HANS KURATH

Hans Kurath, President of the Linguistic Society in 1942 and, through his teaching and research, a shaping influence in dialectology and lexicography, died in Ann Arbor on January 2, 1992, in his 101st year.*

For his eightieth birthday, colleagues assembled a Festschrift containing, among other things, a list of Kurath's publications (Scholler & Reidy 1973) to which readers of this notice are directed. At the time of his retirement from the faculty of the University of Michigan, the official record was supplemented with an overview of his professional life, and, since Kurath himself added a few details omitted in an earlier version and approved the new wording of the whole, this document provides a useful introduction to his career as he saw its highlights:

> 'Hans Kurath, Professor of English and Editor of the *Middle English Dictionary*, entered upon his retirement on the first of this month [July 1, 1962] at the statutory age of seventy. A native of Villach, Austria, Professor Kurath came to the United States in 1907 and was naturalized in 1912. He received his undergraduate education at the Universities of Wisconsin and Texas and his graduate education at the Universities of Texas and Chicago, earning his doctorate at the University of Chicago in 1920. The last-named institution further conferred an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree upon him in 1959. His early career embraced terms in the departments of German of the University of Texas and of Northwestern University. He was appointed Professor of German and Linguistics at Ohio State in 1927 and Professor of Germanics and Linguistics at Brown University in 1931. At Brown he served as Chairman of the Department of German until 1941, and Chairman of the Division of Modern Languages from that date until 1946. In the same year The University of Michigan invited him to join its Department of English Language and Literature and to undertake the duties he is now relinquishing.
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> 'Professor Kurath's scholarly career was devoted chiefly to dialectology and lexicography. In 1930, partly on the basis of his monograph on American pronunciation in 1928, the American Council of Learned Societies appointed him Director of that monumental enterprise, the Linguistic Atlas of the United States. Outgrowths of this work which Professor Kurath himself compiled or edited are the *Linguistic Atlas of New England* (1939–43), *A Word Geography of the Eastern United States* (1949), and, with Raven McDavid, *The Pronunciation of English in the Atlantic States* (1961). Under Professor Kurath's direction, furthermore, the first twenty-eight parts of the *Middle English Dictionary*, amounting to more than a third of the total, have at length been published. This dictionary, undertaken first at Stanford, later at Cornell, and since 1930 in Ann Arbor, has long been the most pressing single need of scholarship concerning English life and letters in the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries. Professor Kurath also found time to serve as President of the Linguistic Society of America in 1941 [sic] and to direct the Society's annual Linguistic Institute from 1947 to 1950. And he continued to the end of his career to teach graduate seminars and direct doctoral theses.

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'The final tribute to Professor Kurath will be the enduring use by the scholarly community of those works which his distinguished gifts of mind and powers of organization have made possible. On the occasion of his seventieth birthday, the Linguistic Society of America appropriately dedicated to him the December 1961 issue of *Language*. On campus, in the same year, his colleagues expressed their high esteem for him when they voted him the Distinguished Faculty Achievement award.' [In 1968 he received a second honorary doctorate, this one from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Though retired, Kurath accepted jointly with his successors the University of Michigan Press Book Award in 1972 for the *Middle English Dictionary*.]

Kurath's career was thus closely connected with the history of twentieth-century linguistics. His outlook was shaped by Americans steeped in the neogrammarian ideas that so influenced intellectual inquiry in our field at the time of the founding of the Society. Appropriately, the 1991 volume of *Language* was dedicated to him at the centenary of his birth.

An English intellectual has recently asserted that 'we live in the shadow of a Renaissance as brilliant and dominating as the Italian Renaissance.' By this he means that the Anglo-American scientific enterprise has been shaped by 'the explosion of genius which burst in Germany and Austria in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' (Annan 1984:165). Hockett has emphasized the same sources for American philology and linguistics in his biographical work on Kurath's near contemporary, Leonard Bloomfield. 'It is hard for us today,' wrote Hockett (1970:536), 'to realize how strong and deep was the tradition of German scholarship in American universities before the first World War, and how enormous a blow that tradition received at the time of the War.' Intellectual and personal details of Kurath's career exemplify this historical moment.

Following their migration to the United States, the Kurath family settled in Milwaukee, then an especially vibrant center of German culture, and Hans began his education in the German-American Teacher's Seminary in that city. From this same institution, a great mentor of American linguists, Eduard Prokosch, had himself graduated in 1900 and had immediately thereafter been appointed instructor in German at the University of Chicago. In 1905, Prokosch began teaching at the University of Wisconsin, and, doubtless keeping in close touch with the Milwaukee Seminary, attracted the young Kurath to Madison. When Prokosch moved to still another academic appointment, this time at the University of Texas in 1913, Kurath went with him, completed his bachelor's degree in 1914, and was appointed to the faculty as an instructor of German. The fierce anti-German sentiment aroused among nativists following U.S. entry into the War led to Texas abolishing academic instruction in German. Bloomfield explained these circumstances dryly in his eulogy of Prokosch: 'he lost this position during the war, chiefly because of a correct factual statement in his text book *Introduction to German* (published in 1911) concerning the representation, under the Empire, of the German people in the Reichstag' (Hockett, 347). These political events, however, had no very serious consequences either for Prokosch (who went to Bryn Mawr [1919–27], New York University [1927–29], and Yale [1929–38]) or for Kurath (who then completed graduate study at Chicago).

When Bloomfield arrived at Wisconsin fresh from Harvard in 1906, he was

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immediately captivated by Prokosch's intellectual example. Writing in 1938 in memory of Prokosch, Bloomfield recalled: 'By the time we sat down to the meal, a matter perhaps of fifteen minutes, I had decided that I should always work in linguistics' (Hockett, 348–9). Bloomfield's testimony alone might suffice, but the brilliance and cosmopolitan character of the Prokosch household was reported by all who came into it. One son, Frederic Prokosch (b. 1908), became a novelist, poet, and translator, and his memoirs detail the visit of Pavlova to the Prokosch household in Austin. On that occasion, Gertrude (b. 1901) danced childishly but beautifully for their guest. Later, in Philadelphia, Thomas Mann spent time in literary discussion with the family. The powerful example of the father has been well (if lavishly) described by the son (Prokosch 1983:4–5):

> 'My father taught linguistics and philology at the university. He was a finely profiled man with keen black eyes and a fondling voice. He had fled from Austria many years ago because of a scandal involving a duel, and he had sailed to America, rebellious and penniless. One evening in Milwaukee (or so he told me one day), he had a vision of a vast multiplicity of ancient languages blended into an all-engulfing panorama. After this he devoted his entire soul to a single end: to disentangle from this intricacy the history of the Indo-European tongues. His vision was fulfilled in a philological masterpiece of heroic proportions and of a saintly lucidity.'

In this environment, the younger generation carried on the tradition. Gertrude became an Amerindian ethnologist, particularly concerned with music and dance (see Dyen 1980), and Frederic, apart from his original writing, an accomplished translator, particularly known for his English version of *Medea* (see Squires 1964). No wonder Kurath was swept up by this lively household, and his younger brother William Kurath (1900–1949) likewise came under its influence to be a student of Bloomfield's and later, from the convenient post of chair of the German department at the University of Arizona, a student of Amerindian languages. Twice a widower, Hans Kurath affirmed his attachment to the Prokosch household by marrying Gertrude Prokosch in 1930.

No doubt Eduard Prokosch encouraged his protégé to begin graduate studies at Chicago. The milieu of those days was earnest and authoritarian. Francis Asbury Wood was the senior and most important philologist when Kurath arrived after having been dismissed from Texas in 1919. Following a period of study at Göttingen, Wood had completed one of the very early Ph.D.s at Chicago (1895), writing on Germanic Lautgesetze. Of more original manufacture was Wood's work on 'semasiological possibilities', and within that scheme he assigned Bloomfield's dissertation topic, 'a semasiologic differentiation in Germanic secondary ablaut' (Bloch 1949:88). A second influential teacher at Chicago was Carl Darling Buck, a member of the original faculty at Chicago, at which he arrived straight from a Ph.D. in Leipzig with Brugmann. Buck seems to have selected Kurath's dissertation topic, *The semantic sources of the words for the emotions in Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and the Germanic languages* (published 1921). This work was part of a series of topical dissertations Buck fostered among his students, all as subsets for his life work, *Synonyms in the principal Indo-European languages: A contribution to the history of ideas*

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(1949, repr. 1987), conventionally and aptly described as 'monumental'. Acknowledgments in Buck's volume are minutely graded; Kurath's work does not merit one of the several levels of celebration at the end of the preface. Indeed it is limited in visibility to a 'cf.' in Buck's chapter dealing with 'Emotion (with some physical expressions of emotion): Temperamental, moral, and aesthetic notions'. Perhaps the sparing recognition of Kurath's dissertation has some connection with the fact that Kurath himself never published anything further within the grand scheme of Indo-European comparative study.

For those pursuing careers as Germanic philologists before the War, a period of study in Germany was expected. (Moulton reports that Bloomfield was told bluntly in 1912 that he should go to Germany if he expected promotion; probably this climate was not much changed in 1920, even by the anti-German hysteria brought on by the War [Moulton in Hockett 1970:515].) Such was the idea that the source of all good things intellectual was in Germany. As a result of his personal study with Leskien, Brugmann, Wackernagel, and Oldenberg, Bloomfield articulated the idea of the regularity of sound change as an abiding principle of linguistic study. In characteristically terse style, Bloomfield summed up his mature view in the opening sentence of his chapter on dialect geography in *Language*: 'The comparative method, with its assumption of uniform parent languages and sudden, definitive cleavage, has the virtue of showing up a residue of forms that cannot be explained on this assumption' (1933:321). The same idea is expressed even more vividly in Moulton's recollection of working as Bloomfield's doctoral student: 'Either we believe in regular sound change or we don't. If we do, we can continue the wonderful work of our Neo-Grammarian predecessors and try to enlarge upon it. If we don't, we are charlatans' (in Hockett, 518). Kurath sustained this orthodox view, though he did not receive it at its source. Thus, in his last full-scale work in the field, Kurath endorsed 'the central concept [of] the regularity of phonemic change as finally formulated by the Neo-Grammarians' (1972:183).

Bloomfield and Kurath were closely connected. When Wood retired in 1927, Bloomfield moved to fill the vacancy at Chicago, and Kurath went from Northwestern to Ohio State in Bloomfield's place. When Bloomfield moved to Yale in 1940, there were twice-weekly visits, Kurath coming from Providence (where he was by then Professor of German) to continue the advanced teaching of his deceased father-in-law, to assist Bloomfield in preparing Prokosch's *Comparative Germanic Grammar* for posthumous publication, and to consult Bloomfield on the *Linguistic Atlas*. They were both faculty members at the summer Linguistic Institutes held at the University of Michigan in the late 1930s, and their personal affiliations and their academic interests remained close.

Travel to remote natural areas during the 1920s gave Kurath a chance to experience American regional speech first hand. Germanic scholarship had established the importance of folk life for philology, and Kurath grasped an opportunity to undertake fieldwork. On a camping trip during the summer of 1925 (or '26?), he and his brother set out southward from Chicago:

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'We started from Evanston where I was teaching at the time and Bill was a graduate student, and made for the triangle between the Mississippi and the Illinois, where I first heard a sort of Southern Mountain speech. From there we cut across southern Illinois and crossed the Ohio at Evansville. The area around Mammoth Cave was fascinating: no real roads but, as a native put it, 'just a way to go.' Our shovel and chain came in handy several times. In one spot somewhere between Lincoln's birthplace and Danville a farmer maintained a slough in the road for making a little money by pulling cars through with his team of oxen. We were one of his customers. We spent some time in Danville, where an old friend of mine [Fritz Metzger, recalled by Eric Hamp as "a real Junggrammatiker"] (who wound up as the German department's head at Bryn Mawr, first as an associate of Prokosch) was teaching [at Centre College]. This was my headquarters for the Blue Grass area. Then we made for the Cumberland Gap. One evening we pitched our tent in the woods near the road. Out came a man, step by step, totin' a gun on his shoulder. I walked towards him just as leisurely and said: "D'ye mind if we stay here overnight?" After due inspection and deliberation he said: "T's awright, I was jist goin' to see who it was."' (In Kretzschmar 1979:147–48.)

Not unprepared for such encounters, Kurath had brought with him an adapted text of 'Arthur the Rat', the story written in the nineteenth century by Henry Sweet as a diagnostic for English dialects. (It is also worth noting that Kurath felt obliged to penetrate trackless wilderness to locate 'dialect' among the 'folk'.) At the Modern Language Association meeting in 1926, Kurath reported his findings from this trip (in the context of discussion of needed revisions in IPA) and, he later recalled, 'that's what got me into the Atlas business' (in Kretzschmar 1979:147).

Another contributing factor—the one already mentioned in the retirement tribute—was his essay 'American Pronunciation', published in 'tract' 30 of the Society for Pure English. SPE had been founded by Robert Bridges, Poet Laureate of Great Britain, who was both puristic and habitually prejudiced against perceived 'Americanisms'. For Bridges, writing in 1925, the threat of 'other-speaking races' to pure-bred Englishmen settled abroad was alarming, and American English a welter of 'blundering corruptions' (quoted in Bailey 1991: 206). SPE had, however, attracted rather less bigoted members of the international philological community, and it did not seem entirely odd that a descriptive essay of twenty pages on American pronunciation should appear in its tracts. With no more than these slender credentials, Kurath was designated in 1930 as director of the ambitious project to map dialect regions in North America, the 'Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada'.

Dialect geography was a field of emergent importance in the 1920s for American linguists. Through the Modern Language Association, a committee was formed (chaired by Charles Carpenter Fries) in December 1928 to come up with a plan of work. Without being aware of these deliberations, E. H. Sturtevant brought the same idea to the attention of the American Council of Learned Societies in January 1929, acting in his role as delegate from LSA (for details of the deliberations, see Joos 1986:31–34). It was, he told them, viewed by Edward Sapir as an especially desirable idea. Two further meetings that year moved the cause forward—the first in Cleveland, where the National Council of Teachers of English gave its endorsement (and paid the costs), the second in New Haven in conjunction with the LSA Linguistic Institute. Though

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a national survey was proposed, ACLS delegates thought a pilot study should be carried out first in New England. In January 1931, the final plan was accepted, and funding flowed through ACLS from the Rockefeller Foundation. In addition, colleges and universities in New England provided support, usually in the form of fellowship support for fieldworkers. In July 1931, Jakob Jud (Zürich) and Paul Scheuermeier (Bern) trained the prospective workers at another LSA Institute, ensuring up-to-date knowledge among them of the methods of German dialectology as carried out in Italy and Switzerland.

Despite the widespread poverty and despair that flowed from the Great Depression, intellectual life in America flourished (though in unexpected ways). Since there were few (indeed, fewer than formerly) academic jobs, junior scholars were obliged to leave their fields or to accept minimally paid employment on projects. Kurath was thus in the enviable position of being able to choose among the best younger scholars. Reflecting this situation, the *Linguistic Atlas of New England* (1939–43), henceforth *LANE*, lists Kurath as 'director and editor' and as collaborators Bernard Bloch, Miles L. Hanley, Marcus S. Hansen, and Guy S. Lowman, Jr. Staff members between the inception of the project in 1930 and its completion in 1943 included, among others, Martin Joos and Herbert Penzl. In addition to Bloomfield and Prokosch, the 'committee in charge' enrolled others then or later prominent in LSA: Charles H. Grandgent (Harvard), Archibald A. Hill (Virginia), and Kemp Malone (Johns Hopkins). In characteristically blunt fashion, Kurath rated the workers (and himself) on various abilities: 'minuteness in phonetic recording', for instance, and 'freedom from systematization according to the phonemic system of the fieldworker's own speech'. As a warning to those who suspected his workers of being interpretive, Kurath also evaluated 'freedom from systematization according to the phonemic system of the informant' (*Handbook*, 1939:52–3). In all but one of the nine measures, Bernard Bloch had the highest ratings.

When *LANE* was nearly complete, Kurath encountered a young man who became his most faithful disciple, Raven I. McDavid, Jr. This moment McDavid regarded as life-transforming, and in a celebratory essay published to mark Kurath's retirement, McDavid described the meeting in this way (in Kretzschmar 1979:112):

> 'The first time I met him, in the Michigan League building before the Ann Arbor conference of 1940 on non-English dialects in the United States, I did not know what to say to him. It was characteristic of him that he put me at my ease, and—aware of the fact that I was then without academic connections—remarked, "I wish I could find funds to put you to work on the Atlas, but we don't have any." Somehow, in that one sentence (entirely unsolicited by any requests on my part) he enabled me to see my own vocation, not as another teacher of English with a side interest in dialects, but as that of a serious professional student of language, with no need to be ashamed in the face of other such scholars, however great their distinction.'

As McDavid put it, Kurath's encouragement was precious 'during the painful years of unemployment, marginal employment, and low-paid academic employment (which sometimes seemed worse than no employment at all); it is not to be forgotten in present prosperity' (112). In gratitude McDavid sponsored Kurath's honorary doctorate from Chicago in 1959, and Raven and Virginia

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Glenn McDavid established (generously and personally endowed) the Kurath Fund to support Linguistic Atlas work.

McDavid's experience illustrates Kurath's ability to inspire fieldwork in a time of economic and political distress. Even when there was no money, McDavid tirelessly conducted interview after interview, not only in the coastal South but also in whatever region had offered him one of those 'marginal' academic appointments. Similarly, Kurath managed to keep Guy S. Lowman, Jr., on the job even after fieldwork for *LANE* was complete, sending him not only down the Atlantic seaboard but also to England, where he conducted interviews along the south and east coasts using the same technique that had been refined in New England. The results of Lowman's transatlantic investigations were published by Kurath in 1970 as *The dialectal structure of Southern England: Phonological evidence*. (Lowman [1909–41] was a reckless driver, and Kurath was obliged on one occasion to intervene with the Governor of Connecticut to have his license restored. Though a native of Missouri, Lowman had adopted a mid-Atlantic variety of English after studying phonetics with Daniel Jones in London, a manner which must have seemed outlandish to those he interviewed. As an active homosexual, Lowman occasionally found himself in scrapes requiring Kurath's intervention. His unflagging support of his most faithful fieldworker is a testimony to Kurath's willingness to support excellence where others might have succumbed to prejudice or become terminally impatient.)

Once Kurath had moved to Michigan as editor of the *Middle English Dictionary* in 1946, his full-time involvement with dialectology ceased. Even so, the *Word Geography* (1949) and *Pronunciation of English in the Atlantic States* (1961) were major contributions drawing upon the fieldwork completed after *LANE* had been published. Perhaps even more important, Kurath encouraged various younger scholars to undertake Atlas work across North America, some of them his own dissertation students (notably Walter S. Avis, with 'The mid-back vowels in the English of the eastern United States' [1956], and H. Rex Wilson, 'The dialect of Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia' [1959]), but most being people who, like McDavid, had been attracted to the work in seminars at the LSA Institutes or through sponsoring societies, particularly the American Dialect Society. Prominent among this group were Harold B. Allen (Minnesota), Frederic G. Cassidy (Wisconsin), and E. Bagby Atwood (Texas), all of whom sought Kurath's counsel and gratefully acknowledged his encouragement.

The cause was, however, most fervently espoused by McDavid. So admiring of Kurath, McDavid was unsympathetic to innovations that departed in any significant way from the example of the master. Thus Kurath welcomed with appreciative appraisals, though with some private dissent, the work of William Labov and other sociolinguists of the 1960s and following years. Of Labov's New York City study (1966), Kurath wrote: 'this is a remarkable achievement, destined to be a model for future investigations of urban speech communities' (1972:172). McDavid believed that any study of American dialects ought to begin with the existing *Atlas* records, however unavailable or resistant to in-

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terpretation many of them might be. While one might characterize McDavid's review of Labov's New York City work as grudgingly admiring, considering it mainly in comparison to what would have been done if Kurath's method had been employed, McDavid was scathing in his treatment of Labov's followers—particularly when they received government funding he believed ought to have gone to continue the *Atlas* work (see Kretzschmar, 385).

Scholars untrained in the neogrammarian tradition did not always realize that American dialect geography was good historical linguistics, not bad sociology. As already suggested, Kurath's view of language change was much influenced by nineteenth-century ideas that have had great staying power in our field; change takes place either through internal causes (e.g. abrupt shifts in sound systems, analogy) or as a result of external influences (the impact of other languages or dialects through, for instance, borrowing). As a consequence of these ideas, Kurath directed his attention almost exclusively to those who provided exemplars of the well-springs of English undefiled (whose usage, in turn, would be normative for comparing other varieties of English found in North America). Thus, *Atlas* work gave almost exclusive attention to the descendants of early English-speaking settlers, and the consultants chosen for the New England study were disproportionately (though not exclusively) male, old, uneducated, and rural, as if American dialects, like those of Europe, were the property of aged men living in isolated districts. These representatives of the 'folk' would provide information, on an item-by-item basis, of earlier states of the language. Hence a massive part of the *Atlas* effort was the compilation of local history so that settlement patterns might be discerned in an effort to determine that this community was tied to East Anglia, for instance, or that to the West Country of seventeenth-century Britain. Kurath's method emerged logically from a theory of language evolution founded on the Darwinian idea that isolation leads to speciation, not only in biology but in language.

Apart from their influence on the study of American English, these ideas also shaped American dialectology generally. Thus Robert A. Hall, Jr., describes several visits to the *Atlas* headquarters in Providence during World War II (1991:178):

> 'Hans gave me, in many informal conversations, an understanding of the principles of linguistic geography, especially the recognition of centres of diffusion (*Kerngebeite*), graded areas (*Staffelgebeite*), and relic-areas (*Reliktgebeite*), and the criteria for recognizing such areas from the distribution of isoglosses.'

Bringing these insights to bear on the data published in the Italian *Atlas* of Jaberg and Jud (1928–1940), Hall discerned such configurations and published his results in this journal (among other places). To this day, Hall asserts that 'the facts of linguistic geography [can] be properly interpreted only in light of assumed regularity of sound-change' (178).

Little wonder then that American dialectologists eagerly sought similar patterns on their own landscape; Albert H. Marckwardt, for instance, identified a 'Hoosier apex' and an 'Ohio wedge' (as if these temporary configurations on the American flatland had the same enduring stability as the speech configurations of a Tyrolean valley or a Greek island) (see Marckwardt 1957). Perhaps

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most symptomatic of these instances is the identification of the district around Marietta, Ohio, as a 'speech island' (by E. Bagby Atwood from a single field record completed by Lowman in 1940 and by Alva L. Davis through a lexical questionnaire). Just as Labov had used *Atlas* records as a baseline for his study of Martha's Vineyard in his 1962 Master's essay, so Thomas L. Clark studied the Marietta speech island in 1968, using the questions formulated by Kurath for New England to determine the evolution of English (see Labov 1963, Clark 1972). Whatever one may think of apexes, wedges, and islands on the American savanna and woodland—or for that matter, calls to farm animals as dialect indicators—these developments show just how influential Kurath's faithful adoption of European models has been, and, with the continual publication of *Atlas* (or *Atlas*-inspired) work, they will obviously endure well into the next century.

There is no need to rehearse here the criticisms of American areal linguistics. What is important to note, however, is that American dialectology as formulated so influentially by Kurath emerges coherently from a theory of language, a fact not always fully recognized by its critics. If one accepts Kurath's neogrammarian assumptions, all else follows as a consequence—hugging the phonetic ground, selecting communities and informants, casting findings as the result of history and region, locating change in either 'internal' or 'external' causes. Kurath formulated this research design through intimate and extended conversations within the Society. His assumptions and methods were scrutinized by the leading scholars of the day—not only by Bloomfield and Sapir, but also by the ever-present Prokosch until his untimely death in an automobile accident in 1938. Dialect geography lost some of the attention of LSA activists with 'the eventual severe eclipse of humanistically-oriented historical linguistics' (in the words of Michael Silverstein, personal communication, 1992), and it did not evolve in the LSA or elsewhere with other subdisciplines in linguistics. This decline of interest is owing in part to Kurath's change of affiliation and focus in 1946. Another explanation has recently been suggested by William J. Gedney. Such was Kurath's eminence and so much was he associated with the linguistic eminences who had founded the Society that public dissent was muted:

> 'Another criticism of the *Atlas* was commonly mentioned in private conversations in the late 50s and early 60s, and that is this: The enormous labor involved in the minute phonetic transcriptions was a waste, because the important thing is to locate the boundary between an area that makes a particular distinction and neighboring areas that don't, and it is very difficult, usually impossible, to figure this out from the *Atlas* maps. I remember hearing the late Henry Lee Smith, Jr., express these sentiments in private conversations. I don't remember ever seeing discussion of this point in print, and it may never have been discussed publicly. No doubt this reticence was due to the great affection everyone had for Hans, and respect for the monumental nature of the work. But in retrospect I wonder if Hans himself may not have been aware of this criticism, and perhaps even shared in it, and that is one reason why he turned to other work' (William J. Gedney, personal communication, 1992).

Here there is no room to anatomize the history of Middle English lexicography, but, as the retirement eulogy explains, the American branch of the effort had begun at Stanford early in this century, evolved at Cornell, and arrived at

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the University of Michigan in 1930. Like the *Atlas* work, academic dictionary-making was funded by Rockefeller through ACLS and supervised by a committee of distinguished scholars. These advisors took an active role in the management of the project, and, once the hiatus caused by World War II had been closed, determined that their (proxy) investment should result in publication of a dictionary rather than in more of the endless preparatory work that had been going on for decades. When Kurath was chosen for the editorship of the *Middle English dictionary*, some of these external advisors questioned his credentials in medieval subjects and in lexicography. Since Michigan was making the appointment (and by that time paying for it), there was little that the dissenters might do to influence the choice. As a regular participant in the Institutes before the War, Kurath was well known to the most influential faculty members at Michigan—particularly to Fries, who had chaired the committee making him responsible for the *Atlas* more than fifteen years earlier, and to Marckwardt, who since 1938 had been designated by Kurath as supervisor for dialect geography in the Great Lakes region. They believed that his excellent record as an organizer of large, long-term projects was sufficient to overcome any doubts, and they were right.

Kurath's method as a lexicographer had much in common with his method as a dialectologist. 'Fine-spun distinctions', he wrote in his 1954 *Plan* which inaugurated the *Dictionary*, 'are apt to reflect personal bias or fancy rather than distinct meanings' (3). Like the dialect fieldworkers, the editors should present the unvarnished evidence as fully as possible, with little irreversible theorizing, so allowing the consumer to interpret it as suited the need. Explanation in the *MED* is thus minimal, with one or two modern English glosses justifying the division of quotations into groups. Further, Kurath wrote, 'the so-called extensions, restrictions, and transfers in the use of words, often highly conjectural, are not explicitly noted' (1954:3). For such a spare approach to be useful, rigorous accuracy was essential, and Kurath organized the best collection of medieval English facsimiles and editions anywhere, developed a system of transparent abbreviations for referring to it, and instituted cross-checks to make sure that the published extracts exactly represented the sources. Aside from the *Plan* and the *Dictionary* itself, Kurath wrote nothing to explain his methods or to speculate on any theory of meaning. In fact, he wrote nothing, apart from the *Dictionary*, on Middle English or on medieval subjects (aside from interpreting modern dialect evidence in light of Middle English origins).

The reception of the *MED* by the scholarly community was prompt and positive. A brief extract from Kemp Malone's review in this journal of the first fascicle shows how highly Kurath was regarded (1953:207–8):

> 'We have here a vast array of quotations carefully gathered and carefully ordered under accurate definitions by a group of sound scholars, led by a man who not only 'knows his stuff' but also knows how to get things done. But for Kurath's leadership the great work in all likelihood would not have been finished within any foreseeable time. Thanks to him and his faithful collaborators, the long-awaited and long-needed dictionary of Middle English is now in sight. Indeed, its first fascicle lies before us. All medievalists who work in the English field, and all linguists interested in this field, owe to Kurath, [Sherman M.] Kuhn, and the rest, and to the University of Michigan, a debt so great that it is beyond calculation. In the name of

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the many who will use the MED day by day the rest of their scholarly lives, let me congratulate the University, the Press, and the staff on a monumental accomplishment.'

It is certain that the *Middle English dictionary*, much shaped by Kurath's intellect and notion of rigor, will be a second and perhaps an even more enduring monument to his scholarship than is the *Atlas*. (For further treatment of the *MED*, see Kuhn 1982, Bailey 1990.)

Despite his heavy workload on his projects in dialectology and the many hours required each week for the *Dictionary*, Kurath found time to foster linguistic study locally and internationally. He chaired the committee overseeing linguistic graduate work at Michigan, and, taking over from Fries, supervised the LSA Institutes from 1947 to 1950. (During the summer of 1949, he recruited Einar Haugen to teach the first course in bilingualism ever offered at an Institute.) As a teacher, he did not court popularity; a confidential evaluation in 1961 contained the judgment: 'His manner of teaching is downright and authoritarian, but he is always ready to discuss his views with advanced students who have learned to challenge them intelligently.' He supervised doctoral dissertations, though sometimes not too attentively, and he was given to recommending new lines of inquiry just when the students believed themselves finished. From the 1950s onward, he was consulted by the organizers of the Survey of English Dialects and of the Linguistic Atlas of Scotland (Scots Section), offering advice and ensuring that likely comparisons between the two hemispheres of English would be identified. In 1952 he served as the Society's delegate to ACLS. After retirement he continued a daily routine of work in an imposingly lavish office thoughtfully (and appropriately) supplied by the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies. Later, when his eyesight failed, he enjoyed listening to recordings of classical music. Only three years ago were Gertrude and Hans Kurath obliged by ill health to leave their dwelling of forty years for a nursing home.

Colleagues remember Kurath as a genial friend, a strong advocate for his scholarly views, and a man who lived simply, attentive to the beauty of the natural world.

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