' *Ode to Fusilius* in a number of important ways. Although these poems are not based directly on classical material, Corvinus peoples these regions with figures from classical myth. For example, Corvinus emphasises the dignity of Poland by employing the myth that Kraków was founded by a Roman soldier named Gracchus. (The early sixteenth-century German geographer Franciscus Irenicus subsequently cited Corvinus as an authority for the Gracchus myth.)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Dionysius Periegeta, *De situ orbis*, transl. Antonius Becharia Veronensis (Venice: Franciscus Renner de Hailbrun, 1478).

<sup>14</sup> See Michael Herkenhoff, *Die Darstellung außereuropäischer Welten in Drucken deutscher Offizinen des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Akademie, 1996), esp. pp. 125–33.

<sup>15</sup> Franciscus Irenicus, *Germaniae exegeseos* (Hagenau: Anshelm, August 1518), fol. 208r.

Corvinus explains each of the characteristics of Kraków as the gift of one of the ancient gods: the beautiful girls as the children of Venus, the warlike men as the sons of Mars, and the profitable lead-mines as the gift of Saturn. Minerva has made her home at the university, a centre for the study of natural philosophy. This science frees us from fear by helping us to realise, for instance, that thunder and eclipses are not signs of divine displeasure, but merely the workings of nature in her course. As the sun rides through the houses of the zodiac, it produces men in Kraków capable of deep speculation. (For Corvinus and his contemporaries, astrology, based on observable and verifiable motions in the heavens and founded on the theory of correspondences, was science, not superstition.)<sup>16</sup> Kraków is also home to Apollo and his hand-maids, the Muses, who produce poets.

Like Corvinus' poem on Poland, his poem on Silesia and Breslau includes a number of mythological images. Corvinus begins with a description of the Odra, springing from its mountain source and watering fields that bear the gifts of Ceres. Corvinus commends the generosity of the Silesians, who diligently till the fertile land. Greatest of the cities of Silesia is Breslau, whose mighty walls reach towards the heavens and dwarf the other cities of the region. Corvinus praises the piety of the city and the great number of churches there, the likes of which the sun scarce sees as it travels across the earth in its chariot. Finally, he acknowledges the political importance of Breslau, whose council has been granted vice-regal power over the entire region.

Corvinus' poem on Neumarkt follows on from the poem on Silesia. The walls of this town have preserved the age of Saturn; here debt and deceit are unknown. The men of the town avoid conspicuous displays of wealth and live from the sweat of their brow, from farming or viticulture, an art introduced by Bacchus. They do not risk their lives as merchants, travelling to far climes in search of wealth. Rather, they spurn wealth and live their allotted days in happiness and the certainty of seeing the Elysian fields. By transporting the classical divinities to Poland and Silesia, Corvinus renders these lands equal in dignity to Greece and Rome, and invests his landscapes with a sense of divine presence and possibility.

<sup>16</sup> See Kocku von Stuckrad, *Geschichte der Astrologie, von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Beck, 2003).

One keen reader of Corvinus' *Cosmographia* was the Nuremberg mathematician and cartographer Johannes Schöner, who made the first in a series of world globes in 1515. In conjunction with this globe, Schöner wrote a brief account of all the countries of the known world, *Luculentissima quadam terræ totius descriptio* (*A most elegant description of the entire world*), which is based in part on Corvinus' work.<sup>17</sup> Amongst the other readers of Corvinus' *Cosmographia* were Conrad Celtis, Hartmann Schedel, Sir Walter Raleigh and Nicolaus Copernicus.<sup>18</sup>

After leaving Kraków, Corvinus took a position as school rector at Schweidnitz. Here he advanced Celtis' project even further by writing a manual on verse composition, *Carminum structura*, in which he provides his students with a coherent picture of the history and importance of poetry, and an exploration of the subject of poetic inspiration. He sets out four practical rules for gathering material appropriate to the subject matter of the poem, and clear instructions on metrical matters. Finally, he offers fresh and attractive examples of how each of the many styles and genres of classical Latin poetry might be used in a modern context to create poems that are clear, elegant and erudite. Like Celtis, Corvinus recommended that the poet's work should deal with the natural environment and the heavens, with the diversity of peoples in different countries, with philosophical and religious issues, and with internal experience.

<sup>17</sup> See Grantley McDonald, 'Laurentius Corvinus', in *Weltentdecker – Weltbeschreiber. Kartenschatze und Reisebeschreibungen aus der Ratsschulbibliothek Zwickau*, ed. Lutz Mahnke (Zwickau: Ratsschulbibliothek, 2006), pp. 34–6.

<sup>18</sup> Celtis' copy of the *Cosmographia* is in Vienna, UB, shelfmark I 138054; see Nikolaus Henkel, 'Bücher des Konrad Celtis', in *Bibliotheken und Bücher im Zeitalter der Renaissance*, ed. Werner Arnold. Wolfenbütteler Abhandlungen der Renaissanceforschung 16 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), pp. 129–66, at p. 142. On Schedel's copy, see R. Stauber, *Die Schedelsche Bibliothek* (Freiburg: Herder, 1908, repr. Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1969), p. 114. On Copernicus' copy, now in Uppsala, see Leonard Jarzębowski, *Biblioteka Mikołaja Kopernika* (Toruń: Towarzystwo Naukowe w Toruniu, 1971), pp. 14, 76. Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World*, in Walter Raleigh, *Works* (Oxford: OUP, 1829) III, p. 270: '[...] Laurentius Corvinus extendeth Phœnicia as fas as Gaza [...]' idem. p. 274: 'Pliny extends it [*i.e.* Phoenicia] further, and comprehends Joppe within it; Corvinus and Budæus, Joppe and Gaza [...]' Cf. Corvinus, *Cosmographia* (1496), fol. F2v.

The prologue to the *Carminum structura* announces a poetic theory that Corvinus would develop throughout his life; his poetics already show an interest in the Neoplatonic poetics of Marsilio Ficino, which would come to dominate his thought for the next two decades. While Augustine had still maintained some reservations about the compatibility of Platonism and Christianity, Ficino minimised these differences, motivated by his conviction that the theology of the Greeks and the Hebrews shared a common root in the legendary Hermes Trismegistus, thrice-greatest king, prophet and priest of Egypt, and putative author of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. This 'Ancient Theology' continued into Hebrew theology on one hand, and on the other into Greek theology, as represented by such figures as Orpheus, Pythagoras, Philolaus, Plato, Plotinus and Proclus. Ficino (like Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius and Origen before him) was deeply impressed by a famous quotation from the Neoplatonist Numenius, who called Plato a Greek-speaking Moses. It was significant for Ficino that the Greek theologians, like the Hebrew prophets, wrote in verse. Indeed, both groups were inspired by God with the same poetic frenzy, which lent all ancient poetry some measure of divinity. Ficino's baptism of the pagan tradition had a profound effect on Western European attitudes to ancient culture. If the pagan theologians and poets had foreshadowed the truth, albeit darkly, scholars were therefore licensed to study their works and to sift the gold from the pagan dross. Moreover, modern poets could claim legitimation for writing neo-pagan poetry by appeal to their ancient forebears.<sup>19</sup>

Corvinus was convinced by Ficino's project, and the reality of the Ancient Theology is an unspoken assumption in virtually all his work. His first task in the *Carminum structura* is to show that poetry posed no threat to morality or to the established university curriculum. He begins by encouraging his students to focus not on the perishable world of the body, but on virtue and learning, the goods of the soul that survive our death and permit us to join the ranks of the divine, as Plato teaches. Corvinus thus suggests that the eternal fame

<sup>19</sup> See Grantley McDonald, 'Orpheus Germanicus: Metrical Music and the Reception of Marsilio Ficino's Poetics and Music Theory in Renaissance Germany', Diss. University of Melbourne, 2002.

of the poet (one of the German humanists' favourite *topoi*) is always contingent on virtue. Poetry is an ideal instructor in virtue, for it teaches, forms and comforts the student. Moreover, it trains the mind to cope with more difficult material. The student of poetry must also have a solid foundation in logic or natural philosophy, without which it is impossible to become a true poet.

Having outlined a general theory of poetry, Corvinus then sets out a technical method for its construction. At the core of this part of the *Carminum structura* stand four rules for the construction of a poem.<sup>20</sup> Many of Corvinus' rules derive ultimately from the Ciceronian *Rhetoric to Herennius* and Quintilian, illustrating the inseparable relationship between poetry and rhetoric in the Renaissance. The poet must first decide the nature of the material: sublime, medium or low. He should then identify some feature of the material under examination and then insert *fabellae*, 'little stories' that have something to do with the history or geographical location of the object, or some astronomical or occult association. The poet should not invent facts, but describe things in such a way that the description corresponds to the truth. Secondly, in agreement with the principle of *decorum*, the language and the *fabellae* should suit the subject matter, so that the words correspond closely to their objects. Sad subjects call for sad *fabellae*, while joyful events require happy *fabellae*. Third, the poet should avoid obscurity of expression and forced cleverness. Fourth, the poet must select appropriate and delightful epithets and synonyms. The young poet should therefore immerse himself in the works of the ancients in order to build up a stock of poetic diction. Corvinus then gives detailed instructions for writing poems in sixteen different metres. He describes the structure of each metre and provides a specimen poem illustrating its structure and the subject matter and register appropriate to it. These specimen poems constitute a kind of fictional autobiography, describing Corvinus' friends, students and royal patron.

Corvinus' *Carminum structura* was significant for establishing the value of poetry as a relic of the Ancient Theology, endowed with remarkable power to impart ethical instruction. Just as importantly, it was one of the few textbooks

<sup>20</sup> Jacqueline G l o m s k i, 'Poetry to teach the Writing of Poetry: Laurentius Corvinus' *Carminum Structura* (1496)', in *Poets and Teachers*, ed. Y. H a s k e l l and P. H a r d i e (Bari: Levante, 1999), pp. 155–166.

based not simply on the memorisation of ancient models, but which provided recent and appropriate Christian models for imitation. Corvinus' rules became important in the development of a standardised poetic technique in Central European humanism, and were adapted almost verbatim by Heinrich Bebel (*Ars versificandi et carminum condendorum*, 1504), Hieronymus Gürtler (*Elegantiarum opusculum*, 1510) and Valentinus Eck (*De versificandi arte opusculum*, 1515); in the work of these theorists, Corvinus' rules reached an even wider audience of students and poets. The poems of the *Carminum structura* also became popular in their own right; for example, Andreas Meinhardi reworked three of them in the first publicity brochure for the university of Wittenberg, *Dialogus illustrata ac augustissima urbis Albiorena vulgo Vittenberg dicta* (Leipzig: Martin Herbipolensis, 1508).

In 1497, Corvinus moved to Breslau, beginning his career there as rector of St Elisabeth's parish school. After Prague, Breslau was the second-largest city under the Bohemian crown, home to some twenty thousand souls. St Elisabeth's, the parish church for the patriciate of Breslau, had a large staff, consisting of a parish priest, a preacher, six chaplains and several altar priests (*altaristae*) servicing 122 mass-endowments at forty-seven altars. This was the highest number of endowed masses in Germany, Poland or Bohemia. As rector of St Elisabeth's school, Corvinus became *de facto* patron of a number of altars in the church, at which he was obliged to say mass or to provide a substitute cleric, such as another teacher.<sup>21</sup> The income from saying mass at these altars supplemented the teachers' otherwise modest stipends.

The traditional curriculum at St Elisabeth's, regulated in 1293 and largely unchanged in Corvinus' day, was oriented towards the boys' service in church. Corvinus altered the curriculum in line with his humanistic program. Around 1500, he wrote a new textbook of Latin conversation, *Latinum ydeoma*, which went through more than fifty editions, including a Danish version. At the same time, Corvinus was experimenting with ancient drama. In 1500 he

<sup>21</sup> Wrocław, Archiwum Państwowe ms Klose 28, p. 303, 306, copy of the lost *libri exaesonum et signaturarum* for 1500; both entries are transcribed in Gustav Bauch, *Aktenstücke zur Geschichte des Breslauer Schulwesens im XVI. Jahrhundert* (Breslau: Graß, 1898), p. 4; cf. Gustav Bauch, *Geschichte der Breslauer Schulwesens vor der Reformation*. Codex Diplomaticus Silesiae XXV (Breslau: Hirt, 1909), pp. 104–6.

presented a performance of Terence's *Eunuch* in the upper hall of the town hall during Carnival; two years later he staged Plautus' *Aulularia*. These were amongst the earliest productions of classical drama in Northern Europe, and were soon imitated by Celtis in Vienna.

Corvinus' next textbook was the *Little Garden of Elegances* (*Hortulus elegantiarum*, 1502), which went through twenty-five editions. The *Hortulus* was designed to wean students off Alexander Gallus' *Doctrinale* and on to the prose style exemplified by Cicero's letters. The *Hortulus* is thus conceived as part of the renewal and purification of prose style so central to the humanist project, as announced in Lorenzo Valla's *Elegantia*. Corvinus' textbooks played a formative role in humanistic education for some forty years, in schools and universities from Kraków to Cologne. Yet Corvinus' paedagogical reforms were not restricted to mere style. Corvinus tried to show that the humanist dream of eloquence and learning could be used as a tool for social reform.

In 1503, Corvinus published his first major independent poem, *Apollo and the Nine Muses*, a work of 130 elegiac couplets, amplified by an extensive commentary running to over fifteen thousand words. This poem is essentially a reworking of Corvinus' unpublished poem *On the Nine Muses*, which he had written back in Kraków. The poem is set in summer, when Corvinus leaves the city to refresh himself on the *Bürgerwerder* (*Kępa Mieszczańska*). He falls asleep, but is then awoken by the arrival of Apollo and the Nine Muses. Apollo stills Corvinus' fear and then discourses on the nature of celestial music before commanding each of the Muses to come forward and sing of her individual task. Apollo bids Corvinus worship him and the Muses, and finally sprinkles him with the dew of inspiration. The climax of the poem is depicted in the large title-woodcut: Corvinus, dressed in clerical habit, is lying on the ground, shielding his eyes before the glory of the divinity. Apollo, crowned with laurel, gives the sign of blessing, while the Muses play their heavenly harps.<sup>22</sup>

Corvinus' inclusion of a commentary on his own work is consistent with the poetics he had outlined in the *Carminum structura*. No-one, writes Corvinus in one of the scholia, can approach the doors of true poetry without divine

<sup>22</sup> I ascribe this woodcut to Baumgarten himself on the basis of stylistic similarities with woodcuts from the 1504 *Legend of St Hedwig*, see Guido Pressler, *Die Holzschnitte der deutschen Hedwigslegende (1504)* (Hürtgenwald: Pressler, 1997).

inspiration and frenzy (Plato, *Phaedrus* 245a), but to write great and erudite poetry also requires deep and broad learning in a number of areas, such as natural philosophy, astronomy, geography and all the liberal arts. As a Christian Platonist, Corvinus believed that the increasingly higher forms of knowledge symbolised by the Muses can draw us back towards the divine. Apollo is a visible icon of the Good itself, as Corvinus explains in the commentary: 'In the *Republic* [VI.508b], Plato calls the light of the sun (and thus the sun itself) the son of the Good, that is, the son of God, whose nature it is to spread out and generously bestow himself to all, as Dionysius says in his book *On the divine names* [IV.1].'<sup>23</sup> The epiphany of Apollo and the Muses changed Corvinus profoundly. He longs for further insight, but, like the philosopher in Plato's parable of the cave, he was also conscious of his responsibility to return to the city and share his enlightenment.

The publication of the *Carmen de Apolline* also coincided with two important events in Corvinus' life: his marriage and a change of career. Perhaps through the influence of his new father-in-law Johannes Münsterberg, who sat on the city council, Corvinus began working as a secretary in the city chancery. After about three and a half years in this position, Corvinus left Breslau with a glowing letter of recommendation which testifies to his good character, and explains that he was searching for better-paid employment elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> He found a similar position in Toruń, where he re-established contact with his former student Nicolaus Copernicus. When Copernicus began his publishing career with a Latin translation of the letters of the Byzantine writer Theophylactus Simocattes, Corvinus offered to accompany the print with two poems.

<sup>23</sup> Laurentius Corvinus, *Carmen elegiacum de Apolline et novem Musis* (Breslau: Baumgarten, 1503), fol. C3v: 'Plato enim in libris de Republica, lumen solis et inde ipsum solem nominavit filium ipsius boni, hoc est dei, cuius est, ut scribit Dionysius in libro de divinis nominibus, se diffundere et sua largitate omnibus se impartiri, quod maxime soli convenit.'

<sup>24</sup> Wrocław, Archiwum Państwowe, *Notularum Communium* (Akta Miasta Wrocławia Nr. 28, Sign. 602) fol. B6v (= p. 80). The document, dated 18 July 1506, is transcribed in Wrocław, BU, ms Akc. 1953/32, fol. 13r; cf. Bauch (1883), p. 264 n. 2.

Corvinus was clearly aware of Copernicus' studies of astronomy, and describes in the longer of the two poems how Copernicus examined 'the swift course of the moon and the alternating movements of her brother, the stars and the rushing planets, and he knows how to investigate the marvellous work of the Almighty and the hidden causes of things according to remarkable principles':

Qui celerem lunæ cursum alternosque meatus  
Fratris cum profugis tractat et astra globis,  
Mirandum omnipotentis opus, rerumque latentes  
Causas scit miris quærere principiis.<sup>25</sup>

This is the first written evidence that Copernicus was attempting something new in astronomy.<sup>26</sup> It is possible that Corvinus was at least partly responsible for introducing Copernicus to Neoplatonic and Pythagorean ideas. In the commentary to the *Carmen de Apolline*, for example, Corvinus praises the sun as the 'leader, chief and moderator of the other lights' (*dux et princeps et moderator reliquorum luminum*).<sup>27</sup> In *De revolutionibus*, Copernicus likewise describes the sun in familiar Neoplatonic terms as lamp, mind and ruler of the universe ([*solem*] *quidam lucernam mundi, alii mentem, alii rectorem vocant*) and cites the mythical Hermes 'Trismegistus' opinion that the sun is the visible God (*Corpus Hermeticum* V. 3).<sup>28</sup>

Corvinus' wife Anna was not happy in Toruń, and missed Breslau desperately, so after two years away they returned home. Corvinus again took up his old position as city secretary. He also continued to contemplate what he

<sup>25</sup> Laurentius Corvinus, 'Carmen [...] quo valedicit Prutenos', in *Theophilacti scolastici Simocati epistolæ morales: rurales et amatoriae*, transl. Nicolaus Copernicus (Kraków: Haller, 1509), fol. A2v.

<sup>26</sup> For contrasting views, see Ernst Zinner, *Entstehung und Ausbreitung der copernicanischen Lehre* (Erlangen: Physikalisch-medizinische Sozietät, 1943), p. 185; Jerzy Dobrzycki, 'Notes on Copernicus's Early Heliocentrism', *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 32 (2001), pp. 223–5.

<sup>27</sup> Corvinus (1503), fol. A2r. Cf. Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, I. 17

<sup>28</sup> Copernicus, *De revolutionibus*, Kraków, ms BJ 10,000, fol. 10r, facsimile in Copernicus, *Complete Works*, ed. P. Czartoryski (London: Macmillan, 1985) vol. I.

could do to further education and piety in the city. It became clear to him that the answer lay in the promotion of Plato. His doctrines seemed more compatible with Christianity than those of Aristotle, whose ideas and manner of reasoning had dominated education for so long. Unfortunately, many of the schools in Breslau had by this stage sunk to a low ebb, as the diary of Thomas Platter attests. Corvinus took personal responsibility for keeping humanistic studies alive in Breslau, teaching students in his spare time. Amongst his students from this period were Rudolph Agricola the Younger and Franz Faber, who would both establish reputations as poets. But we might perhaps wonder why a busy man like Corvinus, who had left the schoolroom behind, who had become something of a statesman and who was financially stable, would still take on private students. His next major work, *A Dialogue on the most salutary exhortation of the Divine Mind to the honest study of the liberal arts* (1516), gives us a clue: we discover in this work that Corvinus and Anna had no children.<sup>29</sup>

The *Dialogus* is Corvinus' literary and philosophical masterpiece, an ingenious fusion of Platonic and Christian political and educational theory. In this work, Corvinus joins the cultural aspirations of the Silesians with their spiritual life by arguing that culture and learning should be combined with piety. According to Plato, the ideal regime could be realised by creating an élite educated in advanced philosophical studies. Corvinus apparently wanted to realise Plato's ideas to some extent in Breslau. Yet he also knew from Augustine that the 'heavenly city' must be focussed on Christ. Corvinus merges Plato's ideal republic with Augustine's 'city of God' by promoting the Franciscan tradition of the devotion to the passion of Christ, as represented by Bonaventure. He combined this with Ficino's notion that the life and passion of Christ represents the most perfect expression of the Platonic virtues. Corvinus thus merges Plato, Augustine, Bonaventure and Ficino into a synthesis uniquely his own, creating a liturgy that allowed the new Platonic and heavenly city of Breslau to participate in a communal act of contemplation and praise. The *Dialogus* was apparently well received, and there are echoes of the poems in the work of Ambrosius Moibanus and Klemens Janicki.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> L. Corvinus, *Dialogus carmine et soluta oratione conflatus de Mentis saluberrima persuasione ad honesta ingeniarum artium studia* (Leipzig: Schuman, 1516).

<sup>30</sup> Ambrosius Moibanus, the first Lutheran pastor of St Elisabeth's, included the ninth poem from the *Dialogus* as well as Corvinus' seven office hymns from the Hours of the

The plot of the *Dialogus* resembles that of the poem *On Apollo and the nine Muses*, while its form is borrowed from Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. Corvinus is walking through his father's vineyard in Neumarkt when a storm blows up. He hides among the trees, but their fruitfulness seems to reproach his own infertility. Suddenly a beautiful woman appears, accompanied by four Muses playing lyres. She reveals herself as the Divine Mind, through whom God created the universe and mortal minds attain knowledge and truth. The Divine Mind cleanses Corvinus' eyes to allow him to look upon them, and then grants him a revelation, speaking now in verse, now in prose. Most of the poems in the *Dialogus* are sung, either by Corvinus himself or by one of the Muses, and Corvinus supplies the musical notation in the print.

Mind begins by lamenting the miserable plight of the human race, which is torn between its longing for heaven and its desire for carnal gratification. The constant search for wealth distracts us from cultivating our souls. The natural and divinely implanted desire to reproduce can also enslave us and drag us down to hell. While the body desires to produce physical offspring, the mind desires to produce spiritual offspring. Mind thus encourages Corvinus

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Passion as an appendix to his *Catechismi capita decem* (Wittenberg: Weiß, 1538). Moibanus' first published work, *Carmen de origine diversarum religionum*, in *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulani Principis, Concordiaque Comitum. Hymni heroici tres, Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem. ad Christum. Et ad Virginem Mariam. Ambrosii Mediodphri Wratislaviensis Carmen de Origine diversarum Religionum una cum hymno, de mysteriis sanctissima Trinitatis* (Vienna: Vietor, 1517), fol. G2r, also contains strong echoes of Corvinus: 'Cum pater omnipotens confusæ semina molis | Formarum æterni cinxisset lumine mundi, | Protinus ætheream convexo limite sedem | Iussit in excelsa mundi consistere parte [...]. Sic ait, et mundum variis animalibus implet | Turba volatiliū peciit confinia cæli, | Aequora squamosis cesserunt piscibus alta, | Et pecudum omne genus media tellure resedit'; cf. Corvinus, *Dialogus* poem III.1–4: 'Dum pater omnipotens ignavæ pondera molis | Edidit in formas, me moderante, novas, | Lucidaque informi signa imposuisset Olimpo, | Oceano pisces, quadrupedesque solo [...].' Klemens Janicki borrowed or adapted lines from Corvinus in his *Tristia* II.45–50 (cf. Corvinus, *Dialogus*, poem III.1–8) and *Carmina collecta* X.34 (cf. Corvinus, *Dialogus*, poem III.19–20), in K. Janicki, *Carmina: Dzieła wszystkie*, ed. Jerzy Krókowski et al. (Wrocław: Inst. Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1966), pp. 16, 290. Janicki also used the rare diminutive form *roskidulus* ('dewy'), *Varia elegia* II.43, in *Carmina*, p. 92 (see Krókowski's note); Corvinus uses this form three times in the *Dialogus* (poem III.19; poem IX.1; poem X.4), albeit with the orthography *rossidulus*.

to forget his longing for physical offspring and to focus on producing spiritual children: the virtues, his books and his students, offspring that never perish.

In order to produce such progeny, Mind commands Corvinus to overhaul the educational system of Breslau. The new educational model should not be based on the 'doubtful propositions and sophistic snares' of scholasticism, but on the gold of Platonic philosophy, which comes closer to the truth of Christianity. For example, Plato suggested that God too produced an offspring. Christians know that this offspring descended to earth and was born of a Virgin to reveal the image of the Father. He is the source of all virtue and knowledge, the true Pallas Athena, sprung from the head of Zeus, wellspring of all harmony and life, as revealed darkly in the writings of the Ancient Theologians. We ought therefore to recall God's infinite kindness and give him thanks, however small. One way of doing this is by devoutly singing the Hours of the Passion, compiled by St Bonaventure, to which Mind has added a number of hymns meditating on the sufferings of Christ.

It was Corvinus' wish that this Christian-Platonic liturgy should be performed in Breslau as a way of promoting both piety and learning; to a large extent his intention in the *Dialogus* was to convince the city council, the clergy and the laity to pay for a choir of clerics to perform this liturgy regularly at St Elisabeth's church. His plan worked. The chantry received the support of the clergy and the laity, and donations are recorded in the account books from 1517 until 1522. Corvinus reworked Bonaventure's liturgy quite substantially, replacing Bonaventure's office hymns, written in the mediaeval *rithmus*, with hymns in classical metres, which he also set to music. The liturgy was published in 1521 and again in 1522, and formed the basis of a similar experiment by Corvinus' former student Rudolph Agricola the Younger.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Laurentius Corvinus, *Cursus sancti Bonaventurae de passione domini* (Breslau: Dyonn, 1521). The second, expanded edition, printed by Dyonn at Breslau in 1522, was edited by Anton Pauß, and contains material with a more discernibly Lutheran character. Rudolph Agricola, *Passio dominica per septem horas Canonice distributa, elegantissimisque vario carminum genere conflatis, Hymnis, Antiphonis, & sacra devotione plenius orationibus conscripta, adiectis quibusdam in margine scholiis, & carminum appellationibus* (Kraków: Vietor, 10 March 1520), is clearly derived conceptually from Corvinus' example. Agricola had also appended a number of poems by Corvinus to his edition of *Octavii Cleophili Phanensis Poeta Vennustissimi de poetarum catu libellus* (Kraków, 1511).

In 1518, Corvinus' fellow city-secretary and close friend Gregor Morenberg died after a painful illness. Morenberg, mindful of his friend's childlessness, had nominated Corvinus as guardian of his children. Morenberg's son Johannes would in time become rector of St Elisabeth's school and representative of the city's schools in the city council. At the time of his father's death, Johannes Morenberg was studying in Kraków. Corvinus had an opportunity to visit his new adoptive son in April that year, when he attended the wedding of king Sigismund I of Poland and Bona Sforza, princess of Bari, where he declaimed two poems as part of Breslau's wedding gift to the newly married pair.<sup>32</sup> By this stage, Corvinus was being hailed as one of the best poets in Central Europe, and over the years would be acclaimed by the likes of Celtis, Hutten, Melanchthon, Bebel, Vadianus, Moibanus and Leonard Coxe.

Hundreds of delegates from all around Europe attended the wedding, and there is no doubt that Luther's theses on indulgences were discussed over the table at the wedding feast. By 1519, Lutheran tracts were being reprinted in Breslau. It should be repeated that the issue of indulgences was of very little importance to the introduction of Lutheranism to Breslau, since indul-

<sup>32</sup> Jodocus Ludovicus Decius, *Diarii et earum quæ memoratu digna in splendidissimis Potentissimi Sigismundi Poloniae Regis, et Serenissima Domina Bonæ Mediolani Barique Ducis Principis Rossani nuptiis gesta [...] descriptio* (Kraków: Vietor, May 1518). Corvinus' two poems for the wedding are printed as *Epithalamium. Laurenti Corvini. In nuptiis sacrae regiae Maiestatis. Poloniae [...]* (Kraków: Vietor, 1518). Documents relating to the wedding, including Decius' *Diarium* and the poems of Cricius and Corvinus, are found (in somewhat defective transcriptions) in *Acta Tomiciana. Epistolæ, legationes, responsa, actiones, res gestæ*, ed. Tytus Działyński (Poznań: Popliński, [1855]) IV, pp. 276–327. Jakub Niedźwiedz edited Corvinus' poem 'Edite Cæsareo' and translated it into Polish in *Szesnastowieczne Epitalamia Łacińskie w Polsce*. *Terminus Bibliotheca Classica I* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1999), pp. 202–9. On Corvinus' other wedding poem 'Ad Famam', see Jakub Niedźwiedz, 'Podróż sławy Zygmunta Starego do Nowego Świata Wawrzyńca Korwina *Ad Famam*', *Terminus* 3 (2001), pp. 243–55. Stanislaus Gorski, *Tercius Tomus legationum. responsionum, literarum. rerumque Polonicarum: Sub Dino Sigismundo primo. rege Poloniae [...] actarum [...]*, (Kraków, BJ, ms 6548 III, pp. 64–8 [*Edite*], 69–71 [*Fama*]). On p. 63 of this ms is written an instruction that the title decoration from the print of Corvinus' poem is to be copied into the ms by hand: 'hic Aquila pingi debet inferius. Sum Regina Avium [...]', indicating that the two poems were copied from Vietor's print. The title page of Corvinus' print is reproduced as plate I in Niedźwiedz (1999).

gences had been resisted by the cathedral chapter even before this time.<sup>33</sup> The issues that did cause concern in Silesia were the accumulation of benefices, the immorality (real or perceived) of many clergy, the situation of the altar priests, and the use of the ban to punish late payment of church dues.

The introduction of Lutheranism to Breslau was assisted to a large extent by the one-year vacuum of power that followed the death of bishop Turz  in 1520. The cathedral chapter wrote several times to Rome for confirmation of their bishop elect, but these letters went unanswered. Many in the chapter feared that the rising threat of Lutheranism would destroy the church entirely, and the cathedral chapter sent Corvinus to the Diet of Worms to lobby the emperor, presumably ignorant of the fact that he had recently received a letter from Melanchthon.<sup>34</sup> Corvinus arrived a couple of days after Luther's departure, but was evidently impressed by Luther's defiance of pope and emperor. It may well have been here that Corvinus decided to throw in his lot with the Lutheran party.

The first Lutheran preachers in Breslau were Franciscans from the monastery of St James, which had close connexions with the monastery in Wittenberg.<sup>35</sup> During Luther's enforced absence in the Wartburg in 1521 and 1522, a destructive radical wing gained ascendancy in Wittenberg and then in Breslau, crying out for the abolition of everything associated with the old religion, including the mass and church schools.<sup>36</sup> The council, itself now increasingly influenced by Luther, was thus placed in a difficult position, unwilling to stem the popular tide of support for Luther's message, yet careful that the hordes should not sweep away everything old and good. Corvinus and the lawyer Johannes Metzler did their best to make sure that sound education continued in the city, taking care of such fundamental issues as regular payment of tea-

<sup>33</sup> Alfred Sabisch, *Acta Capituli Wratislaviensis 1500–1562* (Vienna: B hlau, 1972–76) II, pp. 98–101.

<sup>34</sup> Sabisch, *Acta Capituli* II, pp. 271–2.

<sup>35</sup> Ferdinand D elle, 'Das Wittenberger Franziskanerkloster und die Reformation', *Franziskanische Studien* 10 (1923), pp. 279–307.

<sup>36</sup> See Nikolaus M ller, *Die Wittenberger Bewegung 1521 und 1522* (Leipzig: Heinsius, 1909).

chers. Metzler even held classes in Latin and Greek beside his legal practice to ensure that these subjects were still being taught regularly.<sup>37</sup>

Relations between the pro-Lutheran city council and the cathedral chapter were becoming increasingly tense. The first act of will on the part of the city council was in a dispute with the Bernardine monastery, which ended only when the entire monastic community left the city in June 1522.<sup>38</sup> Was the city's intolerance of the Bernardines perhaps the result of Melancthon's advice that Corvinus should reject the superstitions of the monks? It is impossible to say, although Corvinus' role in the dissolution of the monastery was noted with horror by a number of clergy who remained faithful to the old ways. Meanwhile, the city council also began to take over ecclesiastical prerogatives like poor relief, under the influence of Luther's tracts. In mid-1523 the council set up a charitable foundation for the poor and infirm that was to be supported by donations and revenue from previously established bequests. Corvinus was the first administrator of this foundation; his regulations for the organisation show the decisive influence of Luther's treatise *On the Freedom of a Christian*, though his preamble for the establishment of the foundation still contains traces of the pre-Reformation view that the poor are a means for the rich to receive salvation through the practice of charity.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ambrosius Moibanus, dedication of *P. Terentii comedia, iuxta doctissimorum virorum recognitionem quam diligentissima excusae* [sic] (Breslau: Andreas Winkler, Feb. 1540), transcribed in Bauch, *Aktenstücke*, p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> Erich Franke, 'Über die Vertreibung der Bernhardiner aus Breslau', *ZVG.Schlesien* 41 (1907), pp. 37–98; Richard Foerster, 'Heinrich und Seyfried Ribisch', *ZVG.Schlesien* 41 (1907), pp. 181–240, at pp. 192–198; Lucius Teichmann, 'Die Franziskaner-Observanten in Schlesien vor der Reformation', diss. theol. Breslau, 1934; Kurt Engelbert, 'Die Anfänge der lutherischen Bewegung in Breslau und Schlesien', *ASKG* 18 (1960), pp. 121–207, esp. 149–60.

<sup>39</sup> *Stad Register czuo dem Gmeinen Almosen, Anno dni 1524*, Wrocław, Archiwum Państwowe, Sig. 7608 (formerly ms Q 250, in Corvinus' hand); Wrocław, Archiwum Państwowe, Handschrift P. I., fols. 41–44, transcribed in *Schlesische Kirchen- und Schulordnungen von der Reformation bis ins 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Hans Jessen and Walter Schwarz. Quellen zur Schlesischen Kirchengeschichte 1 (Görlitz: Starke, 1938), pp. 1–5. On the development of the theology of the poor, see Carter Lindberg, *Beyond Charity: Reformation Initiatives for the Poor* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

Ever since the failed bid to establish a university in Breslau in 1505, the city council had been keen to appropriate the bishop's right to appoint priests to the two parishes of St Elisabeth and St Mary Magdalene, and teachers to the parish schools. St Mary Magdalene's had been in the hands of an administrator since the death of the last incumbent in 1517, an unsatisfactory situation that the council resolved by appointing Johannes Heß as the parish's first Lutheran minister in 1523. Corvinus was intimately involved with the planning and execution of all these manoeuvres.

To legitimate his appointment, Heß wanted to justify his theological position through a public disputation, in imitation of Zwingli's first Zurich disputation of 1523. Despite the opposition of the archbishop, the disputation was held in April 1524 in St Dorothy's Augustinian monastery.<sup>40</sup> Heß and his assistant Johannes Wunschalt faced stiff opposition from a delegation from St Adalbert's Dominican monastery. Corvinus acted as the council representative, and at the end of the second day of the disputation declaimed a poem celebrating the spread of Luther's divine gospel message through Silesia. The model of the Breslau disputation, in which the final judgement is given not by delegates of a university but by the city council or the laity, was to prove decisive in subsequent religious colloquies throughout the Empire.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Johann Heß, *Von disen nach geschriben Schlußreden ist gehandelt worden auß Göttlicher geschriff zu Breßlaw/ auff den zwainzigsten tag des Monats Aprilis/ durch herrn Doctorem Johannem Hessen/ Alda Thümbherrn und Pfarberrn* (n.p.: n.p., n.d.). The notarial protocol for the Breslau disputation, made by Anton Lebe and Sebastian Heynemann was in Stadtarchiv, Urkunde H 33a, but is now lost. It was published in C. A. J. Kolde, *Dr Johann Hess, der schlesische Reformator* (Breslau: Trewendt, 1846), pp. 106–121. An annotated summary is in Georg Kretschmar, *Die Reformation in Breslau I* (Ulm: Unser Weg, 1960), pp. 110–2.

<sup>41</sup> Otto Scheib, 'Die Breslauer Disputation von 1524 als Beispiel eines frühreformatorischen Religionsgespräch eines Doktors der Theologie', in *Festschrift für Bernhard Stasienski. Beiträge zur ostdeutschen und osteuropäischen Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Gabriel Adriányi and Joseph Gottschalk (Vienna: Böhlau, 1975), pp. 98–106; Werner Laug, 'Johannes Heß und die Disputation in Breslau von 1524', in *Martin Luther und die Reformation in Ostdeutschland und Südeuropa. Wirkungen und Wechselwirkungen*, ed. Ulrich Hutter and Hans-Günther Parplies. Beihefte zum Jahrbuch für Schlesische Kirchengeschichte 8 (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1991), pp. 67–77.

The response to Heß's theses for disputation from the Catholic side was swift. Peter Risinius (Ridzinski), a young Catholic apologist, published a sustained attack on the theses.<sup>42</sup> Heß was defended against Risinius' charges in a pamphlet by the pseudonymous author Paulus Cacchinnius.<sup>43</sup> Risinius replied with another volley, in which he suggested that Antonius Niger and Corvinus stood behind the person of Cacchinnius.<sup>44</sup>

One of the first and most public disputes over liturgical reform in Breslau occurred in 1524. Luther had criticised the feast of Corpus Christi as essentially idolatrous and irreligious.<sup>45</sup> In the lead-up to Corpus Christi in 1524, the Breslau council sought to scale down the procession by reducing the number of monstrences, and Corvinus was sent to announce the council's plans to the cathedral chapter.<sup>46</sup> Corvinus' role in Heß' disputation and in the negotiations over the Corpus Christi procession made him unpopular with the clergy who had remained faithful to the Roman church, and he was publicly criticised in an anonymous pamphlet.<sup>47</sup> On 25 April 1525, Heß put into effect other liturgical changes that Luther had suggested in his 1523 treatises *On the order of the parish service* (*Von Ordnung Gottesdiensts in der Gemeinde*) and the *Order of the Mass and Communion* (*Formula missæ et communionis*). Yet it is also suprising how much of the liturgical life of the mediaeval church was preserved by the Lutherans in Breslau. For example, Corvinus' Hours of the Passion continued to be sung at St Elisabeth's into the mid-nineteenth century.

In 1525 and 1526, Corvinus defended Lutheranism against Roman Catholic antagonists in a series of four letters to his old friend Stanislaw Byliński,

<sup>42</sup> Petrus Risinius, *In axiomata Ioannis Hessi Wratislaviæ ædita* (Kraków: [n.p.], 1524).

<sup>43</sup> Paulus Cacchinnius Vratislaviensis, *Petro Risinio Cracoviensi pro Ioanne Hesso, Parocho suo* (Breslau: Libisch, 1524), reprinted in Siegismund Justus Ehrhardt, *Presbyteriologie des evangelischen Schlesiens* (Liegnitz: Pappäsche, 1780) I, pp. 493–505.

<sup>44</sup> Petrus Risinius, *In Ioannis Hessi Cachinii Sympphantias responsio* (Kraków: Ungler, 1524). On the basis of prose style, vocabulary and manner of argumentation, I would suggest that Corvinus was responsible only for the central chapter, on the priesthood of Christ.

<sup>45</sup> D. Martin Luthers Werke. *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–1983) XII, pp. 578–81; XIX, p. 1613.

<sup>46</sup> Sabisch, *Acta Capituli* II, pp. 348–50.

<sup>47</sup> Wrocław, Archiwum Państwowe, Scheinig 628, transcribed Gustav Bauch, 'Ein Beitrag zur Breslauer Reformationsgeschichte', *ZVG.Schlesien* 16 (1882), pp. 273–9.

canon and preacher at Przemyśl.<sup>48</sup> Throughout the correspondence, Corvinus' position is largely a rearticulation of Heß' theses on the primacy of the Word of God and the high priesthood of Christ. Corvinus also expresses a belief that Luther's linguistic and exegetical recovery of the word of God in the Scriptures has effected an improved access to the Word of God in the person of Christ. Although Corvinus relies more on biblical citations in his letters to Byliński than ever before, there is also a certain continuity of images in these letters taken over from his earlier, Platonising, period.

After years of service to education, piety and government, Corvinus died on 21 July 1527. During his life he had played an uncommonly important role in the unfolding of Central European humanism. He had advanced Conrad Celtis' humanistic program with perhaps even more tenacity than his teacher. He had pressed humanistic studies into the service of the city and the creation of a civic myth in the same spirit as the Italian civic humanists. He had encouraged the astronomical investigations – not to mention the literary pursuits – of his student Copernicus, arguably the most important Polish scholar of the sixteenth century. He had taken the refined Platonism of Ficino out of the rarefied atmosphere of the literary sodality and brought it to the attention of an entire city, giving it a liturgical expression which would last more than three hundred years. He had argued vigorously for Luther's radical interpretation of grace and responsibility, and agitated for the official introduction of this doctrine in his beloved city of Breslau. Moreover, through his students and those he influenced – from Copernicus, Bebel, Cingularius and Valentin Eck to Ambrosius Moibanus, Johannes Metzler and Melancthon himself – Corvinus had contributed not only to the blossoming of Breslau, the 'sacred flower of Europe', but to the gentle unfolding of Central European humanism at large.

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<sup>48</sup> The correspondence between Byliński and Corvinus is reprinted in S. Byliński, *Defensorium Ecclesiae adversus Laurentium Carvinum Lutheranae hereseos sectatorem editum* (Kraków: Scharffenberg, 1531).

