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German Literature of the High Middle Ages

Edited by Will Hasty

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To a dear colleague and friend, Sidney M. Johnson (1924–2003)

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W. H.
August 2005

Introduction

Will Hasty

THE EUROPEAN HIGH MIDDLE AGES saw a convergence of oral and written narrative traditions, new philosophical and scientific knowledge, and individual creativity that has been called the "Twelfth Century Renaissance."[1] Beginning in the twelfth century, authors schooled in the *septem artes liberales* (seven liberal arts) turned in greater numbers from Latin to the vernacular languages as their means of literary expression. Literary works from classical antiquity enjoyed a surge of popularity and reached wider audiences as they were transformed into epics in French and German.[2] Poetry originally based on events during the migration period (*Völkerwanderungen:* fifth and sixth centuries) or on conflicts with Saracens in the Carolingian period (eighth century), which may have been transmitted orally through countless generations, also began to take literary form as authors structured it into longer epic narratives involving fanciful versions of historical figures such as Theoderic the Great, Attila the Hun, and William, Count of Orange, and legendary heroes such as Arthur and Roland. Lyric love poetry arose in Provence, spread from there to the kingdoms of France and Germany, providing impetus to already existing indigenous lyric traditions. Contacts with Islamic culture put Western Europe in contact with philosophical and scientific texts from Greco-Roman antiquity that had been preserved in Arabic, and sometimes provided with Arabic commentaries that were quite influential in their own right.[3] The knowledge gained from an intensive preoccupation with these texts contributed to an increasing sensitivity for the natural world and peoples' place in it, opened up new questions for intellectual inquiry,[4] and in turn enriched the flourishing vernacular literatures. Individual authors, often knights who acquired the ability to read and write, emerged to make their own characteristic marks on literary culture, despite the continuing authority of pre-existing narrative traditions and conventions, and the medieval dependence of the vernacular artist/author on the favor, largesse, and tastes of powerful patrons and the noble audiences among whom the authors typically lived and worked.[5]

The Twelfth Century Renaissance is the broader European context for the literary history addressed by the chapters in this volume, the principal aim of which is to familiarize readers with the most significant authors,

works, and literary traditions in medieval Germany, during what has come among German literary scholars to be known as the first *Blütezeit*, or "period of flourishing" of literature in the German vernacular, from ca. 1170 to ca. 1270.[6] The use of the term *Blütezeit* brings with it the risk of overlooking or understating the importance of literary developments that may occur between periods of flourishing, but it nevertheless seems appropriate in the case of the German literature of the High Middle Ages, when a vibrant literary culture in the German vernacular emerged in the form of narrative and lyric poetry that continued to shape the cultural horizons of German-speaking peoples to the present day. Seemingly all at once, in the latter twelfth century, German poets are singing of their love, writing didactic and political (gnomic) poetry (*Sangsprüche*), and composing longer and shorter poetic works — epics, romances, courtly legends, and shorter narratives — that are frequently about the quest of an individual, usually a lay-person and a knight, for someone or something — a wife, higher social standing, the Holy Grail — that can be seen as representing the achievement of one's proper position in the world and one's appropriate relationship to God.

The efflorescence of literature in the German vernacular in the High Middle Ages occurred in fertile cultural and literary ground. Since about the middle of the eleventh century, religious authors had again begun producing texts in the German vernacular, after more than a century of silence. The language that these authors employed was so clearly different from the Old High German used in earlier centuries that German language historians have considered it appropriate to speak of a new stage of language development, Middle High German, beginning ca. 1050 and lasting until, very roughly, 1350.[7]

Like Old High German, Middle High German was not a single codified super-regional standard language throughout German-speaking domains. The extremely large corpus of Middle High German texts (in comparison to the small number of surviving texts in Old High German) shows a high degree of dialectal variation. Phonologically Middle High German reflects the reduction of unstressed full vowels in Old High German (as with the word "praised": OHG *lobôta* → MHG *lobete*) and also orthographically marks the fronting of all back vowels followed by original *i* or *j*, which is called "Secondary Umlaut" (a case of which is the word for "would be able to": OHG *mochti* → MHG *möchte*). Consonants were affected by a word-final devoicing of OHG *b*, *d*, and *g* to *p*, *t*, and *k* (OHG: *tag* — *taga* → MHG *tac* — *tage*). With the reduction of unstressed suffixes, the umlauted root vowel became more important as a marker of morphological categories (such as singular and plural), and the general reduction of unstressed syllables in OHG resulted in a weakening of OHG inflectional markings, the function of which was taken over in MHG by the increasing use of articles to mark case and gender. The

overall result was a considerably more supple and expressive language than Old High German had been.

Already in the early Middle High German period leading up to the literature covered by the chapters in this volume, one can observe not only a lively literary activity among both religious and lay-noble populations, but also some early signs of some of the problems and concerns that became central during the *Blütezeit*. Particularly the approximation of religious and worldly concerns, the endeavor to mediate between the value placed on a life of action in this world and that placed on a life of prayer, contemplation, and preparation for the afterlife, was a concern that is visible already in the early MHG period. This is the case in the corpus of early MHG religious literature consisting of about ninety works that was produced from ca. 1060 to ca. 1180, which consisted of biblical epics, moral allegorical tracts, commentaries on the Song of Songs, sermons, zoological treatises, minstrel epics, commentaries on the Mass, litanies, laments for sin, and historical literature.[8] This literature includes four works about Christ's act of Redemption by the first woman poet in the German language who is known by name, Frau Ava (d. 1127), who probably came from a noble family and retired to a hermit's cell at the monastery at Melk. Ava's poetry has been regarded as "a natural outcome of her beliefs,"[9] evincing an immediacy of individual spirituality and religious fervor outside of the formal rhetorical trappings of monastic and cathedral schools. This literature also included the *Melker Marienlied*, in which we find many of the epithets that will become traditional in Marian poetry. As the most human of the divine personages,[10] Mary was adored and venerated with an emotional intensity that anticipated and prepared the way for the adoration of beloved ladies in the courtly love lyrics.

Around the middle of the twelfth century, a massive chronicle called the *Kaiserchronik* (Emperors' Chronicle), composed by an anonymous cleric in Regensburg, claimed to relate the history of all the Roman emperors from the foundation of Rome to the present, though it is in fact more concerned with the saints who lived and died under the respective emperors. This text, full of real and imagined episodes, was ultimately designed to present pagan and Christian rulers of the past as examples for those of the poet's own time, and it served as one of the great models for the later vernacular chronicles (such as Rudolf von Ems's *Weltchronik*). This draws attention to one of the important functions of this corpus of early MHG religious literature. Following the Investiture Conflict (which officially ended with the Concordat of Worms in 1122)[11] and coinciding with its ongoing and increasingly insistent claim to temporal power, the Church was interested in influencing the noble laity and in setting down for the laity the proper way to live one's life in this world.

Another corpus of texts that preceded the courtly period covered in this volume, and that shared certain aspects with heroic epics, saints' lives, and

romances, without belonging to any one of these genres, was the so-called *Spielmannsepen*, or minstrel epics (*König Rother* [King Rother], *Herzog Ernst* [Duke Ernst], the *Münchener Oswald* [Munich Oswald], *Salman und Morolf*, and *Orendel*), all of which were probably first written down sometime in the second half of the twelfth century. The minstrel epics, though they lack the concern with chivalric adventure and love (*âventiure* and *minne*) that would be central features in much of the later court poetry, were intensely interested in life in this temporal world and in control over it.[12] Almost all of these epics (with the exception of *Herzog Ernst*) are based on a bridal quest, in which the king/hero undertakes to win a wife in a foreign realm. The winning of the bride invariably involved the hero in conflicts with pagan adversaries, and these conflicts, in which the hero's efforts ultimately extend and consolidate the empire politically, also would have carried a religious significance for audiences during the time of the crusades. King Rother fights against heathens and retires to a monastery at the end of his life. Oswald and Orendel become saints. These and other examples from the *Spielmannsepen* show us that these epics, despite their emphasis on worldly action, are frequently not distant from the religious concerns of the saints' lives. In their own way, the minstrel epics show the approximation of religious and worldly concerns, and the presentation of ideal ruler-types, that were also characteristics of early Middle High German religious literature, and thus form part of the fecund literary terrain in which German literature blossomed beginning in the second half of the twelfth century.

Earlier literature in the German vernacular had been, on the whole, a tentative extension of Christian Latin culture. By contrast, the vernacular literary culture of the *Blütezeit*, though it was still heavily indebted to Christian Latinity, was an integral part of broader cultural developments in which traditional and authoritative antique/Christian cultural and literary models were transformed in novel ways. In the vernacular literary culture of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, we begin to witness new ways of thinking, feeling, and imagining. These new developments do not occur in the manner of a revolution or declaration of independence on the part of a secularized courtly culture, even if some of the manifestations are quite striking. In the prologue of Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*, the story of the adulterous lovers is given added importance by likening it to the bread of the Holy Eucharist.[13] Here Christian imagery is put to a startling new use that lends a religious aura and spiritual depth to a very worldly love. By and large, this is the manner in which innovations occurred in the period under discussion. Traditional religious images and rhetorical devices are neither forgotten nor rejected, but rather endowed with new functions in the framework of narrative and lyric poetry that is intensely interested in this world, as well as in the afterlife.[14]

One of the predominant and recurring ambitions in the German court literature of the High Middle Ages is to be pleasing both to God

and to one's fellow man. This ambition involved establishing a difficult balance of values and priorities. Giving too much of oneself to the world brought with it the risk of eternal damnation. In the prologue of his *Gregorius*, the author Hartmann von Aue laments his earlier attachment to worldly honor and warns his audience against the sinfulness of worldly ties and the youthful temptation to believe there will be time enough for penance later on:

> swer durch des helleschergen rât
> den trôst ze sîner jugent hât
> daz er dar ûf sündet [. . .]
> der gedenket anders danne er sol. (7–16)[15]

> [Whoever in his youth trusts the scheming of hell's jailer, and, trusting in his youth, sins . . . such a person thinks other than he should.][16]

In a didactic song laden with a clearly religious import, Walther von der Vogelweide addresses the same danger of perdition from the perspective of a wise old man, who informs the world that his debt is paid and that he is leaving her service for good:

> Frô Welt, ir sult dem wirte sagen
> daz ich im gar vergolten habe.
> mîn grôziu gülte ist abe geslagen,
> daz er mich von dem brieve schabe. (100, 24–27)[17]

> [Lady World, you must tell the host [= Satan] I am square with him. My great debt is paid off, so he needs to remove me from his list of debtors.][18]

While the religiously inspired thought that all worldly delights have to be categorically rejected was never very far from mind (however formulaic its specific manner of articulation), the courtly authors were simultaneously and intensely invested in worldly life. *Minne* and *âventiure* (love, adventure), the principal worldly themes of the poetry of the medieval *Blütezeit*, show an involvement in and fascination with the sundry challenges of the military life, and with new and gentler forms of social interaction between the genders that may have been taking hold at larger courts.[19] Although borrowing from older literary genres (saints' lives, epic poetry), the new poetry of love and adventure was dynamic and indeterminate to an unprecedented degree, and no doubt owed much of its allure to its open-endedness. It was in the nature of an adventure — perhaps derived from the Latin *advenire* (to come to) — to be unpredictable. An adventure can involve an encounter with nearly anything, from a formidable knight, to a monstrous giant, to a fire-breathing dragon, the only constant being that it requires great courage, strength, and force of will on the part of the knight facing it. Love — in some of its most striking instances

adulterous love[20] — is dynamic and unpredictable in a different way, as a feeling one begins to have for another (which is inspired by the other's beauty and often beyond the individual's control) and that one hopes is mutual. However, affection on the part of one's beloved can only be fervently hoped for, never forced. Love involves individual risk. Courtly poetry is full of examples demonstrating that happy, mutual love is fleeting, depends on a confluence of individual characteristics and fortuitous circumstances, and that any endeavor to force one's beloved to return the feeling is foolhardy and misguided at best. Love and adventure as literary manifestations suggest an investment in the world and other people — an investment that incorporates a fascination with the unknown and a tolerance for the unpredictable that was unknown or unacceptable in earlier literary genres and traditions.

If there was a single overriding concern of the courtly poetry of this period, it was establishing a balance between the worldly concerns of love and adventure (and the more dynamic, open-ended relationship to the world and others they involved) and the religious concerns alluded to above (which frequently involved a more fixed and preemptively condemnatory posture towards all things worldly). Authors envisioned such a balance in their poetry very directly. In another of his didactic poems, Walther von der Vogelweide anxiously considers how one should live properly in the world:

> deheinen rât kond ich gegeben,
> wie man driu dinc erwurbe,
> der keines niht verdurbe.
> diu zwei sint êre und varnde guot,
> daz dicke ein ander schaden tuot.
> daz dritte ist gottes hulde,
> der zweier übergulde. (8, 8–14)[21]

[I couldn't give any council, about how one could acquire three things, of which none would be ruined. They are worldly honor and possessions, which often do harm to each other; the third is God's favor, more valuable than the other two.]

Another of the finest and most memorable poetic expressions of this balance is achieved at the end of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, when the significance of this singular romance is boiled down to a simple moral:

> swes leben sich sô verendet,
> daz got niht wirt gephendet
> der sêle durch slîbes schulde
> und der doch der werlde hulde
> behalden kan mit werdekeit,
> daz ist ein nützīu arbeit. (827, 19–24)[22]

> [When a man's life ends in such a way that God is not robbed of his soul because of the body's sinning and who nevertheless succeeds in keeping his fellow's good will and respect, this is a useful toil.][23]

This reconciliation of religious and worldly interests, along with other less weighty social and individual ambitions, was pursued with an expressive literary language, as supple as it was forceful, that allowed for a wide array of poetic positions and stylistic approaches. One of the important features of this language was the evident endeavor on the part of many authors to aim for a trans-regional literary language that was largely, though never entirely free of the peculiarities of the regional German dialects. The great variety of individual stylistic variations in this trans-regional poetic idiom can be seen in terms of degrees of adherence to, or divergence from, a compositional standard grounded in the medieval art of rhetoric that involved the elegant correspondence of content and form, subject matter and its poetic expression. The range of stylistic approaches is already visible in the works of the great poets of the *Blütezeit:* Hartmann von Aue represents an exemplary standard, according to the later poet Gottfried von Strassburg, who writes in his *Tristan*:

> wie er mit rede figieret
> der âventiure meine!
> wie lûter und wie reine
> sîniu cristallînen wortelîn
> beidiu sint und iemer müezen sîn. (4621–30)[24]

> [How eloquently he establishes his story's meaning! How clear and transparent his crystal words both are and ever must remain!][25]

Gottfried's own ornate style, visible in these verses, is not coincidentally indebted to the same rhetorical standard of compositional clarity and formal elegance that is praised in Hartmann's writing, and it is no coincidence that Gottfried, as Hartmann before him, clearly prided himself on his education in the liberal arts and placed this education on display in his poetry. For poets such as Hartmann and Gottfried and the majority of their literary successors in the thirteenth century, poetry was a learned craft involving the expert adornment and exegesis of the subject matter (that is, the tale, or *âventiure*, as it existed in the sources available to these authors). Gottfried's poetic style, though similar in its clarity and elegance to that of Hartmann, tends to rhetorical flourish and poetic showmanship, somewhat independent of the subject matter proper. This tendency would be further developed by later poets such as Konrad von Würzburg, who would bring the purely formal aspect of poetry as close to *l'art pour l'art* as one finds in the Middle Ages. On the other end of the stylistic spectrum is Wolfram von Eschenbach, who pointedly denies being

educated (though his works betray an abundance of knowledge that demonstrate he somehow achieved a high level of learning), and whose literary style often seems like a transcription of living speech — rambling, spontaneous, and sometimes obscure. The power of Wolfram's poetry consists precisely in its independence from the clerical ideal of poetry as rhetorical craft, which enables the poet to convey his material to audiences with an unmatched intensity and immediacy. Rather than from rhetorical learning, Wolfram claims to have the structuring principle for his poetry from a quite different source:

> swaz an den buochen stêt geschriben,
> des bin ich künstelôs beliben:
> nicht anders ich gelêret bin,
> wan hân ich kunst, diu gît mir sin. (2, 19–22)[26]

> [I have remained ignorant of what is written in books and am tutored in this way alone: if I have any skill, it comes from my mind.][27]

The period covered by the chapters in this volume begins with the production of the first significant narrative poems by Heinrich von Veldeke and Hartmann von Aue, the first songs by the earliest minnesingers, and the first preserved heroic epics. The beginnings of German court literature thus coincide with the highpoint of the rule of Emperor Friedrich I of the Hohenstaufen dynasty (known by the nickname "Barbarossa"; ruled 1152–90) who, in unstable political times plagued by private wars and feuds, succeeded to some degree in restoring order and stability to the Holy Roman Empire. Basing his reforms on Roman and feudal law, Friedrich succeeded in expanding imperial power in both Germany and Italy.[28] It is tempting to draw parallels between the Whitsun festival in Mainz in 1184, at which Barbarossa's sons Friedrich and Heinrich were knighted, and the courtly festivals of King Arthur as depicted in literature.[29] Political reality and literature here seem to enter an alliance that enabled Barbarossa to bask in the glow of the chivalric authority and security depicted in the literature. Just as in the fictional world of Arthur, political and social stability remained tenuous, because the centralized authority of the emperor could be maintained only against the particular, centrifugal designs and ambitions of the powerful German princes (many of whom themselves were also patrons of literature), among whom the emperor was, in the best of times, closer to a *primus inter pares* than to the absolute monarchs of later centuries. Political and social turbulence, and the violence that went along with it, were never far removed and remained a major concern in literature.

Barbarossa's son Heinrich VI, also a patron of literature and possibly even the composer of some preserved love songs,[30] consolidated and extended the imperial power his father left him, but when he died

Kaiser Heinrich. A miniature from the Codex Manesse (364r).

unexpectedly in 1197 upon his departure on the Fourth Crusade, his son and designated heir Friedrich was only three years old. Old rivalries among the German princes resurged. Philip von Schwaben (Heinrich's brother), originally designated to serve as regent until young Friedrich reached maturity, and his rival Otto von Braunschweig (son of Barbarossa's great nemesis Heinrich der Löwe) were both crowned German king in 1198 (also coincidentally the year in which thirty-seven-year-old Innocent III was elected pope). Struggles between the partisans of Philip and Otto continued during the first decade of the thirteenth century, in which Innocent asserted himself as a powerbroker in German politics by recognizing Otto and excommunicating Philip and his followers in 1201. In the years after 1202, the military and political tide nevertheless turned in Philip's favor. The political schism between the Hohenstaufen party of Philip and the Welf party of Otto remained in place until the murder of Philip by the Bavarian count Otto von Wittelsbach in a private feud in 1208. Otto, now recognized even by Philip's former supporters, was again crowned king in 1208, and in the following year he was crowned emperor Otto IV by Innocent III in Rome. In subsequent years Otto set about to chase his only remaining rival, Friedrich, son of Heinrich VI and grandson of Barbarossa, out of Sicily. The new political contest now was between Otto and young Friedrich, whose supporters elected him emperor in 1211. This contest was not concluded until 1214, when Otto (along with his ally, the English King John) was decisively defeated at Bouvines by Friedrich's ally, the French King Philippe Augustus. In 1215, Friedrich II was crowned German king in Aachen, and in 1220, he was crowned emperor in Rome by Honorius III (1216–27). By many accounts Friedrich II, who was shaped by the "multi-cultural" milieu of his native Sicily (and particularly by the rational-empirical scientific approach fostered in Islamic learning that had taken hold in Sicily), was the first modern political leader. Friedrich spent most of his reign in Sicily, returning only once to Germany in 1235 to put down a rebellion staged by his son Heinrich.

The ostensibly supreme worldly power of the emperors had to maintain itself not only against the ambitions of princes, but also against a papacy that reached the height of its political ambitions under Innocent III (ca. 1160–1216, pope 1198–1216). As early as the time of the so-called Investiture Conflict (1075–1122), emperors and popes had contended over the right to elect and install bishops and abbots, and popes continued in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to claim ascendancy even in worldly affairs based on the primacy of religious concerns over material ones.[31] The Roman Catholic Church at the beginning of the thirteenth century was an opulent worldly institution that was bent on obtaining and holding worldly power and authority. Medieval lay people who were in a position to do so — which in most cases means the lay nobility — responded to the worldliness of the church in different ways. Some became eremites, others swelled the

numbers of the new mendicant orders, the Franciscans and Dominicans, and still others brought their dissatisfaction with ecclesiastical institutions to literary expression. One of the principal functions of the court literature produced in Germany around 1200 was to strike a morally and spiritually fulfilling balance between worldly and religious concerns. The attempt to achieve this balance frequently involved a lay religiosity that was at least as pious and devout as orthodox forms of literary expression.

The events outlined in the above paragraphs, some of which find explicit mention in court poetry (especially in the political poetry of Walther von der Vogelweide), show not only the occasional political instability of this period, but also the importance of strong individual personalities and their continued rule for lasting political stability. Given that a modicum of political stability is a prerequisite for blossoming cultural activity, it seems appropriate to view the Hohenstaufen dynasty as the political foundation of the literary *Blütezeit* explored in this volume. Many of the literary developments that first flourished around 1200 and were continued in the thirteenth century did, of course, not cease with the demise of the Hohenstaufen dynasty and the ensuing period of political and social chaos called the Great Interregnum (1256–73). Despite the continuing cultivation of court literature following models established during the first flourishing, a new chapter of political, cultural, and literary history arguably begins with the coronation of Rudolf I, the first of the Habsburg emperors. The Hohenstaufen dynasty was, in the end, a glorious, tumultuous, and relatively brief chapter in the history of the Holy Roman Empire. Its fame in posterity is probably more literary than political, as its rulers succeeded for a short period in stemming the centrifugal designs of the powerful territorial princes and in creating a courtly-chivalric literary culture based mainly at the larger courts in Germany. The circumstances of the production of the Codex Manesse (also known as the *Große Heidelberger Liederhandschrift*), produced in the first quarter of the fourteenth century by lay and ecclesiastic nobles near Zurich, suggests the direction of developments in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when the cities became increasingly important and began to rival the cultural importance of courts. (The Codex Manesse includes more than a hundred small paintings, or miniatures, of medieval poets, ten reproductions of which can be found on the pages of this volume.)

The organization of this volume endeavors to do justice to a complex literary and cultural period in which we see both the emergence of significant individual authors such as Wolfram, and the cultivation of literary traditions in which the creativity of individual authors is still bound to a great degree to generic and communal considerations of different kinds. Authors provide the starting point of discussion in the first and third sections of this volume. Writers of Christian-Latin literature tended to remain anonymous, consistent with the subordination of the individual to generic and communal

traditions that is characteristic of monastic and clerical cultures. With the beginnings of the vernacular poetry of the High Middle Ages, we witness the emergence of the author as a "known quantity" in many of the vernacular genres, though caveats are necessary. In contrast to the situation of modern authors, there is virtually no historical information about the lives of courtly authors such as Heinrich von Veldeke, Hartmann von Aue, Wolfram von Eschenbach, and Walther von der Vogelweide. The modicum of knowledge we have about the authors as individuals and their life circumstances is based on what they say about themselves and each other in their literary works. In some cases, it is difficult to know if we really get to know the authors at all, rather than the different roles they play in their narratives. Despite these caveats, it nevertheless seems appropriate to say that in the court poetry of the *Blütezeit*, the authors themselves emerge for the first time, on a broad scale, as a visible, active, and creative force. In recent years there has been an ever increasing appreciation of the degree to which the vernacular authors of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries did not merely copy, disseminate, and compile already existing authoritative texts (which may have been more characteristic of earlier times), but rather transformed existing narratives in frequently striking ways, by virtue of their own imaginative and expressive capabilities.[32]

The treated authors have been divided into two groups in order to suggest two different stages of literary development during the time covered by this volume. The first section, titled "The First Flourishing of German Literature," includes the significant authors working from ca. 1180 to ca. 1220, whose works could be considered pioneering and continued to be viewed with awe and reverence and to serve as models through the thirteenth century. In the first section, poets and a period of literary and cultural history are examined. Albrecht Classen's chapter on Heinrich von Veldeke and Rodney Fisher's chapter on Hartmann von Aue show how these two pioneering poets established a poetic foundation upon which later generations of poets could build, especially by means of their introduction of the themes of love and adventure to German audiences. Rüdiger Krohn's analysis of the German Tristan-narratives finds in the subject matter of the story itself something quite new for the Middle Ages: a radical conflict between social norms and individual drives that no poet takes farther than these narratives' principal representative in Germany: Gottfried von Strassburg. In their chapter on Wolfram von Eschenbach, Marion E. Gibbs and Sidney Johnson underscore the individual, forceful, idiosyncratic style of this poet's literary idiom, which has been discussed above: the myriad differences that separate his *Parzival*, for example, from its Old French source. Nicola McLelland's chapter on Ulrich von Zatzikhoven's singular Lancelot narrative, which, though probably composed around the first decade of the thirteenth century, evinces characteristics of the so-called "post-classical" romances, shows this work

to be quite exceptional in its own way, as an innovative combination of narrative styles and voices. Finally, Will Hasty's chapter on Walther von der Vogelweide explores the innovations this most famous of the medieval German poets brought to didactic poetry and the love lyrics.

Despite the new importance of the author as a creative force in the production of vernacular poetry, authors continued to work in a cultural setting and social milieu in which literary conventions and the demands and expectations of powerful patrons and audiences had an immediate impact on the production of vernacular literature. Some literary traditions, such as the relatively "new" Arthurian romances, lent themselves to a relatively higher degree of creative adaptation and transformation by individual authors, and allowed these authors to achieve a higher degree of visibility (at least via their narrative personae). In other kinds of vernacular literature, traditions, conventions, and communal considerations played a much more important role, and the position of the author, while still important (often in terms of coming up with creative variations on certain set themes), is not as immediately visible as in the romances and much of the narrative poetry.

The second section of this volume, titled "Lyric and Narrative Traditions," focuses on four such literary traditions that shaped German literary history from 1170 to 1270: political and didactic poetry (the *Sangsprüche*), the love songs of the minnesingers (*Minnesang*), heroic narratives, and early mystical writing. In the respective chapters on these corpora of literature, generic and communal considerations form the primary points of departure for discussion.

The tradition of didactic and political poetry, or *Sangsprüche*, the topic of Nigel Harris's chapter, was in the beginning associated with wandering, non-noble bards, who were hired for short-term engagements to present their moral-didactic stanzas. It was left to Walther von der Vogelweide to expand and transform this genre into a courtly art, but it never succeeded in becoming a courtly art of nobility in the same way as the love lyrics (*Minnesang*). In the political and didactic poetry, the space for authorial creativity and innovation seems largely determined by the moral-didactic concerns the poetry brings to expression, and by the interests and demands of powerful patrons. Even Walther, who greatly expanded the range of expressive possibilities of this poetry, had to adapt the content of his *Sangsprüche* to the tastes and whims of his patrons, and could indulge in criticisms of former patrons only when he was safely in the orbit of another. The love lyrics of *Minnesang* were, by contrast, exclusively an art form of nobility. Will Hasty's chapter on the lyrics shows that they adhered closely to set conventions regarding content and form, though there are ample demonstrations of the singer's own individual artistic proclivities within the constraints posed by these conventions. We know the minnesingers by name because they are mentioned by poets in other genres (in his *Tristan*,

Gottfried von Strassburg mentions the minnesingers collectively, before discussing some of their most famous representatives individually),[33] and because they are named in the illuminated manuscripts in which their songs are transmitted, but not because they name themselves in their lyrics, which very rarely occurs.[34] Given the importance of literary conventions and communal considerations in the political and didactic lyrics and in the love songs, and the great number of individual singers (an individual treatment of which would be impossible in a single volume), the chapters on these corpuses of lyrics focus primarily on the most significant generic and communal aspects of these types of literature, and discuss a few representative individual cases in view of these general aspects. It is fitting to discuss the love lyrics of poets such as Heinrich von Veldeke, Hartmann von Aue, and Wolfram von Eschenbach in the chapters dealing with these authors, because their involvement in *Minnesang*, alongside their production of longer epic narratives, provides us with a more complete picture of the versatility and creative talent of these individual poets.

The points of departure for the discussion of the heroic narratives and early mystical literature are also primarily generic and communal. Heroic literature, surveyed in the chapter of Susann Samples, was from its earliest origins a communal art form, and the anonymity of the author was always a set part of the evolving tradition of heroic tales and narratives, even when they began to be fashioned into longer epic works in the course of the twelfth century. The heroic poetry revolves around the great deeds of historical and legendary leaders of peoples ranging from Alexander the Great to Charlemagne. Although by the High Middle Ages all the heroic narratives incorporated at least some Christian elements, the majority of heroic narrative traditions were originally pre-Christian, with their roots in Greco-Roman antiquity (in the case of the Alexander epics) or in ancient Germanic societies in which, as the Roman historian Tacitus tells us, warriors sang songs of their heroes to rouse their spirit when going into battle. The Chansons de Geste maintain the heroic ethos of the pre-Christian epics, but have a religious significance by virtue of their rendering of struggles between Christians and Muslims that occurred in the eighth and ninth centuries. The chapter on the early mystical literature by Sara Poor focuses on some of the overriding common characteristics of this literature — the importance of Bernhard of Clairvaux's commentaries on the Song of Songs, the low German and Dutch urban contexts in which this literature was produced, and, perhaps most important, the fact that the early vernacular mystical writers were women who had to develop their own strategies regarding authorship/authority in a time in which (as today, despite the greater range of possibilities), authorship and authority tend to be male-gendered. This chapter is somewhat exceptional in that, in order to present a complete picture of early mystical writing, it considers texts in Latin, German, and Dutch, some of which combine prose and poetry.

The third section, "Continuity, Transformation, and Innovation in the Thirteenth Century," includes a representative group of significant thirteenth-century authors from ca. 1220 onward, who responded in different ways to the literature of their hallowed predecessors (as which the earlier authors were generally seen, even when the later authors diverged from their predecessors' literary conceptions quite intentionally and sharply, as they often did). Scholars have traditionally distinguished between the earlier "classical" works (those of Hartmann von Aue, Wolfram von Eschenbach, and Gottfried von Strassburg) and later "post-classical" works, and seen the latter as artistically inferior to the former. The distinction between "classical" and "post-classical" has been used by scholars to stress the presence of certain characteristics (such as the bipartite quest of the hero in the Arthurian romances) and their absence in the later "post-classical" works. Recently, scholars have argued that the "post-classical" works quite consciously employ different structural models and literary styles, and that their divergence from the "classical" bipartite model cannot and should not necessarily be seen as aesthetically deficient.[35] While the terms "classical" and "post-classical" continue to turn up in the critical literature and also appear on the pages in this volume, it has become increasingly difficult to use these terms as an aesthetic judgment of superiority or inferiority.

The chapters in this section demonstrate that the later authors, even if their gaze was directed back towards the "first flourishing," often operated quite independently and creatively with the models handed down to them by their revered predecessors. Neil Thomas's examination of Wirnt von Gravenberg's *Wigalois* and Heinrich von dem Türlin's *Diu Crône* focuses on these narratives as critical responses to Wolfram's version of the Grail story. Michael Resler's chapter on Der Stricker, who is somewhat exceptional in that he does not seem to have been a knight, looks at this poet's less elegant, yet nevertheless very spirited and witty narrative style. Elizabeth Andersen's chapter on Rudolf von Ems continues a trend visible in many of the chapters in this section by focusing on the greater scope and diversity of this poet's subject matter, due in large part to his adaptation of Latin literary traditions. An especially striking case among the later poets is Ulrich von Liechtenstein, treated in the chapter by Ulrich Müller and Franz Viktor Spechtler, who with his *Frauendienst* authored what these two scholars regard as the first autobiographical romance in the German vernacular. Much like Der Stricker with respect to the breadth and variety of his literary oeuvre, but much more a stylistic virtuoso, Konrad von Würzburg, as examined in the chapter of Rüdiger Brandt, develops a poetic style that comes close to a modern *l'art pour l'art* position. Finally, Ruth Weichselbaumer's chapter examines the transposition of the courtly chivalric plot structure to the peasant milieu, and the interesting consequences of this poetic experiment, in her chapter on *Helmbrecht*.

The final section includes two chapters that provide different perspectives of the historical situation in which the literature of the *Blütezeit* was produced. William H. Jackson's chapter on violence and constraints on violence not only provides important perspectives for our understanding of many of the narrative works discussed in the other chapters, in which force and its legitimate uses seems often to be a central concern, but it also helps link this literary history to a lively scholarly discussion about chivalry and violence that is currently taking place among historians and literary scholars.[36] The final chapter on medieval mobility by Charles Bowlus paints a picture of political culture in the High Middle Ages that is consistent with the literary and cultural situation described in this introduction. In the High Middle Ages, the world was in motion, both intellectually and spatially.

The poetry covered in the volume is, almost without exception, a poetry of nobility, composed with a view to its "live" performance before audiences at the larger courts of emperors, princes, and bishops, those with the political contacts to acquire source manuscripts and the financial wherewithal to maintain poets and support their craft. Despite critical intentions of various kinds on the part of individual authors and the ongoing importance of conveying some kind of moral if not religious significance, this poetry was largely dedicated to entertainment and tends to depict a world in which noble magnates and their retinues see an ideal image of themselves. The retinues were to a large degree made up of *ministeriales*, legally unfree knights who performed a variety of military and administrative services for their lords.[37] Peasants, who make up the vast majority of the population, rarely appear in this poetry, and when they do, as in the love poetry of Neidhart (in the form of the *gebûren* depicted in his lyrics) or in the *Helmbrecht* of Wernher der Gärtner, it is seldom in a very flattering light. Burghers fare somewhat better: Gottfried's Tristan masquerades in Ireland as the son of a merchant without any very negative aspersions being made about his station, and in Wolfram's *Willehalm*, the burgher Wimar is the only person in Laon who is willing to provide the weary Willehalm with lodging and food. Despite the relatively narrow social milieu in which this poetry was cultivated — when seen in comparison to the entire social range of the medieval world from the highest nobles to the lowest laborers — the secular literary culture that this poetry involved might be regarded as a first, necessary step in the direction of a world and a time in which "culture" will no longer be the possession or prerogative of a single privileged social group (as it had been of monks and clerics in the early Middle Ages). In the thirteenth century, not long after literary culture has taken hold at noble courts in Germany, urban elites, especially in southern Germany, Switzerland, and along the Rhine, adopted and transformed this poetry according to its own interests and priorities, thus beginning a trend that shows no signs of abating in our networked world today: the appropriation and assimilation of idealized knights in armor, their deeds, and their loves.

Even as it represents communal values and interests, the court poetry nevertheless opens up a greater range of exemplary models — and therefore possibilities for identification — for individual men and women. Though they doubtless incorporate characteristics of males as represented in saints' lives and heroic epics, men as represented in the court poetry — in the Arthurian romances, for example — are no longer the perfect heroes of the older literary genres, but rather flawed human beings, who do their best, make their way in an unpredictable world in which one's best is often not good enough, and invariably reach some kind of accommodation with their world, though not always a blessed or even happy one. Just as with the literature of later historical periods, the production of poetry during the first *Blütezeit* was largely the preoccupation of men. In Germany there is no female patron of literature with the stature and fame of an Eleanor of Aquitaine, nor do we see a female poet such as Beatriz de Dia. While direct evidence concerning the role of women in the production of court literature in medieval Germany (in contrast to early mystical writing) is scant, the basic concerns of the poetry — the *âventiure* and *minne* discussed above — give great weight to women and the concerns of women, however mediated these may be by male authorial perspectives and the communal values and interest in which these in turn were grounded. With characters such as Hartmann von Aue's Enite and Wolfram von Eschenbach's Herzeloyde, the court poetry articulates many models of womanhood between the extremes of sinful Eve and the blessed Virgin. In the representation of female as in that of male characters, court poetry experiments with individual, sometimes even quite idiosyncratic variations on set models. This greater scope in the representation of individual contours is one of the important ways in which this poetry can be considered to participate in a renaissance — that of the twelfth century — and to anticipate the more famous one that begins less than two centuries later in Italy.

After lying dormant during the age of Enlightenment, the German court poetry of the High Middle Ages began to experience its own "renaissance" in the latter half of the eighteenth century in the same geographic region where many of the most famous medieval poets lived and worked, with the publication in Zurich of the *Sammlung von Minnesingern aus dem schwäbischen Zeitpuncte* (Collection of Minnesingers of the Swabian Period, 1758–59) by Johann Jakob Bodmer and Johann Jakob Breitinger, and of Hartmann von Aue's *Der arme Heinrich* (Poor Heinrich) and *Iwein* by Christoph Heinrich Myller in the first volume of the *Sammlung deutscher Gedichte aus dem 12. 13. und 14. Jahrhundert* (Collection of German Poems from the Twelfth, Thirteenth, and Fourteenth Centuries, 1784). The interest in the Middle Ages and in medieval poetry increased greatly in the first half of the nineteenth century among the poets, philologists, and scholars associated with German Romanticism. Initially the allure of the Middle Ages and medieval poetry was in their perceived divergence from

the rationalistic conception of poetry championed most prominently by Johann Christoph Gottsched, according to which poetry had to adhere to the same "laws" that were seen to underlie all of nature. In contrast to such a narrow rationalistic conception of poetry, early Romantic writers such as Novalis stressed the role of fantasy and imagination, unfettered by any kind of rules, and saw in the Middle Ages a wondrous and unitary time in which the world had not yet been "demystified" by Enlightenment, and divided, separated, and classified according rationalistic "laws." From the early nineteenth century onward, the scholarly and artistic reception of medieval German literature (notably Richard Wagner's adaptation of medieval romances and legends in his music dramas) were shaped, and perhaps even to a great degree sustained, by the idea that the medieval poetry articulated aspects of German national character, even the very spirit of the German *Volk*. This nationalistic (mis)understanding of medieval poetry, which remained particularly interested in separating that which was considered to be specifically German from that which was not,[38] continued into the twentieth century and did not end until the cataclysms of the Second World War and the Holocaust.

For the latest chapter of the scholarly and artistic reception of medieval German poetry — from the mid-twentieth century to the present — there is no single organizing idea or principle. Freed to a large degree from its nationalistic moorings, this reception has gone in many different scholarly and artistic directions, far too many to be addressed in this introduction; and the social role of poetry — and not just of medieval poetry — in the networked world of today is certainly no longer as clear as it once was. A starting point for the understanding of the German poetry of the High Middle Ages has been suggested in this introduction and is borne out in different ways by the chapters in this volume: this poetry marks the beginnings of a secularization of literary culture in particular, and of culture in general, among German-speaking peoples. In this poetry, the divine language of God has begun to be a language of medieval men and women, used to represent the spiritual and worldly things dearest to them. In this important respect, the poetry of the High Middle Ages is not merely part of a renaissance: it is modern.

Notes

[1] Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957).

[2] Such as Virgil's *Aeneid*.

[3] By Avicenna (ibn Sina, 980–1037) and Averroes (ibn Rushd, 1126–98); in his *History of the Arab Peoples* (New York: MJF Books, 1991), Albert Hourani stresses the importance of Neo-Platonism in the philosophies of Avicenna and Averroes,

particularly the concept of the created world as emanations of divinity, which the philosophers particularly associated with light imagery (172–75).

[4] Particularly the question of the relationship of philosophy to religion, of reason to faith and revelation, which formed the basis of Scholasticism in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and went hand in hand with the foundation of the first European universities: Bologna 1119, Padua 1222, Naples 1224, Oxford 1214, and Cambridge 1229. In Germany, educational institutions associated with the Dominicans functioned practically as universities around 1300; the first German university was founded in Prague in 1348.

[5] See *Literarisches Mäzenatentum: Ausgewählte Forschungen zur Rolle des Gönners und Auftraggebers in der mittelalterlichen Literatur*, ed. Joachim Bumke (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1982) and Joachim Bumke, *Mäzene im Mittelalter* (Munich: Beck, 1979).

[6] The second traditional *Blütezeit* being the age of Goethe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

[7] Robert B. Howell, "The Older German Language," in *A Companion to Middle High German Literature to the 14th Century*, ed. Francis G. Gentry (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 27–52; here 40.

[8] Francis G. Gentry, "German Literature to 1160," in *A Companion to Middle High German Literature to the 14th Century*, ed. Gentry, 53–115; here 88.

[9] Gentry, "German Literature to 1160," 112.

[10] Gentry, "German Literature to 1160," 113.

[11] This will be discussed in more detail below.

[12] See Maria Dobozy, "Spielmannsepen," in *German Writers and Works of the Early Middle Ages: 800–1170*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 148, ed. Will Hasty and James Hardin (Detroit: Gale, 1995), 268–78.

[13] Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, ed. Friedrich Ranke, rev. ed. & trans. (modern German) Rüdiger Krohn, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984), verses 233–44.

[14] See Walter Haug, *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter: Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 13 Jahrhunderts: Eine Einführung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985), especially chapter 1 (7–24).

[15] Hartmann von Aue, *Gregorius*, ed. Hermann Paul, 13th revised edition by Burghart Wachinger (Niemeyer: Tübingen, 1984).

[16] The translation is from *Arthurian Romances, Tales, and Lyric Poetry: The Complete Works of Hartmann von Aue*, trans. Frank Tobin, Kim Vivian, and Richard H. Lawson (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State UP, 2001).

[17] *Die Lieder Walthers von der Vogelweide, vol. 1: Die religiösen und politischen Lieder* ed. Friedrich Maurer (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1974).

[18] Translations of Walther's lyrics are the editor's.

[19] See the chapter "On the Sociogenesis of *Minnesang* and Courtly Forms of Conduct" in Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 236–56.

[20] As in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*.

[21] Citing the edition of Maurer.

[22] Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. Karl Lachmann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965).

[23] Citing A. T. Hatto's translation *Wolfram von Eschenbach, Parzival* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980).

[24] Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, ed. Friedrich Ranke, trans. (modern German) with an afterword by Rüdiger Krohn (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984).

[25] Citing A. T. Hatto's translation, *Gottfried von Strassburg, Tristan* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1960).

[26] *Wolfram von Eschenbach, Willehalm Buch I bis V*, ed. Albert Leitzmann (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1963); whatever the ultimate sources of Wolfram's artistry may have been, it is important to realize that his seemingly rougher and more spontaneous poetic language is a conscious stylistic choice, rather than a sign of rhetorical or poetic deficiency.

[27] Citing the translation of Marion E. Gibbs and Sidney Johnson, *Wolfram von Eschenbach, Willehalm* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1984).

[28] Michael Frasetto, "Medieval Germany: History of Emperors and Empire, c. 750–c. 1350," in *A Companion to Middle High German Literature to the 14th Century*, ed. Gentry, 1–25; here 18.

[29] Josef Fleckenstein, "Friedrich Barbarossa und das Rittertum: Zur Bedeutung der großen Mainzer Hoftage von 1184 und 1188," in *Festschrift für Hermann Heimpel*, vol. 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972).

[30] See the songs attributed to Emperor Heinrich VI in *Des Minnesangs Frühling*, ed. Karl Lachmann, Moriz Haupt, Friedrich Vogt, and Carl von Kraus, 37th rev. ed. Hugo Moser and Helmut Tervooren (Stuttgart: S. Hirzl, 1982).

[31] Maurice Keen, *The Penguin History of Medieval Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 135–45.

[32] See, for example, D. H. Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance: Fact and Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).

[33] See Gottfried's *Tristan*, 4751–4820.

[34] Among the principal poets of the *Blütezeit*, Hartmann von Aue is the only one to name himself in the love lyrics.

[35] See, for example, Monika Schausten, *Erzählwelten der Tristangeschichte im hohen Mittelalter: Untersuchungen zu den deutschsprachigen Tristanfassungen des 12. & 13. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Fink, 1999) and Neil Thomas, *Diu Crône and the Medieval Arthurian Cycle* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002).

[36] See, for example, Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999).

[37] For a detailed treatment of *ministeriales* as a specifically German social and political phenomenon, see Benjamin Arnold, *German Knighthood 1050–1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

[38] The "other" was typically defined as French.

Part I

The First Flourishing of German Literature

Heinrich von Veldeke. A miniature from the Codex Manesse (30r).

Heinrich von Veldeke

Albrecht Classen

TWO CLOSELY CONNECTED MYTHS deeply influenced medieval concepts about the origins of the medieval world and its cultural identity. The first myth dealt with the history of ancient Troy and its defeat at the hands of the Greeks, originally described in Homer's *Iliad*, parts of which were later handed down in the sixth century *Historia de excidio Trojae* attributed to the Latin author Dares Phrygius and in the fifth century *Ephemeris belli Trojani* attributed to Dictys Cretensis, which in turn goes back to a Greek source from the first century.[1] The second myth concerned Aeneas and his successful escape from the defeated city. After landing on numerous European shores, according to ancient tradition, Aeneas eventually became the founder of Rome, as Virgil (70–19 B.C.) reported in his *Aeneid* (29–19 B.C.). Aeneas was thus an integral part of the medieval conception of the transferal of imperial authority and glory from the eastern Mediterranean to Western Europe (the *translatio imperii*). The story of Aeneas was reiterated, for instance, in the eleventh-century Middle High German *Annolied* and in the fourteenth-century Middle English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, but many other poets and chroniclers also dealt with this fascinating figure from classical antiquity. One of the most extensive accounts was the Old French *Roman d'Eneas* (more than 10,000 verses), written before 1160, which in turn became the source for the Middle High German *Eneit* by Heinrich von Veldeke.[2]

In his famous *Tristan* romance (ca. 1210), Gottfried von Strassburg praises his predecessor Heinrich von Veldeke as the founder of German courtly literature:

> wie wol sang er von minnen!
> wie schône er sînen sin besneit!
> ich waene, er sîne wîsheit
> ûz Pegases urspringe nam,
> von dem diu wîsheit elliu kam.
> [. . .]
> er inpfete daz erste rîs
> in tiutischer zungen. (4728–39)[3]