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Fragments of Didacticism: The Early Middle High German 'Rittersitte' and 'Der heimliche Bote'

Abstract: Some of the earliest texts in the medieval vernacular languages are transmitted as unique and often fragmentary manuscripts. In most cases we have no information as to their composition or reception, and sometimes even parts of their content remain unclear. This article proposes a way of reading early vernacular fragments as parts of the discourses to which they contribute. It argues that this context can help us assess the literary and didactic status of a text and even aid in their editing. This is demonstrated by the example of two early Middle High German texts: the 'Rittersitte' and 'Der heimliche Bote'. The former is transmitted as a fragment and its editor has attempted to fill the gaps based on vivid imagination rather than on sound philological principles or contextual information. Scholars are still uncertain concerning the unity of the latter and its literary genre: is it a love letter or a didactic poem? Considering the broader discourse in which these texts participate provides some context for the transmission of the manuscripts and can help establish social situatedness for early didactic literature, even if the witnesses are incomplete or of questionable literary status.

This chapter will reintroduce two pieces of didactic literature into the scholarly discussion and offer a new approach for understanding them. In reading the 'Rittersitte' and 'Der heimliche Bote' in their discursive context, we will not only explore ways to gain clarity about the contents of these texts, but also demonstrate what they can tell us – despite, or even because of their fragmentary status – about the *Sitz im Leben* of early secular didactic poetry. My aim is to establish more clearly the relevance of secular didacticism in the High Middle Ages and offer strategies to interpret the sparse evidence.

I will first discuss the status of fragments in the field of medieval studies and explore its implications for an epistemological assessment of medieval writing, and then develop some of these ideas further using the examples of the 'Rittersitte' and 'Der heimliche Bote', addressing some unresolved issues scholars have to face when studying these texts: the content of the 'Rittersitte' and the question of the unity of 'Der heimliche Bote'. Both texts are among the earliest examples of secular didactic literature in the German vernacular and are therefore essential for our understanding of the way vernacular didacticism came into its own in the Middle Ages. While both have been mentioned from time to time in recent scholarship, these arguments tend to be based on assumptions made about the texts in the 1930s to 1970s, which were both flawed and built around unrevised literary categories.

The *Sitz im Leben* of medieval vernacular didactic poetry, that is, the social relevance of these texts by the time they were produced, is not easily established. The increase in secular didactic writing from the twelfth century onward demonstrates a growing interest in guidance for life in the world.¹ The norms and values codified in these prescriptive texts appear to have been valid for a surprisingly long period: the *gros* of text transmission of the two most popular, 'Der Winsbecke' and 'Der Welsche Gast', date to the fourteenth century.² The earliest examples from the twelfth century, however, have come down to us only in a single (often incomplete) manuscript.³ Nothing about them suggests a wider readership, as we can establish for later texts.⁴ How can we judge the relevance of these texts, if we have no indication that they ever left the monasteries in which they were produced? Given their fragmentary condition, how do we even know for sure what content they meant to transmit? How can we analyse texts that display substantial *lacunae* or assess the conceptual unity of a text that does not conform to our criteria of genre, and without another witness against which to compare it? With no contextual information, such as authors, scribes, origi-

1 Ernst HELLGARDT, Die deutschsprachigen Handschriften im 11. und 12. Jahrhundert. Bestand und chronologischer Aufriss, in: Volker HONEMANN/ Nigel F. PALMER (eds.), Deutsche Handschriften 1100–1400. Oxford Kolloquium 1985, Tübingen 1988, pp. 33–81, lists 63 manuscripts containing German texts for the eleventh century, and 176 for the twelfth century, 83 of which fall into its last quarter or date around the turn of the century. He names the 'Kaiserchronik' and the German 'Song of Roland' ('Rolandslied') as the most notable texts in terms of the number of manuscripts transmitted from the twelfth century (p. 52).

2 Of the 16 manuscripts or fragments which transmit 'Der Winsbecke' (composed in the mid-thirteenth century), one dates to the late thirteenth century, two from around the turn of the fourteenth century, and the majority, eight manuscripts, to the fourteenth century (<http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/431>). Similarly, 'Der Welsche Gast', composed in the winter 1215/16, is transmitted in two manuscripts from the thirteenth century, and 14 from the fourteenth or the turn of the fifteenth century (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/wgd/handschriften.html>).

3 Only the 'Tugendspiegel', an adaptation of the *Moralium dogma philosophorum* from around 1170 is transmitted in two manuscripts, one fragment dating from the end of the twelfth century (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, mgo 226) and another, incomplete one from the first half of the fourteenth century (Klosterneuburg, Stiftsbibl., Cod. 1056). Cf. Joachim BUMKE (Hg.), Wernher von Elmendorf (Altdeutsche Textbibliothek 77), Tübingen 1974, pp. XII–XVI und illustration 2.

4 'Der Welsche Gast' is transmitted, in most manuscripts, with an elaborate programme of illustrations to aid the instruction, a premise that is questioned by HELLGARDT in this volume. For an introduction in the work and image cycle cf. Kathryn STARKEY, A Courtier's Mirror. Cultivating Elite Identity in Thomasin von Zerclaere's Welscher Gast, Notre Dame, Indiana 2013; Heinrich RÜCKERT (ed.), Der wälsche Gast des Thomasin von Zirclaria (Bibliothek der gesamten deutschen National-Literatur 30), Quedlinburg, Leipzig, 1852. 'Der Winsbecke' was included in the prestigious Große Heidelberger Liederhandschrift, the 'Codex Manesse'. It also sparked a parody from the fourteenth century, indicating a broader audience which would appreciate the comic reversal of the advice; cf. Albert LEITZMANN (ed.), Winsbeckische Gedichte nebst Tirol und Fridebrant, 3rd reworked edn. by Ingo REIFFENSTEIN (Altdeutsche Textbibliothek 9), Tübingen, 1962; nach Berlin, Staatsbibl., mgf 474.

nal length, date of composition, intended audience, or context for transmission, what can these texts actually tell us about secular instruction?

I Fragments in Medieval Studies: Recent discussions

The questions raised here are, of course, not only relevant for the study of didactic literature. Medievalists are constantly confronted with the fragmentary nature of all relevant sources. It is therefore of great importance that historians and philologists continue to reflect on possible strategies to deal with fragmentary transmission.⁵ Not only is a significant amount of source material simply no longer extant – the percentage of what is transmitted varies depending on the field⁶ – but even if everything that was ever written down, painted, built, or otherwise produced was still available, it would nonetheless provide us with only a small window into the time we study, and one which offers a distorted view.

In recent years there has been a new wave of theoretical reflection on fragments in cultural studies in general and medieval manuscript studies in particular. In 2003, in his discussion of the relevance of philological work, GUMBRECHT defined the task of the philologist as identifying, editing and commenting on fragments, placing them in their historical context and teaching the information gained in the process (and the process itself) to future generations.⁷ In his exposition of these tasks, GUMBRECHT not only defines the field but also rekindles the discussion on what he identifies as the primary subject of study, the fragment, and its relation to the ‘whole’ of which it was once a part. “The term [fragment] applies to any object that we identify as part of a larger whole without implying, however, that this part of a larger whole was meant to be a metonymy, representing the whole.”⁸ While in some cases aesthetic judgment can help us imagine that there was a larger whole the fragment was part of (as in the case of words and letters cut of the page), in other cases, as GUMBRECHT emphasises, it is the intention of the producer we imagine, which is no longer fulfilled by the surviving part.⁹ MALCHER, MÜLLER, PHILIPOWSKI and SABLONNY, in their introduction to the

5 For the field of medieval German literature, GLASSNER has shown that c. 60 % of the transmission of texts from the thirteenth and fourteenth century is in fragmentary manuscripts; Christine GLASSNER, *Zwischen Christherre-Chronik und Iwein: Aus zwei Jahrhunderten germanistischer Fragmentenforschung*, in: Christian GASTGEGER/ Christine GLASSNER/ Kornelia HOLZNER-TOBISCH/ Renate SPREITZER (eds.), *Fragmente. Der Umgang mit lückenhafter Quellenüberlieferung in der Mittelalterforschung* (ÖAW, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse. Denkschriften 415), Vienna 2010, pp. 109–12, pp. 110.

6 Eltjo BURINGH, *Medieval Manuscript Production in the Latin West*, chapter 4: *Loss of Medieval Manuscripts*, 4.1: *Loss rates*, Leiden 2011, pp. 180–182 estimates a survival rate of 0.75 of the manuscripts from the eleventh and twelfth century in the medieval West.

7 GUMBRECHT, *The Powers of Philology. Dynamics of Textual Scholarship*. Illinois, 2003.

8 GUMBRECHT (note 7), p. 13.

9 GUMBRECHT (note 7), p. 15.

collective volume on the role of fragments in cultural studies, continue this thought when they regard fragments as signs which refer to a whole artefact (say, a jug) but no longer fulfil the function for which they were intended (as, for instance, shards of a jug or a separated handle).¹⁰ Thus, in order to identify a fragment, one has to reconstruct the intended function of the whole. The fragment is therefore a category defined from the producer's point of view. The authors are aware of the difficulties this perspective can pose to a study of textual fragments. Any discussion of the part-whole relation of fragments and texts must necessarily engage with definitions of 'the text' and especially in medieval studies 'the whole text'.¹¹ ZUMTHOR has emphasised that "the text", when bound to the voice and corporality of a performer, is hardly identifiable as a text, but rather become one of many "varying actualizations of a traditional continuum of speaking"¹² of a subject with no complete "whole" to refer to.¹³ It is at this point, MALCHER at al. note, that the term "fragment" loses meaning as a philological category.

It is precisely here that another use of the term "fragment" comes into effect. A "traditional continuum of speaking" of a subject, that is, what can be said about a subject, is called, after Foucault, a 'discourse', its varying actualisations 'fragments'.¹⁴ The discourse becomes the new 'whole'. I do not wish to go so far as to substitute a work (*oeuvre*) such as the 'Tristan' with the concept of discourse.¹⁵ 'Tristan' participates in a number of discourses, but it does also exist as a relatively defined textual tradition which can be spelled out in groups of texts, translations, manuscript witnesses and so forth. If we were to find a new witness of the 'Tristan' it would make a lot of sense to analyse it as to which group of 'Tristan' texts it belongs, and where it can be placed in the transmission of 'Tristan'-manuscripts. However, the situation is quite different with (fragments of) early vernacular texts that are transmitted in only one or

10 Kay MALCHER/ Stephan MÜLLER/ Katharina PHILIPOWSKI/ Antje SABLOTNY, Fragmentarität als Problem der Kultur- und Textwissenschaften. Eine Einleitung, in: IDEM (eds.), Fragmentarität als Problem der Kultur- und Textwissenschaften (MittelalterStudien 28), Munich 2013, pp. 9–32, here p. 11.

11 Owing to the scope of this article, I will not engage in this discussion in detail. The question of *mouvance*, as the openness of medieval texts is called in New Philology, will, however, be important in the second part of this essay, when the "wholeness" of a text is called into question. See the overview by Joachim BUMKE, Der unfeste Text. Überlegungen zur Überlieferungsgeschichte und Textkritik, in: Jan-Dirk MÜLLER (ed.), 'Aufführung' und 'Schrift' in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit (Germanistische Symposien, Berichtsbände 17), Stuttgart, Weimar 1994, pp. 118–137, and more recently Thomas CRAMER, Mouvance, in: Helmut TERVOOREN/ Horst WENZEL (eds.), Philologie als Textwissenschaft. Alte und neue Horizonte (Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie. Sonderheft), Berlin 1997, pp. 150–181.

12 MALCHER/ MÜLLER/ PHILIPOWSKI/ SABLOTNY (note 10), p. 16, note 17: "übergeordnetes Traditionskontinuum des Sprechens, dass sich in einzelnen Texten aktualisiert."

13 Paul ZUMTHOR, Le text-fragment, in: *Langue française* 40 (1978), pp. 75–82, here p. 73.

14 Michel FOUCAULT, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, London/ New York 2002 (first published 1969), pp. 7–12.

15 I use the term 'work' to translate ZUMTHOR's '*oeuvre*', cf. Paul ZUMTHOR, *Essai de poétique médiévale*, Paris 1972, p. 72.

very few manuscripts, such as early didactic literature. There is often no complete 'whole', no 'work' we can reconstruct with any degree of certainty. These texts are nonetheless fragments of a discourse, a category no less difficult to delineate than that of the 'work' in the case of the 'Tristan'. Discourses are groups of statements which deal with the same topic and which seem to produce a similar effect.¹⁶ They are associated with institutions or social elites that are authorized to establish the rules and limitations of a discourse, i.e. what can be said about a certain topic and what is excluded. A discourse has a centre and margins, overlaps and interferes with other discourses, and each and every fragment of it reshapes what we perceive as 'the whole' of a discourse, precisely as is the case with 'the text'. Therefore, texts transmitted in single manuscripts, especially if fragmented, can still be useful objects of medieval studies when regarded as parts of a larger discourse. Given that no amount of textual witness can ever give the modern scholar 'the whole' of medieval thought, their fragmentary status does no longer disqualify them as objects of analysis: if we keep in mind that all we have is fragments we can start to think about incomplete textual transmission in a new way.

I suggest that we deal with texts as fragments of a discourse analogous to the way we would deal with witnesses of a 'work' or fragments of a 'text'. These fragments in a wider sense can similarly be situated in the context of other witnesses of the same discourse just as a new 'Tristan'-fragment would be situated in the context of other witnesses of this text. Just as these fragments in the narrower sense in all their variety bear witness to the constant generation of the 'text' the fragments of the discourse bear witness to the discursive process. Both kinds of fragments allow us some insight into the larger whole without being fully representative for it. At the same time, reading fragments in the contexts of the 'whole' of which they are parts allows us to understand their peculiarity. This does introduce the risk of a circular argument, but this can be avoided by carefully separating observations on the fragment from information drawn from the larger (textual or discursive) context. This means first and foremost allowing the fragment to remain incomplete and not supplementing it with details from the 'whole' on which it is supposed to shed light.

For the remainder of this chapter I would like to demonstrate how reading didactic fragments as part of a larger discourse can add much to our understanding of the individual fragment, aid philological work on these texts and help us establish the social relevance of these earliest written representations of the discourse. For this purpose, I will consider my two examples as part of a discourse on a 'good life in the world' and focus on its realizations in the German vernacular. With the first example, the 'Rittersitte', I will demonstrate how a consistent consideration of a fragment in the context of other didactic texts from the period can allow us to assess its remains, even if no complete coherent text can be reconstructed. For this purpose, I also provide a

16 Sara MILLS, *Discourse* (The New Critical Idiom), London, New York 1997, p. 65.

corrective reading of its manuscript and address some of the *lacunae* that make the text so troublesome to study. It will be seen that knowledge of the discourse is useful even for the edition of a text. In my second example, I will discuss the unity of *Der heimliche Bote* and suggest an assessment of the text that does not focus on the question of its genre. Both these texts have received little attention in the last century, arguably because of the difficulties their transmission poses to academic enquiry. However, if we embrace the unknowable as part of our field and method, these and other witnesses can become interesting objects of study once more.¹⁷

II The fragmented nature of didactics: the ‘Rittersitte’

The remains of the ‘Rittersitte’ were found in the binding of a codex containing Latin *Vocabulae*, dating from 1420.¹⁸ The five leaves used for the binding were originally taken from a bible manuscript from the eleventh century, which had on some free leaves additions dating from the twelfth century in Latin and the ‘Rittersitte’ in German.¹⁹ It has been dated from the first half of the twelfth century.²⁰ Four Latin texts and the German poem were written on five empty leaves of the Latin bible manuscript, which was copied, as MENHARDT could prove, in the monastic scriptorium of Millstatt in Carinthia (present day Austria). This presents us with the first indications as to a readership of the poem. A scribe in a monastic scriptorium knew the poem – how, we do not know – and found it worth copying. It is no simple *probatio pennae*, but a full leaf occupied almost entirely by a German text which contains, as far as we can say, some kind of instruction in the vernacular. The number of vernacular additions

17 This approach is partly indebted to though different from a perspective taken by Heather BAMFORD in her excellent essay Heather BAMFORD, *Fragments as Phenomenon and Philological Subject in: La corónica. A journal of Medieval Hispanic Languages, Literatures, and Cultures* 39, 2 (2011), pp. 29–60. BAMFORD argues for a perspective that liberates the fragment from its metonymic position in which it stands in for a greater whole, but instead regards the fragment as a whole in itself. This approach is valuable as it enables to view fragments from the user-perspective, not only in the Middle Ages and today but throughout its transmission history, even as they are valued for the raw material they provide to the bookbinder. As will be clear on the following pages, BAMFORD’s theoretical approach to fragments has become a point of departure for my own reflection, which do, however, pursue a different aim.

18 Hermann MENHARD, *Verzeichnis der altdeutschen literarischen Handschriften der österreichischen Nationalbibliothek*, vol. 1 (Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin – Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für deutsche Sprache und Literatur 13), Berlin 1960, p. 490. For an overview on the transmission and scholarly discussion of the ‘Rittersitte’ cf. Werner SCHRÖDER, *Rittersitte*, in: *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*, 2nd ed. vol. 8 (1992), cols. 109–110.

19 <http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/1601>.

20 Hermann MENHARD, *Rittersitte. Ein rheinfränkisches Lehrgedicht des 12. Jahrhunderts*, in: *Zeitschrift für deutsche Altertum* 68 (1931), pp. 153–163, poem on pp. 160–162.

to Latin monastic codices, even if it is not very high in the twelfth century, is sufficient to suggest a general interest in vernacular texts, which most frequently contained religious instruction, prayers, confessions and similar texts that could be useful for pastoral practice.²¹ We should not forget, however, that the brothers themselves, lay or ordained, could also have been interested in reading their own language, even in a monastic context. Our scribe, for one reason or another, deemed the little poem worthy of his time and effort and copied it on the empty leaves of a bible manuscript.

These leaves, now numbered I to V, were cut in strips and used for the binding of Codex 2871 some time after 1420.²² This is our second evidence of a reader-response, or at least a user-response. As BAMFORD has pointed out, we must acknowledge that in the case of manuscripts used for book binding, the value of the transmission was seen mainly in the raw material, the parchment.²³ We know that bookbinders acquired often substantial amounts of parchment from scriptoria,²⁴ so the selection of what could be destroyed and what was preserved was with the monastery, not the bookbinder. The Latin bible manuscript could have been chosen because it was old, damaged or incomplete; we cannot know for sure. Geary reminds us that parchment was often chosen on the basis of its format rather than because of the text it contained.²⁵ Since the Latin codex as well as the German poem in it were produced without any decoration it is not surprising that almost 300 years after its production someone decided that they could do without it. It seems likely that the German poem became part of the binding more or less accidentally; but it also indicates that the text was not deemed worthy of being rescued from the pile of parchment for sale: the advice it contains must have been outdated by the fifteenth century, the language old-fashioned, and the poetic value low. As we do not know who sold the bible manuscript to the bookbinder, we cannot be sure if the 'Rittersitte' ever left the monastery in which it was copied into the Latin codex.

The German poem is on folio Vv of the bible manuscript; the short poem comprises 54 lines in the manuscript, composed in rhyming couplets. The Latin text is in

21 Ernst HELLGARDT, *Lateinisch-deutsche Textensembles in Handschriften des 12. Jahrhunderts*, in: Nikolaus HENKEL/ Nigel F. PALMER (eds.), *Latein und Volkssprache im Mittelalter*. Regensburger Colloquium 1988, Tübingen 1992, pp. 19–31, here p. 29.

22 MENHARD (note 20), p. 490.

23 BAMFORD (note 11), p. 34.

24 KER's study of the fragments in book bindings from the Oxford suggest that the binders bought old parchment by weight; Neil R. KER, *Fragments of Medieval Manuscripts used as Pastedowns in Oxford Bindings with a Survey of Oxford Binding c. 1515–1620* (Oxford Bibliographical Society Publications N. S. 5) Oxford 1954, p. X. Powitz demonstrates for German monastic libraries that mostly Latin parchment manuscripts from the own library were used as pastedown; Gerhardt Powitz, *Libri inutiles in mittelalterlichen Bibliotheken. Bemerkungen über Alienatio, Palimpsestierung und Makulierung*, in: *Scriptorium* 50 (1996), pp. 288–304.

25 Patrick J. GEARY, *Fragments of Words – Fragments of Bodies*, in: GASTGEBER/GLASSNER/HOLZNER-TOBISCH/SPREITZER (note 5), pp. 13–20.

three columns, whereas the German text was written across the entire folio Vv. Only Vvb and Vvc, the last two thirds of the folio, are preserved, the first part is missing. Due to folding, some writing on Vvb is rubbed off, and Vvc was damaged when the leaf was peeled off. Therefore, the text is in a very bad state and contains many gaps. It also means that approximately ten letters of each line are missing (3.5–4.5 cm; Vva is completely cut off and about 1.2 cm of Vvb is as well).²⁶ The first and the last line are slightly separated from the main body of text, of which altogether 54 lines survive. The last line ends a few centimetres before the right margin of the leaf. This might indicate that this is the intended end of the poem. Verses are separated by *punctus elevatus*. In few cases a new couplet begins with majuscules (“[a.a.] with few [A.a.]”).²⁷

The poor condition of the manuscript has not prevented scholars from making all kinds of assumptions on the content, only few of which can really be proven by the text. The first and only edition of the text was published 1931 by MENHARD, who gave it the title ‘Rittersitte’ (Manners of the Knight) by which the poem still goes in scholarship. However, the word *ritter* (knight) does not occur in the poem. This is our third instance of a reader-response, 400 years later, influenced (as with the first) by the contemporary cultural context. MENHARD assumed that the poem was intended for ‘knightly circles’.²⁸ By the time he published his edition and commentary of the text, German medieval literature had just gained new interest and it was the ‘knightly’ culture it was thought to represent that attracted scholars and won much appreciation.²⁹

MENHARD admits that parts of the content must be subject to guesswork but he attempts to summarise the train of thought nonetheless. He finds advice about property, women, friendship, religious life, combat, and generally good behaviour, and suggests that the texts “confronts a young knight with his duties which was hitherto unknown in the literature of the twelfth century”.³⁰ MENHARD’s edition and assessment remained the uncontested standard until today, despite their problematic method. His assigned title is not the only case in which too much assumption and too little consultation of the witness influenced his judgment. His reading of the text is mostly accurate, though in a few instances my own reading varies. His conjectures, though, more often than not lack a solid basis. And, as he states in his introduction,

²⁶ MENHARD (note 20), p. 158.

²⁷ Cf. Nigel PALMER, Manuscripts for Reading. The Material Evidence for the Use of Manuscripts Containing Middle High German Narrative Verse, in: Mark CHINCA/ Christopher J. YOUNGE (eds.), *Orality and Literacy in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of D. H. Green* (Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literature 12), Utrecht 2005, pp. 67–102, here p. 97.

²⁸ MENHARD (note 20), p. 154; “ritterliche Kreise”.

²⁹ A brief overview of the history of medieval German philology can be found in Tomas TOMASEK, Germanistische Mediävistik, in: Tomas TOMASEK/ Volker HOHNEMANN (eds.), *Germanistische Mediävistik. Eine Einführung* (Münsteraner Einführungen: Germanistik 4), Münster 2000, pp. 1–33, here pp. 13–18.

³⁰ MENHARD (note 20), p. 163.

when he was at his wits' end with the text he sent his transcription to his supervisor, Konrad ZWIERZINA, who continued the guesswork – albeit never having seen the manuscript in person. MENHARD includes both his own conjectures and those of ZWIERZINA in his edition, and subsequent scholarship has used transcription and conjectures indifferently, perpetuating the rather too romantic image of German 'knightly culture' that had coloured MENHARD's assumptions.³¹ The editors of the "Referenzkorpus Mittelhochdeutsch" have recently returned to the fragment and produced a new diplomatic reading of the text which amends some of MENHARD's misreading, but which also uses MENHARD's edition as a 'secondary source' whenever gaps in the manuscript have caused blanks in the reading text.³² This results in entire lines of the edition being made up of conjectures that have no secure footing in the manuscript.³³ A corrective reading of the 'Rittersitte' (see appendix 1) and a detailed discussion of those parts that can be confirmed can guide the philological work and help fill some of the gaps. In giving the 'Rittersitte' a contextual framework we can make the scattered remains of the poem speak to us once more.

Topics of the instruction

There is no piece of advice formulated and transmitted completely, so the focus must be on the use of words or groups of words and the context in which they occur in the poem. Seen in relation to similar texts from the period – other discursive fragments – they can tell us more than a first glance at the fragmented page would suggest about the poem, its intended audience, and the role of didactic literature.

a) Religious duties

The first line on the manuscript reads [...]*ichi wil imi got gu*[...]. Already, the first word poses some problems as it is not transmitted in full: an early Middle High German word **ichi* is not recorded. The first word could transmit the last letters of the word *richi*³⁴ or any adjective ending in *-lich*.³⁵ The grammatical form of the finite verb *wil* would agree with the first person or the third person singular, which is used in the

31 Eg. in Horst WENZEL, *Frauendienst und Gottesdienst. Studien zur Minne-Ideologie* (Philologische Studien und Quellen 74), Berlin 1974, pp. 93–95.

32 <https://www.linguistics.rub.de/rem/corpus/details.html#M204>; "Sekundäre Referenz".

33 https://www.linguistics.rub.de/rem/pub/texts//M204_mod.pdf.

34 The word *richi* encompasses a broad range of meaning from rich to powerful, but also glorious. As a noun it refers to an empire, a kingdom or simply a realm, the *himilrichi* means heaven. The position directly in front of the predicate suggests that it is the subject of the sentence.

35 E.g. *analichi*, *missilichi*, *gilichi*, *guolichi*, *ratlichi*.

remainder of the text. Given the word *arm* in the verse directly following this one, *richi* could be a logical possibility. We will see that the ‘Rittersitte’ uses oppositions frequently as part of its didactic strategy. Read this way, the line could be translated: “A rich man wants to [verb] himself [preposition] to God”, as the introduction to the following precepts. In verse 4, just one line³⁶ below on the manuscript, we find: *wil er gote [...]*. This is in line with the descriptive tone of the text, in which the author seems to introduce scenes or actions and give a value judgment. The syntax indicates a subjunctive: “[If] he wants to [verb] God, [...]”. The word God appears three times in the first six verses. Given that only thirteen words can be identified in this section with any certainty, this is a significant cluster. The legible words in the following five verses, *machit sundi* (v. 7, makes sin), *herzi* (v. 7, heart), *och demi libi gut* (v. 9, also good for the life/body), *gutin sin tragi* (v. 12, have good understanding), suggest that the verses until v. 14 form a thematic unit. These words suggest that sinful behaviour and good understanding are related to God and evaluated from a divine perspective, as the phrase *w[i]rt imi got* (“God will [verb] him”) indicates, but also relate to life in this world.

We know this order of advice from contemporary and later secular instruction, which all base their counsel first and foremost on divine judgment.³⁷ Comparable didactic poems such as the ‘Tugendspiegel’ (c. 1170) or the father-son dialogue ‘Der Winsbecke’ (1220s) give advice on a good life in the world, but emphasise that all conduct must be based on the desire to please God.³⁸ The father, who advises his son in ‘Der Winsbecke’, insists despite his worldly teachings that moral behaviour and fulfilment of noble duties need the foundation of a Christian heart and submission to God.³⁹ These elements occur in the ‘Rittersitte’ in the words *herzi* and *gutin sin tragin* (vv. 9 and 12). The ‘Tugendspiegel’ explains in 44 verses the benefits of following the

³⁶ In the discussion of the ‘Rittersitte’, I distinguish between verses as parts of a rhyming couplet, and lines on the manuscript.

³⁷ Many examples of divine invocations or prayers which introduce early Middle High German (didactic) poems are listed and analysed in Christian THELEN, *Das Dichtergebet in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*, Berlin, New York 1989, chapter 3: *Das Dichtergebet in der mittelhochdeutschen Literatur: Eingangsgebete*, 3. *Lehrdichtung*, pp. 413–426.

³⁸ The ‘Tugendspiegel’ (note 3) mentions explicitly that its sources for advice are *heyden* (heathen). The Middle High German poem is an adaptation of the Latin ‘*Moralium dogma philosophorum*’, which in turn compiles wisdom of pre-Christian, classical authorities. The author of the German text, Wernher of Elmendorf, explains that while the sources of this wisdom are heathen, they must inspire his Christian audience even more to acquire virtues in order to live in God’s grace (vv. 30–33).

³⁹ ‘Der Winsbecke’ (note 4), a poem in which a father instructs his son as to a virtuous, noble life style, initiates the advice with the precept to love God, which builds the basis to all that follows (stanza 2, v. 1). This stanza is followed by a *memento mori*, a reminder of the finite and superficial character of life, followed by a stanza which reminds the son to always strive for god’s favour. These stanzas create the religious backdrop against which the advice for a life in the world is set. The next stanza (5) connects the religious basis with the knowledge which is to be transferred in the poem: All wisdom (*wisheit*, secular knowledge) is worth nothing if the heart does not love God.

advice in the poem both for this life and the next.⁴⁰ The phrase *och demi libi gut* indicates that a similar connection is established here.⁴¹ The density in which religious and moral-philosophical terminology occurs in the first lines on the folio suggests that verses 1–13 indeed provide an introduction into the didactic enterprise of the text.

As in other didactic texts, religious topics are taken up again in the course of the instruction. Verses 25–26 preserve the words: *seltin hin zi chirchin gat [...] unde ani rehti [...]* (vv. 29–30, rarely goes to church [...] and without order), paralleling one with the other. Lack of order (*reht*) is here associated with neglect of Christian duties; however it is not clear in what sense the term *rehti* is used here.⁴² MENHARD reads a positive equivalent to this precept in the following lines: *Swer [...] ticki (zichirchin gat) [...] ist andir weidi (gituffit). Swer sini (seli bifiliht) [...]* (Who goes to church often [...] is baptized anew. Who entrusts his soul [...] vv. 28–29). As much as this reading and MENHARD's conjectures would fit the context, my own reading of the manuscript could not confirm them. The key words are not legible.

The next lines offer little to make sense of until the rhyme *wart giborn/der hat seli virhorn* (vv. 84–85, was born/has lost his soul). Though any indication as to what is under discussion here is lost, the couplet still shows the poem's mode of reasoning. Certain misbehaviour results in the loss of salvation. The first part could be part of the lamentation formula, 'to regret that one was born'.⁴³

⁴⁰ The 'Tugendspiegel' (note 3), vv. 24–72 explain the relevance of the texts own didactic endeavour. The following thematic unit (vv. 73–228) continues in this vein, emphasising the importance of good counsel for a lord.

⁴¹ The prologue of the 'Kaiserchronik', too, justifies its didactic objective with the benefits its audience could expect when they learned from the examples in the text; cf. Edward SCHRÖDER (ed.), *Die Kaiserchronik eines Regensburger Geistlichen*, (MGH Dt. Chroniken 1,1), Hannover 1892. On the didactic agenda of the 'Kaiserchronik' cf. Claudia WITTIG, *Political Didacticism in the Twelfth Century – The Middle High German Kaiserchronik*, in: Michele CAMPOPIANO/ Henry BANTON (eds.), *Universal Chronicles in the High Middle Ages*. York 2017, pp. 95–120.

⁴² The didactic poem 'Vom Rechte' presents us with a broad range of meanings of this term, from social order, status or personal relationship to law and justice; cf. Ingeborg SCHRÖBLER (ed.), *Das mittelhochdeutsche Gedicht vom Recht*, in: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 80 (1958), pp. 219–252. See also Matthias LEXER, *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch*, headword "reht", 3 vols., Leipzig 1872–1878, online (http://woerterbuchnetz.de/cgi-bin/WBNetz/wbgui_py?sigle=Lexen).

⁴³ E.g. Heinrich von Morungen, *Moringen-Ballade*, l. 17: *Er gedacht im leit und also schwere: "Ach, das ich je geborn wart."* (Heinrich von Morungen, *Moringen-Ballade*, in: Hanno RÜTHER (ed.), *Der Mythos von den Minnesängern. Die Entstehung der Morunger-, Tannhäuser- und Bremberger Ballade* (picture et poësis 23), Köln, Weimar, Wien 2007, p. 65. Often the formula is used when a lyrical 'I' regrets its own failures, such as Judas in the Frankfurt Passion Play (Frankfurter Passionsspiel), ll. 2653–56: *ach das ich ye wart geborn. / wie han ich so ubel gefarn / an mynem herren Ihesu Crist.*; cf. Johannes JANOTA (ed.), *Die Hessische Passionsspielgruppe*, 3 vols, vol. 1: *Band 1 Frankfurter Dirigierrolle – Frankfurter Passionspiel*, Lateinisch – Deutsch. Berlin, New York 2003, pp. 67–430. There are many more examples in Middle High German literature.

A later cluster of verses (vv. 93–98) are a structural unit, a double formula, and seem to return to religious aspects. The first and the third verses open with the word *iarlanc* (during a year) the corresponding verses have the word *clostir* (monastery, v. 93) and *got mainit* (god loves, v. 95); three lines later the word *nunnin* (nuns, v. 98) occurs. This might be a reminder to care for and protect the monasteries, ‘for the love of god’; a typical call for duty from churchmen to the lay lords, though it cannot be said for sure.

b) Secular Values

The verses 14–19 form another thematic complex. With the conjunction *Swenne* (when/never) and the verb in a third person singular *wegit* (‘to turn to’ or ‘to value’)⁴⁴, the paragraphs introduces another scenario, apparently one that has to do with fornication: in the next verse we read *unzuhti*, in the following ones *daz firwiz[it]* [...] [si]n *gislahti*. This suggests a precept that warns the reader or listener to abstain from fornication because of their lineage – indicating an audience which connects claims to moral superiority to their noble birth, a notion that gained currency among Western European nobility in the late twelfth century.⁴⁵ We find a similar construction in the nearly contemporary ‘Tugendspiegel’, which also emphasises that noble lineage brings the obligations of particularly moral conduct (vv. 907–923). This interpretation is further supported by a pair of verses just one line further down, in which we can read the words *hurrin*, *giwimtas nimer eri* (fornicate, v. 19; never gain reputation, v. 20). Middle High German *êre* – prestige or good reputation – is the social capital in a courtly society and is closely tied to noble descent and the dynastic duty to preserve it, as we can read in the ‘Tugendspiegel’.⁴⁶ Lax sexual morals are presented as detrimental to the pursuit of prestige, which in the ‘Tugendspiegel’ and other secular texts, is emphasised as a major task for the individual nobleman.⁴⁷ In this context the

⁴⁴ The strong verb *wegen* can have a range of possible meanings that must be established by context, which is difficult in this particular case. Cf. LEXER (note 42), “wegen”.

⁴⁵ David CROUCH, *The Birth of Nobility. Constructing Aristocracy in England and France 900–1300*, London, New York, 2005, ch. 2: From *preudomme* to *chevalerie* presents in detail the increased connection of morality and noble lineage that emerges around the turn of the century, 1170–1220.

⁴⁶ The author translates a quotation by Seneca: *so die vederen sin von grozereme namen / so suich die kint me mugen schamen* (If the ancestors are of a good name so their children must discipline themselves the more; ll. 907–8) and further *dune wellis selbe tugende ladin / so stet dir zu gelichem schadin / dinir mage ere und rum* (if you do not want to accumulate virtues, your ancestors’ reputation and fames are detrimental to you, ll. 921–23).

⁴⁷ Knut GÖRICH, *Die Ehre Friedrich Barbarossas. Kommunikation, Konflikt und politisches Handeln im 12. Jahrhundert* (Symbolische Kommunikation in der Vormoderne), Darmstadt 2001 offers a nuanced historical analysis of the concept of prestige and honour for the high nobility of the Empire in the twelfth century.

verse *undi chomin[t] dar vil libi geste* (and if many dear guest come; v. 22) is legible. Prestige is established by other people's judgement, so it can be greatly enhanced by hosting guests in one's house. This line could well provide advice in this vein,⁴⁸ as we encounter e.g. in 'Der Winsbecke' (st. 49–51) and 'Der Welsche Gast' (vv. 377–388).

An interesting parallel, though not a full piece of advice, is offered by the couplet: *Sundi ani ruiwe undi man ani triwe* (Sin without repentance and man without loyalty; v. 23–24). This parallel seems to address two moral failures seen as equally wrong and perhaps even coinciding in one person. *Riuwe* and *triuwe* are both crucial terms, one being at the centre of religious life, the other one as a key term for a feudal society. As a rhyming couplet they are closely tied together as often in medieval courtly literature.⁴⁹ *Triuwe* is one of the key terms of Middle High German literature and medieval Western-European society: it can mean 'fidelity', 'fealty', 'faithfulness' and more, opening up a broad semantic field connecting to a range of discourses. Recently, LEPSIUS/REICHLIN have dedicated a collective volume to the study of the term *triuwe* and its Latin equivalent *fides* and the significance of the concepts and ideals behind them in the German Empire.⁵⁰ Knut Görich, in this volume, has emphasised the stabilizing function of oaths of fidelity in the HOHENSTAUFEN administration and exercise of power.⁵¹ This explains the great importance of *triuwe* not only in medieval chivalric romance, where loyalty to a knight's overlord or lady is a central characteristic of the hero and a lack thereof threatens the entire order of the courtly society.⁵² The term is

48 Cf. Meinolf SCHUMACHER, *Gast, Wirt und Wirtin: Konstellationen von Gastlichkeit in der Literatur des Mittelalters*, in: Peter FRIEDRICH/ Rolf PARR (eds.) *Gastlichkeit: Erkundungen einer Schwellensituation*, Heidelberg 2010, pp. 105–116 has analysed the representation of hospitality in medieval literature in detail. Hans Conrad PEYER, *Von der Gastfreundschaft zum Gasthaus. Studien zur Gastlichkeit im Mittelalter*, Hannover, 1987 also mentions the celebration of joyous hospitality in poetic texts from the twelfth century onwards (pp. 30–32), but also lists a range of household account of European noble courts which bear witness to their readiness to host guest, especially, but not only, for occasions such as tournaments and courtly festivities (32–34). Hospitality could be used as an occasion to display *largitas* and thus increase the host's reputation as well as honour the guest, when luxurious food was served, and costly gifts exchanged (p. 32).

49 E.g. in the Middle High German 'Erec' (273f.): *er was getriuwe / und milte âne riuwe* (he was loyal and generous without reservations). Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*. *Mittelhochdeutsch/Neuhochdeutsch*, ed. Volker Mertens (Reclam Universal-Bibliothek 18530), Stuttgart 2008.

50 Susanne LEPSIUS/ Susanne REICHLIN (eds.) *Fides/Triuwe (Das Mittelalter 20, 2)*, Berlin 2015.

51 Knut GÖRICH, *Fides und fidelitas im Kontext der staufischen Herrschaftspraxis (12. Jahrhundert)*, in: LEPSIUS/ REICHLIN (note 50), pp. 294–310.

52 Cf. Jan-Dirk MÜLLER, *Was heißt eigentlich triuwe in Wolframs von Eschenbach 'Parzival'*, in LEPSIUS/ REICHLIN (note 50), pp. 311–326 who demonstrates that *triuwe* is, in Wolfram's *Parzival*, the basis for all other virtues and most closely connected to *êre* (prestige, reputation). Similarly, the early Middle High German poem 'Vom Rechte' (c. 1150, note 42) names *triuwe* as one of the three duties in the divine order of the world (alongside justice and truthfulness). Albert WAAG/ Werner SCHRÖDER (eds.), *Deutsche Gedichte des 11. und 12. Jahrhunderts*, Tübingen 1972, pp. 112–131.

also omnipresent as a value promoted in German didactic literature. As texts of this type aim to instruct their lay (noble) audience as to their duties and responsibilities in a functioning society, loyalty is among the most important virtues to be acquired – along with *geloube* (*pietas*) and *staete* (*stabilitas*) – to ensure social order.⁵³ *Triuwe* guaranteed that individuals fulfilled their social contracts, as men to their overlords, as pupils to their teachers, as wives to their husbands, and is thus often associated with *êre*.⁵⁴ In a society in which personal relations and legal procedures were largely a matter of oral agreements, a reputation of reliability was an important factor that integrated a person into their social group. With the church reform of the eleventh century and the resulting religious movement, repentance gained a central role in lay piety. As laypeople gained more autonomy in their spiritual development, a phenomenon due also to the increase in teaching activity by clerics, repentance became an important aspect of connecting worldly life with Christian lore.⁵⁵ In the ‘Tugendspiegel’, the notion is the basis for all attempts to improve: *Daz saltu tun allir erist* (what you should do first) *daz du dich dinez unrehtes bekerist* (that you should turn away from your wrongdoing, ll. 562). *Triuwe* and *riuwe* thus represent the integration of the individual into the Christian community and courtly social order.

In the following lines, only few words can be identified with any certainty: *g[e]sti*, *fruint*, *landi*, and *rat* can be found (v. 35–41, guests, friend, land, counsel). These are important terms and topics other didactic poems cover. The appreciation of hospitality and loyal friendship was consistently emphasised already in Roman classical literature, such as Cicero’s ‘On friendship’ and widely received in high medieval didactic literature, Latin as well as vernacular.⁵⁶ The care for the land is stated in the *speculum*-literature and its vernacular counterparts as one of the primary duties of kings, prin-

53 István P. BEJ CZY, The Concept of Political Virtue in the Thirteenth Century, in: István P. BEJ CZY, Cary NEDERMAN (eds.), *Princely Virtues in the Middle Ages: 1200–1500* (Disputatio 9), Turnhout 2007, pp. 9–32.

54 Cf. ‘Tristan’ (11741–11743): *Tristan, dô er der minne enpfant, / er gedâhte sâ zehant / der triuwen und der êren* (when Tristan became aware of his love, his first thoughts were concerned with loyalty and reputation). Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, ed. Rüdiger KROHN, vol. 2 (Reclam Universal-Bibliothek 4472), Stuttgart 1994.

55 The concepts of repentance and penance were closely connected and marked the sinner’s turn to a better life. Their importance in scholastic theology was propagated by the reception of Augustine’s ‘De civitate dei’ (X c. 5) and Gregory the Great’s ‘Moralia in Iob’. Repentance, in this conceptual framework, was both, virtue and grace (Thomas Aquinas, ‘Summa theologiae’, III a. 84 and 85). Both repentance (*riuwe*) and penance (*buoze*) were actively advertised as ways to salvation to lay audiences in Middle High German didactic literature and vernacular sermons, as e.g. in ‘Der Winsbecke’ (note 4), where the father’s repentance and penance mark the turn from a chivalric lifestyle to the religious life of the monastery and thus his care for the afterlife.

56 Albrecht CLASSEN, Introduction, C: Marcus Tullius Cicero, in: Ibid./ Marilyn SANDIDGE (eds.), *Friendship in the Middle Ages. Explorations of a Fundamental Ethical Discourse*, Berlin, New York 2010, pp. 8–14.

ces, and lords.⁵⁷ From the literary tradition of court criticism, a genre increasingly produced in High Medieval Europe, we know of the type of the bad advisor, and indeed many vernacular texts teach their audience how to tell bad from good advice, as in the ‘Tugendspiegel’: *nv merke ouch da mite / der getruwen ratgeben site* (thus you recognise that ways of a good advisor, vv. 121–22).⁵⁸ It is not surprising that instructional texts particularly emphasise the relevance of good advice, as this is precisely their own objective: *Dv salt beuelin al din leben / vil getruen rat geben* (You shall entrust all your life to loyal advisors; ‘Tugendspiegel’, vv. 73–74). The verse *darf niemin gitruw [in]* (v. 37) is clearly legible and seems to have conveyed some kind of warning, perhaps comparable to the ‘Tugendspiegel’'s warning against bad friends or advisors: *valschr frunde der ist vile / da wur hute dich zalleme spile, wenne suchez tu iren rat* (There are many treacherous friends, be wary of them, when you seek their advice vv. 109–12). Once again, the role of trust and loyalty is thematised. In the same context we can read the verb *giuerit* (41, to grant, 3rd Ps. Sg. Pret.) pointing to the sphere of generosity, a key aspect of high medieval court culture and noble identity.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, we can only speculate as to what these lines instructed in detail – their occurrence is, however, in the range of expected topics in secular didactic poetry.

The next section that provides a collocation worth interpreting is *[w]ol cimet tegin / cappe in [...]* (nicely befits to the warrior / the cap in [...], vv. 49–50). The *tegin* is associated with a particular garment,⁶⁰ but more interesting is the verb *cimet* here, as it shows that this precept is about the appropriate appearance of the warrior. As the following verse talks about the *bosi iuncherri* (evil young noblemen, v. 52), again a dialectic approach seems to be at work. A very similar phrase is used in the ‘Tugendspiegel’ (*bosen edelinc*, ‘evil nobleman’, v. 912) in a passage that discusses the duties of a nobleman and condemns the *bose iuncher* as he dishonours his entire lineage, a thought we have come across already a few verses earlier. Among the few legible words in the following verses are *nimin giruch[i]t* (no one provoked, v. 54) and *harti gischendit* (greatly disgraced, v. 56). In the context of the words *fluith* (v. 59, escape),

57 The ‘Tugendspiegel’ (note 3) dictates: *dir in sal nicht sin widir dines landis ere* (You shall never turn against the honour of your domain/land, l. 620), translating a passage from *De religione* in the ‘Moralium dogma philosophorum’: *faceres enim contra rempublicam que tibi debet esse carissima. Sic multa que honesta uidentur natura, temporibus fiunt inhonesta*. (Moralium dogma philosophorum, I.B.2.bII.α. De religione). This duty is found also in the Latin speculum-Literature, such as the contemporary ‘Policraticus’ by John of Salisbury.

58 The ‘Tugendspiegel’ (note 3) translates a passage from the ‘Moralium dogma philosophorum’ on ‘De providentia’, which warns not to accept counsel from *falsi amici* and lists criteria for good advisors.

59 Cf. Wolfgang AUGUSTYN, *Liberalitas-Largitas im Mittelalter: Bemerkungen zu Begriff und Bild einer Tugend*, in: Johanna AUFREITER/ Gunther REISINGER/ Elisabeth SOBIECZKY (eds.), *KunstKritikGeschichte: Festschrift für Johann Konrad Eberlein*, Berlin 2013, pp. 73–106.

60 Middle High German *kappe* can refer to a kind of cloak with a hood or a piece of headgear. If MENCHARD's conjecture *in stritin* (in combat) were correct it would rather suggest a type of helmet, though this meaning does not seem to be common usage.

and the phrase *zagin gizalt* (v. 64, regarded as a coward) in the next line, we seem here to encounter precepts about honourable behaviour in combat.

Noble duties occur again towards the end of the poem, including the dispensation of justice and fighting. In verse 107, *richteri* and, in the following verse, *machit reht[i] [s]teti* (v. 108), are legible, apparently a reminder to be just in one's rule – another commonplace in didactic poems.⁶¹ In verses 112–115 SCHRÖDER and MENHARD read that *(s)nellimi helidi* (strong heroes) are to have horse and spear. The words *snellimi helidi*, *speru* (brave heroes, v. 112; spear, 116) and *celtir* (horse, 115) appear in apparently the same context – the precise meaning of the lines, however, is not clear. MENHARD reads the final line on the parchment as *fil ganzi [sigi] sue[ch]in* (130), which has been seen as the conclusion and most important task for the addressed 'knight': to fight successfully. I am not quite sure how he conjectures *sigi* in this line. Also, a word is added above the line that is now illegible. The conjecture *suechin* is plausible because of the rhyme with *ruchin*. The concept of chivalry is just beginning to gain popularity in the late twelfth century in the Empire and these lines prove that a certain code of conduct for the secular duties of the nobility existed and that was included into their moral instruction.

c) Love-advice?

The poem also addresses the relationship between the genders, but not in the way that has hitherto been purported. It talks about the *wol gi(s)in(t)i chone* (v. 63, well-meaning wife)⁶² and provides the rhyme *wibi* with *gizog(inlich)i nigt*⁶³ (woman, decently bowing, v. 64–65), a phrase which most likely refers to the behaviour of a good woman, who – as we know from other didactic texts – does not look around or proudly raise her head.⁶⁴

⁶¹ In the context of law courts, the 'Tugendspiegel' (note 3) advises its audience not to be influenced by personal friendships or hatred (v. 540–541) and always speak truth and justice (v. 534, 549). Heinrich von Melk, in his *contemptus mundi*-poem 'Von des todes gehugde' opens his section on the secular orders with the *wertlichen richtaere* (secular judges) whom he compares to greedy wolves who oppose God and all the good in the world. (Heinrich von Melk, *Von des todes gehugde – Mahnrede über den Tod*. Mittelhochdeutsch/ Neuhochdeutsch (Reclam Universal-Bibliothek 8907), ed., transl., comm., and introduction Thomas BEIN, Stuttgart 1994, ll. 264–267.

⁶² [G]isinti is MENHARD's conjecture. It would suit the context, the prefix *gi-* is legible, but any other participle would also be possible.

⁶³ MENHARD's reading in parenthesis, which I could not confirm in my reading but can accept as a possible conjecture.

⁶⁴ Advice to women to keep their head low and still is known from thirteenth-century didactic poetry; cf. 'Diu Windsbeckin' (note 4), st. 7–8 focuses on the female gaze and 'Der Welsche Gast' (note 4), regulates a woman's gestures, gazes, posture and the way she walks (vv. 391–418).

MENHARD suggests that the next lines describe a *minne*-dialogue taking place in front of the maid's bedchamber, perhaps the gravest instance of imaginative reading of the fragment. The only words that point in this direction are *iungi man*, *chemin[ete]*, and *erin gidenchit and lin wat* (young man, private room, reputation considered, linen garment; v. 69–75).⁶⁵ This section in particular has drawn the attention of scholars, without receiving the critical verification it required. WENZEL claims that it demonstrates a bond of trust between a knave and his lady: he knocks on her door until she opens, and they converse in front of her door.⁶⁶ How we know that the subject is a knave, and on whose door he knocks, remains unclear. No lady is mentioned in these lines, we have not much indication as to the status of the young man, apart from some references to a fighting profession, and, as WENZEL also concedes, *minne* is not mentioned at all. Mohr reads this “*minne*-scene” as a mirror of an existing social reality, the close relationship between a young knight who is sent to a foreign court for education, and the lady of the court, who cares for him and for whom the young knight aims for excellence in his knightly virtues – a social construct for which Mohr finds evidence in courtly romances.⁶⁷ It is in this scene in particular that we see the perils of literary analysis based on less-than-critical textual editions and interpretations that refer to other literary texts without questioning the social realities presented in them. MENHARD's and ZWIERZINA's readings and conjectures in these lines cannot be supported by a re-examination of the manuscript. The relationship of love and service of young knights to their ladies has long been identified as a literary construct for which no proof can be found in other sources.⁶⁸ However, even without the romanticised reading offered by MENHARD, these lines offer interesting insights into the didactic discourse of which the ‘Rittersitte’ is a fragment.

The repeated mention of reputation and the explicit reference to a young man is interesting, even though we do not know in which context they occur, as it confirms that the text speaks about a young man in a private interaction. It is also relevant for an assessment of the advice offered in the poem that clothing is mentioned once more, indicating the importance of appearance in secular advice literature. The rhyming couplet *sp[r]echin* and *sin lait alit ubi immi rechin* (speaking; revenge his suffering through him; vv. 76–77) which follows directly in the poem, indicates that a conversation scene is indeed described; however, it is not love but revenge that appears to be the subject. Instead, the pronouns *sin* and *immi* indicate two male interlocutors. Too

⁶⁵ The last letters of the word were found by MENHARD (note 20), p. 153 as imprinted on the opposing leaf. I was able to confirm this reading by consulting the manuscript.

⁶⁶ WENZEL (note 31), p. 94.

⁶⁷ Wolfgang MOHR, *Minnesang als Gesellschaftskunst*, first issued in: *Der Deutschunterricht* 5 (1954), pp. 83–107, reprinted in Hans FROMM (ed.), *Der deutsche Minnesang. Aufsätze zu seiner Erforschung* (Wege der Forschung 15), Darmstadt 1966, pp. 197–228.

⁶⁸ C. Stephen JAEGER, *Ennobling Love*. In *Search of a Lost Sensibility* (The Middle Ages series), Philadelphia 1999, ch. 11: *Virtue and Ennobling Love* (2), pp. 145–154, here p. 151.

much of the conversation described here is missing for us to reconstruct what the advice would have included. The few legible words are reminiscent of scenes familiar from courtly literature, but what the audience was supposed to learn remains obscure.⁶⁹

Didactic Strategies

The advice is phrased in the third person singular, either as *er* (he) or more general as *man* (one). This more general address is also shown in the lines beginning with *swer* (whoever, vv. 18, 28), *swa* (if, v. 20) *swenne* (when, 13), or *swi* (v. 78). MENHARD takes these words as indicators for the didactic character of the poem and it is true that they appear frequently in contemporary texts with instructive aims.⁷⁰ Verse openings such as *manic man* (many a man, v. 100) or *Swer alli sini sinni cherit* (whoever turns their mind, v. 110) indicate the general applicability of the advice to all people who take it. In several cases, as shown above, the author works with oppositions. In depicting the good results of a favourable behaviour and contrasting them with the corresponding negative case the instruction works both ways, as prevention and promotion, to offer the audience the possibility of identifying with the positive example while being aware of their own faults.

Contextualization

The concluding line is read by MENHARD as *fil ganzi sigi suechin* and, together with some other phrases led him to label the poem ‘Rittersitte’. He interprets as indicative for a knightly audience words such as *gislahti* (lineage, 15), *bose iuncherri* (evil young noblemen, 52), *helidi* (heroes, 112), and *cimet tegin* (befits the hero/young man, 49) which point to the military as well as the social function of nobility. The words *helid* and *tegin* are already known from Old High German literature and are ambiguous in their meaning: both can refer to a strong fighter, a hero, or simply to a man.⁷¹ The same goes for *ritter*, knight. The word does not occur in the poem, and it is in any case

⁶⁹ MOHR (note 67), p. 204 compares this section from the poem to a number of constellations from courtly romances, without pointing to a comparable dialogue scene. The knight that takes revenge on behalf of the lady in distress occurs frequently in romances; however, there is no other reference to this in didactic poetry of the time. MENHARD (note 20), p. 162 even assumes the lady wants to ‘talk her grief off her chest.’ The verb *rechin* is, however, clearly legible and cannot be translated this way.

⁷⁰ MENHARD (note 20), p. 163. Cf. Justin VOLLMANN, *Wer wen wie behandeln soll. Formelhafte Moraldidaxe in mittelhochdeutscher Epik*, in: Henrike LÄHNEMANN/ Sandra LINDEN (eds.), *Dichtung und Didaxe. Lehrhaftes Sprechen in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*, Berlin 2009, pp. 55–72.

⁷¹ LEXER (note 42), headwords “degen” and “helt”.

similarly ambiguous. The ‘knightly circles’ *MENHARD* imagines as an audience can be grasped neither in the text nor as a strictly defined social group in the mid-twelfth century.⁷² The terms do refer, however, to a sphere of Christian noble laymen. Whoever copied the poem on the free leaves of the New Testament thought it worth preserving, perhaps for the use in oral instruction of the laity. The codex could also have been commissioned by a secular lord or a court cleric who had an interest in reading the poem to a secular audience. The fact that it has been copied shows that there was interest in preserving it. And while it is of course possible that someone inside a monastery had an interest in such a poem (perhaps a lay brother), it is likely that it was at least intended to be read or heard by a lay audience.

We do not know much about the institution in which the poem originated, nor can we say anything about the author or the scribe, but the fact that it was added to a bible manuscript combined with our knowledge of literary production in the twelfth century allow us to assume a monastic scriptorium as its place of production. As the language of the poem is Franconian, the Millstätt copyist is probably not the author of the poem.⁷³ Perhaps it came from one of the prolific scriptoria of the Rhineland to Millstätt, where it was copied into a bible codex.⁷⁴ This implies that at least one other copy of the poem existed and, whether on purpose or by chance, was brought to Carinthia. This means the author could have been a monk from another monastery, but also a parish priest, a *ministeriale*, a tutor at a noble court – we cannot know. Nothing in the religious advice necessarily points to a monastic author. The Christian background is unspecific, so that a court cleric and even a layman could have composed it, the latter being less usual but not unthinkable. The general remarks on the protection of monasteries, if that is indeed what the verses say, are well in line with the task of the nobility as understood by themselves. The few instances of German didactic literature from the twelfth-century that have identifiable authors indicate that it was mostly secular clerics, not regulated canons, who produced these texts.⁷⁵

As far as we can conclude from the few legible parts of the manuscripts, the poem is a loose collection of advice for a good life in the world, which does not follow a particular theoretical structure, but rather develops its precepts in an associative manner. This is true for other vernacular didactic texts, too, and allowed for alterations

72 See BUMKE’s study of the term and concept of ‘knighthood’ in the Middle Ages, with a focus on its use in literary sources. Joachim BUMKE, *Studien zum Ritterbegriff im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert*, 2nd extended ed., (Beihefte zum *Euphorion* 1), Heidelberg, 1977; English translation: *The Concept of Knighthood in the Middle Ages*, transl. W.T.H. Jackson/ Erika Jackson, New York 1982.

73 *MENHARD* (note 20), p. 160.

74 *MENHARD* (note 20), p. 154.

75 One example is Wernher von Elmendorf, who describes himself as *phaffe* (priest, clergyman) in the position of a *capelin* (chaplain), translating a Latin moral treatise into German on behalf of his provost; ‘Tugendspiegel’ (note 3), vv. 8–9 Thomasin von Zierklaere was probably a canon at the court of the patriarch of Aquileia, cf. Christoph CORMEAU, Thomasin von Zerklaere, in: *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*, 2nd ed. vol. 9 (1999), cols. 896–902.

and adaptations in different situations of reception. Contrary to Latin moral treatises, many didactic texts in German focus on applicability and avoid learned reflexions for greater clarity of their teaching.⁷⁶ The structure of the poem must remain doubtful since we never know whether we get to hear a coherent thought or two half-lines of two different ideas. The little that can be said is the following: The opening verse refers to God and then quickly proceeds to secular instruction. There is no concluding verse that could serve as an epilogue. The poem seems to close rather at random; it could easily be continued or abridged without loss of form. Though great parts of the text are lost or illegible it can still be said with some certainty that the 'Rittersitte' is addressed to an audience of laymen; the key terms that occur in the text are clearly taken from the sphere of lay nobility. The density in which they occur throughout the text indicate a conscious use of such terminology. Though there is a good deal of religious thought in the poem, the allusions to fighting, marriage and reputation point towards a life in the world of which religious life is unequivocally and necessarily part.

The proof that the poem is in fact meant to be didactic is not only content-related but stylistic as well. Impersonal pronouns and formulas are common in didactic poetry, and both occur frequently in the poem. The range of topics dealt with in the poem is typical for early didactic works in the German vernacular. Therefore, it can be concluded that the poem is an early fragment of the discourse on nobility in its manifestation as moral-didactic poetry. On its own, it is too fragmented to provide a basis for analysis, but in the context of other works from the period it contributes valuable details. Thus, the 'Rittersitte' offers three principal revelations: firstly, the very existence of the poem adds to the number of didactic texts, of which many must be lost, and gives a picture of the precarious situation of the manuscript transmission of those minor works. Secondly, it provides a *terminus post quem* for the writing of didactic poetry for laymen. Thirdly, it shows how, in a small, rather loosely constructed poem this early in the period, a number of topics are covered which recur throughout German didactic poetry from the 'Rittersitte' onwards to the 'Der Welsche Gast' and 'Der Winsbecke', which are copied well into the fifteenth century. These topics, commonplaces in all didactic poems, represent the core of the discourse on morality and nobility, and therefore their early appearance is relevant to its examination.

76 This becomes very clear in the case of the 'Tugendspiegel' (note 3), which completely takes apart the structure of its source, the 'Moralium dogma philosophorum', and instead gives simple rules. Similarly, the 'Magezoge' does not follow any particular structure and its manuscripts show that it was readily altered to fit a new context. Gustav G. ROSENHAGEN (ed.), *Kleinere mittelhochdeutsche Erzählungen, Fabeln und Lehrgedichte*, Berlin 1909, pp. 21–29.

III Parts of a whole? ‘Der heimliche Bote’

Another early fragment of the didactic discourse in the vernacular is called, after its opening lines, ‘Der heimliche Bote’⁷⁷ (The Secret Messenger), or alternatively ‘Ratschläge für Liebende’ (Advice for Lovers),⁷⁸ or ‘Lehren für Frauen und Männer’ (Instruction for Women and Men).⁷⁹ It presents itself as a trusted messenger (v. 1) and offers love advice for women (vv. 9–56) and virtue ethics for men (vv. 57–100). The text has been dated from the second half of the twelfth century, “soon after 1150”⁸⁰ or “around 1170/80”.⁸¹ It is transmitted on a single leaf that was bound into a Latin codex from the thirteenth century.⁸² SCHNEIDER dates the hand from the first quarter of the thirteenth century.⁸³ The poem is written in two hands: the first writing until line 17 (v. 56), the second one until the end (line 34/v. 100).⁸⁴ On the lower part of the leaf, 11 lines in Latin are added. The text is composed of rhyming couplets with 3–4 stresses. The lines are written continuously with regular *punctus elevatus* both in the middle of the couplet and at the end. There are few capital letters, which mark the beginning of a new topic rather than a new couplet. Bernhard DOCEN discovered the German text at the beginning of the nineteenth century and edited it without mentioning its

77 First by Elias STEINMEYER, Review of: Wilhelm Scherer, *Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung im elften und zwölften Jahrhundert*, Quellen und Forschungen 12 (Straßburg 1875), in: *Akten für deutsches Altertum* 2 (1876), pp. 234–240.

78 First by Bernhard Joseph DOCEN (ed.), *Miscellaneen zur Geschichte der teutschen Literatur, neu aufgefundenen Denkmäler der Sprache, Poesie und Philosophie unserer Vorfahren enthaltend*, vol. 2, Munich 1807, pp. 305–307.

79 Heinrich MEYER-BENFEY (ed.), *Mittelhochdeutsche Übungsstücke*, 2nd ed., Halle 1920, pp. 30–32. I quote from this edition. MEYER-BENFREY’s transcription is available online on the web page of the Bibliotheca Augustana, (https://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/germanica/Chronologie/12Jh/Bote/bot_text.html, last accessed 19.09.2018).

80 Ernst MEYER, *Die gereimten Liebesbriefe des Mittelalters*, Marburg 1899, p. 42 and Henning BRINKMANN, *Entstehungsgeschichte des Minnesangs*, Weimar 1926, p. 114.

81 Gustav EHRLMANN, Phaset, in: *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 64 (1927), p. 305, Helmut DE BOOR, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, vol 2: *Die höfische Literatur. Vorbereitung, Blüte, Ausklang, 1170–1250*, Munich 1979, pp. 372–373, and Ingeborg GLIER, *Artes armandi. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte, Überlieferung und Typologie der deutschen Minnereden (Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters 34)*, Munich 1971, p. 18, note 1.

82 <http://www.mr1314.de/1174> (last accessed 19.09.2018).

83 Karin SCHNEIDER, *Gotische Schriften in deutscher Sprache*, vol: *Vom späten 12. Jahrhundert bis um 1300*, Wiesbaden 1987, p. 109, with a reprint of the folio in the ‘volume of illustrations’, illustration number 54.

84 As with the ‘Rittersitte’, I will quote the poem with reference to verse numbers rather than manuscript lines, as rhyme couplets can tie single precepts together and thus provide information on the context which can easily be missed when referring to lines on the manuscript. The division into verses follows the count on Bibliotheca Augustana (note 79). I spell out abbreviations and replace diacritical letters with standard Latin alphabet.

division into two parts.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, the oak apple liquid *Docen* applied to the leaf to enable him to read some of the blurred words has darkened and now makes most of the upper part of the parchment illegible. Subsequent diplomatic editions therefore had to rely on his reading for this part of the text. The second half is mostly legible, except for a 2 cm strip on the right edge.

There has been some debate about the poem, mostly concerning its two parts and their respective intention. Both parts are written directly after one another with no significant gap, but by different hands.⁸⁶ It has been assumed that the entire text is one poem that falls into separate parts addressing women and men.⁸⁷ *Docen* regarded the entire poem as a genuine love letter, containing love-advice. *Fischer* shares the view of a love letter, but only for the first part.⁸⁸ He argues that a didactic poem begins at verse 57 (line 18 on the manuscript), while the first part bears all signs of an early love letter.⁸⁹ *Meyer* follows *Steinmeyer* in his characterization of the text as instruction for men and women, with advice for women on the topic of love and advice for men about virtues.⁹⁰ *Purkart* assumes the text has to be seen as a courtship scene,⁹¹ and *Glier* classified it as representative of the early letter-booklet type,⁹² for which a “mixture of advice for love and virtues” is typical. The two aspects are “additively juxtaposed”, often merging.⁹³ Indeed, it is not rare to have separate sections for women and men in advice poetry.⁹⁴ *Huschenbett* calls the first part “Love-rules for women” and the second part a “court-education” addressed to men. He does not conclude whether the two parts belong together.⁹⁵

According to *Steinmeyer* the poem bears an “early courtly” character and its language is probably Alemannic in origin.⁹⁶ *Fischer* assumes a middle-German origin, which is partly obscured by the Alemannic transmission. *Ehrismann* has called the

⁸⁵ *Docen* (note 78), p. 305.

⁸⁶ *Meyer-Benfrey* (note 79), p. 30.

⁸⁷ Cf. *Meyer-Benfrey* (note 79), p. 30 and Dietrich *Huschenbett*, *Der heimliche Bote*, in: *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*, 2nd ed. vol. 3 (1999), col. 646.

⁸⁸ *Docen* (note 78), p. 305. Ottokar *Fischer*, *Die sogenannten ‘Ratschläge für Liebende’*, in: *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 48 (1906), p. 421.

⁸⁹ *Fischer* (note 88), p. 421.

⁹⁰ *Steinmeyer* (note 77), p. 238; *Meyer* (note 80), p. 42–43.

⁹¹ Josef *Purkart*, “*Der heimliche Bote*” – Liebesbrief oder Werbungsszene?, in: *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 2 (1972), pp. 157–172.

⁹² *Glier* (note 81), p. 18–53; “Brief- und Büchleintyp”.

⁹³ *Glier* (note 81), p. 18.

⁹⁴ *Glier* (note 81), p. 18. Cf. ‘*Der Welsche Gast*’ (note 4) where advice for men and women is mostly separated, but in some cases merging; or ‘*Der Windsbecke*’, an advice poem for men and its female counterpart ‘*Diu Windsbeckin*’. Similarly, the ‘*Windsbeckin*’ offers mostly love-advice while the advice for men covers many fields of courtly and, in a second part, religious life (note 4).

⁹⁵ *Huschenbett* (note 87), cols. 645–656.

⁹⁶ *Steinmeyer* (note 77), pp. 239–240.

poem the first distinctly knightly instruction on virtues.⁹⁷ The ‘Handbuch Minnereden’ treats the poem as one text, consisting of a narrative introduction, and the two instructive parts for women and men.⁹⁸ Its inclusion in the corpus on Love Speeches is indicative for the overall reception of the poem as predominantly love-related. The ‘Handbuch’ does, however, employ a fluid system of genre criteria,⁹⁹ and also lists the poem in the category of “Instruction in Love and Virtues”.¹⁰⁰ This discussion is symptomatic of the uncertainty the purpose of the poem. I will demonstrate in the remainder of this chapter that the question of genre is of limited epistemological value for this text; however, if read it as a fragment of the secular didactic discourse of the twelfth and thirteenth century, we find it is situated at the very centre of this discourse, formulating typical statements, if in a creative literary form.

Contents of Instruction

As mentioned above, the text is divided into two parts, which are not only recognisable by the two different hands but also by distinctions in addressee, narrative frame and rhyme. FISCHER sees the rhyme schemes in the two parts as “virtually opposed to each other”,¹⁰¹ as the majority of the rhymes in part I are masculine, whereas feminine rhymes dominate part II.

The first part deals with love advice for a woman and uses the messenger-frame. It opens with the poem introducing itself as a secret messenger who entrusts its mission to God. This narrative voice speaks in the first person singular. It states its aim as courtship on behalf of his sender, who remains anonymous (v. 1) but is presented as a well-known man (v. 3). After these introductory lines the advice to the female receiver begins. She shall take good care of her emotional disposition (*gemuote*, l. 4), so she would not turn her affection to an unworthy man who cannot love her as he should. It contrasts the vain knight who spends all his time jousting (v. 43) with the *wol minnenden man* (the well-loving man, v. 47), who is characterized in a book called *Phaset* v. 49) as *gutlich* (amicable, v. 51).

The second part is not introduced separately but begins immediately with advice for a virtuous life and success in courtly society, addressing a male person. He is encouraged to be sensible, abstain from all evil and pursue virtues (vv. 57–62, 73–76). If his material situation does not allow him to live according to his wishes, he must

⁹⁷ EHRISMANN (note 81), p. 305.

⁹⁸ B300: Der heimliche Bote, in: JACOB KLINGNER/ LUDGER LIEB (eds.), *Handbuch Minnereden*, vol 1, Berlin, Boston 2013, pp. 466–467.

⁹⁹ JACOB KLINGNER/ LUDGER LIEB, *Einleitung*, in: IDEM (note 98), pp. 1–21, here p.1

¹⁰⁰ KLINGNER/ LIEB (note 99), p. 17. It is again listed as love advice of a man but not as instruction in virtues (p. 18.)

¹⁰¹ FISCHER (note 88), p. 421.

strive all the more to decorate his life with virtues (vv. 76–80). He should speak and answer wisely, following the protocol for courtly communication (*schone antwurte und guoten gruoze*, v. 82) so that everyone speaks well about him. Whoever acts according to the advice given by the narrator will maintain and even increase his reputation (vv. 96–100). The first-person singular pronoun here could well take up the messenger-frame of the first part, tying the two parts together.

Key concepts

The key concepts in ‘Der heimliche Bote’ are love in the instruction for women and a virtuous life in the instruction for men. It is not unusual that instruction for women is reduced to advice about love. The mother-daughter dialogue ‘Diu Winsbeckin’ focuses her instruction on the way a noble girl must attract the right kind of suitor. Her social status is largely defined by her chastity in younger years and, when she comes of age, her ability to please the honourable men to whom she may give in.¹⁰² The ‘Bote’ advises the same and ascribes to his addressee the same scope of action. *Si sulh sich dar gewenden / da man si kan geminnen* (She must focus on being lovable, vv. 19–20). The good suitor cares for her reputation and keeps his love secret, so he does not damage her reputation. This is why, in the instruction of the ‘Bote’ as in many other poems, religious texts and even courtly romances, the importance of *heinlich* or *tougen minne* (secret love) is emphasised. According to JAEGER, its secrecy is an integral part of the ennobling quality of courtly love.¹⁰³ Given the relevance of the right suitor for a girl’s reputation, her scope of action is rather limited; however it is assumed that she can make a choice, if only from among her suitors.

Contrary to, for example, courtly romances, knights do not seem to make suitable lovers. The poem focuses in fact on the negative image of knighthood. Vanity, the desire for fame, and a lack of reliability are the characteristics of the knight in the ‘Bote’. Lacking moral qualities, his *huobeschet* (courtliness, v. 45) disqualifies him as an ideal lover. Since he is busy with *turnei* (tourney, v. 43) and therefore *seltn* [...] *daheime* (rarely home, l. 12), he causes the lady much harm. These aspects of high

102 ‘Diu Winsbeckin’ (note 4), st. 27, v. 7–10: [...] *du minnest einen man / der saelden ist und eren wert / der sol doch nach dem willen min / von dir beliben ungewert* (if you love a man, who is kind and honourable, according to my will, he may be not be repelled by you). An anonymous medieval love song from the anthology of medieval love poetry ‘Des Minnesangs Frühling’ explains that [t]ougen minne diu ist guot / si chan geben hohen muot (secret love is beneficial, it can lead to elated spirits; Namenlose Lieder, poem IX, st. 2, v. 1–2), while another, composed by Meinloh von Sevelingen advises that [s]wer werden wiben dienen soll must carry his love *verholne in dem herzen*; *er sol ez nieman sagen* (whoever wants to serve worthy women, hidden in his heart, he must not tell it to anyone; Meinloh von Sevelingen, poem I, St. 3, v. 1–4); Carl von KRAUS (ed.), *Des Minnesangs Frühling*, 35th ed., Stuttgart 1970.

103 JAEGER (note 68), p. 192.

medieval knighthood are criticised by other didactic authors as well. Not only those who argue for a turn away from a life in the world, such as Heinrich von Melk,¹⁰⁴ but also those who show much understanding for the secular life bemoan the potential for vanity inherent in the knightly pursuit of prestige and, instead, emphasise the obligation for moral superiority that we now call 'chivalry'.¹⁰⁵ No other text from the period, however, looks at the deplorable side of knighthood from the perspective of a young lady. The 'Bote' shows a remarkable degree of empathy.

The addressee of the 'Bote' should instead chose a man who is *gutlich* – amicable (l. 16), perhaps meant in contrast to the unsteady and bellicose life of the knight. This led others to the assumption that the poem was composed by a cleric and there was an opposition between clerical and knightly love.¹⁰⁶ Though the tone is generally anti-courtly, however, there is no indication of a clerical author promoting himself as a lover. The advice is solely based on advantages of social situation and with regard to the reputation of the woman, and there is no praise for chastity and no mention of a clerical way of life. Any man of good standing who finds no satisfaction in vain prestige could fulfil the requirements. 'Minne' here refers already to romantic, interpersonal relationships, courtly love, despite the poem's warning against a courtly suitor.

The advice given in the 'male' part of the instruction aims largely at gaining a good standing in society. Reputation and virtue are the key concepts, very much in line with the didactic and courtly poetry of the time, such as the older 'Rittersitte'.¹⁰⁷ Virtues need to be practiced even when one feels unsatisfied with one's socioeconomic situation. In that case, one 'should cover a lack of property with decency and good qualities' (*dedeche sine armuote / mit fuoge vn mit guote*, vv. 69–70). A lack of property is mostly seen in connection with a lack of social power and prestige, but it can be compensated by behaviour associated with prestigious standing and a good reputation. A set of communication skills for social situations is necessary. The formula *rede und gruoze* is frequently used for appropriate communication among the nobility, as 'Der Welsche Gast' tells us.¹⁰⁸ Knowing how to speak to others in social situations is crucial for maintaining the social order and winning for oneself the best standing wit-

104 Heinrich von Melk (note 61) emphasises the vanity of the knight's attempts to appear courtly, elegant and beautiful as he contrasts it with his decay after his death (vv. 597–638)

105 E.g. 'Der Welsche Gast' (note 4), in which the pursuit of prestige by tournament and the focus of the knight on his good looks are ridiculed, vv. 3831–3852.

106 FISCHER (note 88), p. 421; WENZEL (note 31), p. 128.

107 'Der Welsche Gast' (note 4) mentions *ere* 44 times and *tugent/tugende* 152 times. For the role of prestige in medieval literature cf. Stephanie SEIDL, 'Eine kleine Geschichte der 'ère''. Thesen zur historischen Semantik von Ehre und zu ihrer Narrativierung in höfischen und legendarischen Texten des hohen Mittelalters, in: Beate KELLER (ed.), *Höfische Textualität. Festschrift für Peter Strohschneider* (Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift. Beiheft 69), Heidelberg 2015, pp. 45–63.

108 'Der Welsche Gast' (note 4), st. 23–24; Harald HAERLAND, *Höfische Interaktion. Interpretationen zur höfischen Epik und Didaktik um 1200* (Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur 10), Munich 1989, pp. 138–149.

hin the boundaries of one's status. The addressees for this section are obviously not the most powerful members of noble society. In addition to lacking wealth (and therefore social reputation), they might also be victims of disadvantages others can cause them (vv. 85–87). In gaining a good reputation, serving dutifully (v. 57), and conforming to social protocol, the individual's social standing can be improved.

Social prestige appears as the highest social value, which must be gained by the less powerful as it was not granted to them at birth and must be maintained throughout their lives. Virtues appear as a code of conduct that helps the individual to confirm the social order and to fulfil their position within it to the best of their ability. They are a means to achieve a good reputation, the ultimate aim of much secular didactic literature of the period.

Didactic Strategies

The first piece of advice is phrased as an order the un-named sender gives to the lady (*heizen* – to give an order, l. 4). One other instruction is given by means of the auxiliary *suln* (to be supposed to), or in one case by an imperative that directly addresses the lady (*sih* – see!). This is the only direct form of address. Another clear piece of advice is a phrase stating what 'the women should' do (*die vrouwen dorften*: the verb is in subjunctive mood, which is a more polite and indirect way to put advice). Apart from these occurrences, the advice is given by explanation about the character of one kind of love and another, as description rather than rules. A certain type of lover would be *ein michel ungemach* (a great displeasure, l. 11) and cause the lady *leit*, (harm, l. 12).

The reference to the *Phaget*, perhaps book of 'Facetus', serves to legitimize the advice.¹⁰⁹ The 'Facetus' was commonly used at the schools for teaching moral values alongside Latin, as indicated in the formula *litterae et mores*.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, this reference indicates that the lady addressed is already familiar with instructional literature, and gently reminds her of her existing knowledge. The overall tone of the messenger is polite and does not give the impression of a teacher, but rather of a benevolent friend, which is the reason the poem has been perceived as a love letter.

The precepts for men are phrased much more directly. It opens with an imperative by means of the auxiliary *suln*, which is addressed to men in general. 'The man', *er*, remains the addressee throughout the second part. The precepts are phrased by means of the imperative forms of the verbs or likewise by *suln*. The last lines construct

¹⁰⁹ EHRISMANN (note 81), p. 305.

¹¹⁰ Leopold ZATOČIL, *Cato a Facetus. Pojednání a texty. Zu den deutschen Cato- und Facetusbearbeitungen. Untersuchungen und Texte* (Spisy Masarykovy University v Brně, Filosofická Fakulta – Opera Universitatis Masarykianae Brunensis, Facultas Philosophica 48), Brno 1952. Cf. C. Stephen JAEGER, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe; 950 – 1200* (The Middle Ages series), Philadelphia 1994, pp. 49–52.

a community of the listeners and readers of the poem and the implicit speaker: ‘We have all heard of men who won virtue and prestige this way’ (*des haben wir vernomen gnuoc der vil magnig [...] tugent und ere alsus gewan*, ll. 32–33): these lines establish the rules as common knowledge, legitimate them in this way, and encourage the audience to follow those good examples. The last line further motivates a compliance with the rules in naming the single most important benefit this will entail: an increase and maintenance of prestige. The last word of the text is the key term of the poem.

‘Der heimliche Bote’ as fragment of the didactic discourse

There is no definite reason to treat parts one and two as two different texts or genres; it can simply be an advice poem in two parts. Instruction for women is often reduced to advice on choosing the right lover/husband. The end of the poem could close the narrative frame opened by the ‘messenger’ at the beginning of part one. Reputation will be gained and maintained by following the rules, so the poem ends. This applies equally to the lady choosing the right lover and the man practising the recommended virtues – both will improve their social status. The *gutlich* man recommended to the lady as a lover and husband could be the ideal described in part two. This way, the interplay between the two parts would work in both directions: as a more concrete example to the lady as to the ideal husband, and as an encouragement to a knight to comply with the precepts so that he may win the favour of a woman. The *minne*-conception is already that of the courtly romances, a personal romantic relationship of mutual responsibility with the potential to increase both partner’s social standing.

The evidence of the manuscript is not conclusive. At least one of the copyists saw some sort of coherence in the two parts/poems, so they ended up on the same leaf of parchment, without any visible interruption other than the change of writing hands. Differences in style may well be didactic strategies to better address the target audiences of the gendered advice. The attempt to identify the genre of the text does not help us assess its unity. However, as we have seen, both parts clearly participate in the same discourse.

It is most interesting to see advice aimed at a specific layer within noble society that must strive to improve its position, as it is not automatically bestowed on them by birth. Indeed, poems like ‘Der Winsbecke’ or the ‘Magezoge’ similarly address the lower ranks of the secular elites. Commonplaces of religious instruction, such as praise of chastity for women and a reminder of the salvation of the soul, are absent. Wenzel’s label “clerical agitation literature” is mistaken;¹¹¹ the poem is clearly dedicated to teaching rules for a life in the world.

111 ‘geistliche Agitationsliteratur’, WENZEL (note 31), p. 129.

IV Conclusion

At some point in the mid-twelfth centuries, two manuscripts were produced that contained didactic writing in the German vernacular, containing instructions for life in the world. These texts, the fragmentary 'Rittersitte' and the ambiguous 'Der heimliche Bote', transmit advice that has, as far as can be established, much in common with secular didactic works composed and copied many times in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The relevance of this seemingly simple observation becomes clearer when we consider that at this point in time writing in the German vernacular was not yet very common, and the majority of what is transmitted is distinctly religious in its content. Both didactic texts stem from a monastic scriptorium. In this light it is remarkable to discover that the contents of the instruction resemble so closely those of the courtesy books composed decades later, that the didactic strategies do not seem to involve threats of condemnation and eternal hellfire, and that the didactic voice present in the text is already developed and varied. The very existence of these early texts proves that someone thought it useful or necessary to compose a little poem in German that instructs noble men and women about good conduct for life outside the monastery. The discourse has not only been present but has already been dealt with in poetic form. The function of norms and values for the discourse has been realized and accordingly phrased in the text.

The 'Rittersitte' is the first fragment we have of a discourse that becomes immensely important a few decades later, and as it is composed in German, it allows us assumptions about the participants in this discourse and the close connection that may have consisted between members of secular and clerical elites by the time of its composition. On their own, the few legible words on the parchment do not tell us much, but read as a fragment not just of a text but also of a didactic discourse, the 'Rittersitte' gains greater context and adds to our understanding of the social relevance of secular instruction in the twelfth century. This context also allows us to try and fill some of the gaps in the text while precluding overly romantic assumptions.

The fact that 'Der heimliche Bote' defies any unambiguous categorization should make us reconsider our way of thinking about textual genres: Is it a love letter? A love booklet? A didactic poem? Is it one text or two? The copyists who placed its two parts on the parchment apparently identified it as part of the same discourse, the instruction for pursuing a good life in the world. Since the statements that construct and contribute to a discourse can come in a variety of forms, the question of whether or not part of it was a love letter becomes less significant. As the contributions in this volume show, a sermon, a novel and a poem can be as didactic as a performance or an image. The didactic discourse of the High Middle Ages, in its reception of the Horatian *prodesse et delectare*, encourages creativity and playfulness and will therefore continue to provide fascinating material for the study of medieval culture.

Appendix

This diplomatic edition aims to replace the edition of the text provided by **MENHARD** (note 4), which included several unconfirmed readings and numerous conjectures, which were not based on sound philological analysis. I give the text almost exactly as it is presented in the manuscript, with two differences. Firstly, I insert line breaks. Since the verses are written in continuous lines over the leaf, the gap in the text is in some cases mid-verse, in others at the beginning or end, and sometimes an entire verse is missing [see image 1]. By looking at *punctus elevatus*, length of the verse, and rhyme words, in many cases the line break can be made with reasonable certainty. This way, both the original length and form of the poem become clearer, but the *lacunae* in text can also be visualized better. Furthermore, it will be easier to assess later on which ideas and words in the text are actually occurring in close proximity, which can aid the analysis. Secondly, I add my own conjectures in square brackets. I offer them cautiously and only in cases of relative certainty, for instance the grammatical endings of words, or when faint imprints of the letters allowed for justified assumption. In the apparatus, I give the most important instances of where my reading differs from **MENHARD**'s. In two cases the scribe inserted corrections above a word without crossing out the rejected word in the line. I give the interlinear corrections underlined following the corrected word.

- 1 ... ichi wil imi¹¹² got gu[...] •
 [...] imi [...] •
 [...] arm •
 wil er gote [...]n •
- 5 w[i]rt imi got [...] •
 [...] •
 machit sundig[i] [seli] •
 [...]piht[...]ez¹¹³ herzi •
 och demi libi gut [•]
- 10 [...]lir dingi •
 daz [...] •
 [...] gutin sin tragi •

112 M204 reads *ime*, **MENHARD** reads *imi*. I agree with **MENHARDT** as <e> tends to be more rounded in this text.

113 **MENHARDT** reads *forihtindez*; M204 reads only a few letters but accepts **MENHARD**'s reading as conjecture, however this word is not possible here, as the third letter, though it merges with the l from a line below, is clearly a <p>.

- Swenne [...] wi[n]t wegit •
 [...] [u]nzuhthi •
- 15 daz firwiz[...] [si]n gislahti •
 [s...] [...] [.]nini tati •
 obir Gutī [...]t he[t] [•]
 Swer hurrin [...]•
 [de]r giwinnte is¹¹⁴ nimer eri •
- 20 Swa mon here •
 [...] ni so vest •
 undi chomin[t] dar vil libi geste •
 Sundi ani rviwe •
 undi man ani trivvi •
- 25 [...] seltin hin zi chirsch[in] gat •
 unde ani rehte [...]•
 [...] slagin •
 Swer [...]ch ticki zich[irchi]n g[at] •
 [...] [i]st andir weidi g[...]ti t[...]¹¹⁵ •
- 30 S[...] sini [...] [[...]ht •
 [...] dint nialtir •
 [st]atir¹¹⁶ inihi[m]il[i] •
 [...]•
 darf niemin g[itr]vw[in] •
- 35 Swe[r] g[e]sti pha[h]in [•]
 [...] da mac min vindin [...]•
 [...]idir gis[...] •¹¹⁷
 [...]di libir giuerit •
 ni [...] [...]i landi •

114 MENHARD reads *gewinntis*, but M204's reading seems more convincing and is supported by grammatical logic.

115 MENHARD's reading *gituffit*, accepted as conjecture by M204 is not a possible reading.

116 MENHARD reads *statir*, though a ligature of <s> and <t> would have a centre stroke, which is not there, cf. *uest* a line above. I accept <st> as a conjecture nonetheless, as the alternative (l) does not lead to an existing early MHG word.

117 MENHARD also reads *gisinti* in v. 40 where I can only securely identify the first three letters.

- 40 daz ist [...] ein groz wnni •
 w[...] wart der di fruint [•]
 [...] bist ani gar so me[...] [d]ir rat [•]
 [...] witin[t•]
 [...] undi caphint cers •
- 45 [...] [...] •
 [...]t inieni •
 Spachin s[...] •
 un[...] [...] •
 [w]ol cimet tegin •
- 50 cappe in [...]in •
 alsi tut dem [...] •
 [...] undi bosi iuncherri •
 [...] [z]wei sint luzil st[...] [...]it •
 das nimin giruch[i]t •
- 55 der [.]a[.]fa[.]it nime[t•]
 [...] harti gischendit •
 s[...] [...] er dannin wendit •
 [...] undi da fluith da re[...]e[...]t •
 holdi¹¹⁸ [...] sol man gebin noch [...]n •
- 60 [...] •
 [...] zagin gizalt •
 Sw[er] [...] eini [...]willigi[n•]
 [...] undi eini wol gi[.]in[...] choni [...] •
 [...] mac [...] so dir Rabi •
- 65 chuni [...] [a]dilar¹¹⁹ •
 [...] scach [...] wibi •
 an daz si gizog[...]i nigi [•]

118 MENHARD reads *heldi*, which the Referenzkorpus accepts as conjecture. Though the second letter is a bit pale, it is clearly recognisable as an <o>, both in the physical manuscript and the magnified digital copy.

119 Though I cannot confirm MENHARD's reading of this line *chuni [alsi] dir adilari* as a whole, I accept the <a> for [a]dilarⁱ. Together with *Rabi* in the previous line and the adjective *chuni*, this is entirely plausible.

- undi [...] [...]•
 [...]nni dir iungi man [...]•
 70 [...]u z[...] [...]ra r[...] [...]•
 [...]li •
 in iri clainimi s[...]di •
 [...] der chemine[te] •
 [...]n rat •
 75 erin gidenchi[t] [u]ndir lin wat •
 [...] sprechin •
 sin lait al[it] ubi immi rechin •
 Swi [...] [...] [u]ndi ist div naht fin[stir]¹²⁰ [•]
 [u]ndi rurit sich d[...] [...]•
 80 [...]st gihit •
 Swer so [...]•
 daz er nimir irwi[ndit] •
 [...] wart giborn •
 der [...] seli uirlorn •
 85 Iarlanc [...] umbi wazziR¹²¹ •
 rit[it] [...] clostir •
 iarlanc [...] diu got mainit [...]•
 Zu[...] [...]wol giht¹²² •
 [...] nunnin woli giht •
 90 I[n] [...] holzi [...]luh[...] sun •
 dir hunt ist [...] [...]ehin sun •
 [...] [...]n •
 undi sidn seniwe [•]
 [...]d[...] s[...]•
 95 [...]•
 [s]wer hat vili lieb •

120 I accept MENHARD's reading *finstir* as a conjecture, though the last four letters are not legible, because among the adjectives beginning in *fin-* this is the only one that fits in this context.

121 -r corrected from -n.

122 I reject MENHARD's *gibit* here, as the word in the line must be shorter. It is clearly the same word as its rhyme word in the following verse.

- der [...] ir[...] [...] ummari •
 Swer alli s[ini] sinni [...] •
 [...] [...] [he]rzin •
- 100 Manic man w[...] daz er m[ani]c man [...] •
 [...] so was den manic man •
 daz er nie wart n[...] •
 gihaizzi dihaiimi s[...] in man •
 daz s[...] [...] •
- 105 [...]n wi holin •
 chuph[ir] demi goldi •
 ubir [...] [...] [r]ichteri •
 machit reh[ti s]teti •
 Wenigiz lutzi stub[.]¹²³
- 110 [...]im man ubili •
 Wo[l] g[iri]mit [...] ¹²⁴ furbugi •
 [...] [s]nellimi helidi •
 mit [...] [...] sper[.]¹²⁵
 d[az] [...] [.]owin¹²⁶ •
- 115 wi dir celtir [...] rowit di[...] •
 [...] [i]s ruchin¹²⁷ •
 fil ganz i s[...]i [...] [s]ue[ch]in •¹²⁸

123 *Stube* would be a possible conjecture, another term referring to a domestic environment, similar to *cheminete* in line 73.

124 MENHARD reads *rot*. Nothing is visible here, neither on the parchment nor on the opposing leaf. The adjective must be rejected.

125 A small stroke after *sper* could to be part of another letter in the end of the word, however it cannot be an <a> or <o>. Given the context, *sper* ('spear') would fit perfectly and the stroke could be a smudged rhyme point.

126 *-owin* could be *scowin*, as MENHARD assumes, or *rowin*. The verb is attested in the 3rd person singular in the following line and could either mean 'to rest' or 'to regret'. The second possibility is a verb frequently used in didactic literature, however in connection with the words in the same lines, 'spear' and 'horse', 'to rest' may be more likely.

127 Both Middle High German *ruochen*, 'to wish', 'to care', or *rucken*, 'to push' or 'to draw' are possible readings.

128 The distance of this line from the previous one seems to suggest that it was added (by the same hand) as an afterthought or perhaps a conclusion.