

IMAGES OF THE MERCHANT IN GERMAN RENAISSANCE LITERATURE

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Germany on the eve of the Reformation was doing well. By the end of the fifteenth century, when the New World was being discovered, her natural and technical resources were second to none. The German-speaking territories of the Holy Roman Empire produced many of the raw materials which the period most needed: silver, copper, tin and lead; they included some of the richest areas in Europe, and were major centres of mining and metallurgy. Moreover, Germany was criss-crossed by major trade routes linking east and west, north and south, along which commodities of every kind, both humble and exotic, were forwarded from one entrepôt to another. The movement of raw materials and the manufacture of finished goods led to expanding markets and increased production; consumption grew, and with it rose the standard of urban living. All this presupposed the active presence and participation of a merchant class. Indeed merchants were everywhere to be found playing a vital part in the shaping and day-to-day running of German society in the period before and after 1500, an era which has been called the golden age of the urban bourgeoisie in Germany.¹ What image of them does the literature of the period transmit?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that a merchant is 'one who buys and sells commodities for profit', a definition almost identical with that of the word 'Kaufmann' in Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch*: 'Die bedeutung ist zweifach, verkäufer, entsprechend den doppelsinn von *kauf*, *kaufen*.' Between 1450 and 1550 the use of the term 'kaufmann' expanded to include concepts such as 'merchant-manufacturer' and 'merchant-banker' as well as its usual meanings of wholesaler, retailer and petty trader. One significant factor, especially in south Germany, was the emergence of family trading associations; another was the spread of what is called 'das Verlagswesen', a system in which one individual entrepreneur or 'Verleger' undertook to purchase and supply the raw materials required by craftsmen-manufacturers, raised capital for them if needed, and guaranteed the marketing and disposal

¹ Friedrich Lutge, 'The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries in Social and Economic History', in *Pre-Reformation Germany*, ed. Gerald Strauss (London: Macmillan, 1972), 316–79, at 346. See also Ernst Pitz, *Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte Deutschlands im Mittelalter* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1979), 153–60.

of their finished products. If a whole group or guild of craftsmen-manufacturers joined in his scheme, materials and goods could be purchased, handled and sold on a larger scale; profits would rise accordingly, and could then be re-invested in real estate and expanding industries.² Such developments brought merchants into ever closer contact with industry, while their commercial and financial expertise could sometimes also make them useful to governments and princes, on whose behalf they could act as intermediaries and negotiators. Thus the Fuggers, an Augsburg merchant family, managed to secure a virtual monopoly of copper production in the Tirol, Moravia and Hungary, and major interests in the industries which depended on this vital commodity: armaments, engineering, and the minting of coin. Soon they began to supplant the great Italian financiers as the funders of the mighty, and soon the new Emperor, Maximilian I, was heavily in debt to them. By 1500, Augsburg had become one of Germany's relatively few big cities with populations of 20,000 or more. Though Germany had some 3,000 localities of more or less urban character, the vast majority were market towns with a population of less than 3,000 souls. Its two main areas of high urban population in the post-Hansa period were the prosperous merchant cities along the Rhine, with Strasbourg and Cologne, Germany's largest, at their head, and the cities of Swabia, Bavaria and Franconia, notably Nuremberg and Augsburg.³

It was here that printing gave a new impetus to literature at the start of the period. This great technological and cultural advance was built on the long-standing skills and industries of these cities; the paper-makers and leather-workers provided the folios and bindings, while the manufacture of arms and gunpowder and the minting of medals and coins provided the technological expertise for the ink and type. The early involvement of merchants in the physical production and dissemination of the printed book is self-evident; but their presence made itself felt in other ways, too. As their commercial interests widened and their lines of communication lengthened, German merchants increasingly transacted business from their 'Schreibkammer' or office; this necessitated the most meticulous attention to accurate clerical detail and book-keeping, which in turn led them to pay growing heed to education and to the subjects of the curriculum in urban schools.⁴ As early as the thirteenth century,

² Bernd Moeller, 'Deutschland im Zeitalter der Reformation', in *Deutsche Geschichte*, ed. Joachim Leuschner, ii, *Frühe Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 1-154, at 23.

³ There are many studies of German towns. In English one of the best is Gerald Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1968). See also F.R.H. Du Boulay, *Germany in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Athlone Press, 1983). Cf. Erich Maschke, 'Deutsche Städte am Ausgang des Mittelalters', in *Die Stadt am Ausgang des Mittelalters*, ed. Wilhelm Rausch (Linz: Osterreichische Arbeitskreis für Stadtgeschichtsforschung, 1974), an informative account giving detailed population figures.

⁴ Edith Ennen, *The Medieval Town* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1979), 201f; Winfried Hausmann, *Kontor und Kaufmann in alter Zeit: Das Büro des deutschen Kaufmanns vom 12. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf: Schilling, 1962).

emphasis on the need for vocational training had begun to erode the educational monopoly of the clergy: now, in places where trade was prospering, the three Rs took on new relevance because letter-writing and arithmetic were vital, and importance was also given to the acquisition of foreign languages. Merchants' sons learnt the elements of literacy and numeracy at school, then acquired professional know-how in their fathers' offices and with relatives or associates elsewhere. The rapid increase in literacy created a growing readership, and one of new complexion. This is shown by the rise in importance of the vernacular alongside Latin, a language of less interest to merchants and their offspring than it was to lawyers and the clergy; it is also reflected in the tendency of German publishers to cater for young people when producing fiction in the vernacular, and by their readiness to publish works translated from foreign languages or set in foreign countries.

How, then, is the merchant and his role in contemporary society reflected in the literature of the period? The question is surely a legitimate one. All literature reflects reality to some degree, and during the hundred years or so with which we are concerned, merchants formed an influential part of that reality.⁵ One would therefore expect them to figure in the vernacular literature in which some of them had a financial interest. Does it provide any counterparts to the portraits of merchants painted by Renaissance artists, of which that by Dürer of Jakob Fugger the Rich (1520) is one of the most notable?

A good starting-point is provided by the *Narrenschiff* or *Ship of Fools* (Basle, 1494), the grandiose satire with which the Strasbourg scholar-lawyer Sebastian Brant summed up an age, passed sentence on it, and inaugurated a new era in German literature.⁶ The *Ship of Fools* passes in review the foibles, faults, and failings of mankind, diagnosing each as a more or less malignant symptom of the foolishness or folly endemic in all human beings. Brant deals with types and degrees of folly, not with social types or classes, let alone individuals. Merchants therefore make no appearance *per se*, any more than do priests, lawyers or members of other professions, yet as the *Ship of Fools* unfolds, it becomes clear that some of the values underlying its criteria for gauging folly must have been congenial to those engaged in trade.⁷ An early instance occurs in chapter 15, entitled 'Of foolish plans':

⁵ Evamaria Engel, 'Zum Alltag des deutschen Kaufmanns im Spätmittelalter', in *Volkskultur des europäischen Spätmittelalters*, ed. Peter Dinzelbacher and Hans-Dieter Muck (Stuttgart: Kroner, 1987), 89–108.

⁶ Sebastian Brant, *Narrenschiff*, ed. Friedrich Zarncke (Leipzig, 1854, repr. Darmstadt, 1964); see also *The Ship of Fools*, trans. Edwin H. Zeydel (New York: Dover Publications, 1944, repr. 1962). Quotations are taken from this version.

⁷ Little is known about the reactions of ordinary contemporary readers to Brant's poem, but see Severin Corsten, 'Kölner Kaufleute lesen Brants Narrenschiff', in *De captu lectoris: Wirkungen des Buches im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*, ed. W. Milde and W. Schuder (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1988), 67–80, demonstrating that a particular copy of the Latin version of the *Ship of Fools* (1497) originally belonged to Hermann Rinck, a Cologne merchant who represented the family firm in London from 1481 on: the Rincks exported steel goods and Rhine wines to England and imported English cloth via Anwerp and Calais.

Whoe'er would build without regret
 Should plan before the stones are set.
 Regret in many a man commences
 When losses in his purse he senses.
 If you would venture something bold,
 Reserves are needed, cash and gold,
 To reach your distant destination
 Of which you dream without cessation.

The folly identified here is of course one primarily associated with builders and developers, yet there are clear connotations of commercial risks and argosies in this chapter which ends with references to the pyramids beside the distant Nile. The theme, and the references to Egypt, are taken up in chapter 25, 'Of borrowing too much', a title which at once invites the attention of readers engaged in trade:

The man who's careful when he borrows
 Has but few cares and fewer sorrows;
 Trust not the men, they are not true,
 Who'd sign your bond and lend to you;
 If you can't pay you will be bled.

This anticipation of *The Merchant of Venice* acts as a caution in a spiritual as well as a commercial sense. The religious purpose underlying Brant's work comes out even more audibly in another early chapter which also introduces a topos frequently encountered in connection with merchants in the literature of the period. Chapter 17 ('Of useless riches') makes skilful use of the parable of Dives and Lazarus to satirize the adulation of wealth. Straight away we are projected into the context of a self-governing German city:

Such councilmen one fain would choose
 As have the greatest wealth to lose;
 The world believes a man as much
 As he has funds inside his pouch.
 Lord Lucre leads the greedy on:
 If still alive were Solomon,
 The council he would have to shun
 If but a simple weaver he,
 Or if his purse of gold were free.

The indictment of civic self-satisfaction and of the electoral process is sharp; more subtle is the identification suggested between the poor man, Lazarus, a simple weaver, and King Solomon, a link no doubt suggested by the words of Christ in Matthew 6: 28–9 and Luke 12: 27. Respect is foolishly, but all too frequently, paid to rich men; but how do men become so rich? That question is not answered until chapter 93, entitled 'Usury and profiteering'. This is by far the most biting portrait Brant paints of his merchant contemporaries. The tone is more sombre now: the satirist is no longer a buffoon, but more like a prophet of old as

he deplores the modern methods of doing business. Price-fixing is rife, and it is linked to deliberate profiteering from natural disasters, for example by buying up basic foodstuffs such as corn and wine, and hoarding them until inevitable price-rises will ensure a handsome profit. Not only that: now that the Jews have gone, 'Christian Jews' impose even more intolerable rates of interest on those who cannot afford to pay.

The emphasis laid in this late chapter of the *Ship of Fools* on fraudulent financial dealing reflects a concern which recurs throughout the period and casts a shadow over the image of the merchant entrepreneur at a time when the economic expansion of early capitalism in Germany depended on his enterprise and success. It found fullest expression in *Von Kaufshandlung und Wucher* (1524), known in English as *Trade and Usury*, one of Luther's most important early writings on man and society, and likely to have been widely read in merchant circles in Protestant Germany.⁸ In the first half of this large-scale treatise, the second half of which is virtually identical with his 'long' sermon on usury of early 1520,⁹ Luther sets out to discuss the sins and abuses associated with merchants, which all stem from that golden rule of theirs: sell for what you can get! Commerce, he argues, is nothing but the theft of the property of others. Can profit therefore ever be justified? It should cover the cost of labour, trouble, and transport, and since the Bible tells us that the labourer is worthy of his hire, this is primarily a matter of conscience; yet, as the subtitle of the sermon woodcut bluntly puts it, the philosophy prevalent in the world is one of 'Pay up or give interest, for I must have my profit!'¹⁰ Luther not only questions the profit motive, he also condemns the practice of standing surety; it is after all foolhardy to trust another human being to that extent, when God alone can and should be trusted. Christians, being rare folk and brothers, may admit of some exception in this respect, but even they might do better to barter or pay cash, rather than borrow.

At this point Luther sees an opportunity to put forward a truly Christian concept of the merchant, yet he is not so naïve as to suppose that other approaches are not more attractive to those whose main objective is to acquire wealth quickly in order to go up in the world; indeed everyone nowadays wants to become a merchant and get rich. This does not alter the fact that the three activities (Luther calls them errors) most closely associated with the merchant – the pursuit of extra profit, borrowing, and standing surety for others – are the source of all injustice. Yet the economic situation at the time he was writing meant that expanding trade needed capital, while capital accumulated in trade

⁸ Martin Luther, *Trade and Usury*, trans. Charles M. Jacobs, revised Walther I. Brandt, in *Luther's Works*, xlv (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 233–310.

⁹ Michael A. Pegg, *A Catalogue of German Reformation Pamphlets, 1516–1546, in Libraries of Great Britain and Ireland* (Baden-Baden, 1973), nos. 1652 and 2527.

¹⁰ H.H. Robinson-Hammerstein and M.W. Senger, *Reformation and Society in Germany, 1500–1530* (Dublin: Trinity College, 1980), 29.

sought safe and profitable investment; at the same time, the risks involved in the expansion of trade routes and in maritime commerce seemed to justify profit and had created the need for a new type of contract, unknown in Roman law, whereby one merchant stood surety for another. It was fraught with legal and moral problems which came to a head artistically in *The Most Excellent Historie of the Merchant of Venice* at the end of the century.

Luther condemns speculative buying. He has no doubt that it is wicked to buy up a commodity in order to inflate its price, to hoard goods until they can command inflated prices, or to corner a market, a practice carried to the crudest lengths by the English cloth merchants. Practices such as these cause widespread misery, but they happen all over the place: the world is evil. St Paul tells us that love of money is the root of all evil (I Timothy 6: 10), and a merchant, as Ecclesiasticus 26: 29 puts it, can hardly keep himself from doing wrong. We complain about robbers and about robber barons: but the great trading companies which were becoming a feature of the business world in northern Europe are, he says, beyond the bounds of divine justice and Christian law: 'there is no end to such cheating, and no merchant can trust another out of his sight and reach'. It is not surprising to see the Old Testament figure of Joseph occupying Luther's mind in this context; Joseph is an example diametrically opposed, in Luther's view, to that of the dishonest self-seeking merchant against whom his implacable criticism is aimed. Joseph's appearance here is an early pointer to the important role he came to play in literature exemplifying the Protestant ethos.

Luther's diatribe against the business ethics and commercial practices of his period stemmed from his characteristic conviction that theologians had turned a blind eye to what was going on; his gloomy view of the merchant owes much to his profound concern with the spiritual state of humanity. Merchants, however, could be seen in a more sanguine light; indeed they make regular appearances in the humorous anecdotal literature of the period, in which Germany is so rich. They may not turn up as frequently as, say, the student, the peasant, or the priest, but some stories about them add a further, realistic dimension to the literary image of them.

A good example, which allows us to witness merchants going about their business and reminds us of Germany's industrial base, is told by Heinrich Bebel (1472–1518), a pupil of Sebastian Brant. Bebel was much admired for his ability to reconcile elegant humanist latinity with the popular story-telling tradition in his *Facetiae* (1508), a collection of anecdotes which appeared in ever-expanding editions all through the sixteenth century. Anecdote 65 in Book III of the Strasbourg 1512 edition takes us to Frankfurt on Main, one of the great centres of German trade, whose famous autumn fair went back to the middle of the twelfth century. Translated, it reads as follows:

A certain man who was buying iron in Frankfurt told the vendor that he never owed anyone anything, and that up to now he had never bought anything without ready cash. Now, however, he requested the vendor to sell him the iron on deferred terms, as they say [i.e. for payment on an agreed date]. The seller replied: 'I shall hand over nothing to you without ready money, because either you have no credit – since merchants do not always carry money on them – or you have never done business before, or you are so rich that you have no need of terms. Consequently I shall not wait for you to find the cash.'¹¹

In this anecdote the would-be purchaser is recognized by the vendor as either very naïve and commercially inexperienced, or as a rogue intent on getting something for nothing. He may be living on his wits or he may be rich: after all, rich people are often as reluctant as the impecunious to pay up! Implicit in this diagnosis is the vendor's own image of himself as a fair and honest trader endowed with a business ethos; without such standards, trade would have broken down in an age lacking the controls and rapid communications the modern business world takes for granted. Separated by enormous distances from their home bases and their money, merchants had to be able to rely on trust in all their dealings: creditworthiness meant more when it could less easily be verified.

The far-flung dimensions of German commercial activity in the period are brought home by accounts by merchants themselves, such as the *Reisebüchlein* of Andreas Ryff, a Basle dealer in cloth and silver who had links with both Italy and Antwerp from 1573 onwards,¹² or the 169 letters exchanged during the last two decades of the sixteenth century between Balthasar Paumgartner, a Nuremberg merchant on his travels, and his wife Magdalena, back home.¹³ These letters provide close insight into the realities of life for people of their class, and bring home the essential part merchants' wives played in the running of a successful business. They show us human beings concerned with their household and family, their work, and their physical and spiritual health: neither partner had much scope for action, but both accept their lot in life as worthwhile and fulfilling. Here, the image which comes over is a positive, albeit limited, one. These real-life instances happen to date from the latter part of the period; but the book, which may well have been the favourite light reading of Ryff, the Paumgartners, and their kind, had first appeared in print in Augsburg in 1509.¹⁴

Fortunatus, for a long time one of Europe's best-loved stories,

¹¹ Heinrich Bebel, *Facetien*, ed. Gustav Bebermeyer (Bibliothek des literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, 276, Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1931), 128.

¹² Andreas Ryff, *Reisebuchlein*, ed. F. Meyer and E. Landolt, *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, 72 (1972), 5–136.

¹³ *Briefwechsel Balthasar Paumgartners des Jüngeren mit seiner Gattin Magdalena, geb. Behaim 1582–1598*, ed. G. Steinhausen (Bibl. des lit. Vereins in Stuttgart, 204, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1895); see also Steven Ozment, 'The World of a Nuremberg Merchant and his Wife', *Daphnis*, 15 (1986), 535–50.

¹⁴ The merchant is often conspicuous by his absence in tales turning on what his wife gets up to while he is away. Examples include Hans Sachs's versions of the snow-child story.

provides valuable insights into the merchant's world.¹⁵ It was produced as Augsburg was becoming the centre of the European money-market, and its preoccupation with money, as well as its popularity, suggest that it reflects the reading tastes of the period and place; Augsburg seems to have had a particularly *laissez-faire* attitude towards the accumulation of fortunes.¹⁶ Its anonymous author relates the rise and fall of a family over two generations and, in doing so, parallels the history of the Fugger family; the story's reflection of contemporary realities is, however, offset by elements of fairy tale and far-fetched yarn which add further significant dimensions. In the first place, they remind us that trade often drew the merchant out of the parochial security of German urban normality into a world fraught with risks and perils. In *Fortunatus*, as, later, in *Robinson Crusoe*, the element of adventure is infused with the ethos of the merchant class. Extraordinary its subject-matter may sometimes be, but closer scrutiny reveals the unity of concept; indeed, the fairy-tale element, represented most obviously by the magic purse given to the hero by Dame Fortuna, which conveniently never runs out of cash, is closely and symbolically linked to the central theme of the book: the materialism at the heart of man and society. Fortunatus, the son of an impoverished citizen of Famagusta, returns from his adventures in London, Venice, Constantinople, and elsewhere, marries into the nobility, and becomes a respected and prosperous merchant. On one of his later travels even further afield he purloins the Sultan of Egypt's magic cap, which, donned, will transport the wearer wherever he wishes. However, his two sons, Ampedo and Andolosia, do not take after him. One squanders his wealth and destroys the purse, the other provokes hostility and is finally done out of the magic cap and murdered. From this brief summary it will be seen that the success and affluence, but also the decline and sorry end, stem from the hero's early encounter with Fortuna; given a choice, he chose wealth in preference to wisdom, strength, health, and beauty. Germany's first middle-class novel, as it has been called, presents a human comedy in which money is perceived as a means to achieve upward social mobility, and the pursuit of gain is revealed as the underlying motive for high adventure and exotic travel. Though published in 1509, *Fortunatus* draws on older material and conveys a world-view which predates it by several decades. Yet the many translations, versions, and retellings of *Fortunatus* in many of the main languages of northern and eastern Europe (Dutch, French, English, Danish, Hungarian, Polish) are evidence that it was the most entertaining treatment of the merchant figure to emerge from the German-speaking cultural area during the late-medieval and Renaissance period.

¹⁵ *Fortunatus*, ed. Hans-Gert Roloff (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981).

¹⁶ Pamela J. Rohrmann, 'The Central Role of Money in the Chapbook *Fortunatus*', *Neophilologus*, 59 (1975), 262-71.

But the most penetrating and problematic portrayal is to be found in one of the period's finest plays: *Mercator seu iudicium*, by the Protestant pastor and controversialist Thomas Kirchmeyer (1511–63), better known as Naogeorg, the humanist version of his name. It first appeared in Latin in 1540; an anonymous German translation followed in 1541, further editions in both languages (as well as in Low German, French and Dutch) appearing at intervals throughout the remainder of the century. Naogeorg's *Mercator* is a remarkable work.¹⁷ It dramatizes the struggle going on within its protagonist as his conscience attempts to rescue him from habits of mind and a set of values which go back to the day he was seduced by a young whore called Sors or Hauptsumm (that is, capital bearing interest) who bore him an illegitimate child he named Lucrum or Gewinn (i.e. gain) but other people called 'Interest'. Something of the flavour and effectiveness of the play can be gauged from its protagonist's first appearance: Lyochares, the gracious messenger of Death, invites Conscience to come and observe the merchant while he is in conversation with his servant or clerk: 'Have all my accounts been properly done, and my outgoings and income correctly noted? I need to know what profit I have made on all my exotic wares!' (Act I, lines 585–88). The idea that he may have to quit this world at a moment's notice fills him with panic, not because hell awaits him if he is not careful, but because he has so much business in hand; for example, he is about to set out for Frankfurt to collect the sum of 12,000 *Gulden* (a handsome sum: the 1534 Luther Bible retailed at 2 *Gulden* 8 *Groschen*). It seems as if in this state of mind nothing can save him; yet, slowly, his values start to right themselves. At first he falls into old habits and has recourse to outdated Catholic responses: perhaps money may buy salvation? Pilgrimages could be substituted for business trips? Good works might still prove efficacious? Only very gradually, and after a crudely realistic depiction of his moral purging, does he come to realize that only God's grace can save him from his fatal attachment to earthly things. Before the judgement-seat of Christ he appeals for clemency. Unlike the prince, the monk, and the bishop with whom he finds himself, *Mercator*'s pleas are heard and he is spared: the drama ends with a masterly stroke as Satan suggests to the merchant's fellow defendants that God may hear their appeals tomorrow.

Naogeorg's play is the first German work in which a merchant is made to look at himself. During its five long acts its protagonist is made to travel a long way in psychological – or, rather, spiritual – terms, from self-centred, greedy complacency to despair, and then to a fundamental review of his values, the realization of his own worth as an individual, and a confession of faith in the redemptive power of the Almighty. In the process, the stereotype of the merchant, while remaining basically undisturbed, is shown to possess an element of individuality in the

¹⁷ Thomas Naogeorg, *Mercator: Der Kaufmann in Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Hans-Gert Roloff, ii (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1982).

sense that, materialist and worldly though his values may be, Mercator has been touched by the Lutheran message and discovers that he has a soul like any other human being. Though he has spent his whole life indulging in deceit, dishonesty, and financial wheeler-dealing, the call of conscience is still audible within him. Thus Luther's conception of the Christian merchant is vindicated, if only on the threshold of death.

The 1550s witnessed a renewed spate of writing in Germany. The decade seems to have been one of economic stability and consolidation, and the overall tone of its literature is one of harmless amusement and earnest entertainment. Two figures stand out: the long-lived poet-cobbler Hans Sachs, who was already coming to personify the moral and aesthetic temper of what was now Germany's foremost trading and manufacturing city, Nuremberg, and Jörg Wickram, a writer based in the Alsatian satirical tradition which went back to Brant. Wickram widened his precursors' range by exploring the possibilities of the prose romance as a vehicle for this approach. His *Von guoten und boesen Nachbarn* (*Good and Bad Neighbours*), dedicated to Caspar Hanschel, a goldsmith and citizen of Colmar, and published in Strasbourg in 1556, is an extraordinary anticipation of Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (1901), or indeed of Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*, in that it traces the fortunes of a merchant family over three generations.¹⁸ From the technical point of view, Wickram's foray into the world of the realistic novel may seem premature; but as a reflection of mid-sixteenth-century attitudes and manners it is highly instructive. Its theme is neighbourliness, and he examines it from various angles, widening its scope to include friendship and marital and parental love. There is a strong didactic impulse, too, as he pays considerable attention to the effects on young people of good and bad company. Clearly, therefore, *Good and Bad Neighbours* is intended as an exploration of human relations within the framework of a community and its ethos; but what community does he have in mind? In a dedicatory preface he gives his reasons for writing the work. Last, but not least, ' . . . both young and old are shown how when someone travels to foreign countries he doesn't know in order to do business there or carry out his trade, he won't be helped if he tells his host or other strangers about his business dealings or his trade, unless, that is, he has got to know them and gained some experience of them already'.¹⁹

This prepares us for the cosmopolitan setting in which the story unfolds. As it opens, Robertus, a rich and upright Antwerp merchant, finds himself being drawn into conflict with his neighbour, a cloth-finisher, whose son is having a bad influence on the merchant's children. Personal disaster then strikes his family: his wife and nine of his ten children die; but a turn for the better occurs when a rich uncle, who deals in precious stones, proposes to leave him his fortune if he

¹⁸ Georg Wickram, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Hans-Gert Roloff, iv (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1969).

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 6.

comes to Lisbon to run his business. Ten years later, Robertus has a commercial empire stretching from Lisbon to Brabant, England, Venice, and elsewhere. His wealth and position are assured, and he can afford to marry his daughter, Cassandra, to a young Spanish merchant called Richard, who had joined his party on the voyage back from London to Lisbon, and whom Robertus had nursed back to health when he was taken ill on the way. When, later, Richard is mugged, Lazarus, a properous dealer in pearls and precious stones, comes to his assistance: the criminals are tracked down and brought to justice, while the two young merchants join forces to set the firm of old Robertus on an even broader footing.²⁰ Things go well; yet the perils of their profession are never far away. Lazarus is kidnapped by the captain of a Turkish vessel, but rescued just in time by Richard and another merchant who comes to his aid. The calm voyage home after this adventure prompts Wickram to reflect on the merchant's life. Rich burghers may have constant business worries, but so, too, does the merchant: ' . . . he has to endure great perils in collecting his wares and goods, for on land highway robbers are always likely to set upon him and he has constantly got to protect his goods and person from them. And when he goes by sea, the cruel and terrifying waves make him feel afraid, so that he feels quite put off eating and drinking.'²¹

By now, both Richard and Lazarus have become fathers, and their children, Amelia and Lazarus Junior, are obviously meant for each other. But first young Lazarus is sent to Antwerp to learn modern languages – the need for merchants to be competent linguists is stressed recurrently. The account of hotel life and business routine there is counterbalanced by another episode which brings home further perils that beset merchants: a valuable gem disappears from the workshop, but is finally traced and restored to its owner in a well-told narrative sequence. Young Lazarus moves on to Venice, where he almost becomes the victim of a murder plot when he fails to be trapped into marrying his hotel-keeper's daughter. Back home at last, he marries Amelia: significantly, the wedding celebrations are *zimlich und ehrlich* (seemly and respectable). Rich these merchants may be, but they fear unnecessary expense. As the novel nears its close, its central characters agree to live together in harmony, sharing the cost of housekeeping. Richard heads this expanded family; but he reminds them that its true head is Peace.

Wickram's novel provides the fullest panorama of a merchant's world in post-Reformation German Renaissance literature. Its dedication to a local goldsmith, its subject matter, and its moral argument

²⁰ Strauss, *Nuremberg*, 129, mentions a Nuremberg merchant, Jakob Cromberger, who went to Seville; he, his son Hans and his son-in-law Lazarus Nurnberger were among the first German family firms to put their money into the American trade. They acted as factors for other Germans and dealt in sugar, pearls, jewels and gold.

²¹ Wickram, *Samtliche Werke*, iv. 78.

indicate that it was intended for a readership which shared its values, experience and philosophy of life.²² Nor are its geographical scale or range of references out of keeping. By the time Wickram was writing, Lisbon and Antwerp had largely usurped the positions once held by Venice and the great cities of Germany, and a growing population of foreign merchants, bankers, financiers and entrepreneurs was congregating in Antwerp, making it the centre of north-western European trade at a time when the nature of commerce was changing and a greater range and variety of products reflected the rising standards of living of the Renaissance period. The overland routes by way of the Rhine contributed in no small measure to Antwerp's prosperity, and brought to it the South German merchants, while the Portuguese trade, which plays such a central part in Wickram's novel, moved there along the western searoutes. Maximilian I called upon the nations to transfer their trade to Antwerp from Bruges; Portugal moved its wine staple there in 1499 and the city also captured much of its spice trade; important, too, was the import and re-export of English cloth, which created a substantial textile finishing and processing industry there, of which the opening episode reminds us. The theme of neighbourliness and mutual assistance which runs through the novel also reflects on the personal, human level a state of affairs familiar to the economic historian: the need for rapid and reliable commercial information required the close physical proximity of merchants and their agents in a single market which could then also function as an entrepôt in the commodity trade. As Wickram was writing, the port he and his fellow Germans called Antorf was indeed the great entrepôt and therefore a natural setting for his story; ironically, the loss of its pre-eminence coincided with the novel's publication. Financial crisis struck the city in 1557.

Good and Bad Neighbours has features in common with *Fortunatus* written half a century earlier, but it provides a more closely focused image of the merchant of the period. Based on reports, if not on direct personal experience, it circumscribes a world within which merchants really did function. Gone is the element of fantasy represented by the magic purse and hat, and drawn from the folklore of the Celtic west and the Arabic orient. In Wickram's novel self-reliance and good fortune are no longer considered enough. Initiative and trusting to luck have to

²² A real-life account on much the same lines is told in the autobiography of Bartholomäus Sastrow of Stralsund: see Ursula Brosthaus, *Bürgerleben im 16. Jahrhundert* (Forschungen und Quellen zur Kirchen- und Kulturgeschichte Ostdeutschlands, 11, Cologne and Vienna: Böhlau, 1972), 7. Cf. Hannelore Christ, *Literarischer Text und historischer Realität* (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann, 1974), 46–9, and Ingeborg Spriewald, *Vom 'Eulenspiegel' zum 'Simplicissimus': Zur Genesis des Realismus in den Anfängen der deutschen Prosaerzählung* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1974), 109–26. Pamela J. Rohrmann, 'The Role of the Merchant in Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century German Literature and its Background in Medieval Literature' (Case Western Reserve University Ph.D. thesis, 1971) confines her discussion of later material to *Fortunatus* and the last three novels of Wickram. Rohrmann sees Wickram's major characters as idealized but regards the background figures as very realistically portrayed.

be complemented by motivation, proper training, and, above all, prudence, if a merchant is to be successful in the long term.²³ From start to finish, it conveys a consistent *Weltanschauung* which shows how trustworthiness, fair-dealing, and careful planning, the traditional priorities of the merchant, had been reinforced during the first half of the sixteenth century by a greater emphasis on personal responsibility, sobriety, and good conduct. Above all, however, the traditional association of the stereotype merchant figure with greed, guile, and the self-centred pursuit of wealth gives way in Wickram to a new emphasis on good neighbourliness, a Christian virtue which had been given renewed prominence by the Protestant reformers.

²³ The moral 'Never act in anger and haste, but wisely and justly' is exemplified in more lurid light in the tale of the Leipzig merchant, no. 32 in Valentin Schumann's *Nachtbuchlein* of 1559.

