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Epic and Identity: Exploring Genre and Understanding the Self in the Middle High German 'Spielmannsepen'

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Epic and Identity:
Exploring Genre and Understanding the Self in the Middle High German *Spielmannsepen*

A Dissertation Presented

by

RACHAEL A. SALYER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2018

German and Scandinavia Studies

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EPIC AND IDENTITY: EXPLORING GENRE AND UNDERSTANDING THE SELF IN THE
MIDDLE HIGH GERMAN *SPIELMANNSEPEN*

A Dissertation Presented

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DEDICATION

For Alex

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ABSTRACT

EPIC AND IDENTITY: EXPLORING GENRE AND UNDERSTANDING THE SELF IN THE
MIDDLE HIGH GERMAN *SPIELMANNSEPEN*

SEPTEMBER 2018

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The cluster of anonymous Middle High German epics known as the *Spielmannsepen* presents an interesting challenge to notions of genre and identity in the Middle Ages. This project explores some of the issues surrounding those notions in three particular texts, including *König Rother*, *Orendel*, and *St. Oswald*. Discussions of genre and identity complement one another in this work because each functions as a means of categorization. Questions surrounding the poems' manuscript traditions and presumed composition dates are analyzed, and aspects of the eponymous heroes' identities are also examined.

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INTRODUCTION

Because the anonymous Middle High German poems *König Rother*, *Orendel*, and *Sankt Oswald* all share several stylistic and thematic traits—fancifully attributed to wandering minstrels—they have become known collectively over time as the *Spielmannsepen*. The action in each epic centers on its eponymous hero, and the protagonists invariably find themselves in situations that are foreign in every sense of the word: They travel to new realms, they encounter different religions and cultures, and they come into conflict with people from a variety of social spheres. The poems' primary narrative arcs include bridal quests, sea voyages, adventures in unfamiliar lands, and Crusades and other battles; these encounters provide a backdrop against which the heroes' identities are defined.

Identity—both a cognizance and projection of one's most defining characteristics—is a complex construct. The nature of literature and of the *Spielmannsepen*, in particular, is especially suitable for both the author and the audience to explore their understandings of identity. As works of fiction, the *Spielmannsepen* provide a neutral ground on which to play and to experience new ideas, and I argue that these frequently funny and oftentimes outrageous poems provide a particularly safe atmosphere for literary play. The iterations of and inquiries into identity that can be found in literature are not legal or doctrinal; rather, they are possibilities. Audiences witness, but do not experience firsthand, a character's developments and encounters.

With this in mind, I examine three of the *Spielmannsepen*—*König Rother*, *Orendel*, and *St. Oswald*—to determine how each author puts his protagonist in contact with “new” people and circumstances and to distinguish how those interactions shape the protagonists' understanding of their own identities. Identity is not a quantity to be measured easily, rather a quality to be described complexly, and for the purposes of this study, I look at several key aspects of the

characters' identities: their social positions, their ethnicities, their religious beliefs, and their gender roles. Because the heroes and heroines of the *Spielmannsepen* experience such a variety of people, places, and situations, the texts offer a great wealth of examples that highlight their characters' identities.

While all of the *Spielmannsepen* share many traits, I have chosen to focus on these three texts in particular because they have the most similarities, particularly in terms of their heroes and the adventures they undertake. Rother, Orendel, and Oswald are all superlative Christian noblemen, and their journeys bear some striking resemblances. They have much in common with *Herzog Ernst* and *Salman und Morolf*, but the practically identical narrative elements of *Rother*, *Orendel*, and *Oswald* set these three texts apart from the other two.

In order to examine the epics effectively, we must first survey their history and acknowledge that they have been relatively neglected in modern scholarship. These epics differ thematically from other medieval German epics, but that difference does not make them any less valuable. Additionally, the *Spielmannsepen* have traditionally been dated to the so-called "pre-courtly" period of the mid- to late-12th century. If we accept these conventional dates, then the epics could provide a wealth of cultural information about the pre-courtly world.¹ This period was a time of great change, and I assert that the works from it offer a unique glimpse into the world in which they were written.

Both the late-12th and early-13th centuries were an extraordinarily productive time in the development of German literature, and the wide variety of texts that were produced during this era includes everything from lyrical poetry to biblical and heroic epics and romances. The so-

¹ This on the assumption that the epics can be dated to the 12th century, a not unproblematic contention that will be examined for each work in its respective chapter.

called *Spielmannsepik* is thus only one genre among many, but unlike the term “romance,” for example, *Spielmannsepik* was not used to describe any type of poem in the Middle Ages. In fact, the Grimm brothers in the 19th century were the first scholars to apply the term to such “pre-courtly” works as *Herzog Ernst*, *König Rother*, and *Salman und Morolf*, and the Grimms’ understanding of *Spielmannsdichtung*—heavily influenced by Herder’s ideas of a *Naturpoesie* as opposed to a *Kunstpoesie*—equates the term with the Romantic idea of *Volksdichtung*.

Die Brüder Grimm gehen also nicht von der historischen Erscheinung der Spielleute aus, sondern von einer Gestalt der Dichtung, die ‚Spielmann‘ genannt wird; sie verwenden den Begriff im Zusammenhang ihrer eigenen, an Herder orientierten Kunsttheorie und beschreiben seine Wesenszüge von diesem Aspekt her. So erscheint der Spielmann als der typische Mann aus dem ‚Volke‘, wie es die Romantik sieht, gleichsam als eine Inkarnation der Volksseele, naturhaft wie diese und daher der Träger der ‚Naturpoesie‘. Er zieht von Ort zu Ort und trägt der lauschenden Menge vor.²

While the Grimms’ and other 19th-century scholars’ use of the term *Spielmann* was based on a literary, Romantic understanding of medieval poets and poetry, some subsequent scholarship sought to explain certain texts as being written by actual *Spielleute*—travelling entertainers or minstrels (from the Middle High German *spilman* and *spilliut*). The definition of *Spielmann* in the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*³ reveals the Romantic lens through which later 19th-century scholars sometimes viewed the term *Spielmann*:

spilman bezeichnet zunächst die mittelalterlichen nachfolger der römischen joculatores, mimi u. s. w., die fahrenden, die durch allerlei kunststücke und primitive, volksthümlicherbe kunstübung, als seiltänzer, gaukler, taschenspieler, kunstreiter, jongleure, springer, tänzer, puppen- und possenspieler, besonders auch als musikanten, zugleich als erben der altgermanischen sänger durch die pflege der volksdichtung und selbst durch

² Walter Johannes Schröder, *Spielmannsepik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1962), 2.

³ “Die Bände des DWB,” *Der digitale Grimm*, 2017, <http://dwb.uni-trier.de/de/>. The Grimms began work on the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* in 1838, and their successors (Rudolf Hildebrand, Karl Weigand, Moritz Heyne, Hermann Wunderlich, the Prussian Academy of Sciences, etc.) completed it over a century later. The term “spilman” first appeared in volume X, I (“Seeleben-Sprechen”) in 1905.

*den vortrag höfischer dichtungen für die unterhaltung des publicums, der vornehmen gesellschaft wie des gewöhnlichen volkes, sorgten [...]*⁴

By describing *Spielleute* “as the heirs of the Old German singer/poets in their cultivation of folk poetry and even in the presentation of courtly poems,” the Grimms’ successors have defined the performers of the *Spielmannsepen* as the bearers of both folk- and courtly culture. To some early Germanists, the *Spielleute* were the purveyors, but not necessarily the authors, of the epics. Over the course of the 20th century, however, both of these contentions have fallen out of scholarly favor.

Whether or not *Spielleute* were responsible for authoring or performing the various texts that we now know as *Spielmannsepen*, the weight of scholarly tradition has still ensured that these works will invariably be associated with that label. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, the terms *Spielmannsepiik*, *-epos* / *-epen*, and *-dichtung* will be used in this study to group these epics together and to show that, since they were “rediscovered” in the 19th century, they have been understood as a separate category of epics, distinct from biblical epics, heroic epics, and romances.

Although the term *Spielmannsepiik* has become outdated, the fact that these texts have been grouped together has not. The “canon” of five *Spielmannsepen* was crystallized in the early 20th century. One reason for this is that works like *Herzog Ernst* and *König Rother* simply do not fit into the other, better-known genres of the 12th and 13th centuries, but in some ways, they do seem to fit well with one another. In fact, there are certain similarities amongst all of the *Spielmannsepen* that justify their being studied together. While some facets of his definition are

⁴ “Spielmann,” *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm. 16 Bde. in 32 Teilbänden*, 2017, woerterbuchnetz.de/cgi-bin/WBNetz/wbgui_py?sigle=DWB.

debatable, Walter Johannes Schröder's description of this genre serves as a good starting point for examining these texts:

Als gattungsbestimmendes Kriterium gilt meist der Stil der Werke (im weitesten Sinne). Man versteht darunter einen Komplex bevorzugter Motive, typischer Vorgänge und formelhafter Wendungen in der sprachlichen Darstellung, Mischung von Ernst und Scherz, bunte Fülle der Ereignisse, geringe Sorgfalt in Metrik und Reim, alles in allem eine gewisse Unbekümmertheit der Erzählweise, die mehr auf Unterhaltung und Belustigung des Publikums als auf künstlerische Form.⁵

Schröder and Michael Curschmann are two of the most influential *Spielmannsepen* scholars of the 20th century, and both were most active in the 1960s and 1970s.⁶ These two decades were the most productive in the course of 20th-century scholarship related to the *Spielmannsepen*. Along with Joachim Bahr's 1954 essay "Der 'Spielmann' in der Literaturwissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts," Piet Wareman's monograph *Spielmannsdichtung: Versuch einer Begriffsbestimmung* from 1951 can be seen as a precursor to—or perhaps catalyst for—this period of scholastic flourishing. Other important encyclopedia entries, translations, and prose retellings were also produced during this period. The basic purpose of these works seems to have been to promote awareness of the *Spielmannsepen*, to develop an understanding of the previous scholarship, and to pose new questions for future study. One interpretive essay from this time that stands out is Max Wehrli's 1968 essay in which he characterizes *Herzog Ernst* as a

⁵ Schröder, *Spielmannsepeik*, 1.

⁶ Ibid.; Michael Curschmann, "*Spielmannsepeik*" - *Wege und Ergebnisse der Forschung von 1907-1965, mit Ergänzungen und Nachträgen bis 1967* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1968); Walter Johannes Schröder, *Spielmannsepeik, Wege der Forschung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977). Both Schröder and Curschmann wrote and/or edited books on the history of the *Spielmannsepeik* and its scholarly tradition, and Curschmann wrote the *Verfasserlexikon* entries for three of the five epics.

political-historical epic; he later includes *König Rother* in this description and labels the other three *Spielmannsepen* as “legendarische[] Romane.”⁷

Another main branch of *Spielmannsepen* scholarship in the 1960s and 1970s focused on questions of structure and imagery. Ingeborg Koppe-Benath, for example, wrote a series of comparative studies on the epics (1962-63 and 1966-67), Wolfgang Näser published *Die Sachbeschreibung in den mittelhochdeutschen Spielmannsepen: Untersuchungen zu ihrer Technik* (1972), and Armin Wishard (1971-1972), Uwe Pörksen (1971 and 1980), Karl-Berhard Knappe (1971), and Paul H. Gottschalk (1971) studied the use of formulaic narrative structures and the role of the narrator. Gottschalk, Pörksen, and Knappe were part of a small minority of scholars who did comparative studies with non-*Spielmannsepen*.⁸

During the 1980s and 1990s, scholarship related to *Spielmannsepik* began to taper off, and the most important development during this time was the examination of political and economic structures in the epics. Examples of this new development include Vicki Jane Roberts-Gassler’s dissertation *Aspects of the Economic Systems in the German Medieval Spielmannsepen “König Rother,” “Herzog Ernst,” “St. Oswald,” “Orendel” and “Salman und*

⁷ Max Wehrli, “Herzog Ernst,” in *Die Reichsidee der deutschen Literatur (Wege der Forschung)*, ed. Rüdiger Schnell (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983); Max Wehrli, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im Mittelalter*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1997); Max Wehrli, *Literatur im deutschen Mittelalter: Eine poetologische Einführung* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984).

⁸ Paul H. Gottschalk, *Strukturelle Studien zum ‘Ortnit’ und den mittelhochdeutschen Spielmannsepen* (Dissertation: University of Colorado at Boulder, 1971); Karl-Bernhard Knappe, *Repräsentation und Zeichen: Studien zur Herrscherdarstellung in der vorhöfischen mittelhochdeutschen Epik (‘Geistlichendichtung’ - ‘Spielmannsepik’)* (Dissertation: University of Kiel, 1970-71); Uwe Pörksen, *Der Erzähler im mittelhochdeutschen Epos: Formen seines Hervortretens bei Lamprecht, Konrad, Hartmann, in Wolframs ‘Willehalm’ und in den Spielmannsepen* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1971); Uwe Pörksen and Gunhild Pörksen, “Die ‘Geburt’ des Helden im mittelhochdeutschen Epen und epischen Stoffen des Mittelalters,” *Euphorion* 74 (1980): 257-286.

Morolf” (1984), Maria Dobozy’s monograph *Full Circle: Kingship in the German Epic: “Alexanderlied,” “Rolandslied,” ‘Spielmannsepen’* (1985), and Ulrike Koch’s thesis *Das rîche in zwei Spielmannsepen des 12. Jahrhunderts: die Thematisierung des Reichs im “König Rother” und “Herzog Ernst”* (1996). In the past ten years or so, there have been few scholarly works that focus on the *Spielmannsepen*. One work of note is Corinna Beisterfeldt’s *Moniageder Rückzug aus der Welt als Erzählschluß: Untersuchungen zu “Kaiserchronik,” “König Rother,” “Orendel,” Barlaam und Josaphat,” “Prosa-Lancelot”* (2004). Contemporary scholars who do work with *Spielmannsepik* tend to concentrate on individual epics or to compare a single text to other non-*Spielmannsepen*.⁹ Some examples that draw from the traditions of feminist scholarship and from women’s or gender studies include Thomas Kerth’s *King Rother and his Bride*, Marianne E. Kalinke’s *St. Oswald of Northumbria: Continental Metamorphoses*, and Sarah Bowden’s *Bride-quest Epics in Medieval Germany: A Revisionary Approach*.¹⁰ Most contemporary scholars, however, are not examining the epics together, nor are they exploring how identity is created and understood in medieval German texts.

In examining the history of *Spielmannsepen* scholarship, it becomes clear that the issue of genre is quite significant. More specifically, scholars question where the epics fit into the

⁹ Barbara Haupt, “Ein Herzog in Fernost: zu ‘Herzog Ernst A/B,’” *Germanistik im Konflikt der Kulturen, Band 7: Bild, Rede, Schrift; Kleriker, Adel, Stadt und ausserchristliche Kulturen in der Vormoderne; Wissenschaften und Literatur seit der Renaissance* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008): 157-168; Monika Schulz, *Eherechtsdiskurs: Studien zu “König Rother,” “Partonopier und Meliur,” “Arabel,” “Der guote Gêrhart” und “Der Ring”* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2005); Markus Stock, *Kombinationssinn: narrative Strukturexperimente im “Strassburger Alexander,” im “Herzog Ernst B” und im “König Rother”* (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 2002).

¹⁰ Marianne E. Kalinke, *St. Oswald of Northumbria: Continental Metamorphoses* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005); Thomas Kerth, *King Rother and his Bride Quest and Counter-Quests* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2010); Sarah Bowden, *Bride-quest Epics in Medieval Germany: A Revisionary Approach* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2012).

traditionally accepted genres of Middle High German literature in particular and, more broadly, into the standard genres of medieval literature. In looking at the classic histories of Middle High German literature by Gustav Ehrismann, Helmut de Boor, and Max Wehrli, to name a few, the problem becomes clear.¹¹ Standard literary histories and anthologies often provide only cursory information about the *Spielmannsepen*, address only one or two of them, or even ignore them entirely. When one or more of the *Spielmannsepen* is discussed, scholars choose a variety of descriptors and categories for it, but seldom do they devote even half as much space to all of the *Spielmannsepen* combined as they do to just one of the well-known works of the High Middle Ages. One example may be found in Joachim Bumke's *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im hohen Mittelalter*. Bumke shares Wehrli's perspective (noted above) that *Herzog Ernst* and *König Rother* emphasize political themes, while *Orendel*, *Oswald*, and *Salman und Morolf* are considered "die spielmännischen Legendenepen."¹²

Ehrismann's *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters*, for example, briefly mentions both *Herzog Ernst* and *König Rother* in his discussions of the scopos of the "vorliterarische Zeit,"¹³ and while referring to *Rother* as a *Spielmannsepos*, Ehrismann sees the text as part of a larger saga tradition of the *Historia Langobardorum* which

bilden novellistische Erzählungen und christliche Legenden, wichtige oder bedeutungslose Episoden aus dem Leben der Großen, oder auch entscheidende Staatsereignisse. Die

¹¹ Gustav Ehrismann, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters, Erster Teil* (Munich: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1932); Helmut de Boor and Richard Newald, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Beck, 1957); Wehrli, *Literatur im deutschen Mittelalter*.

¹² Joachim Bumke, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im hohen Mittelalter* (Munich: dtv, 1990), 74-82.

¹³ Ehrismann, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, 64.

ganze Darstellung ist ein Zusammenspiel von Dichtung und Wirklichkeit. Das Stoffgebiet dieser Erzählungen ist umfangreich.¹⁴

Another tendency in Ehrismann's *Geschichte* is to use images or brief scenes from the *Spielmannsepen* as examples in more general discussions. For example, *Rother* is mentioned in a list of texts with harp-playing scenes, and *Salman und Morolf* is used as an illustration of a text with hart and hind imagery. The most revealing aspect of Ehrismann's dismissal of the literary value of the *Spielmannsepen* can be seen in the organizational structure he uses for discussing *das höfische Epos*. He divides his discussion into five major sections: *die frühhöfischen Epen (um 1170/80)*, *Heinrich von Veldeke und das höfische Epos in Mitteldeutschland am Anfang des dreizehnten Jahrhunderts*, *Hartmann von Aue*, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*, and *Gotfrid von Straßburg* [sic].

The question of where these epics fit into the grander scheme of medieval literature, in particular, and Middle High German literature, specifically, is actually best answered by considering several related questions. First, we must examine the history of genre labels—both of *Spielmannsepik* and of other Middle High German (or medieval) appellations. Ultimately, we must ask how our contemporary understanding of genre differs from a medieval understanding of it.

The term genre in itself has been highly contested, particularly by scholars in the twentieth century. A great number of descriptions have been offered by genre studies scholars, and the discussion is ongoing. Most of the questions surrounding genre explore how it functions in an active, contemporary sense. Genre scholarship acknowledges the difference between a system in which authors and audiences operate and a system that is imposed by some later and/or

¹⁴ Ibid., 20.

outside group.¹⁵ There is always a tension between the types of genre systems, particularly because one work can reside in multiple systems. During the past forty years or so, the focus of genre studies has been on examining authors' and audiences' roles in how genres develop and function.

Some of the most influential modern scholarship on the concept of genre in the Middle Ages can be found in the works of Paul Zumthor, particularly in *Essai de poétique médiévale* (1972).¹⁶ While Zumthor draws his examples primarily from the French tradition, his theories can also be applied to other vernacular literatures, and in his introduction to the English translation of *Essai (Toward a Medieval Poetics, 1992)*,¹⁷ Zumthor describes the impetus for his study as:

[A] methodological problem [...] of knowing how to perceive and understand medieval texts without altering their nature, while yet assimilating them properly to my experience [...] and integrating them with the rationalism and sensitivity of my own era. [...] The major difficulty came from the need not to distort the texts in any way; if they and their nature were not fully taken into account, you could say anything about them, and nothing worth mentioning any longer separated the *Lancelot-Graal* from *A la recherche du temps perdu* in critical discourse.¹⁸

In other words, Zumthor acknowledges the vast divide between contemporary medievalists and the works they examine, and he seeks to find a way to approach each work on its own terms

¹⁵ Rosalie Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1973), quoted in Mary Depew and Dirk Obbink, eds. *Matrices of Genre: Authors, Canons, and Society* (Harvard: University Press, 2000).

¹⁶ Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972).

¹⁷ Paul Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, trans. Philip Bennett (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

¹⁸ Paul Zumthor, "Author's Introduction to the Translation," in *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, trans. Philip Bennett (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), xii.

while still allowing individual scholars to express their perspectives. Throughout *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, Zumthor further outlines the relationship between texts and scholars, and he clarifies that “[t]he ideal goal of a study of this sort would be to allow the contemporary reader to decode the medieval text in his own way and yet without anachronism.”¹⁹

To Zumthor, the text should not be subsumed by its genre. While an individual text (i.e. a single iteration of a work) may demonstrate characteristics of a certain tradition, that tradition does not dictate what *should* be found in a text; rather, it offers possibilities about what *could* be found in it. If we allow tradition to prescribe the elements that must be found in a text in order for it to fit into a particular genre, then we are giving tradition a greater weight or significance than the text itself has. Daniel Selden offers a similar word of caution to contemporary readers of older texts. He notes that modern preconceptions can hinder scholars and prevent them from the best possible analysis of a text. Like Zumthor, Selden cautions against accepting genre systems simply because of convention, arguing that “academic course offerings, conferences, and publications persist in massively reinforcing [such generic] categories as ‘a matter of convenience,’ while remaining for the most part oblivious of the critical consequences this entails.”²⁰

Instead of relying on conventional understandings of genre, Zumthor argues that we must let a text speak for itself; our understanding of genre in the Middle Ages should, therefore, start with texts themselves, not with tradition. Similarly, Stephen Hinds contends that genre has always been impure, and that the boundaries among various genres are fluid. He uses interpretations of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as an example of the lengths that many scholars will go

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Daniel Selden, “Genre of Genre,” in *The Search for the Ancient Novel*, ed. James Tatum (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 57.

to in order to fit every text into a particular genre system.²¹ Hinds concludes that no matter where or how often the “unepic” elements appear, scholars still do not accept them as potential epic qualities because they perceive the “unepic” traits as threats to the essence of the true epic genre.²² In other words, tradition has frequently been used to define the boundaries of certain genres, and texts that have been compared to traditional genres and have been judged as lacking are not allowed to participate in that genre. It is precisely this kind of top-down system of classification that Zumthor argues against. Instead, he asserts that modern scholars should start with the texts themselves:

The description of a certain number of individual texts leads us to group them in sets, which constitute subdivisions of the corpus; the examination of these subdivisions results in a dynamic definition of them, which in turn leads us back to the original texts as constituents of the sets that have been established. We proceed from the first to the third stage of this analysis by induction, and from the third stage to the last by deduction. The third, theoretical, phase is the semiotic one in which models are elaborated and notions of regularity established. Tradition can be defined as the totality of the models established. The absence of a predetermined theoretical model to serve as a guide for description may be deplored, but the very idea of such a model strikes me as a contradiction in terms when we are dealing with a poetry totally foreign to our own culture.”²³

With this description, Zumthor separates his theory of genre from conventional definitions of it.

Zumthor also argues that manner in which scholars have used “genre” to describe the poetry of the Middle Ages is not a system that the poets of the time would have understood or had experience with. Zumthor eschews such an ahistorical approach and turns to medieval texts

²¹ Stephen E. Hinds, “Essential Epic: Genre and Gender from Macer to Statius,” in *Matrices of Genre. Authors, Canons, and Society*, eds. Mary Depew and Dirk Obbink (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 221-244.

²² Ibid.

²³ Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, 107.

themselves. Here he uses another term—“registers”—in place of “genre” in order once again to avoid the traditional connotations of it:

The study of tradition has led us to distinguish a certain plurality at the level of the system, and the existence of what I have called subtraditions. These could broadly be defined according to differences in the distribution of types. Historically speaking it appears in fact that as they took shape the various types had a tendency to mutual generation, grouping themselves in more or less strongly structured sets, which I have previously called “registers.” [...] The existence of such relatively autonomous sets can hardly be denied for texts prior to the end of the twelfth or even the thirteenth century. From epic and *trouvère* lyric to *fabliau*, not only is the choice and concatenation of types different, but their density, which may vary little from text to text within the group, shows great variation between groups.²⁴

The concepts of a “tendency to mutual generation” and of “more or less strongly structured sets” that Zumthor describes are especially useful when considering the *Spielmannsepen*. All of these texts share many stylistic, thematic, and linguistic similarities, but situating the *Spielmannsepen* within the larger scope of Middle High German literature is problematic for several reasons. First, each epic has its own complicated history of manuscript transmission. Although many scholars date the poems to approximately 1160 or 1170 A.D., almost no empirical evidence exists that confirms those dates. The traditional means for assigning dates to texts for which no original manuscripts exist include analyses of the language and content of such texts. With regards to the former, if a medieval text contains certain “antiquated” vowel sounds or poetic structures, for example, it might be judged to have been written in the early Middle Ages, and with regards to the latter, if a text contains references to particular historical event or figure, it is judged to have been written after that event.

One difficulty in using such means to date texts when no original manuscripts exist is that such texts can be altered over time. Later copiers—or printers, in the case of the *Spielmannsepen*—can purposefully and/or inadvertently change both the language and content of

²⁴ Ibid.

a text. Another problem with dating literary texts by the language and structures they use is that an author may employ such devices to construct a sense of antiquity; authors need not use contemporary language. Furthermore, the problems with dating literary texts by their historical references are that some such allusions can be obscure and/or interpreted in various ways, some texts only contain one or two brief references, and these references only provide earliest possible dates.

Regardless of when they were composed, the *Spielmannsepen* do share some striking narrative and stylistic similarities that justify studying them as a group, but they also contain traces of other common Middle High German genres, such as the heroic and courtly epics. The epics, as we have seen, have also often borne the epithet “pre-courtly,” and while they certainly do not depict courtliness in the same manner as somewhat later romances like Gottfried von Straßburg’s *Tristan*, they do contain examples of courtly behavior. The most obviously lacking courtly element, though, is *Minne*, but even that is not completely absent; traces can be seen in both *Herzog Ernst* and *König Rother*.

Other Middle High German texts from this time period depict the virtues of courtesy and courtly love more fully. Hartmann von Aue’s *Erec* and *Iwein*, for example, were composed around the same time as the *Spielmannsepen*, and they provide a vastly different picture of marriage and *Minne*.

Throughout 19th- and 20th-century scholarship, comparisons of *Spielmannsepik* as a whole and of the *Spielmannsepen* individually have placed these works on the lesser side of the equation; in this study, I examine more closely how such a devaluation has happened and continues to happen. Questions of genre, manuscript tradition, authorship, dates, language, and structures are all addressed, but I also explore the motifs and ideas presented in each epic on its

own in order to demonstrate the cultural value of the texts, particularly as they relate to the development of the protagonists' identities. Most of the themes addressed here stem from the heroes' travels into unknown lands and from the encounters with the people they meet on those journeys.

The journeys and the constantly changing settings found in these epics emphasize the importance of place and geography in the texts. As Michael Curschmann notes, "daß die Welt neu als Gegenstand in die Dichtung tritt, gilt seit jeher als Hauptcharakteristikum der 'Spielmannsepik.'"²⁵ In general, the heroes' journeys all follow the same basic pattern: The hero leaves his home and travels to other lands where he accomplishes whatever tasks have been set before him, and then he returns to his original (or, occasionally, new) home. Because the epics often end in the same location where they began, the basic pattern of journey and return sometimes gives them a cyclical rather than linear feel. Despite the geographic returns, however, all of the heroes of the *Spielmannsepen* do progress and find resolution for the conflicts they face at the beginnings of the epics. It is, in fact, through or because of their journeys that the heroes are able to complete their quests.

In addition to the general departure and return structure, all of the heroes' journeys share several more specific characteristics. First, the heroes of each epic travel not just to multiple destinations, but to different types of destinations, including locations in Europe, around the Mediterranean, and in the Holy Land, as well as to mythical or legendary locations like the *(K)lebermeer* and the lands of the Cyclopes or the Crane people. Geographic variety can, in general, be linked with a variety of peoples, societies, etc., and in literature, this variety is much greater, because literature opens up the realm of possibilities to include the fantastic.

²⁵ Curschmann, "*Spielmannsepik*" - *Wege und Ergebnisse*, 63.

Curschmann notes that this diversity of places and figures was an earlier thread of *Spielmannsepik* scholarship, particularly referencing Walter Broel's 1948 dissertation *Stufen des Wunderbaren im Epos des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts*:

Unter den vier "Gestaltstufen" des Wunderbaren, die W. Broel zu unterscheiden versucht hat, sind es [vor allem] die zweite und die dritte, die im "Spielmannsepos" (wie im Heldenepos) hervortreten: Mythisches (Riesen, Meerfrauen, Botenvögel, *wîse wîp*) und Sagenhaftes (in Form schon des Legendarischen: Rock Christi, Salomons Werbung) erscheinen mit neuer Ausdrucksmöglichkeit durch neue Zusammenhänge (Broel sieht mehr das Material, interpretiert kaum); die legendenbetonten [*Orendel*] und [*Oswald*] führen hier in die Nähe der erst im höfischen Epos und auch nur in einigen Fällen ganz erreichten vierten Stufe (rein symbolischer Charakter des Wunderbaren), indem hier das Wunderbare nicht mehr Steigerung der Wirklichkeit, sondern Vergegenwärtigung des Transzendenten ist.²⁶

Beyond their encounters with mythic and legendary figures (who are, perhaps, the most "foreign" component of the epics), the heroes also encounter people whose religions and ethnicities are often different from their own. None of these meetings would have been possible if the heroes had not gone on their journeys.

Furthermore, the heroes' journeys also all share some similar (and often overlapping) motifs, including participation in a Crusade, a pilgrimage, and/or a bridal quest. These themes are frequently integrated--with varying degrees of success or smoothness--in the texts. The heroes (and other characters), for example, sometimes disguise themselves as pilgrims in their efforts to woo and/or rescue their brides. At other times in their travels, the heroes are diverted from their bridal quests to fight in a Crusade or other battle against "heathens," which helps cement the heroes' status as good Christian men.

The journey motifs of the Crusades, pilgrimages, and bridal quests frequently work together in the *Spielmannsepen*. In fact, Curschmann addresses some of the scholarly discussions surrounding the ways in which these themes relate to one another:

²⁶ Ibid., 66.

Wichtig ist aber der Hinweis auf den Kampf um die Frau als “Gottesurteil” oder, wie man im Hinblick auf die Genese des Topos besser formulieren würde, als Rechtsentscheid. In dem Maß, in dem zugleich der alte Gedanke, daß die im Heidenkampf Gefallenen eo ipso himmlischen Lohn erwerben, in einen Anspruch der Kämpfer auf göttliche Hilfe in der Welt umgebogen wird, scheint damit eine Verschmelzung der Bereiche “Kreuzzug” und “Werbung” stattzufinden, in der das Kreuzzugsschema doch mehr als Vehikel ist.²⁷

This helps clarify the significant role that women play in these epics. With the exception of Duke Ernst, for example, each of the heroes of the *Spielmannsepen* is balanced by the presence of a central female character: either his wife (Salman) or his future bride (Rother, Orendel, Oswald). It is important both to examine each figure as an individual and to consider the relationships between them. There is certainly a place for each approach in medieval studies, but considering the *Spielmannsepen* in light of the ways in which marriage is portrayed and functions in these texts—both in terms of character development and narrative structure—is particularly fruitful since each of the epics contains at least one marriage.

The term “marriage” here is defined quite loosely and includes a wide variety of male-female relationships, including bridal quests, kidnappings, seductions, chaste marriages, and even a widow’s marriage.²⁸ A bridal quest occurs in all three of the epics discussed in this study, and seductions are also quite common. In fact, the heroes perform the bridal quests along with the kidnappings and seductions, and there are also antagonists—heathen rulers in these texts—

²⁷ Ibid., 67.

²⁸ It should be noted here that the *Spielmannsepen* do portray some same-sex interactions and relationships—mostly between/among men, but those situations will be addressed separately from the male-female ones.

who abduct and/or seduce the heroes' brides, including, for example, Ymelot in *König Rother*.

Kidnappings and seductions that are part of a bridal quest also occur in *Orendel* and *Oswald*, that depict chaste or unconsummated marriages.

In order to evaluate thoroughly the role(s) that marriage plays in each epic, one must first consider marriage in its many contexts. There are many ways through which to approach such an analysis, including comparisons portrayals of marriage in other literary works and examinations of the roles the female figures play in each epic. Such interpretations are an integral part of this study, which is divided into chapters that focus on three individual epics. While each chapter begins with a summary of the text and an overview of its manuscript tradition, the emphasis is on providing an analysis of the development of the heroes' identities and, in most cases, that of their brides as well. In focusing on the central male and female figures from each text, I am able to analyze the characters' actions in different circumstances in order to gain a greater understanding of how their identities are presented and—oftentimes—transformed.

CHAPTER 1
KÖNIG ROTHER

Introduction and Summary of the Text

At just under 5200 lines, the anonymous verse narrative *König Rother* is one of the longest *Spielmannsepen*, and it is also one of the best known; only *Herzog Ernst* is both longer and more widely recognized. While *Rother* and *Ernst* share the superficial similarity of the hero's journey to an unknown land, *Rother's* narrative arc more closely follows the same basic journey pattern of *Orendel* and *Oswald*, namely, the bridal quest pattern.²⁹ King Rother, the poem's hero, is a superlative figure, and as such, only the most admirable woman will be a suitable wife for him. The epic primarily details Rother's attempts to woo, rescue, and protect his bride successfully.

The poem contains no preface or invocation, and the unnamed narrator opens directly with a description of the hero-king of Bari: "da lebete er zu ware / mit vil grozen erin" and "er was der aller heriste man."³⁰ As a reflection of its virtuous ruler, Rother's court at Bari also stood "mit eren / unde mit grozen zuhtin."³¹ These opening descriptions of the hero and his kingdom reveal his worthiness and highlight the fact that no ordinary bride would suit such an extraordinary man. Indeed, the only thing that the remarkable Rother lacks is an equally remarkable wife to bear him an heir:

²⁹ There are also similarities to the "reverse bridal quest" in *Salman und Morolf* and to the voyage in to the Orient in *Herzog Ernst*, but the connections with *Orendel* and *Oswald* are more direct.

³⁰ Peter K. Stein, ed. and trans., *König Rother: Mittelhochdeutscher Text und neuhochdeutsche Übersetzung*, ed. Ingrid Bennewitz (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000), lines 4-5 and line 10, respectively. All citations of the text are taken from this edition. "There he lived in truth with very great honor. He was the most noble man."

³¹ Lines 14-15. "With renown and with great decorum."

daz ime da an gote nitches ne gebrach,
 wene daz *er* ane vrowen was.
 do rededen die iungen graven
 20 die in deme hove waren,
 wie se ane vrowen
 ir erbe solden buwen.
 do duchte sie <*daz*> recht,
 swar so war ein gut knecht,
 25 deme die riche werin al undertan
 unde so manic wol geboren man,
 daz *er* ein wip neme
 de ime zu vrowen gezeme.
 unde virsciede er an erben,
 30 so waneden se irsterben,
 weme sie dan die cronen
 solden gebin zo Rōme.³²

From the moment the idea of a wife is introduced, it is clear that her significance will lie not in her own identity, but in the things that she will be able to provide her future husband—most importantly, an heir to ensure proper succession and rule in Rother’s kingdom. Because the king and his heir must be above reproach, so too must the chosen bride—whoever she turns out to be—possess the most outstanding qualities.

In *Rother*, as in *Oswald* and *Orendel*, no suitable lady can be found in the hero’s own realm; therefore, Rother must seek his bride in foreign lands. Thus, the poem shifts quickly from the need for a bride to the need for a bridal quest. If the bride is the object of the quest, then the hero is its subject, and the journey, the battles, the challenges, and the adventures he undertakes often serve to keep the focus of the narrative on the hero rather than his female counterpart. This is particularly true of *Rother*, an epic whose female protagonist is not even given her own name;

³² “So that he lacked nothing except that he was without a wife. Then the young counts who were in the court discussed how they should keep their inheritance without a lady. They thought that it was right that if one was a worthy knight and ruler over the whole domain and over so many a well-born man, then he ought to take to himself a wife to be his lady. If he died without an heir, then they would die: to whom should they then give the crown of Rome?”

the *Orendel* and *Oswald* poets, however, have more fully integrated their heroines, and Bride and Paug take on roles as subjects themselves.³³

Rother seeks guidance from his advisors when choosing his bride, and although they are initially unsuccessful in finding a suitable lady, one man, Lupolt, describes the beautiful and virtuous daughter of Constantine who lives “oster over se.”³⁴ Although Constantine has killed all other suitors, Rother is confident that he will win the lady as his bride, and he sends Lupolt and eleven other advisors as his representatives to Constantinople to woo her on his behalf. As they depart, the men arrange a secret signal: Whenever they hear three harp songs, they will know that Rother himself is nearby.³⁵

Constantine and his wife initially welcome Lupolt and the other messengers to their shores, but the moment Rother’s suit is presented, Constantine becomes enraged and imprisons them all. They remain his captives for a year and one day, and Rother decides that he must travel to Constantinople himself to free them. Rother spends three days and three nights devising his plan, and he realizes that the best way to defeat Constantine is not with force, but with cunning; therefore, Rother travels with only a small entourage—including three giants—and disguises himself as “Dietrich” in order to avoid attention. He also makes certain to take his harp along.³⁶

The use of representatives who carry messages and act on behalf of the hero is a common motif in the *Spielmannsepen*. Oswald has a raven messenger, for example, and Salman relies on Morolf to act as his agent. The scenes in *Rother* where the men prepare to set sail also echo

³³ See chapters 2 and 3 for further discussion of the roles of these women in the epics.

³⁴ Line 65. “east across the sea”

³⁵ Lines 63-197.

³⁶ Lines 198-819.

similar scenes in the other epics; each text contains several voyages, and each poet emphasizes certain objects or tasks that should not be forgotten. In *Oswald*, for example, the raven carries letters and rings between the hero and heroine, but Oswald does not remember to bring the raven when he eventually travels to Aron's court himself. Conversely, Rother does remember to bring his harp so that he can signal his men.

Once Rother arrives in Constantinople, he and his men (and giants) go before Constantine while he is holding court at Easter.³⁷ "Dietrich" tells of the hero Rother and of being banished from his land, and Constantine welcomes them all into his service. At a later gathering, the queen admonishes her husband for the way he has treated Rother's men and for his behavior towards his daughter's suitors. Even Constantine's men begin to grumble about his parsimonious and capricious nature. "Dietrich's" generosity and charity, on the other hand, earn him great favor among the people, and Constantine's men begin to follow "Dietrich;" six thousand warriors take his side, along with a man named Count Arnolt and three of his barons who had fled their homeland.³⁸ That Rother can attract the loyalty of those around him despite the fact that he is disguised speaks greatly to his virtuous nature. While it is certainly important that Rother marry, produce an heir, and secure his kingdom's rule, it is also significant that he does so through the strength of his character, not just the strength of his sword.

The new loyalty of some of the men adds to the other tensions in Constantine's court (some of which are caused by the presence of the three giants who travelled with Rother), and an argument breaks out at a festival over where "Dietrich's" place at the court table should be. Meanwhile, Constantine's daughter has developed an interest in the hero and wants to speak with

³⁷ It is commonplace in epics for the action to start around the time of a Christian holiday or saint's day. St. Stephen's Day, for example, plays an important role in *Orendel*.

³⁸ Lines 820-1514.

him in her bower. In a scene that parallels gift exchanges in the other *Spielmannsepen*, Dietrich has a pair of shoes—one silver and one gold—sent to Constantine’s daughter. Then, he meets her secretly, places the shoes on her feet, and confesses that he is, in fact, Rother in disguise. This moment marks the first time that Rother and his chosen bride interact with one another when each knows the other’s identity; until this point, that knowledge rested solely with Rother.

Significantly, Rother’s revelation and its aftermath occur in a private place, not a public one, and the balance of power between the hero and heroine starts to shift slightly. In revealing his true name and purpose for visiting Constantinople, Rother displays his confidence in her reply and his trust in her discretion. The pair is isolated from the rest of the court, and Constantine’s daughter serves both as the object of his affection and as his confessor in this sheltered space. Her initial remarks to “Dietrich” and her subsequent reaction to Rother’s revelation, then, denote the only opportunity she has had thus far to address the events of the epic directly. When the two are finally alone together, she reveals:

2225 “soldich aber die wele han,
 so nemich einen helit got unde balt,
 des botin quamin her in diz lant
 unde ligin hie zware
 in minis vater kerkenere.
 der ist geheizin Rothere
2230 unde sizzet westert uber mere.
 ich wil ouch immer magit gan,³⁹
 mer ne werde der helit lossam!”⁴⁰

³⁹ This expression is similar to a phrase used by the *Minnesänger* Der von Kurenberg (“*Aller wibe wunne diu gêt noch megetîn*”) and in the English poem *The Romance of Guy of Warwick* (“How longe schalt þou maydyn gone?”). In these examples, the male narrator or protagonist uses the phrase to describe a lady, but in *Rother*, the heroine uses the label to describe herself.

⁴⁰ “If I should have the choice, then I would take a bold and worthy hero whose envoys came here to this land and indeed lie here in my father’s dungeon. He is called Rother, and he dwells in the west across the sea. I shall always be a maiden, unless the praiseworthy hero can be mine.”

When Constantine's daughter unwittingly pronounces her devotion directly to the object of her admiration, Rother uses the opportunity to reveal his true identity to her, and he responds by saying:

2260 “nu lazich alle mine dinc
 an godes genade ande din:
 ia stent dine voze
 in Rotheris schoze!”⁴¹

In this scene between the hero and heroine, we see that the princess unknowingly plays a role in her own wooing, and by initiating the private meeting with “Dietrich,” she has also taken on greater agency. The heroines of the *Spielmannsepen* demonstrate varying degrees of autonomy; for example, Paug, the heroine of *Orendel*, actively works against her father before she and Orendel meet. Constantine's daughter, on the other hand, only begins to act more independently once she and Rother have met, and after she learns of “Dietrich's” true identity, she convinces her father to free Rother's men, and Constantine releases them to “Dietrich's” control. Subsequently, the men recognize their king through the harp signal they had arranged before their voyage.⁴²

With the declarations of devotion between the hero and heroine and with the release of Rother's men, the poem's conclusion seems near at hand. Further conflicts, however, quickly arrive. First, the heathen king Ymelot from Babylon (i.e. Cairo) attacks Constantine's realm,⁴³

⁴¹ “Now I lay all of my possessions on God's mercy and yours. Your feet now stand in Rother's lap!”

⁴² Lines 1515-2554.

⁴³ Ymelot's Babylon is a reference to Egyptian or Deltaic Babylon, which as Friedrich Panzer notes, was the seat of the Fatimid Caliphate in present-day Coptic Cairo. This is a sign that *Rother* might not be as old as some scholars argue; see Friedrich Panzer, *Italische Normannen in deutscher Heldensage* (Frankfurt: M. Diesterweg, 1925), 50-51.

and “Dietrich” pledges himself to fight on Constantine’s behalf. Thousands of soldiers rally behind him, and they march out to meet Ymelot. The Christian army sets up camp, and Rother and twelve other men sneak into the Babylonian encampment during the night and capture Ymelot himself. Constantine decides that “Dietrich” should return to Constantinople to report that the heathen king had been captured, but when Rother reaches the city, he quickly takes Constantine’s daughter to his ship and sets sail for Bari. Ymelot escapes from Constantine and his men, but Constantine has learned of his daughter’s seduction/abduction and concentrates his efforts on regaining her rather than on recapturing the heathen king. Constantine’s ploy works, and his men are able to lure the now-pregnant wife of Rother onto another ship that sails back to Constantinople.⁴⁴

Rother must return to Constantinople in pursuit of Constantine’s men and his abducted wife, but the stakes are much higher at this point than they have ever been. In his initial voyage, Rother was motivated by the idea of a potential bride; by the time of his second voyage, however, he must rescue his actual bride and his unborn child. The urgency of this new situation is reflected in Rother’s new tactics: Instead of approaching Constantinople with only a small entourage, the King of Bari sets sail with thirty thousand warriors and twenty-two ships.⁴⁵ The hero has already proven his cunning, and time has come now for Rother to demonstrate his might.

When he arrives in Constantinople, Rother once again dons a disguise; he and two of his men dress as pilgrims so that they can travel around without drawing attention to themselves.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Lines 2555-3652.

⁴⁵ Lines 3261-3652.

⁴⁶ Pilgrim disguises play an important role in the other *Spielmannsepik*, too.

They soon learn that the heathen king Ymelot had gathered his army after he had escaped from Constantine's men. Ymelot has returned and is besieging Constantinople, and by the time Rother arrives, the heathen king is already trying to force a marriage between his son Basilistius and Constantine's daughter. In order to rescue his bride, Rother sneaks under the table where Ymelot and his men are celebrating the intended marriage between the captive princess and Basilistius, and then the hero secretly slides a ring on his bride's finger, and she recognizes her husband immediately. Then Rother reveals himself to Ymelot's men and lets himself be arrested; they make plans to hang him the next day.⁴⁷

In a coordinated effort, Lupolt and Count Arnolt stage Rother's rescue. Lupolt blows a horn that signals Rother's army to attack, and in the ensuing battle, Basilistius is hanged, and many men flee while Ymelot retreats. The giants who fought with Rother want to torch Constantine's castle with the ruler still inside, but, in another show of generosity and mercy, the hero forgives Constantine for succumbing to Ymelot's demands. As a result, Constantine admits the sinfulness of his actions and also recognizes the validity of his daughter's marriage to Rother. Constantine and Rother want to reward their men who had acted properly and bravely, but first, the union between the hero and his bride must be celebrated and their conflict with Constantine fully resolved. To this end, Constantine declares, "nu nim die scone thochter min."⁴⁸ Then they commemorate the union of Rother and the princess and the defeat of Ymelot and his men, and Constantine and his wife officially present their daughter to Rother. The festivities and ceremony mark the significance of the occasion in a number of ways, and they also serve to further emphasize the worth and worthiness of Constantine's daughter.

⁴⁷ Lines 3653-4009.

⁴⁸ Line 4532. "Now take my beautiful daughter"

Constantine's blessing of his daughter's union and his presentation of her to her new husband are rare scenes in the *Spielmannsepen*. Elsewhere, the brides either act independently of their parents—especially of their fathers—or their parents are completely absent.⁴⁹ The *Rother* poet, however, presents the traditional moment when a woman's identity shifts from that of daughter to wife, and as the poem nears its end, the daughter takes on another role as well—mother. When Rother and his bride return to Bari, their son Pippin is born, and he ultimately becomes the father of Charlemagne.⁵⁰

The final scenes of the poem shift forward to show Pippin as a young man. When he is twenty-two, he journeys to Aachen to receive his sword. All of the warriors who had fought alongside his father Rother in Constantinople come to the celebration, and Pippin gives a speech to the people he will one day rule. One of Rother's companions, Berchter, Duke of Meran, advises Rother to step away from his throne and to retire to a convent. He and his wife follow this suggestion. Thus, the heir has inherited the throne and the line of succession is secure; the kingdom flourishes under Pippin's rule until he dies and passes the crown to his own son.⁵¹

Manuscript Tradition

Like the other *Spielmannsepen*, *Rother* is commonly described as a verse narrative from the mid- to late-12th century; unlike the other epics, however, the *Rother* composition date is

⁴⁹ A further example is the second marriage of Duke Ernst's mother in *Herzog Ernst*, which offers another wedding scene.

⁵⁰ Lines 4726-4925. Charlemagne is a popular figure in medieval German literature; the *Rolandslied des Pfaffen Konrad* and der Stricker's *Karl der Große* are two examples of texts where he figures.

⁵¹ Lines 4927-5197.

based on fairly conclusive manuscript evidence. As will be noted, the manuscript evidence for the other epics is either inconclusive (at best) or contradictory (at worst). In fact, Curschmann has described this distinction in the manuscript tradition of *Rother* as “am relativ günstigsten.”⁵²

The text of *Rother* can be found in one nearly complete manuscript, which Stein dates to the 12th or, possibly, early 13th century, and this manuscript is the primary source for all later editions of the poem:⁵³

- (H) Heidelberg manuscript (cpg 390) from the University Library in Heidelberg - written primarily in Middle German, with some Lower Franconian and Upper German (especially Bavarian) elements.⁵⁴

Rother also exists in four additional fragments, whose language Curschmann describes as predominantly Upper German:⁵⁵

- (B) Baden fragment (Nr. 27744) from the Library of the Germanic National Museum in Nürnberg and (E) Ermlitz fragment (from the same manuscript but privately owned) (second half of the 13th century);

⁵² Curschmann, “*Spielmannsepik*” - *Wege und Ergebnisse der Forschung*, 25.

⁵³ Peter K. Stein, “Einleitung,” *König Rother* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000), 12 and 20; see also: Theodor Frings and Joachim Kuhnt, *König Rother*, Rheinische Beiträge und Hülfbücher zur germanischen Philologie und Volkskunde 3 (Bonn and Leipzig: K. Schroeder, 1922); Karin Schneider, *Gotische Schriften in deutscher Sprache: Band 1 – Vom späten 12. Jahrhundert bis um 1300* (Wiesbaden: L. Reichert, 1987). The presumed date for the H manuscript was established by Frings and Kuhnt’s in their 1922 edition of *Rother* and has not been convincingly contested since, except (as noted by Stein) perhaps by Schneider.

⁵⁴ Curschmann, “*Spielmannsepik*” - *Wege und Ergebnisse*, 25-26; Schröder, *Spielmannsepik*, 22-24; Hans Szklenar, “König Rother,” in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Vervasserlexikon* 7, ed. Burghart Wachinger, et al. (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1977), 82-94.

⁵⁵ Curschmann, “*Spielmannsepik*” - *Wege und Ergebnisse*, 28.

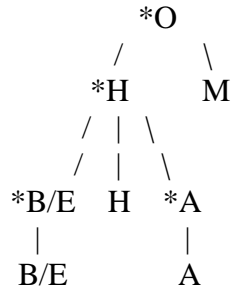
- (M) Munich fragment (cgm 5249, Nr. 1) from the Munich Bavarian State Library (end of the 12th century);
- (A) Arnswaldt fragment (Ms. germ. Fol. 923, Nr. 20) from the State Library of Berlin Prussian Cultural Heritage (Upper German with traces of Middle and Lower Franconian; 14th century).⁵⁶

Based primarily on the poet's use of assonance, some scholars argue that the original *Rother* text (*O) must date to the middle of the 12th century – approximately 1160.⁵⁷ The Munich fragment (M) is thought to be directly derived from this original, and the Heidelberg manuscript (H) is believed to be two generations removed from the original, but in a separate branch from the M fragment. Most scholars believe that the precursors to the Baden/Ermlitz (B/E) and the Arnswaldt (A) fragments were siblings (*B/E and *A) to the Heidelberg manuscript, which makes the fragments themselves three generations removed from the original text. The linguistic evidence, particularly the combinations of dialects, seem to indicate that none of the extant manuscripts and fragments could have been directly related to one another (i.e. parent-child manuscripts). Although they share linguistic qualities (particularly traces or use of the Bavarian dialect), they appear too disparate for an intervening generation not to have existed. Thus, the traditional manuscript family tree for *Rother* would look something like this:⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Stein, "Einleitung," *König Rother*, 21-22; Curschmann, "*Spielmannsepik*" - *Wege und Ergebnisse*, 28.

⁵⁷ Curschmann, "*Spielmannsepik*" - *Wege und Ergebnisse*, 29.

⁵⁸ Schröder, *Spielmannsepik*, 22.



The mixture of dialects in the Heidelberg manuscript has been discussed by many scholars. Curschmann, for example, is unconvinced by much of the previous scholarship on the language of *Rother*, but he also does not believe that “Mischdialekt” alone is an adequate description of the text.⁵⁹ Wehrli contends that the poet must have been Rhenish but was writing for a Bavarian audience,⁶⁰ and Schröder has come to a similar conclusion in his analysis of the language of the H manuscript:

Immerhin weist die Sprache von H mit Sicherheit aus, daß der Verfasser vom Rhein stammt, später jedoch in Baiern gelebt und dort wohl auch gedichtet hat. Inhaltliche Kriterien stützen dies: Rifland (Ripuarien), Verehrung der Gertrud von Nivelles, des St. Ägidius – andererseits die Erwähnung bairischer Adelsgeschlechter. [G] Kramer kommt zu dem Ergebnis, daß das Original im Rheinfränkischen, in Mainz, entstanden sei, H im Raum von Köln.⁶¹

Stein also acknowledges the many problems with the language of the H manuscript that scholars like Schröder, Wehrli, and Curschmann have presented, and he details Kramer’s discussion of the poet’s few attempts to incorporate the “mittel- und niederdeutschn h-Schwund,” which conflict with the vast majority of the other spellings in the poem.⁶² Ultimately, most scholars

⁵⁹ Curschmann, “*Spielmannsepik*” - *Wege und Ergebnisse*, 26-27.

⁶⁰ Wehrli, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im Mittelalter*, 225.

⁶¹ Schröder, *Spielmannsepik*, 23.

⁶² Stein, “Einleitung,” *König Rother*, 15; see also: Günter Kramer, “Zum ‘König Rother: Das Verhältnis des Schreibers der Heidelberger Hs. (H) zu seiner Vorlage IV,’” *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 90, (1968): 69-139.

agree that the mixture of dialects and orthographic trends found in the H manuscript is problematic, and no exact conclusions about the poet and poem's linguistic origins can be drawn.

Despite the complicated mixture of dialects in the Heidelberg manuscript, it is both the fullest and oldest extant version of *Rother*. It is, however, incomplete: A single leaf—the last one of the original text block—has been lost, so the epic's conclusion (lines 5182-5197) is missing. Because of this, the Arnswaldt fragment (A) is used to complete the final sixteen verses.⁶³ Linguistically, the primary dialect of the A fragment only overlaps with one of the secondary dialects of the H manuscript (Upper Germanic / Bavarian). The A fragment is also the youngest of the four *Rother* fragments and was composed approximately a hundred years after the presumed composition date of the H manuscript. It is indeed fortunate that so little of the H appears to have been lost; however, it is also somewhat troubling that the final lines have been replaced by a much younger iteration of the story composed in a different dialect.

The dates of the extant manuscript and fragments (late-12th to early-14th centuries) suggest that there must have been some demand for the story of *Rother* during this time. When considered alongside the fact that the H manuscript is written in early Gothic minuscule—a newer, more efficient script than the traditional Carolingian minuscule—and the fact that the manuscript is simply written with no adornment or ornamentation on the pages, an interesting possibility comes to light. It might be said that economy (both of time and of money) was key in the production of the H manuscript, and since *Rother* is the only text in the H manuscript, it could perhaps follow that it was important to produce a copy of that particular epic at that particular time as quickly and inexpensively as possible.

⁶³ The Arnswaldt text is only a single leaf containing lines 5135-5197, so that it only shares 47 verses with the nearly complete H.

Because of the dates of the H manuscript and M fragment, one might surmise that there was some demand for the text in southeast Germany in the late 12th and early 13th century. Beyond the early 14th century, however, with the A fragment, it seems that interest in the epic—or at least interest in promulgating *Rother* manuscripts—waned after a century to a century and a half of relative popularity. With this pattern, *Rother* distinguishes itself greatly from the other *Spielmannsepen* in two key ways.

First, many of the other epics are found in manuscripts that are much younger than the *Rother* manuscript and fragments. All of the extant manuscripts and fragments for *Orendel*, *Oswald*, and *Salman und Morolf* date only to the 15th century (the only possible exception is a *Salman und Morolf* manuscript that might be from the late 14th century). That means that there is no chronological overlap at all between the original composition and subsequent copying of the extant *Rother* materials and the extant manuscripts and fragments of *Orendel*, *Oswald*, and *Salman und Morolf*. Scholarly tradition from the 19th and 20th centuries, of course, dates the presumed original composition dates of those three epics to around the same time as *Rother* (second half of the 12th century), but no physical evidence exists to support such a claim. A second key distinction between the dates of *Rother* and the other *Spielmannsepen* is that it is the only epic that does not exist as an early (15th or early 16th century) imprint. All of the other *Spielmannsepen*, though, do exist as in early printed form either as incunabula or as early 16th century printings. While it is certainly possible that the poems were each composed, copied, transmitted, and printed across the span of the entire Middle Ages, the surviving evidence does not fully support such a claim.

In his edition of the poem, Stein provides an overview of the dates and other major scholarly concerns surrounding the *Rother* tradition, and he employs current editorial practices,

including the use of modern punctuation, the normalization of certain spellings, and the italicization of textual conjecture.⁶⁴ Stein also offers extensive notes throughout the text which clarify editorial decisions, explore manuscript issues, and present additional information about the poem. In response to Stein and his editors' decision to produce a new edition of the text, Gisela Vollman-Profe has expressed her gratitude, "denn die beiden bisher vorhandenen kritischen Ausgaben von 1922 waren trotz mehrfachen Nachdrucks kaum mehr zugänglich und zudem für den akademischen Unterricht wenig geeignet."⁶⁵ Since it was first published in 2000, Stein's edition of *Rother* has become the new scholarly standard and is used throughout this study.

"Spielmann-esque" Motifs and Genre Discussion

Most scholarly definitions of *Spielmannsepik* include descriptions of three main elements: style, language, and content. These characteristics are used as a foundation both for distinguishing the *Spielmannsepen* from other medieval genres and for including them in their own separate genre. This separation calls to mind Stephen Hinds' discussion of "un-epic" qualities;⁶⁶ despite the fact that the *Spielmannsepen* do share some traits with their *Blütezeit* counterparts, the differences between them are enough to make the *Spielmannsepen* stand out from romances and heroic and biblical epics.

⁶⁴ Stein, "Einleitung," *König Rother*, 17.

⁶⁵ Gisela Vollmann-Profe, "Review of *König Rother* by Peter K. Stein, Ingrid Bennewitz, Beatrix Koll and Ruth Weichselbaumer," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 132, no. 1 (2003), 122.

⁶⁶ See Introduction.

The most straightforward distinctions between *Spielmannsepen* and the poems of other genres can be found in their poetic structures because these traits are less subjective or open to interpretation. This is clearly demonstrated in *Rother*: “Die Reime sind weitgehend noch Assonanzen, die Länge der Verse ist ungleichmäßig, die Füllung der Senkungen wechselnd.”⁶⁷ In contrast, “[d]er Vers der m[ittelhochdeutschen] Blütezeit strebt nach Alternation, d.h. nach einer gleichmäßigen Abfolge von betonten und unbetonten Silben.”⁶⁸ Stein has also stated that the poetic forms of the epic are governed by “frühmittelhochdeutsche[] Kunstprinzipien.”⁶⁹ Simply put, the *Rother* poet uses linguistic and structural elements that share more similarities with earlier German texts like the *Alexanderlied* and *Kaiserchronik* (both from the mid-12th century) than with works of the *Blütezeit*.

The language of *Rother* affects not only the poetic structures, but it also influences the tone and style of the epic. As Robert Lichtenstein has noted,

The style of *König Rother* shows many resemblances to that of oral poetry. The story is told in a swift and straightforward way; there are very few poetic figures, and edifying excursions occur only towards the end. The sentence structure is predominantly paratactic. Stock phrases and epithets abound. The poet lays great stress upon keeping in close contact with his audience: he addresses it directly, assures it of the truth of what it is hearing, comments upon some interesting moment in the narrative. Frequently he gives vent to his feelings in exclamations of wonder or dismay. It is this colloquial tone which is responsible for much of the fresh and spirited effect of *König Rother*[.]⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Schröder, *Spielmannsepik*, 23.

⁶⁸ Helmut Tervooren, *Minimalmetrik: zur Arbeit mit mittelhochdeutschen Texten*, Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 285 (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1997), 2.

⁶⁹ Stein, “Einleitung,” *König Rother*, 16.

⁷⁰ Robert Lichtenstein, “Introduction,” *König Rother*, University of North Carolina Studies in the Germanic Languages and Literatures 36 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), XIV.

The colloquial tone of *Rother* represents one of the hallmarks of *Spielmannsepik*; there is a certain informality or levity to the texts, and even serious occurrences like kidnappings, battles, and deaths never weigh down the tone of the poems. The light tone ensures that the audience never really fears for the hero or anticipates a negative outcome for his story.

While the colloquial tone of *Rother* does not lean towards somberness or sobriety, it does often veer towards humor and frivolity, which is another trademark of *Spielmannsepik*. Wehrli describes this quality in *Rother* as follows:

Wesentliches Element des munter-spannend Erzählens ist schließlich die Komik, die sich aus Anlaß von Rother's riesenhaften Gefolgsleuten und ihrem ungeschlachten Benehmen am Hof zu Konstantinopel breit entwickelt, zugleich aber auch zur Charakteristik der Personen und der Atmosphäre ausgenützt wird. Das ist spielmännisch, wie immer man weltliche Berufsdichter und Geistliche an Entstehung und Vortrag des Werks beteiligen mag. Auch motivisch ist den Spielleuten vom Dichter große Sympathie gewidmet, Rother selbst tritt als Meister des Saitenspiels auf. Im ganzen aber ist schwer zu sagen, was man in diesem Werk als unernsten spielmännischen Synkretismus aus heroischen, historischen und schwankhaften Elementen ansprechen muß und wie weit gerade durch solche Mischung und Spannung einem höfischen Roman vorgearbeitet wird.⁷¹

Although *Rother* and the other *Spielmannsepen* have some elements in common with their courtly and heroic counterparts, there are so many other qualities mixed in—including both farcical and historical traits—that *Rother* cannot be considered an example of any other medieval genre of epic.

One consideration regarding the relationship between genres and courtliness or courtesy is that romances, for example, that rely heavily on chivalric elements typically center on interpersonal relationships and the nuances of behavior between individuals, and oftentimes, those individuals are actually members of the same court. I would argue that the most effective scenes of courtliness in the literature of the *Blütezeit* are those that connect to the audience on an emotional, or even visceral level. In these instances, the characters and their development

⁷¹ Wehrli, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im Mittelalter*, 228.

become the most important aspect of courtly epics. Conversely, the *Spielmannsepen* center around the successful outcomes of the heroes' actions. In most cases—as in *Rother*, for example—the desired goal is explicitly stated at the beginning of the epic. Rother needs a bride, and Constantine's daughter is the most suitable wife for him; therefore, the ostensible outcome of the epic will be the union of these two characters. In such cases, the development of the epic's plot takes precedence over the development of its characters.

Beyond this, however, is the fact that the plot resolutions of the *Spielmannsepen* actually represent something more, something beyond themselves. For instance, the marriage of Rother to Constantine's daughter produces a son—a legitimate heir to Rother's throne. Going one step more, the poet tells his audience that this son is, in fact, Pippin, the father of Charlemagne. The epic actually concludes with the coronation of Charlemagne, “dessen legitimer Nachfolger gegenwärtig in der Person Barbarossas regiert.”⁷²

While the continuity of generations and the preservation of proper hereditary succession to the throne are vital themes in *Rother*,⁷³ the same cannot be said of the other *Spielmannsepen*, whose depictions of bridal quests and marriage lend themselves to other themes. Despite these different particulars, the similarities in plot devices among the epics have been seen as one of the main arguments for grouping them together as a possible genre of their own. The poems have all but rebelled against the “*Spielmannsepik*” designation, as textual evidence contradicts the initial 19th-century reasons for using that particular term. The only reason the appellation is still used today (usually with the added caveat “so-called”) is that no truly suitable alternative term has been successfully offered. One dilemma for scholars who want to examine these epic poems,

⁷² Schröder, *Spielmannsepik*, 33.

⁷³ There are antecedents in Classical literature to the significance of the continuity of generations (e.g., Virgil's *Aeneid* or Homer's *Odyssey*).

then, is that they must frequently either explain why they use the outdated term, or they must explain why the alternative label they employ is a valid choice for the texts. Such discussions are valuable and necessary, but they seldom result in any changes to the terminology; the inertia of scholarly tradition is nearly impossible to divert. Scholarly studies of the *Spielmannsepen* have only in recent years started to move away from technical questions like this and to move into the arena of literary analysis.⁷⁴ Such a move is significant because it marks the beginning, perhaps, of a shift towards demarginalizing the epics.

While some structural and stylistic traits can certainly be used as arguments in favor of *Rother* and the other epics belonging to the same genre, it is important to note that evidence from the physical manuscripts (and fragments and prints) themselves cannot be used to draw the texts together. In other words, based on the manuscript evidence alone, there does not seem to have been a trend to produce collections of texts that contain the so-called *spielmannische* elements as they are designated in *Rother*. The evidence of manuscript activity surrounding the *Rother* manuscripts is unique amongst all of the epics that have been labeled as *Spielmannsepos* by later scholarship. As noted above, there is among the other epics a flurry of manuscript and printing activity in the 15th and early 16th centuries. Based on this level of activity, it would seem that there was at least some demand for texts with the so-called *spielmannische* elements as the Middle Ages were drawing to a close and as the Renaissance was budding.

Ultimately, the most significant themes of *Rother* (and of many of the other *Spielmannsepen*) are not about courtliness or courtesy—the coded behavior and fashionable of the nobility—at all; instead, the most important themes of *Rother* are about the legitimacy of the very kingdom in which those noblemen and noblewomen are able to carry out such behavior –

⁷⁴ See Introduction.

essential matters of the court. The reinforcement of the significance, the validity, and the authority of the actual court and its rulers (“actual” within the literary framework) can be found at the heart of *Rother*.

Development of the Hero and Heroine

Throughout the course of his narrative, the *Rother* poet portrays his hero—Rother, the king of Bari—as a superlative figure and ideal Christian ruler. Rother is wise and just, he heeds the counsel of his noble advisors, and he succeeds in every task he undertakes. His identity is built on his virtuous character and his masterful accomplishments. As with many epic heroes, Rother must undertake a journey, and the adventures he is involved in along the way provide ample opportunity for the poet to highlight Rother’s many strengths and to contrast both Rother and the city of Bari with other kings and kingdoms. The hero’s numerous virtues and talents become ever more evident as the narrative progresses: Rother overcomes all obstacles he encounters, he compares most favorably to other key figures in the text, and—of course—he fulfills his quest.

The hero’s journey satisfies several important purposes throughout the poem. When seen as a function of the epic’s narrative structure, for example, the journey provides a framework that moves the hero from the beginning of his story through conflicts to reach some ultimate resolution. In the case of Rother, that narrative resolution is the successful completion of his bridal quest. Another function of the hero’s journey, though, is to provide him with adventures that allow him to demonstrate his prowess and virtue. Such adventures usually take him to unknown and frequently unusual locations, and the hero may visit those places on any number of different occasions and in any order. A map of the geographic travels of an epic, then, could look

quite different from a map of the more linear narrative structure of that same epic. This is particularly true of the Middle High German *Spielmannsepen*, including *Rother*, which are filled with a great variety of physical locations and whose heroes must be able to journey effectively from place to place in order for their narratives to come to successful completion.

The narrative arc and the geography of *Rother* do interact with and influence one another, of course. As Christian Gellinek has described in his detailed *Ortsgerüst* of *Rother*, the poem's setting is constantly shifting—both on a large scale (land to land) and on a small scale (places within a city or court).⁷⁵ More importantly, though, the hero himself is not always present in the narrative arc of the story. In choosing to remain absent or to remove himself from certain scenes and settings, Rother still manages to mold circumstances towards his own end. Time and time again, Rother manipulates the situation or circumstances in which he finds himself in order to bring about the outcome that he himself desires. This phenomenon illustrates some of the hero's greatest strengths, including his cunning, power, and self-determination.

Ultimately, Rother's journey provides opportunities for his high degree of agency and his superlative character to be highlighted. For instance, by juxtaposing the hero with two other rulers in the story—the Byzantine emperor Constantine and the heathen king Ymelot—the poet emphasizes Rother's strengths and virtues. Although all three of these men resemble one another in wealth, power, and status, the similarities among them are fairly superficial. I argue that one meaningful way in which Rother distinguishes himself from both Constantine and from Ymelot is through his skill in moving in and out of the different physical settings of the story. This includes travels on a large scale (for example, across the sea or from one land to another), and it also includes mobility on a smaller, more subtle scale (for example, moving from place to place

⁷⁵ Christian Gellinek, *König Rother: Studie zur literarischen Deutung* (Bern and Munich: Francke, 1968).

within one particular city or court). Both kinds of physicality and freedom of movement are important to the hero, Rother, and he is a master of each form, much more so than either other ruler. This authority is significant because it provides points of comparison between Rother and the other rulers in the epic.

Before Rother's character and abilities can be compared with those of Constantine and Ymelot (i.e. before he undertakes his journey), however, he must first be presented in his own kingdom. If we look at the introduction of the hero, we see (as previously noted) that the epic's opening lines reveal much about his character; his social, political, and economic status are all clearly stated, as is his geographic location, and his religious orientation can also be inferred. These are the characteristics that are emphasized in Rother's later adventures, particularly in his encounters with Constantine and Ymelot:

[**B**]i deme westeren mere
saz ein kuninc der heiz Rõther.
in der stat zu Bare
da lebete er zu ware
5 mit vil grozen erin.
ime dientin andere heren:
zwene unde sibinzih kuninge,
biderve unde ûrmige,
die waren ime al undertan.
10 er was der aller heriste man,
der da zu Rome
ie intfinc die cronen.

[**R**]ûther was ein here:
sine dinc stunden mit erin
15 unde mit grozen zuhtin an sinen hove
- iz ne haben die böche gelogen -,
daz ime da an gote nictes ne gebrach,
wene daz *er* ane vrowen was.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ “By the western sea sat a king who was called Rother. In the city of Bari he lived in truth with very great honor. Other lords served him: two and seventy princes, brave and honorable, they were all subject to him. He was the most noble man, who had ever received the crown of Rome. Rother was a lord: his affairs stood with renown and great decorum at his court

It is clear that Rother is a greatly admired king of extensive virtue; his qualities must be outstanding—even ideal—if he is served by so many other virtuous rulers. Additionally, Rother is a king whose coronation took place in Rome, the heart of Western Christianity, and he rules the city of Bari, which lies on the edge of the Western Sea. There are also clear references to specific places within the broader geographic location of Bari, namely Rother’s palace and his *hof*. Already in the first lines of the poem, then, we see two key aspects of this epic: the ideal, virtuous character of the hero and the importance and variety of the physical places where he can be found; these motifs remain important throughout Rother’s journeys and adventures.

Schröder describes the city of Bari as the “Hafenort der Kreuzfahrer.”⁷⁷ This description, although brief, is quite illuminating, because Rother—as the king of Bari—rules this realm of transition. This harbor city is not just a portal between land and sea: Its particular location on the Western Sea also makes it a gateway between East and West. Representing the West and Western Christianity, Rother is placed in juxtaposition to Eastern rulers: first, to Constantine, who represents Eastern Christianity, and then, to Ymelot, who represents Islam. The city of Bari itself can symbolize the idea of transitions, of the meeting and changing of space and place. As the master of this place where land meets sea and where East meets West, Rother becomes the symbolic master of the transitions between those places. He belongs to the West, but he is not geographically bound there, and the poem’s early scenes in Bari foreshadow Rother’s actions and accomplishments on his later travels.

– unless the books have lied about that – so that he lacked for nothing except that he was without a wife.”

⁷⁷ Walter Johannes Schröder, “König Rother. Gehalt und Struktur,” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 29 (1955), 301-322.

While it is to be expected that Rother is comfortable in his own homeland of Bari, it is, perhaps, more surprising to see that the hero knows exactly when it is advantageous to stay in Bari and when it is best—or even necessary—to travel to other lands. Rother demonstrates an uncanny ability to travel safely and successfully into the realms of both Constantine and Ymelot. He plans his journeys, his goals, his disguises, and—perhaps most importantly—his exits. Neither of the other two rulers moves so freely amongst the different locations in the epic. Rother always returns home to Bari, but he is neither defined nor hindered by his physical place in the story. Even from the outset of the poem, it is clear that Rother has mastered not only moving himself from place to place, but he is also quite adept at manipulating the physical setting of the story to meet his own ends.

In contrast to the opening portrayals of Rother, the other rulers—particularly Constantine—are given hardly any direct introduction or description. The lack of characterization here forces the reader to analyze these figures *per exclusionem*: Most of what one learns about these other two rulers must be inferred from their circumstances and actions in the text. This becomes quite clear when Constantine is first mentioned in the text by Lupolt, one of Rother’s most-trusted advisors:

Lupolt der sprach zi aller erist:
“ich weiz, wizze Crist,
65 oster over se
einis riken kuninges töchter vil her,
da zo Constantinopole
in der meren burge.
ir vater heizit Constantin,
70 schone ist die tochter sin.”⁷⁸

⁷⁸ “Lupolt spoke first: “I know, knows Christ, east across the sea of the very lovely daughter of a rich king, there in the great fortress of Constantinople. Her father is called Constantine, and his daughter is beautiful.””

The brief descriptions of Constantine here reveal only a few basic facts about him. We learn, for example, that he is wealthy and that he rules Constantinople, and we see that the single most significant aspect of Constantine's life is the fact that his daughter would be a worthy wife for Rother. The characterization here is minimal, and even Rother's own men are described in greater detail than this ruler. One important parallel, though, between the introductions of Rother and Constantine, are the references to geographic locations, which serve metonymically as symbols of their respective rulers.

At first glance, the two cities, Bari and Constantinople, seem to mirror one another on opposite sides of the sea, just as the two rulers, Rother and Constantine, appear to parallel one another in positions of authority in their cities. Upon closer inspection, however, the similarities between the cities and rulers in this poem are revealed to be somewhat superficial, and Constantinople and Constantine become less of a parallel to Bari and Rother and more a shadow of them. This can be seen, for example, when Rother's envoy arrives in Constantinople and visits Constantine's court. Because Rother's men are acting on his behalf, they both represent *and* symbolize their ruler and his kingdom; thus, descriptions and characteristics of the envoy can, in many ways, be understood as references to Rother himself. These passages are both elaborate and extensive:

so manich schone bode ne quam.
ire mantele waren gesteinit bi der erden
mit den besten iachanden die *ie dorften* geworden.
die drachen van (4^r) schiren golde
225 - also siez haben wolden -,
herze unde hinden,
maneger slahte wunder
truogen die heledede gode
uz van golde an ir gewede.
230 mit samitte unde pfellele
waren die sadilschellen
gezirot: dat was michil lof.

sie quamen schone uff den hof.

[D]ie herren ritin uff Constantinis hof,
235 da intfenc man in de ros.⁷⁹

Such descriptions of Rother's men reinforce the earlier descriptions of Rother himself, and the ease with which the men enter Constantine's realm—and even his court—is astonishing. The men of Bari are presented as being superior to those of Constantinople, and the poet even goes so far as to say: “iz nequamen ne lute so wunnencliche / in diz Constantinis riche.”⁸⁰

Despite the fact that he lacks many of the heroic qualities that Rother possesses, Constantine does initially display some mastery of his own realm. He demonstrates this by refusing the marriage offer of Rother's envoy and by imprisoning the men in Constantinople. This act prompts Rother to sail for Constantinople, which—in turn—provides the hero with opportunity after opportunity to demonstrate his own skill and mobility. Julius Wiegand highlights the importance of such journeys, particularly of sea voyages, and the emphasis on action in the text; Wiegand makes particular note of poet's use of directional indicator like “hin” and “her” to add to the sense of motion in the story.⁸¹ This is true for the descriptive language used for both kings' actions, despite the many differences that exist between them.

One such distinction between Rother and Constantine can be seen in Rother's use of disguise. Instead of blatantly wielding his power as Constantine has done—and quite possibly

⁷⁹ “So many handsome messengers had never come. Their cloaks were adorned with stones to the ground with the best jacinths there had ever been. The dragons of pure gold—as they would have it—harts and hinds, the good heroes wore many marvelous wonders out of gold on their clothes. The riding equipment was adorned with satin and silk: that was greatly praised. They came finely to the court. The lords rode to Constantine's court, where their horses were.”

⁸⁰ Lines 268-269. “Never had such delightful people come to Constantine's realm.”

⁸¹ Julius Wiegand, *Stilistische Untersuchungen zum 'König Rother'* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1977), 84-85.

realizing that he might be outmatched by Constantine in a show of physical force—Rother relies instead on his wit and disguises himself as “Dietrich” and gradually wins the affections and loyalty of many people in Constantinople (as noted above), including Constantine’s daughter herself. As the princess confides in “Dietrich” that she loves Rother, and as “Dietrich” reveals his true identity to her, Constantine’s daughter becomes an agent or symbol of Rother—much in the same way that his envoy had represented him at the beginning of the story, and she is now able to speak to her father on his behalf. Rother’s successful wooing of Constantine’s daughter in these scenes moves the hero closer to the completion of his quest, and it also takes a degree of authority away from Constantine.

The fact that Constantine’s daughter remains unnamed and moves from the role of daughter to that of wife demonstrates her lack of agency and her dependence on others within the text. It also emphasizes Rother’s superlative qualities. This woman is secondary to her father and then to her husband, and she functions in the poem not as an independent woman, but as an auxiliary or extension of the male characters. It is no accident, then, that she remains nameless. The emphasis on names and roles and the shifting identities of the hero and heroine can be seen throughout the poem, and they highlight—once again—the power of Rother as the subject of the poem and the dependency of Constantine’s daughter as the object of the quest. In her exploration of the impact of names and naming, Jane Bliss notes:

Names in fiction are at least connotative (because chosen by the writer) if not descriptive; names in the rest of life are denotative. In medieval romance [...] there is a blurring of the difference between personal names and descriptors. A noun functions as an ordinary description to identify a character (the king, the damsel, the lord of Somewhere) unless the storyteller obstinately refuses to give a personal name to a character who is clearly important or mysterious. The noun in this case signals an absent name. By contrast, the king or the damsel in a different story may be neutral and need no personal name.⁸²

⁸² Jane Bliss, *Naming and Namelessness in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 11-12.

Both the use and lack of names can bear significance. For Rother, choosing to let himself be known as “Dietrich” gives him the opportunity to act discretely, while still evoking—to the audience, at least—a great number of heroic connotations. Rother’s true name is the one that holds his kingly power, and every time he invokes it during the epic (when talking about Rother as if he were a separate person that “Dietrich” knows), those around him feel the weight of the hero’s true name. Rother has the autonomy to determine his own name and position within Constantine’s court. For his daughter, however, her identity is not self-determined; rather, it is defined by the relationships she has with others (“tochter” or “wip”).⁸³ The scene where Rother places the shoes on her feet marks a true turning point for Constantine’s daughter; she is transitioning here from one label to another, and each of these roles identifies her not as an individual, but as satellite orbiting the central male figure in her life. The poet strikes a balance in the figure of Rother’s wife: On the one hand, she must prove to be worthy of the hero, but on the other, she cannot outshine him. Her ultimate role is to complement Rother by reflecting his virtuousness and power.

In this fledgling new role, the heroine helps Rother form a plan for approaching her father, and the successful execution of this plan serves to emphasize the power that Rother wields even within the kingdom of another ruler. Constantine ultimately agrees to their plan and releases Rother’s men to their care—on Rother’s guarantee that they will all return after three days:

Die botin gab do constantin
Dietheriche uffe den lif sin,
der herre sie do ober nam.
do volgetin ime des kuningis man
2415 zo deme kerkenere,

⁸³ “Daughter” or “wife”

dar sie mit notin waren.
die helenden haftin
lugin in (35^v) unkreften
unde leveden bermeliche.⁸⁴

This is a situation that Rother has clearly manipulated in order to obtain the outcome that he desires, and while Constantine was powerful enough to have imprisoned the men initially, he lacks the authority and influence that Rother possesses. Thus, even in a kingdom that is not his own, Rother displays great mastery of place. Additionally, he has won the confidence and affection of Constantine's daughter; when this is combined with Rother's rescue of his men, it helps prove his superiority over Constantine and Constantinople.

Just when it seems that Rother's quest might be coming to an amicable end in Constantinople, the poet thrusts a second Eastern ruler—the heathen king Ymelot—into the story. This development creates a second round of challenges to Rother's authority and to his mastery of place and space, and it provides a second strong male figure against which to compare the hero's excellence. The series of further conflicts in Babylon has led many scholars, including Markus Stock, to discuss the possibility of a doubling in the narrative structure of the epic, and—as Stock outlines—there are many arguments for and against this claim.⁸⁵ While Rother certainly must win the hand of Constantine's daughter twice in the course of the epic, many aspects of the story simply cannot be divided into two discrete categories. The qualities of the three rulers, for example, are perhaps better understood when seen through a broad spectrum of interpretation. In comparing him with the two other rulers, then, the manner in which Ymelot

⁸⁴ “Constantine gave the messengers then to Dietrich upon his life, the lord took them over then. Then the king's men followed him to the dungeon where they were in need. The hidden prisoners lay in weakness and lived wretchedly.”

⁸⁵ Stock, *Kombinationssinn: narrative Strukturexperimente*.

is introduced resembles the poem's opening description of Rother, but his position as a hindrance to the completion of Rother's bridal quest aligns him more closely with Constantine:

Do hob sich under deme himele
von zwein unde sibinzik kuningin
2565 Von <*woster*> Babilonie
zo Constantino deme kuninge
die aller groziste hervart
die *iergin* gewart.⁸⁶

The similarities between the introductions of Rother and Ymelot are further emphasized when compared to the definitely lacking descriptions of Constantine. While Constantine is certainly not the king that Rother is, Ymelot is the hero's true foil in this epic. For every "positive" trait that the poet ascribes to Rother, he gives Ymelot the "negative" counter-characteristic. Rother is, for example, a highly honored and esteemed Christian king whose power was invested in him by Rome, he seeks an alliance with Constantinople through marriage to Constantine's daughter, and he only exerts his influence over the other ruler's realm when it becomes necessary—and even then, he only uses enough skill and cunning to free his own men. Ymelot, on the other hand, is a greatly feared heathen king who boldly displays the extent of his strength and authority from the very moment he is introduced, who never moderates his actions through cunning or contemplation, and who attempts to gain more power for himself through the forceful conquest of Constantinople. This is an important distinction, for while Rother proves himself more powerful than either Constantine or Ymelot, he does not attempt to expand his influence by conquering the lands of those rulers. Such conquests are unnecessary since he is able to prove his superior intellect and virtue and to complete his bridal quest without taking other lands.

⁸⁶ "Then under the heavens arose two and seventy princes from the desert of Babylon, the mightiest army there ever was, against Constantine the king."

Rother's dominance can be seen in many of his encounters with Ymelot, but his true superiority as a manipulator of space is best illustrated by the final encounter between these two kings. In an effort to win his kidnapped bride back from the heathen king, Rother allows Ymelot to capture him. Rother then uses the same cunning he had earlier employed in freeing his men from Constantine to now free himself and the princess from Ymelot.

“wir sulin hie vore gan
in ere des himiliskin koningis
3935 unde alles sinis heris,
daz her uns beide behode
durch sin othmote
von der heidenschefte,
die mit sinir crefte
3940 Moysen heiz gan
durch daz Rote Mere (56^v) vreissam
mit der Israhelischen diet:
dar nelevet ein barin nit
an des meres grunde:
3945 got, der hat gebundin
beide ovil unde guot,
swonnez widir ime *duot*!
iedoch si wir reckin
widir unsin *trehtin*,
3950 beide lutir unde licht,
her inlezi*t* uns under wege nit.

in sante Gilies namen:
so wil ich endeliche vore gan.”⁸⁷

⁸⁷ ““We should go forth here in honor of the heavenly king and all of his host, that he would protect us in his mercy from the heathens, who with his might called Moses to go through the terrible Red Sea with the people of Israel: no one would have survived the sea floor: God, who has bound both evil and good, even when it goes against his will! But if we are warriors both pure and light towards our lord, he will not forsake us. In St. Giles’ name, I will finally go forth.””

With these lines, the hero clearly displays his faith in God to see him through this final encounter with Ymelot.⁸⁸ More importantly, though, the poet also reminds his readers of God's mastery over geographic realms. Just as God had led the Israelites out of Egypt, so, too, will He guide and protect Rother and his men. Rother's own ability to move freely into, out of, and even within different places echoes this aspect of the divine. This somewhat belated emphasis on the religious aspects of Rother's quest comes to the foreground in his confrontations with Ymelot more so than with Constantine because Constantinople is depicted as a geographic gray area situated between Christendom and Heathendom.⁸⁹ The connection between the human and divine is emphasized again in the last lines of the poem. Rother's final manipulation of space occurs when he and his wife remove themselves to a cloister in preparation for their last journey, their arrival in the kingdom of Heaven. As the poem closes, Rother has saved his men from Constantine and has freed himself and his bride from Ymelot; now he makes one final escape.

Rother's marriage to and subsequent rescuing of Constantine's daughter represent, then, both the successful completion of his quest and a symbolic mastery over all of the spaces in the poem. The union between the two demonstrates both Rother's eminence over Constantine, who is forced to cede his authority over his daughter to her new husband, and his dominance over all other suitors, including Ymelot and his son. Thus, through the journeys the hero undertakes, he is able to fulfill his quest and simultaneously prove his superior virtue and strength.

⁸⁸ This parallels scenes in both *Orendel* and *Oswald*, but the heroes in each of those texts rely more on divine intervention to aid them throughout their journeys; Rother relies more on his own wit and talents than on heavenly aid.

⁸⁹ Both *Orendel* and *Oswald* also engage in battles with "heathens," and encounters with the Muslim world—including participating in the Crusades—play a much larger role in *Orendel* and *Oswald* than they do here in *Rother*.

CHAPTER 2

ORENDEL

Introduction and Summary of the Text

The *Spielmannsepos Orendel*, which has traditionally been dated to the late 12th century, stands as an intriguing example of Middle High German literature. Because the rules of chivalry and courtesy were still being shaped at the time, both in society and in literature, a certain variety of ideas and fluctuation of form is evident in many early texts, particularly the *Spielmannsepen*. As a representative of those epics, *Orendel* comprises a wide assortment of themes, images, characters, and plot devices that much of the literature of the High Middle Ages simply does not contain. The *Spielmannsepen* are often described as lacking the polish and structure of their better-known, more widely-read counterparts, and because of this, they—with the possible exception of *Herzog Ernst*—have not become part of the traditional canon of medieval German masterpieces. For years, in fact, many scholars systematically avoided analyzing these texts as literature, choosing instead only to study their linguistic qualities or to document their singular peculiarities. W.P. Ker, for example, noted in 1897 that “*Orendel* is a confused and rambling story, belonging to one of the lowest orders of medieval romance, the hack-work of the professional minstrels.”⁹⁰

Whoever the anonymous *Orendel* poet was, he based his text in large part on legends surrounding the Holy Coat (the seamless garment worn by Christ at the time of His crucifixion), which toured the city of Trier as a relic in the early 16th century.⁹¹ Indeed, the poem opens with a

⁹⁰ W.P. Ker, “Notes on *Orendel* and Other Stories,” *Folklore* 8, no. 4 (Dec. 1897), 289.

⁹¹ The Holy Coat is also sometimes referred to as the Holy Robe.

summary of the history of the Holy Coat,⁹² and the introductory scenes link the people, the locations, and the events of the Crucifixion with the later adventures of the poem. The epic also serves in many ways as an effort to legitimize Trier (versus its rival claimant Argenteuil in France) as the reliquary site of the genuine Holy Coat and, thus, as a worthy pilgrimage destination.⁹³ In his discussion of the background of *Orendel*, Curschmann notes that the poet “dokumentiert die Authentizität des (in Wirklichkeit roten) Rocks und seinen Weg nach Trier, in Parallele zur Kreuzfindungslegende um die H[eilige] Helena, an die man in Trier auch die ‘offizielle’ Rocklegende geknüpft hatte.”⁹⁴ The poet integrates such events and beliefs about the Holy Coat in Trier as the framework of his tale.

Beyond basing his narrative on the legend of the Holy Coat, the *Orendel* poet also incorporates elements of the story of Apollonius of Tyre. The basic story of Apollonius is that of a man who flees his home after revealing another man’s incestuous relationship; his forced travels lead to many adventures and to an eventual reconciliation with his family whom he had believed dead. As Elizabeth Archibald notes:

The *Historia Apollonii* is a unique example of a ‘novel’ from late antiquity which was known and enjoyed throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, and maintained unbroken popularity and an almost unchanging plot from the fifth century to the seventeenth, and beyond.⁹⁵

⁹² Hans Steinger, ed., *Orendel* (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1935), lines 1-156. All citations of the text are taken from this edition.

⁹³ Friedrich Lauchert, "Holy Coat," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 7 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07400b.htm>.

⁹⁴ Michael Curschmann, “Orendel,” *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1977), 44.

⁹⁵ Elizabeth Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991), 3.

The great popularity of the Apollonius material is attested in numerous Latin and vernacular versions.⁹⁶ It is quite likely that the *Orendel* poet was both familiar with and influenced by some version of the Apollonius tale, perhaps even the medieval French poem *Jourdain de Blaivies*. According to Hans Steinger, “[d]em deutschen Orendel hat eine verlorene Fassung des Apolloniusromans als Quelle gedient, die dem französischen Roman *Jourdain de Blaivies* in manchen Zügen näherstand als den erhaltenen lateinischen Fassungen.”⁹⁷ Citing Ehrismann’s skepticism regarding this connection, Curschmann states that “[d]as Verhältnis zur französischen Bearbeitung ‘*Jourdain de Blaivies*’ ist nach wie vor nicht geklärt, genauso wenig wie überhaupt das Fortleben des spätantiken Romans in der mittelalterlichen Epik.”⁹⁸

Whether or not the *Orendel* poet was influenced by such texts, he does offer versions of the traditional epic motifs like the hero’s journey and a bridal quest. The mixing of these narrative threads provides many points of comparison with the other *Spielmannsepen*. The religious motifs are easily seen in both *Orendel* and *Oswald*, as each text relies heavily on saints, miracles, and relics to forward its story. The connection with *Herzog Ernst* is not as clear cut, but the Holy Coat could, perhaps, be compared to the *Waise*—a precious stone discovered by Ernst that ultimately becomes the central stone in the crown of the Holy Roman Emperor. As Curschmann states, “So wird denn auch der Rock in einer Abenteuerfahrt ähnlich der Ernsts

⁹⁶ Ibid., 48. The German vernacular tradition includes at least three extant prose versions from the 15th century and a more notable Middle High German iteration: Heinrich von Neustadt’s early-14th-century *Apollonius von Tyrland*, which embellishes Apollonius’ adventures and contains over 20,000 lines. Due to their relatively late dates, these particular texts were probably not known to the *Orendel* poet, but they do point to a proliferation of the Apollonius material throughout the Middle Ages.

⁹⁷ Hans Steinger, “Einleitung,” *Orendel* (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1935), XIV.

⁹⁸ Curschmann, “*Spielmannsepik*”- *Wege und Ergebnisse*, 18.

gewonnen [...], mit abenteuerlicher, im Gegensatz zu den Brautfahrten beschriebener Ausfahrt und zielbewußter, geographisch orientierter Rückkehr.”⁹⁹ One key distinction between *Orendel* and *Ernst* is, of course, that *Orendel* develops into a bridal quest. Additionally, the valued object in *Orendel* carries great religious significance, whereas the valued object in *Ernst* holds important political weight. Finally, the parallels between *Orendel* and *Rother* and *Salman und Morolf* can be found not only in the bridal quests, but also in the adaptive history of the texts. All three of these poems involve important historical figures whose stories are reworked through the *Spielmannsepen*. In *Orendel*, for example, we see a connection to St. Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine; in *Rother*, the hero marries the daughter of Constantine and becomes the grandfather of Charlemagne, and *Salman* presents an Old Testament king as a Christian hero.

These general observations about the poem’s narrative structure, its historical context, and its parallels to other *Spielmannsepen* raise a number of questions and issues that will be addressed later in this chapter. First, though, a summary of the poem offers a starting point and a foundation for those further discussions.

As stated above, *Orendel* opens with a history of the Holy Coat. Lines 1-18 are an invocation, a prayer of thanksgiving to both Christ and Mary. After this opening, the poem shifts, and we briefly see Mary spinning wool and St. Helena (Empress Helena) weaving it into the Holy Coat. With this introductory scene, the poet seems to draw on several sources that link St. Helena with the donation of relics to the Church in Trier, including the *Gesta Trevorium* (1105), Almannus of Hautervilliers’ panegyric of St. Helena (880), and an ivory tablet from Trier’s cathedral treasury (ca. 5th-6th century).¹⁰⁰ Though brief, the scene with Mary and St. Helena also plays on an ecclesiastical link that had been established in Late Antiquity between the two

⁹⁹ Ibid., 80.

¹⁰⁰ Lauchert, "Holy Coat," *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

female figures. Andriani Georgiou credits St. Ambrose, the 4th-century bishop, with cementing Helena's legacy as a key figure in spreading Christianity throughout the realm, in stopping the persecution of Christians, and in preserving relics of the faith.¹⁰¹

These historical and poetic origins of the Holy Coat also add an extra layer of importance to the garment, for we learn that the fact that Jesus wore the Robe is not the only reason it becomes a valuable relic; its connections to Mary and St. Helena also bear significance. The *Orendel* poet offers his readers the entire history of the Holy Coat, including its creation by these two saintly women. After describing the women's spinning and weaving, the poet goes on to detail how Jesus wore the Coat and how, after His death, an elderly Jewish man received it but was forced by Herod to seal it in a stone casket and throw it in the sea because he could not remove the blood stains from it.

There is no doubt that the poet takes certain liberties with the story of the Holy Coat in these opening scenes, but it is not until lines 88-156 that he reveals the truly fantastical nature of the poem. First, a siren breaks open the stone casket and buries the Holy Coat on the shore; then, after nine years, a pilgrim—Tragemunt—finds and recognizes the still bloodstained Coat and throws it back in the ocean, deeming himself unworthy to wear it.¹⁰² Finally, a whale swallows the garment, and it stays inside the animal for eight years. Overall, the opening scenes introduce both the religious themes and the “Spielmann-esque” elements that recur throughout the rest of the poem. The poet also establishes a quick pace and an episodic structure that the rest of the narrative follows.

¹⁰¹ Andriani Georgiou, “Helena: The Subversive Persona of an Ideal Christian Empress in Early Byzantium,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 21, no. 4 (Winter 2013), 597-624.

¹⁰² Pilgrims also play a significant role in *Oswald*; see chapter 3.

After presenting the early history of the Holy Coat, the poet introduces the hero Orendel, the third son of King Ougel of Trier.¹⁰³ As the youngest son, he is not his father's direct heir; however, because he does not bear that responsibility, Orendel is later able to play another important role:

175 ime wart underdan daz [heilige] grap *unsers heren*
und daz lant zu Jerusaleme.
in zoch der kunic, daz ist war,
volleclichen uf druzehen jar . . .
do entphinc er sin swert zware.
[...]
185 er sprach: “hude han ich entphangen sware
min swert uf [der kunigin] sant Marie gnade,
daz sie mir helfe uf diser erde,
das ich [ein guder ritter *und*] *ein rehter rihter* werde
uber widewen und weisen[.]”¹⁰⁴

Even before his journey, we can see that the hero has dedicated himself to the service of Mary and to the protection of widows and orphans. This scene takes place on St. Stephen's Day, which plants the idea of martyrdom and sacrifice early on in the poem. Such religious motifs blend with “Spielmann-esque” elements throughout *Orendel*, and the poet juxtaposes them with fantastical components to create an unusual mixture of levity and earnestness.

Beyond these preliminaries, it is ultimately Orendel's desire for a worthy bride that acts as the catalyst for the action in this epic. Ougel suggests that his son wed Bride, the Lady of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Traditional belief placed the location of the Holy Sepulchre at the site of the Crucifixion, and as the Holy Coat is also bound to the Crucifixion, it seems that the

¹⁰³ Lines 157-192.

¹⁰⁴ “The holy sepulchre of our lord and the land of Jerusalem were subject to him. The king raised him, it is true, until he was thirteen; and then he received his sword in truth. [...] He spoke: “today I have received with difficulty my sword on the mercy of the queen St. Mary, that she would help me on this earth, so that I would become a worthy knight and a just ruler over widows and orphans.”

poet has introduced the two as balance for one another. Indeed, as the story unfolds, the Tomb and Coat become inexorably linked through the figures of Orendel and Bride. Perhaps, then, the seemingly innocent introduction of Bride and the hero's quest for a bride are actually masking a "wedding" of greater significance.

Once Orendel decides to undertake the journey to Jerusalem to woo Bride, it takes more than two years for him to prepare. Finally, seventy-two ships—along with eight kings (each with a thousand knights) and dukes, counts, bishops, and a thousand more knights—set sail; they take along a pair of golden spurs and a golden depiction of the Crucifixion as an offering to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, the fleet gets caught in the "Kleber-" or "Lebermeer" and is unable to escape for three years;¹⁰⁶ they are finally freed as a result of Mary's prayers and God's intervention. Once their journey continues, Orendel and his men conquer the heathen king Belian in a sea battle, but before they can reach Jerusalem, a storm destroys all of the ships, and only Orendel survives.¹⁰⁷ These events occur at the same brisk narrative pace established early on, and they foreshadow the many challenges the hero will face on his quest.

After a naked Orendel washes ashore, he lies in the sand for three days until he is discovered by the fisher Ise, who—because Orendel masquerades as a fisher himself—challenges the hero to prove he is a real fisherman and not a pirate.¹⁰⁸ Once again, God aids

¹⁰⁵ This parallels a similar voyage-preparation scene in *Oswald*.

¹⁰⁶ Based on classical authors like Tacitus, the medieval "Kleber-" or "Lebermeer" is a coagulated sea in the north that traps ships that attempt to sail through it.

¹⁰⁷ Lines 193-514.

¹⁰⁸ The three days Orendel lies in the sand parallel the three days between Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection, and this scene serves as a symbolic resurrection or rebirth for the hero.

Orendel, and not only does he get many fish, but he also catches a whale. The Holy Coat is discovered in the stomach of this whale, and the still-unclothed Orendel asks Ise if he can buy the Coat from him. Since he has nothing to pay with, though, God performs a miracle and makes the Coat appear old and worn, so Ise agrees to sell it for thirty pennies (which an angel brings to Orendel). Once this transaction has taken place, Orendel resumes his journey to the Holy Sepulchre, now clothed in the Holy Coat. He is attacked and imprisoned by heathens along the way, but the angels Gabriel, Raphael, and Michael free him and set him on his way again.¹⁰⁹ This series of events demonstrates over and over again that Orendel is a good Christian hero, and—in keeping with classical epic tradition—he clearly has a particular destiny to fulfill and can rely on divine intervention to achieve it.

The next part of the story details Orendel's battles and other struggles in Jerusalem and also depicts how he wins the hand of Bride.¹¹⁰ When Orendel first arrives in Jerusalem, a knight he encounters addresses him as Herr Grauer Rock, and this becomes the name he is known by. Although Orendel does not deliberately attempt to disguise himself in the same way that Rother, for example, hides his identity, the results are similar; Orendel is not initially recognized for who he is, rather for who he appears to be. A tournament is taking place in the city, and Orendel borrows a horse and armor from the heathen Mercian so that he can participate. Once again, though, Orendel is given holy assistance: An angel brings him golden shoes to wear in the tournament. During the event, Orendel defeats many other knights and, in the process, is able to demonstrate his riding and fighting skills for Bride, who is watching the battles. The Templars, who are also at the tournament, bring the giant Mentwin to fight Orendel, but the hero defeats

¹⁰⁹ Lines 595-847.

¹¹⁰ Lines 848-1866.

him, too.¹¹¹ Then, with the help of the three archangels, Orendel defeats twelve kings. The hero's victories throughout the competition demonstrate his worthiness and strength, but perhaps more importantly, they show once more that he has divine power on his side.

While the tournament challenges are taking place, Bride learns Orendel's true identity, but when she offers him the respect and honor due the son of King Ougel, he denies his parentage and continues to fight. Just as the poet introduces Orendel by outlining the hero's virtues, so too does he establish Bride's worthiness by describing her repeatedly as "die schonste ob allen wiben," "edel[e] kuniginne," and "vil schone maget lobesam."¹¹² In her virtuousness and her position as the Lady of the Holy Sepulchre, Bride proves to be a fitting match for the hero, and demonstrating a great deal of agency, she recognizes their suitability and acts swiftly, saying,

'der sal hie min here wesen,
1470 er sal ouch wesen kunic und here
uber [daz] lant und burg zu Jerusaleme.
sint ir der selbe jungelinc,
so sullent ir mir wilkomen sin.'¹¹³

There is little time for traditional courtship because the city and Sepulchre are repeatedly threatened, but Orendel—or Herr Grauer Rock—overcomes all challenges.¹¹⁴ As these encounters unfold, it seems, then, that the fulfillment of Orendel's bridal quest is less important

¹¹¹ Lines 1201-1441.

¹¹² Respectively, lines 1443, 1485, 1573, 1645, 1782, and 1796; lines 1441 and 1614; lines 1523 and 1579. "the most beautiful of all women" and "noble queen" and "very beautiful and praiseworthy maiden."

¹¹³ "He shall be my lord here, he shall also be king and lord over the land and fortress of Jerusalem. If you are the same young man, so shall you be welcome to me."

¹¹⁴ Similarities can be seen between Orendel's courtship and the marriage of Gahmuret and Belakane in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*.

than his role as a protector and defender of the Holy City. For example, instead of claiming his place as Bride's husband, the hero battles another heathen giant, Liberian, and his army and conquers them with the help of the Sword of David and the three angels. Only after this great victory does Bride adorn Orendel with splendid clothes and crown him with the Crown of David.

After the coronation, Bride and Orendel enter her chamber and are greeted by an angel who announces to them that they have to wait nine years before they will be permitted to love (*minnen*) one another. In response, the hero lays a sword between himself and Bride.¹¹⁵ This action echoes one of the opening scenes in the chapel in Trier when Orendel lays his sword at the feet of the icon of Mary, and it also foreshadows the course of the hero and heroine's relationship.¹¹⁶

After the initial tournament, challenges, and wooing in Jerusalem, a number of difficult battles against the heathens ensue. These scenes, which make up just over one quarter of the entire epic, draw many of the previous threads of the story together, but they also send the story in new directions. First, Orendel fights the giant Pelian, and he is only able to win with Bride's help. This marks a shift from the divine intervention of the angels, for example, that Orendel relies on earlier in the poem, and it also emphasizes the great degree of Bride's agency in the text. Once the couple defeats Pelian, the heathens are baptized, and Orendel—who had still been disguised as Herr Grauer Rock—reveals his own identity:

Do sprach der Grawe Roc:
[...]
[“]Ich furte von Triere
2170 zwene und sibenzic kiele,
die sint mir alle versunken,
[und] in dem wilden mer erdrunken.

¹¹⁵ Lines 1442-1886.

¹¹⁶ It also calls to mind a similar scene between Tristan and Isolde in Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*.

werent mir bliben die selben man,
sie weren mir [alle] mit druwen bi bestan.”
2175 do sprach [die edele] frouw Bride,
die schonste ob allen wiben:
“sint ir der kunic Orendel,
so hat uch got zu mir gesendet,
so ist mir liep sicherlichen,
2180 daz ich uch mit druwen nit bin entwichen.”¹¹⁷

In response to this revelation, the Templars all begin to pay homage to him, but then the fisher Ise appears, claiming that his servant—Orendel—had run away. Ise believes that Orendel owes him gold and sables for his wife, and ultimately, Ise is named Duke of the Holy Sepulchre.¹¹⁸

Afterwards, Ise calls for a campaign against Westfalen, and the army—including Orendel—spends three years in its siege. At one point, Orendel gets too close to the city walls and is caught on a hook and dragged up over the walls. With the assistance of the dwarf Alban, Bride is able to free Orendel, and on their return to Jerusalem, they conquer seventy-two kings in Babylonia. More enemies emerge in Jerusalem, as the heathen kings and brothers Elin and Durian attack with twenty thousand men, but with the help of the angel Gabriel, Orendel and his knights are ultimately victorious. As had happened earlier, the heathens are all baptized after their defeat.¹¹⁹ Throughout these confrontations and resolutions, the hero and heroine function more as equals than one might expect, and each contributes greatly to the many military actions—and victories—of the poem.

¹¹⁷ “Then spoke the Gray Robe: [...] ‘I traveled from Trier with two and seventy ships that have all sunk and drowned in the wild sea. If these men had survived, they would have loyally stood by me.’ Then spoke the noble lady Bride, the most beautiful of all women: ‘If you are the king Orendel, then God has sent you to me, and it is surely dear to me, that I out of loyalty did not leave you.’”

¹¹⁸ Lines 1867-2373.

¹¹⁹ Lines 2374-2877.

Although the next section of the story really is a continuation of the battles against the heathens, it marks an important turning point in the story of the Holy Coat.¹²⁰ After the second group of heathens were baptized in Jerusalem, an angel appears and tells Orendel that Trier has been besieged, so Orendel, Bride, Ise, and their army depart immediately. Their course takes them through Bari, Apulia, Rome, and Metz, and the heathens outside of Trier are easily defeated and baptized. Orendel and his companions remain in Trier for fourteen days, but Bride dreams that the Holy Sepulchre has been attacked, so they hide the Holy Coat in a stone casket and depart for Jerusalem. Here the poet's account of the Holy Coat diverges from the other legends recorded in Trier which generally credit St. Helena with delivering the Coat to the city. The *Orendel* poet had already depicted St. Helena as the creator (along with Mary) of the Coat, but Orendel and Bride are credited with bearing the garment from the Holy Land to the city of Trier.

The final section of the poem recounts new battles against the heathens for the Holy Sepulchre.¹²¹ On their return trip, Orendel, Bride, Ise, and their army travel back to Bari and then to Acre. From here, Bride disguises herself as a pilgrim so that she might enter Jerusalem undetected. In spite of this, she is captured by King Minolt and taken to Babylon, where she is tortured for refusing to marry him. In some ways, this development parallels the double bridal quest narratives of *Rother* and *Salman und Morolf*, but the degree of Bride's independence and agency far exceeds that of either Constantine's daughter or of Salme, and she constantly contributes not only to her own defense, but also to that of the people around her.¹²² Before

¹²⁰ Lines 1867-2877.

¹²¹ Lines 3213-3937.

¹²² This is one of the ways Bride differs from Paug, who is more closely aligned with the Saracen princess motifs of medieval literature.

Orendel and Ise can set off to free Bride, a pilgrim informs them that the heathens have placed seventy-two idols around the Holy Sepulchre. The two men and their army conquer the heathens in Babylon, kill King Minolt, burn the fortress, and then return to Acre. Once more, Bride disguises herself and re-enters Jerusalem. She is recognized again by a guard named Wolfhart, but this time she is able to defend herself by decapitating the guard. Bride quickly sends a messenger to Orendel and Ise, and the Christian army attacks and wins back the Holy Sepulchre.

The story ends with Bride and Orendel once more in their chamber, where they are greeted by another angel who tells them that they may never love (*minnen*) one another and that they will only live for another half of a year and two days. After this, both Orendel and Bride—along with Ise and Duke Achille, a guard of the Holy Sepulchre—retire to a cloister and are eventually led to heaven by angels. The epic concludes as it began: with a prayer.¹²³

Manuscript Tradition

Orendel is an approximately 4000-line legend and adventure story. The text had survived in only one Alsatian manuscript (H) whose signature was dated 1477.¹²⁴ This manuscript had been housed in the Johanniterbibliothek and subsequently in the Stadtbibliothek in Straßburg. The single extant manuscript was, however, destroyed by a fire in 1870, and this version now exists only as an *Abdruck* by von der Hagen (1844) and as an *Abschrift* by Engelhardt (1818). Two later versions of the story, both from 1512, include a printing by Hans Froschauer (D) and a prose version printed by Hanns Othmar (P).¹²⁵ The date of these printings is significant because

¹²³ Lines 3906-3937.

¹²⁴ Steinger, “Einleitung,” *Orendel*, III.

¹²⁵ Curschmann, “Orendel,” *Verfasserlexikon*, 43; Schröder, *Spielmannsepik*, 59.

this is the same year that the high altar of the Trier cathedral was opened and the Holy Coat and other relics were found inside. There is no record of the altar being opened between the time that the Coat was enshrined in the late 12th century and 1512.

In that year, in accordance with the wish of the Emperor Maximilian I, on the occasion of the holding of a Diet at Trier, [the Holy Coat] was taken from its resting-place in the altar on 14 April by the archbishop, Richard von Greifenklau, and on 3 May, and for many days after, solemnly shown to the assembled princes and people.¹²⁶

It does not seem unreasonable, then, to assume that the two 1512 printings of *Orendel* were linked in some way to the opening of the altar and the displaying of the Holy Coat.

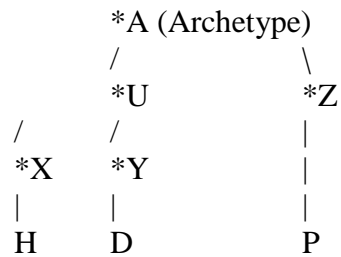
Most scholars believe that these printings and the now-lost manuscript are much younger than the epic itself, and Steinger credits 19th-century scholars Harkensee and Berger for their efforts in reconstructing a possible manuscript history for *Orendel*.¹²⁷ Their conclusion, which Steinger reiterates, is that the two print versions D and P and the manuscript H all seem to have come from different parent manuscripts. The manuscript H and the print D both likely descended from Middle German manuscripts (*X and *Y), and—based on the similar dialects in which they are written—they appear to be two generations removed from a single manuscript (*U), possibly written in an Upper German dialect.¹²⁸ This *U manuscript and the presumed precursor to the P printing (*Z) are thought to have come from the same late 12th-century parent manuscript (*A –

¹²⁶ Lauchert, Friedrich. "Holy Coat," *Catholic Encyclopedia*. For further discussion, see pages 68-69.

¹²⁷ Steinger, "Einleitung," *Orendel*, VI; See also: Heinrich Harkensee, *Untersuchungen über das Spielmannsgedicht 'Orendel'* (Dissertation: University of Kiel, 1879); Arnold E. Berger, *Orendel. Ein deutsches Spielmannsgedicht mit Einleitung und Anmerkungen* (Bonn: E. Weber, 1888).

¹²⁸ Steinger, "Einleitung," *Orendel*, VI.

Archetype).¹²⁹ Based on Steinger and his predecessors' theories, the *Orendel* manuscript family tree looks something like this:¹³⁰



According to Steinger, the *A manuscript is generally believed to have been written in a Middle German dialect in the late 12th or early 13th century, with at least one 13th-century reworking and multiple subsequent versions in the later Middle Ages.¹³¹ Helmut de Boor and other scholars, however, date the original text to the 14th or even 15th century.¹³² Curschmann asserts his opinion against de Boor's theory of the poem's original date, stating that everything from the language and structure to the themes of the poem are all in favor of a much earlier date, possibly 1250-1300.¹³³ Although this date is later than Steinger's, it is still much earlier than de Boor's, and both Steinger and Curschmann make compelling arguments based on the poem's language and structures for an earlier composition date. While it does seem logical that the few extant versions of the *Orendel* story could have stemmed from the same manuscript ancestor, there is simply too little evidence upon which to base any solid conclusions.

¹²⁹ Ibid., IV-VIII; Schröder, *Spielmannsepik*, 59.

¹³⁰ Steinger, "Einleitung," *Orendel*, VII.

¹³¹ Ibid., IX and XII.

¹³² Helmut de Boor, *Die deutsche Literatur: Texte und Zeugnisse* vol. I of *Mittelalter* (Munich: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1965), 330-350.

¹³³ Curschmann, "*Spielmannsepik*" - *Wege und Ergebnisse*, 15-16; Curschmann, "Orendel," *Verfasserlexikon*. 44.

The scant manuscript evidence for *Orendel*, which Curschmann characterizes as the most poorly documented of all the *Spielmannsepen*, also does not provide editors much evidence on which to base their editions, and most modern versions of the poem are simply reprints of older editions.¹³⁴ Hans Steinger's 1935 edition of *Orendel* is the most widely-used version today, but it is problematic because in it, he attempts to reconstruct the presumed language of the archetypal *Orendel* (*A) rather than to present the text as it exists in the extant manuscripts. Despite acknowledging that “*A selbst wird uns sprachlich nicht greifbar,” Steinger later states, “[w]o es möglich schien, habe ich versucht, *A wiederherzustellen.”¹³⁵ Georg Baesecke employed the same fundamental editorial process in his 1907 edition of *Oswald*, which has since fallen out of favor among scholars. Unfortunately, no new authoritative edition of *Orendel* has been published since Steinger, so we must continue to use it despite its flaws. It is important to keep both the lack of manuscript evidence and the shortcomings of Steinger's edition in mind as we examine the text.

“Spielmann-esque” Motifs and Genre Discussion

As noted in the summary above, the *Orendel* poet has included many “Spielmann-like” elements in his text. The fantastical and comedic elements, the swift pace, and the episodic structure all contribute to a certain levity in the poem. While the poet does touch on many serious religious and political issues, there is little opportunity or time to dwell on them. For example, the pattern of miraculous intervention, which is established very early on in the story, contributes

¹³⁴ Curschmann, “*Spielmannsepik*” - *Wege und Ergebnisse*, 14.

¹³⁵ Steinger, “Einleitung,” *Orendel*, VIII and XXX.

to an overall lightness of tone that is typical for *Spielmannsepik*, and it prevents any serious harm from befalling the hero.¹³⁶

With the exception of Ise and his wife, the characters also do not demonstrate any great depth or growth; the poet presents the hero and heroine as good and virtuous, for instance, and those characterizations sustain them throughout the poem. In this way, *Orendel*—and the other *Spielmannsepen*—focus very much on the external lives and experiences of the characters. One result of having this sort of character in a text is that these figures have a great capacity to carry symbolic weight; readers do not value *Orendel* and *Bride* as individuals, rather they admire the virtues the couple represents.

While *Orendel* shares several traits with the other texts that have traditionally been labeled *Spielmannsepik*, it is important to note that such a designation was often made not because a text had certain qualities that placed it solidly in the *Spielmannsepik* category, but rather because it lacked the qualities that would place it in any other genre of epic. In other words, poems like *Orendel* simply did not fit anywhere else.

The variety of adventures the hero and his associates find themselves in is one of the ways that *Orendel* resembles the other *Spielmannsepen*. In the case of *Orendel*, the poem's many narrative threads have a tendency to become somewhat tangled, but it should be acknowledged that the textual intricacies are all ultimately resolved. The very qualities that Ker viewed as weaknesses are those that I contend represent the epic's greatest strengths, for in its complexity there exists an abundance of potential.¹³⁷ Whether purposefully or not, the anonymous *Orendel* poet has captured a world in flux, a world on the precipice of courtly conformity. Among other

¹³⁶ The frequently-occurring wonders in *Oswald* have a similar effect.

¹³⁷ See page 52.

things, the 12th century brought about Crusades, the Concordat of Worms, the establishment of new monastic and knightly orders, the reconstruction and dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the reign of Friedrich Barbarossa, the secularization of education, and the founding of the first universities. European awareness of and contact with both the Eastern Church and with Islam increased dramatically during this time. This is the world in and about which pre-courtly poets were writing, and the *Orendel* poet has captured its chaos and its possibility. The poem contains countless twists and turns and a great variety of characters, disguises, miracles, relics, and narrative devices, and readers soon learn that anything could happen. The world of possibility that the poet has created through the hero's adventures is the very thing that makes *Orendel* a masterpiece of pre-courtly potential.

Even more specifically, though, the *Orendel* poet engages in an active dialogue about the history of the Holy Coat as a relic in the Trier cathedral.¹³⁸ As Curschmann notes, *Orendel* was likely composed around the same time that the seamless Holy Coat of Christ was placed in the high altar of the cathedral at Trier and while many battles over the Holy Sepulchre were taking place.¹³⁹ The important dates associated with the Holy Coat in Trier in the Middle Ages correlate (notably, but perhaps coincidentally) with the presumed dates of the original *Orendel* manuscripts and later printings. As Erich Aretz, et al. describe it:

Erstmals erwähnt wird der Heilige Rock im 11. Jahrhundert; sicher belegt ist die Geschichte des Heiligen Rockes erst ab dem 12. Jahrhundert, als er am 1. Mai 1196 vom Westchor in den neuen Altar des Ostchors gebracht wurde.

Im Jahr 1512: Öffnung des Hochaltars in Gegenwart von Kaiser Maximilian unter Erzbischof Richard von Greiffenklau und erste Wallfahrt zum Heiligen Rock[.]¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ See page 64.

¹³⁹ Curschmann, "Orendel," *Verfasserlexikon*, 44.

¹⁴⁰ Erich Aretz, Michael Embach, Martin Persch, and Franz Ronig, eds., *Der heilige Rock zu Trier: Studien zur Geschichte und Verehrung der Tunika Christi* (Trier: Paulinus, 1996).

As mentioned above, it seems plausible that the poet could have been inspired by the situation in Trier in the 11th or 12th centuries, and it seems likely that the great number of pilgrimages at the beginning of the 16th century could have prompted both the early printing of the poem (D) and the prose version (P) of it.

Beyond the connection between the text and the events occurring in Trier in the Middle Ages, there is also a strong link between *Orendel* and the circumstances surrounding Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre. Several different structures had been built and destroyed over the centuries since Constantine had dedicated the original edifice in Jerusalem in 336, but in 1168, Crusaders built a basilica that stood on the site of the Tomb until 1808.¹⁴¹ Another parallel between the fictional events depicted in *Orendel* and historical events that actually occurred in Jerusalem can be seen in Godfrey of Bouillon, a Frankish Crusader who was offered the kingship of the city in 1099. Godfrey himself would not accept the title of “king” and instead chose to be called the *Advocatus Sancti Sepulchri* (“Defender of the Holy Sepulchre”).¹⁴²

Despite the clear historical and religious threads that are woven into the epic, the *Orendel* poet has not given the text a serious tone. Instead, the tone is light and the language and poetic structure lack polish. According to Steinger:

Spielmannsdichtung arbeitet mit gegebenen Mitteln und in der Regel ohne künstlerischen Ehrgeiz. Was mit einmal geformten Worten gesagt werden kann, dafür bemüht sie sich nicht um neue. Um Wirkung zu erreichen, ist jedes Mittel recht, darüber hinaus geschieht nichts; und im Grunde ist ihr einziger Vorzug eine gewisse Findigkeit im Aufspüren der

¹⁴¹ Arthur McMahon, "Holy Sepulchre," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 7 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07425a.htm>.

¹⁴² Jonathan Riley-Smith, ed., *The Oxford History of the Crusades* (Oxford: University Press, 2002). The title *Advocatus Sancti Sepulchri* is a legal term and not a military one. For a more detailed discussion of Godfrey and the power dynamics in Jerusalem during his reign, see John Gordon Rowe, “Paschal II and the Relation between the Spiritual and Temporal Powers in the Kingdom of Jerusalem,” *Speculum* 32, no. 3 (Jul. 1957), 474.

leicht erreichbaren Wirkung. Für dies Verfahren kann der Orendel als Ganzes geradezu als Musterbeispiel dienen.¹⁴³

In other words, *Orendel* can be seen as the quintessential version of the imperfect genre of *Spielmannsepik*.

Development of the Hero and Heroine

Of the *Spielmannsepen* discussed in this study, *Orendel* presents a hero and heroine whose roles are equally important to the development of the story.¹⁴⁴ The poet does not focus solely on the male protagonist, nor does he add only brief moments with the main female character. Instead, he presents the two leads as equally significant, and that significance comes not from their relationship to one another, but from the complementary ideas that they represent in the text. Orendel is Herr Grauer Rock, and Bride is the Lady of the Holy Sepulchre; in many ways, then, this poem depicts the wedding of these two sacred symbols.

This marriage is brought about over the course of the hero's journey, which is one of the most prevalent narrative devices in *Orendel*. The hero Orendel, his wife Bride—the Lady of the Holy Sepulchre—and Fisher Ise—who becomes the Duke of the Holy Sepulchre—all journey from city to city and land to land both as genuine *and* as disguised travelers, pilgrims, and Crusaders. It is, in fact, the hero's initial journey, Orendel's ostensibly straightforward bridal quest from Trier to Jerusalem, which instigates all of the ensuing action in the epic. While quests, in general, are a practically ubiquitous aspect of medieval epic, and bridal quests, in particular, are also a fairly common element—especially in the 12th century, as Theodore

¹⁴³ Steinger, "Einleitung," *Orendel*, XXVIII.

¹⁴⁴ *Oswald* follows, while *Rother* has the least balance between the central male and female figures.

Andersson has noted—Orendel’s journey to Jerusalem and all of his subsequent travels result in a rather unexpected outcome: A chaste marriage.¹⁴⁵

While Orendel does complete his quest to win a bride for himself, he does not consummate his relationship with her, so there can be no earthly heir. In fact, each time Orendel and Bride retire together an angel appears and prevents them from becoming physically intimate:¹⁴⁶

er sprach: ‘horstu, kunic Orendel,
mich hat got und sin muder zu dir gesendet,
daz du keiner slahte minne
1840 mit frouw Briden salt gewinnen
biz von hude uber nun jar,
daz gebudet dir got, daz ist war.’¹⁴⁷

er sprach: ‘horstu, kunic Orendel?
mich hat got und sin muder zu dir gesendet,
daz du keiner slahte minne
3915 mit frouw Briden salt beginnen:
ir sullent nit lenger leben, daz ist war,
dan zwene dage und ein halp jar,
so wil ich uch bede nemelich
furen in daz frone himelrich.’¹⁴⁸

In most cases, the completion of a bridal quest serves to unite two families or lands and to provide a suitable mother for the hero’s children, as in *Rother*, for example. Orendel and Bride,

¹⁴⁵ Theodore M. Andersson, “Composition and Literary Culture in ‘Þiðreks saga,’” in *Studien zum Altgermanischen. Festschrift für Heinrich Beck*, ed. by Heiko Uecker (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1994), 21.

¹⁴⁶ Similar scenes can be found in *Oswald*.

¹⁴⁷ “He spoke: ‘Listen, King Orendel, God and his mother have sent me to you, so that you shall have no physical love with Lady Bride from today through a year; God bids you to do this, it is true.’”

¹⁴⁸ The repetition in these lines is an example of a phenomenon that occurs throughout the text. “He spoke: ‘Do you hear, King Orendel? God and His mother have sent me to you, so that you shall have no physical love with Lady Bride: You shall not live longer, that is true, than two days and half a year, and then I will lead you both into the holy realm of heaven.’”

however, are denied the right or opportunity to consummate their marriage; therefore, the true function of this bridal quest cannot be ensuring the proper inheritance of titles, wealth, and lands. The poet first hints at the possibility that the hero's quest serves some purpose beyond ensuring proper succession when he introduces Orendel as the third son of King Ougel of Trier, and he does so again as Orendel first embarks upon his voyage. Orendel certainly has all of the characteristics of a true medieval hero, but as the third son of a still-living king, Orendel's responsibilities are different from those of someone like Rother who was already a king in his own right when he decided to seek a wife; therefore, Orendel's quest can be fulfilled in another way.

It is significant that Orendel's piety and devotion to Mary are established before he himself chooses to find a bride, but the importance of these lines is, perhaps, not fully understood until the poem's conclusion.¹⁴⁹ After his knighting ceremony on St. Stephen's Day, Orendel runs to a chapel and dedicates himself to the service of Mary (as previously outlined). St. Stephen's Day, which commemorates the first Christian martyr, falls directly after Christmas. The images evoked by the juxtaposition of the Virgin Mary, St. Stephen, and Christ Himself blend together the ideas of wonder, sacrifice, salvation, and love. These themes can be found throughout the poem, and the fact that Orendel promises to serve Mary and to protect widows and orphans foreshadows the hero's circumstances—his chaste marriage—at the conclusion of the text. By pledging (as all knights do) to defend widows and orphans, Orendel takes on the functions of husband, father, and king without participating in the physical intimacy normally required of

¹⁴⁹ Lines 170-190.

those roles.¹⁵⁰ In other words, he commits himself to an unconsummated relationship with those whom he has vowed to protect, and he does so in order to honor and serve Mary. Orendel has no physical relationship with any of the female figures he encounters; however, his pledge—which serves as a betrothal of sorts—binds him to them, thus creating a more enduring spiritual relationship.

Orendel's commitment to Mary and the widows and orphans precedes his bond with Bride, and it hints at the chaste nature of his future marriage. Directly after the hero makes his promise at the feet of the altar of Mary, he goes to his father and asks for his assistance in finding a true bride of his own, and the fact that these two events occur so close together connects them more strongly in the reader's mind. King Ougel knows of no suitable wife to whom Orendel is not related save Bride, the Lady of the Holy Sepulchre, and he advises Orendel of her worth and tells him how to woo her:

215 sie ist ein edel kunigin here
und ist gesezzen vil verre
uber des wilden sewes flut,
sie ist ein edel kunigin gut.
sie hat sich gezogen in wisdum
220 und hat doch werltlichen rum
vil gar an sich gewonnen:
sie ist aller frouwen ein wonne.
sie ist geheizen frouw Bride,
die schonste ob allen wiben.
225 ir dienet daz heilige grap
dar zu vil der heidenschaft.
mohte ich dir, drut sun, mit sinnen
die edele kunigin gewinnen,
du soltest werden nummer so here,
230 *dune* soltest dinen lip und [ouch] dine sele
oppenn dem [heiligen] grabe unsers heren.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ This passage also echoes traditional formulas, based in part on coronation rites, that were used in rituals of knighthood. A similar coronation takes place in *Oswald*. See: Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984).

Here the poet reemphasizes the theme of sacrifice and ties it to the idea of Orendel's eventual marriage to Bride. The poet also introduces imagery and language directly associated with Crusades and pilgrimages: The hero must cross the sea to the Holy Land where he will encounter heathens, and he is reminded both of necessary physical and spiritual sacrifice. These images are fitting since Bride is, after all, the Lady of the Holy Sepulchre, a site central to the Crusades. As his journey to Jerusalem begins, then, Orendel more closely resembles a pilgrim or a Crusader rather than a suitor, and his pledge to Mary emphasizes this role.

If Orendel seems more like a pilgrim than a lover, what are readers to make of his intended wife Bride? If she were simply described as beautiful, noble, powerful, and wise, she would still be truly remarkable. Through her ties to Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre, though, Bride becomes something more. On the one hand, her position as a woman who stands guard over Christ's tomb parallels the role filled by Mary Magdalene and other women after Christ's crucifixion. From this perspective, it seems fitting that the guardian of the Holy Sepulchre would be a woman, and there are also parallels between Bride and Melisende, Queen of Jerusalem.¹⁵² On the other hand, though, the status and power that Bride holds in Jerusalem would typically belong to men.¹⁵³ Soldier, ruler, defender, protector, and even pilgrim—as Diana Webb has

¹⁵¹ “She is a noble and proud queen and is seated very far across the wild flood of the sea, she is a noble and just queen. She raised herself in wisdom and has won worldly fame for herself: she is a delight of all women. She is called Lady Bride, the most beautiful of all women. She rules the Holy Sepulchre and much of heathendom. If I could win you the noble queen with wit, dear son, and then you shall never be so noble, but thou will sacrifice your life and also your soul to the Holy Sepulchre of our Lord.”

¹⁵² Melisende ruled from 1131-1153 and subsequently served as regent from 1153-1161.

¹⁵³ Including Godfrey of Bouillon; see page 83.

argued—are almost always masculine labels.¹⁵⁴ Bride, then, is something of a paradox, although her commitment to the Holy Sepulchre mirrors Orendel's commitment to Mary.

In her discussions of the roles of women in the Middle Ages, Claire de Trafford notes how rare it is for a medieval woman to stand on her own merits and to have her own identity, one that is not tied to a father, brother, or husband.¹⁵⁵ The Christian brides in other *Spielmannsepen* (like *Rother*) conform to this tradition; Constantine's daughter, for example, remains anonymous and is referred to by her roles as daughter or wife. Conversely, Bride is introduced without mention of any family at all. If she is identified through someone else instead of as an individual in her own right, it is through the figure of Christ. In speaking of independent women and of power, Ursula Liebertz-Grün points out that regardless of gender, "power was a privilege of persons born into [the nobility]," but she also argues that "compared with men of nobility, women of the same social station were second-class nobles."¹⁵⁶ As the Lady of the Holy Sepulchre, Bride holds a position of power and privilege that would normally be reserved for a nobleman, and she represents a blending of masculine and feminine characteristics. This only becomes clearer as the poem unfolds. Bride disguises herself as a pilgrim, travels about without the protection of her husband, escapes imprisonment and rape by beheading her captor, and helps

¹⁵⁴ Diana Webb, "Freedom of Movement? Women Travelers in the Middle Ages," in *Pawns or Players? Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women*, Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless, eds. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 75.

¹⁵⁵ Claire de Trafford, "Share and Share Alike? The Marriage Portion, Inheritance and Family Politics," in *Pawns or Players? Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women*, Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless, eds. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 36.

¹⁵⁶ Ursula Liebertz-Grün, "Women and Power: On the Socialization of German Noblewomen 1150-1450," *Monatshefte* 82, no. 1 (Spring 1990), 18.

free Orendel when he, in turn, is captured. The autonomy Bride displays before meeting Orendel continues to be seen after their union.

Since male characters typically demonstrate a higher degree of self-determination, Bride's agency contributes to a mixture of masculine and feminine traits. She is not, however, the only character who displays such a combination of qualities. The hero himself is acting in service to the Virgin Mary, and he constantly relies on her guidance and intervention throughout the epic.¹⁵⁷ Orendel often finds himself at the mercy of his circumstances: He is caught in the "Klebermeer," is accosted on the road to Jerusalem, and he is captured by the army of a city he besieges. In each of these situations, Orendel does not depend on his own strength and faculties to persevere; rather, he accepts divine intervention and the assistance of his wife Bride.

Bride's rescue of Orendel subverts the expected motif of the heroine's salvation at the hands of her hero, and a dialogue about this inversion of traditional gender roles can be illuminated by considering the scholarly investigation of medieval masculinity and femininity. Experts such as Carolyn Walker Bynum, Barbara Newman, and Jo Ann McNamara discuss, among other things, the notion of the "virile woman," a female 'figure' or type who serves appropriately to represent the highest spiritual attainments of the human soul."¹⁵⁸ Many of the characteristics of this archetype could easily be ascribed to Bride. The debate about the 'virile woman' is balanced by what Shawn M. Kraemer describes as "the significance of a medieval male 'assuming' the role of the female, both in relation to society at large and in relation to God."¹⁵⁹ In other words, as women can take on masculine traits, so, too, can men acquire

¹⁵⁷ Oswald must similarly rely on divine intervention.

¹⁵⁸ Shawn M. Kraemer, "The Virile Bride of Bernard of Clairvaux," *Church History* 69, no. 2. (June 2000), 304.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 304-305.

feminine ones; the shift works both ways. In many texts, the blurring of traditional gender boundaries and the merging of the masculine and feminine is closely tied to spirituality and religious belief, and this is certainly the case for *Orendel*, too.

Krahmer and others point to the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux, particularly his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, as demonstrating significant 12th-century examples of the virile woman, arguing “it appears that Bernard has joined the imagery of bridal love to conceptions of the rational *vir* to describe for us a spiritual ideal in which affectivity and rationality, the typologically masculine and feminine, are joined.”¹⁶⁰ For Bernard, the soul is the Bride of Christ, and the bride herself represents a wedding of masculine and feminine characteristics. When viewing *Orendel* in this light, the idea of the metaphoric marriage of femininity and masculinity exists alongside the actual marriage of Orendel and Bride. Both the hero and his wife display a mixture of masculine and feminine traits; Bride is a “virile woman,” and Orendel “assum[es] the role of the female” at various times throughout the text. As a result, they each individually represent Bernard’s “wedding” of the masculine and feminine. In some ways, then, Orendel and Bride are reflections of one another, which makes them particularly well-suited for marriage to one another.

Because the hero and heroine complement one another so well, their union seems to rely more on spiritual rather than physical intimacy. The fact that their marriage remains unconsummated heightens the bond between Orendel and Bride, and it also reflects the commitments they had made to Mary (Orendel) and the Holy Sepulchre (Bride) prior to pledging themselves to each other. The theme of chastity associated with the Virgin Mary and of sacrifice evoked by Christ can also be found in the hero and heroine’s chaste marriage, and since they will

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 306.

never have a physical heir, perhaps Bride and Orendel become the symbolic parents of other figures in the text—those under their protection. At the very least, the absence of physical intimacy highlights the couple's connection to the divine.

As individuals, each is connected to a significant Christian figure, Orendel to Mary and Bride to Christ. In Orendel's case, this link is further emphasized by his steady prayers and by the constant intervention of angels and other divine messengers on his behalf. Throughout the poem, they play an invariably essential role in Orendel's life. In Bride's case, her tie to the divine is strengthened by her life in Jerusalem, the Holy City. Not only does it serve as a reminder of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, but it also acts as an earthly representation of the promise of the Second Coming and of the creation of a New Jerusalem.

In their own ways, both Bride and Orendel symbolize the bond or wedding between humanity and the divine. As husband and wife, the two become one half of a new spiritual pairing, and at the poem's conclusion, the same angel who had denied them the opportunity to consummate their relationship physically leads the pair, along with two of their companions, to heaven:

3930 die engel von dem himel quament,
die vier sele sie do namen
und furten sie nemelich
zu gode in sin frone himelrich.¹⁶¹

Orendel completes his bridal quest, then, in two different ways: Temporally, his quest is fulfilled by his union with Bride, and spiritually, it is accomplished by his union with God. These two bonds, the earthly and the divine, can also be seen as two steps along the same path: the promise and its fulfillment, the vow and its consummation.

¹⁶¹ "The angels from heaven came and took the four souls there and led them to God in His holy realm of heaven."

CHAPTER 3:
SANKT OSWALD

Introduction and Summary of Text

With 3564 lines, the anonymous epic *Sankt Oswald* is the shortest *Spielmannsepen*,¹⁶² yet it has much in common with *Orendel* and *König Rother*. As *Oswald* opens, the first-person narrator addresses his readers directly and promises to tell them the story of the “miltisten man,” and even before identifying the hero as “kun[i]g Oswald,” the narrator recognizes him as “sand Oswald aus Engellant.”¹⁶³ Such early characterizations of Oswald as a generous (“milt”) and saintly king provide a portrait of a hero who is the best of men—a superlative ruler and Christian; these traits sustain Oswald throughout the text.

After the brief introduction of the virtuous hero, the poet quickly reveals the ostensible motive for the action of the epic: Oswald—like Rother and Orendel—must seek a wife. Because he was orphaned at an early age, however, Oswald cannot seek his own father’s guidance in the same way that Orendel does when choosing his bride. Instead, he has God’s guidance in the form of an angel. Oswald’s heart knows that he needs an heir, so he searches for a lady of equal birth and standing to match him. As with *Rother*, the necessity of ensuring proper succession to the throne is the ostensible reason the hero decides to take a wife in *Oswald*. Unlike Rother, however, Oswald emphasizes his desire to do so only if it can be accomplished “an sund.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Specifically, the version known as the *Munich Oswald*, which is described in greater detail on pg. 101 ff.

¹⁶³ Lines 3, 5, 19 and 27, respectively. All *St. Oswald* passages taken from Michael Curschmann ed., *Der Münchner Oswald - mit einem Anhang: die ostschwäbische Prosabearbeitung des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1974). “most generous man” and “King Oswald” and “Saint Oswald of England”

¹⁶⁴ Line 40. This line could also be understood to refer to the *magedein* who is “without sin.”

When no suitable woman can be found in Oswald's own kingdom, an angel visits the hero and counsels him to travel to the Holy Land to find his bride:

- 60 “ich wil *dir* rat[en], furst guot:
nim dir dhain frauen in den landen dein.
ich wil dir ez raten auf die treuen mein:
du muost varen uber mer
mit ainem kreftigen her
65 nach ainer haidnischer kuniginne:
die soltu uber mer her pringen.
[du muost in die haidenschaft cheren]
und kristleichen glauben meren.
nim *dir* ein haidmische kun[i]gin,
70 daz ist gots will und () der lieben muoter sein.”¹⁶⁵

Both Rother and Orendel also seek their brides from “uber mer”¹⁶⁶ (from Constantinople and Jerusalem, respectively), and such terminology links the idea of the bridal quest with the events of the Crusades. Indeed, as *Rother* and *Orendel* unfold, the heroes and their brides must vanquish heathen rulers and armies before their stories can be resolved. *Oswald* follows this same basic pattern, but there is one key distinction: His intended bride has not yet been baptized; therefore, her conversion to Christianity becomes inextricably linked to her marriage.

After the angel tells Oswald that he should seek a heathen bride—a Saracen princess—the hero turns to his advisors for assistance; however, it is not until a pilgrim named Warmunt visits the English court that a particular lady is chosen:

- 195 nun *cham* auf seinen hof *gegan*
ein ellender waller wolgetan:
der was gehaissen Warmunt,
Zwai und sibitzig land waren im *kund*:
die hiet er erwallen mit er[e]n
in dem dienst unsers lieben heren

¹⁶⁵ “I will counsel you, just prince: take for yourself no lady in your own land. I advise you, in truth: you must travel across the sea with a mighty army to a heathen queen: you should bring her here across the sea. You must go to heathendom and increase Christian belief. Take for yourself a heathen queen, which is the will of God and his dear mother.”

¹⁶⁶ “across the sea”

200 und durch die himisch kun[i]gin,
darzuo stuond im daz gemüet sein.
er truog ein palm in seiner hant,
in gruest sand Oswalt in Eng[e]llant[.]¹⁶⁷

Warmunt tells Oswald of the beautiful Paug,¹⁶⁸ who secretly harbors Christian beliefs:

“enhalb des [wilden] meres flout
do waiß ich ain kungin also guot,
ich muoß dir der warhait jehen,
230 ich han halt so schons nie gesehen
als ir *werder* leib;
ich gesach halt nie schoner weib;
ir schön ist aus der massen groß,
an schön lebt nindert ir genoß.
235 milter kunig Oswalt
ir leib ist *minnekleich* gestalt,
si ist tugentleicht,
si gezäm dir wol uber deineu reich.
si ist die schon frau [Paug] genant
240 *da ze* Aron in dem land.¹⁶⁹

Paug’s heathen father would never allow her to be baptized, and in fact, Aron wants to marry her himself when his own wife dies. In order to help Oswald overcome these complications,

Warmunt advises the hero to send a raven imbued with the wondrous power of speech to woo

Paug on his behalf.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ “Now a foreign Pilgrim came to his court: he was called Warmunt, two and seventy lands were known to him: he was a pilgrim in them with honor in the service of our dear lord and throughfor the sake of the heavenly queen, these were dear to his heart. He carried a palm in his hand, Saint Oswald in England greeted him.”

¹⁶⁸ Georg Baesecke’s edition and those based on it refer to Paug as Pamige; see pg. 102 ff. for further discussion of Baesecke.

¹⁶⁹ ““On one side of the flood of the wild sea there I know of a just queen, I must tell you the truth, I have never seen such a beautiful figure as hers; I never saw a more beautiful woman; her beauty is great, with respect to beauty her companion in no way lives. Generous King Oswald her figure is formed lovely, she is virtuous, she is fitting to share your kingdom with you. She is called the beautiful lady Paug in Aron’s land.””

¹⁷⁰ Lines 79-481.

do sprach der pilgrein:
“herr, nu volg der ler mein,
345 ich wil dir raten, ob ich chan,
recht als ain getreuer man:
du hast auf deinem hof erzogen
(des soltu got immer loben),
— du hast erzogen ainen edlen raben:
350 den soltu zuo poten haben.
ez lebt auf erden nindert als () weiser man
wan der rab dir ez paß gewerben chan.
er ist dir nutzer uber () mer,
dan ob du sandest ain gantzes her.
355 *er* hat von unserm herrn daz gepot
(daz gelaub mir, her, an allen spot),
daz dein rab ist redent worden,
daz glaub mir furst hochgeporen.”¹⁷¹
[...]
385 do sprach der pilgrein Warmunt
(dem *was* umb des raben vart wol chunt):
“her, ir sult euch wol gehalten:
Wann got enpeut *eurem* raben,
— wan got wil durch eur er,
390 so sent er euch *den* raben her.”
der himlisch trachtein
tet da sein genad schein
und gab dem raben an der stund,
daz er alle sprach wol reden chunt.
395 der himlisch hailant,
den raben er schier [her ab] gesant,
daz er kam geflogen pald
fur den milten kun[i]g Oswald.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ “Then spoke the pilgrim: ‘Lord, now follow my instruction, I will advise you, if I can, rightly as a loyal man: you have raised at your court (that you should always praise God), - you have raised a noble raven: you should have him as a messenger. Nowhere on earth lives a man so wise as thee but the raven can do it better for you. He is more useful to you across the sea than if you sent a whole army. He has the command from our Lord (believe me, lord, without any jest), that he is able to speak, believe me high-born prince.’”

¹⁷² “Then spoke the pilgrim Warmunt (to whom the travels of the raven were well known): ‘lord, you should be confident: For God sent your raven, - because God will through you, he sent you the raven here.’ The heavenly Lord showed forth his peace there and granted the raven in that hour that he could speak all languages. The heavenly savior sent the raven here quickly, so that he flew soon here for the merciful king Oswald.”

The messenger figure itself—the talking raven—represents an ongoing wondrous occurrence in *Oswald*, and as he flies back and forth across the sea between England—Oswald’s home—and the land of Paug and her heathen father Aron, numerous other wonders occur that both sustain and aid him in his tasks. Although the raven’s adventures are certainly wonderful, they are also frequently absurd, and this creates a juxtaposition of serious and farcical elements in keeping with the style of *Spielmannsepik*. These introductory scenes propel the action swiftly forward, and they parallel the other *Spielmannsepen* in several ways. The messenger or representative of the hero can be found in *Salman und Morolf* and *König Rother*, for instance, and the “miracles” and heavenly assistance can be seen in *Orendel*.

Another connection among the epics is the use of costly adornments like golden rings, crowns, shoes, and spurs, which serve an important function in part because their exchange in the stories solidifies the unions created between the characters in the epics. *Oswald* is no exception, and the raven is ornamented with gold and jewels and carries a letter and a ring for Paug. Oswald himself instructs the goldsmith:

“ir sult mir meinen raben
 (daz wil ich euch fur war sagen)
 beschlahen schon mit golt,
darumb gib ich euch reichen solt!
 515 beschlaht im daz gevider sein
 (und tuot daz durch den willen mein)
 mit eueren kunstreichen henden,
 wan ich wil in ze poten senden,
 [und] wurcht mir im also schon
 520 auf sein haubt ein guldein kron,
 wenn er chom under die haidem frei,
 daz man sech, daz er ains reichen kun[i]gs pot sei.”¹⁷³

¹⁷³ ““You should cover my raven with gold (that I will tell you truly), and for it I shall give you riches! As a reward adorn his feathers (and to that according to my will) with your artful hands, because I will send him as a messenger, and on my behalf work for him a golden crown for his head, when he comes freely among the heathen, that one sees that he is the messenger of a rich king.””

More wonders occur as the raven messenger flies from England to deliver Oswald's message to Paug in Aron's realm. The raven travels for ten days without nourishment, and when he finally does alight, he is captured by a mermaid and must act as a "Spielmann" and entertain the merwomen before he is able to free himself from the bottom of the sea.¹⁷⁴

When the raven arrives in Aron's castle, he is captured and almost hanged, but Paug intercedes on his behalf and threatens to marry a "Spielmann" if her father refuses to free Oswald's messenger. Aron gives Paug the raven as a gift, and she takes him, the letter, and the ring with her to her chamber.¹⁷⁵ After nine days, the raven departs for England with a new ring and letter for Oswald, who is supposed to return in the spring with the raven, a golden stag, and an army and besiege Aron's castle. More mishaps and "miracles" occur during the raven's flight home; he loses the ring in a storm and meets an ancient cliff-dwelling hermit who prays for God's aid. These prayers are answered when a fish returns the ring to the raven, and the messenger is able to continue his journey. As soon as the raven reaches England, Oswald and his men prepare seventy-two ships for their journey. They also prepare seventy-two thousand golden crosses. Oswald commands his craftsmen:

“ir sult mir wurchen schon aus golt
(darumb gib ich euch reichen solt)
1465 zwai und sibitzig tausent creutz guldein.
nu wurcht mir si durch den willen mein,
wan ich wil varen uber mer
mit ainem creftigen her.”
die meister worchten mit ringer hant,
1470 die chunst was in wol bechant.
diu cräutz wurden schier bereit,
des taucht sich der kunk gemait.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Lines 650-768.

¹⁷⁵ Lines 769-1072.

¹⁷⁶ “You should work for me out of gold (for which I shall give you great reward) two and seventy thousand golden crosses. Now make them for me for my sake because I want to

The men in Oswald's army all wear these crosses on their tunics in order to recognize one another more easily in foreign lands. Such decoration clearly sets Oswald's men apart, and with this detail, the *Oswald* poet has created a literary knightly order that resembles the actual orders that were emerging as a result of the Crusades. The importance of the goldsmiths is also reiterated in this scene, and both the craftsmen and the soldiers play vital roles as the story progresses.

Despite the extensive preparations for his journey—even including the golden stag that Paug had requested—Oswald forgets to take the raven along when he and his men set sail.¹⁷⁷ Their voyage lasts for a year and twelve weeks, but the hero and his men are unable to act once they arrive because they have no way of contacting Paug. Oswald prays, and God sends an angel to the raven who finally arrives four days later. The raven then relays messages between the hero and Paug, and we see that like Bride in *Orendel*, Oswald's intended bride has a fair amount of agency. Although it seems at first that she might be restricted by her father's rule, Paug is actually able to subvert his power and work secretly to accomplish her own goals. Her intelligence and planning, in fact, are what save her, and like Bride, Paug's actions also save her suitor. These two women—both examples of the Saracen princess motif—stand out from the female characters that can be found in the other *Spielmannsepen*, especially when contrasted with the roles of Duke Ernst's mother who follows her new husband's lead, the Indian princess who is attacked by the crane people in *Ernst*, and Salme who—although quite active throughout much of *Salman und Morolf*—falls victim to sorcery and who is hunted by Morolf. Sara Preisig's

travel across the seas with a powerful army.' The masters wrought with quick hands, the art was well known to them. The crosses were quickly ready, the king was made happy by this."

¹⁷⁷ Lines 1425-1625.

summary of the typical Saracen princess narrative in Old French epics also applies to many German texts, including *Oswald*:

The Saracen princess falls in love with the Christian knight, uses her inside knowledge to help him escape from her people, if he has been captured, or conquer her people if he is attacking. She betrays her father or, in some cases, her husband to come to the aid of the Christians and, in the end, converts to Christianity[...]¹⁷⁸

Beyond sharing narrative structures, the Saracen princesses of such epics also share a greater freedom of movement and thought than their Christian counterparts. Preisig attributes this to the fact that “there is no need for her to conform to the social norms that would apply to a good Christian woman.”¹⁷⁹

Not only does Paug demonstrate this same independence throughout her courtship with Oswald, she is also responsible for planning her own escape from her father Aron’s castle. Through the raven messenger, she advises Oswald to set up a camp of goldsmiths outside her father’s gates, and then she urges her father to patronize the new craftsmen. As with his desire to wed only if it could be done without sin, so too is Oswald concerned about the deception he is involved in, and he prays for God’s forgiveness. The hero and his men remain in their camp working as goldsmiths for another year and twelve weeks without once seeing the princess, but their patience is ultimately rewarded when God sends Oswald a dream that shows him how to win his bride. The goldsmiths must make claws, antlers, and a mantle of gold in order to entice Aron away from his castle to hunt for a golden stag. They plan to overtake the stronghold while

¹⁷⁸ Sara L. Preisig, “Epic, Old French,” in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Margaret Schaus (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 255.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Aron is distracted by the hunt, but although the diversion works well, the guards close the gates after the king departs.¹⁸⁰

Paug takes advantage of her father's absence, and through disguise and deception, she plays an active role in her own escape. She prays for assistance, and the gates open on their own so that she can flee the castle and run to Oswald's encampment. Although the two have never met, he recognizes her immediately from the golden headband she wears, and they quickly make their way to Oswald's ships and set sail.¹⁸¹ This type of hasty retreat can be found in all of the other *Spielmannsepen*, for the heroes and heroines (both singularly and together) constantly find themselves needing to escape dangerous situations.

They also all invariably find themselves being pursued by angry, violent opponents—typically heathen kings and their armies. Oswald and Paug are no exception. When he discovers that she has gone, Aron calls his men to him by blowing a magical horn that can be heard in three kingdoms, and then he sets off in pursuit of his daughter. Acting as a lookout, the raven warns Oswald and Paug of the heathen army's approach, and although Paug is afraid, Oswald comforts her:

“junkfrau, ir sult euch wol gehalten!
an got selb chan uns niemant geschaden.
do haben wir [cristen] ain trost
(frau, daz han ich eu noch nit erlost),
2785 daz chain cristen stirbt auf erden,
ez *enmüeß* sein rechter vaigtag werden,
- er hab dan verworcht sein leben
gegen dem himlischen degen,
so stirbt er [auch] e seiner zeit
2790 und hat auch verloren sel und leib.
daz hat *unser chains*, ob got wil, noch *entan*:
wir sullen trost zuo unserm herren han

¹⁸⁰ Lines 1998-2476.

¹⁸¹ Lines 2477-2654.

und bitt wir die himlisch kun[i]gin,
daz si uns helf mit eren von hin!”¹⁸²

The comfort here, of course, does not come in the form of an assurance that they will not die; rather, it is a promise that God would not let them—as Christians—die unless it were their time. Such a distinction is important because it underlines a key point that the poet has highlighted throughout the text, namely that the plans, actions, and intentions of the hero and heroine must constantly be supported by divine will. Wondrous occurrences, angels, and dreams all sustain Oswald and Paug through the course of the poem; the two have not wavered in their belief thus far, and here Oswald reminds Paug that they should still rely on that faith to guide them to the destiny that God has planned for them in the upcoming confrontation with Aron.

A battle with Aron seems inevitable, but God sends fog and wind to delay the heathen army while Oswald and his men sail through clear skies and smooth seas until they are able to reach the shore. There they prepare for the fight, and Oswald himself carries the standard. By evening, the Christians have won the day, and Aron has lost all thirty thousand of his men. Only Aron himself is spared, but he refuses to be baptized. Oswald promises him that God will bring his entire army back to life, but even after that has occurred, Aron only wants to continue to battle the Christian army. His men, though, refuse to fight because they had been sent to Hell when they died, and now they believe in Christ. Despite the wonders he had seen and the testimony of his men, Aron still demands another miracle. This time, a well springs forth from a stone, and the heathen king finally allows himself to be baptized. For three days afterward, Oswald baptizes all of the heathen soldiers who had been brought back to life; the last seventy-

¹⁸² ““Maiden, you should be confident. Without God no one can harm us. Then we Christians have a consolation (lady, that I have not yet saved you), that no Christian dies on earth, unless his preordained day has come or unless he has ruined his life, then he will die before his time and will also lose his soul and body. None has done that, if God will: we should have solace in our lord and ask the heavenly queen that she help us from there!””

two of them jump together into the spring for fear of remaining unbaptized any longer. The men of the newly baptized army soon learn, however, that they must truly die, but their second deaths are gentle, and angels accompany them to heaven.¹⁸³ The miracle had been performed to demonstrate God's power to Aron and to give the heathen soldiers a chance to convert to Christianity.

The closing scenes of the poem take place in England and depict, primarily, the wedding of Oswald and Paug. The saintly king has invited everyone to his celebration, including the poor. One of the guests is Jesus himself disguised as a pilgrim; at first, he asks for food, and then for money, which he gives to the poor. Next, he requires a golden goblet and a cloth embroidered with gold and silver; finally, he demands everything of Oswald—his land, his scepter, his crown, and his wife. Oswald freely gives the pilgrim all that he has and decides to wander the land as a beggar. Christ reveals his identity and, because Oswald had withstood temptation and had freely offered hospitality to his disguised guest, Christ returns everything to the hero. Then, in a scene that parallels the angel's earlier exhortation to Orendel and Bride, Jesus advises Oswald:

3510 "du solt amber chainer sunden mit der frauen pflegen!
du lebst nicht lenger dann zwai jar,
Oswalt, daz sag ich dir fur war.
so soltu dan der vierzehen nothelfer ainer sein:
daz soltu haben von den genaden mein.
3515 merk, wie du den sunden solt widerstan:
wasser soltu vor deinem pet han;
wann dich dein manhait wil betwingen,
so soltu in daz wazzer springen.
also *tuo auch deu frau dein*,
3520 und tuo daz durch den willen mein:
darumb *wirt dir geben* schon
daz himelreich zuo lon."¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Lines 2725-3184.

¹⁸⁴ "You should foster no sin with the lady! You will not live longer than two years, Oswald, that I say to you in truth. Thus should you then one of the fourteen helpers: that you have from my mercy. Note, how you should resist sins: you should have water in front of your

Just as Orendel and Bride are to have a chaste marriage, so, too, are Oswald and Paug to refrain from consummating their vows. On the one hand, the image of husband and wife jumping into a tub of water to dampen their lust for one another seems farcical, and one could imagine such situations playing out in medieval *fabliaux*. On the other hand, though, the advice could be seen as simply practical or even as monastic. After all, this heavenly instruction marks the culmination of a bridal quest that Oswald only desired to undertake if it could be done without sin. Here, then, we see that result. It also marks a change from an emphasis on earthly heirs to heavenly rewards. Oswald and Paug ultimately fulfill their vow to remain chaste, and after two years, they die and are accompanied by an “englischeu schar” to heaven.¹⁸⁵ The poet closes with a brief prayer of benediction.¹⁸⁶

Manuscript Tradition

Each of the *Spielmannsepen* has a fairly complicated history of preservation and transmission, and *Oswald* is no exception. As Curschmann, Schröder, and others have detailed,¹⁸⁷ there are multiple branches of the *Oswald* manuscript tradition. The first grouping, which includes the most complex versions of the *Oswald* narrative and on which most modern editions

bed; when your manhood wants to dominate you, then you should jump in the water. Your wife should do the same, and do that for my sake: because of this I will give you the kingdom of heaven as your reward.”

¹⁸⁵ Line 3538. “angelic host”

¹⁸⁶ Lines 3548-3554.

¹⁸⁷ Michael Curschmann, “Einleitung,” *Der Münchner Oswald - mit einem Anhang: die ostschwäbische Prosabearbeitung des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1974); Michael Curschmann, “*Spielmannsepik*”- *Wege und Ergebnisse der Forschung von 1907-1965, mit Ergänzungen und Nachträgen bis 1967* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1968); Schröder, *Spielmannsepik*.

of *Oswald* are based, is known as the *Munich Oswald* (MO), and this version of the verse narrative can be found in four manuscripts:

- M from the Bavarian State Library in Munich, written before 1444 in a Bavarian dialect;
- I from the Museum Ferdinandeum in Innsbruck, written in the second half of the 15th century by a Bavarian and a Swabian scribe;
- S from the Schaffhausen Library, from 1472 written in a Swabian dialect;
- and Mk from the Bavarian State Library in Munich, written in the 15th century in a Bavarian dialect.

This tradition also includes three prose adaptations of the Munich narrative:

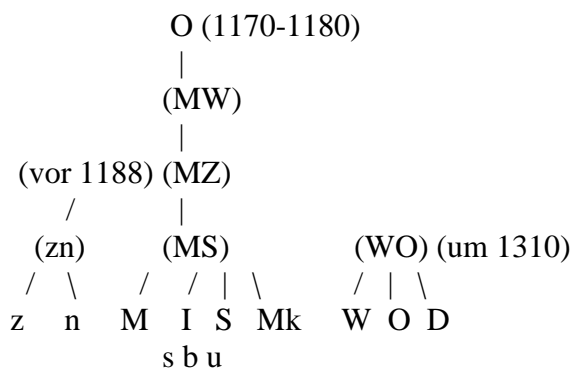
- s from the Württemberg Regional Library in Stuttgart, written after 1479 in a Swabian dialect;
- b from the Prussian State Library in Berlin, written in the 15th century in a Bavarian dialect;
- and u from the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest, written in 1471 in a Bavarian dialect.¹⁸⁸

Several key issues arise from the variety of verse and prose versions of the *Munich Oswald* material. First, the *Munich Oswald* exists in two particular dialects, one—Swabian—from the southwestern region of Germany (present-day Baden-Württemberg), and another—Bavarian—from the southeastern region of Germany. Indeed, all but two of these manuscripts are still housed in the regions from which this branch of the *Oswald* tradition stems. In addition

¹⁸⁸ Curschmann, “Einleitung,” *Der Münchner Oswald*, XV-XXXII.

to the language, the dates of these four manuscripts are also important; all of the extant manuscripts of the *Munich Oswald* are from the mid- to late-15th century.

Early *Oswald* scholars, however, posited that this poem—along with the other *Spielmannsepen*—was originally composed during the late-12th century. Georg Baesecke, in particular, established a manuscript schema that presumed the original version—known as O—must have been composed around 1170 and would have been four generations removed from the *Munich Oswald* manuscripts M, I, S, and Mk, and—for a time—some subsequent scholars adopted Baesecke’s findings.¹⁸⁹ For example, Schröder provides this visualization of the manuscript tradition which relies heavily on Baesecke’s proposed *Oswald* development but also includes additional manuscripts (explained below):¹⁹⁰



Curschmann, however, challenged Baesecke’s schema and his editorial practices. He noted that another manuscript— W from the Vienna State Library, written in 1472 in a Silesian dialect—was discovered since Baesecke’s theories had been published.¹⁹¹ He also expresses

¹⁸⁹ Georg Baesecke, *Der Münchner Oswald – Text und Abhandlungen* (Breslau: M. & H. Marcus, 1907).

¹⁹⁰ Schröder, *Spielmannsepik*, 48.

¹⁹¹ Curschmann, “Einleitung,” *Der Münchner Oswald*, XIV.

skepticism about Baesecke's posited *Ur-Oswald* and his 1912 edition of *St. Oswald*, in which Baesecke had attempted to reconstruct the original 12th-century language and forms.¹⁹²

The W manuscript belongs to another cluster of manuscripts whose versions of the narrative are known as the *Vienna Oswald*. They typically contain less complex versions of the primary narrative and exist in two additional manuscripts:

- O from the Metropolitan Chapter Library in Olomouc, written in 1450 in a Bohemian-Moravian dialect;
- and D from the Prince Georg Library in Desau, written in the second half of the 15th century in an Upper Saxon dialect.¹⁹³

The manuscripts W and O come from regions much farther east than any of the *Munich Oswald* versions, and manuscript D comes from a region to the north of the Munich texts. The extant copies of the *Vienna Oswald* seem much less cohesive than those of the Munich version, but this could simply be because there are fewer manuscripts to compare.

As is the case with the Munich and Vienna branches of the *Oswald* tradition, the earliest possible dates for the third set of manuscripts are also in the late 15th century. This grouping consists primarily of two prose versions of the narrative:

- z, which can be found in numerous manuscripts from the 15th century and in print after 1471;
- and n, which is a northern adaptation from the 16th century.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Curschmann, "*Spielmannsepik*"- *Wege und Ergebnisse*, 8.

¹⁹³ Schröder, *Spielmannsepik*, 48.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

As Sarah Bowden notes,¹⁹⁵ the texts in this branch are more properly classified as *vitae* rather than epics, but many similar plot elements are used in all of the *Oswald* branches. According to Bowden, although the cult of Oswald of Northumbria “spread to continental Europe from the tenth century”

[a]ll the vernacular German Oswald stories are transmitted in manuscripts of the later Middle Ages. There are a number of short *vitae*, all of which contain baptism miracles, Oswald’s bridal quest (with the raven present), chaste marriage, battlefield martyrdom, and posthumous miracles: these lives are found in *Der Heiligen Leben* (often referred to as *zn*), *Das Märterbuch*, *Das Passional*, and (included because it has been concluded to derive from a no longer extant MHG source) in the *Reykjahólabók* (the Icelandic *Ósvalds saga*).¹⁹⁶

This third thread of the *Oswald* tradition—the *vitae* thread—seems to be the most varied in terms of language and geographic region of production.

The three branches of the *Oswald* tradition can be difficult to visualize, especially because the relationship between the branches is not totally clear, and earlier *Oswald* scholarship relied heavily on presumed generations of manuscripts. Many scholarly reconstructions of the possible relationship among the three branches of *Oswald* narratives present variations of Baesecke’s argument (detailed above) that all of the extant manuscripts and printings are from the fourth generation of texts. One of the earliest and most notable exceptions to this trend is Curschmann,¹⁹⁷ and of the manuscripts and Baesecke’s influence, Schröder, has noted:

Für die Vorgeschichte der drei Fassungen gilt heute noch die Meinung Baeseckes, die er in den Abhandlungen seiner beiden Ausgaben ausführlich begründet hat. Danach dürfte das Original (O) in den siebziger Jahren des 12. Jhs in der Gegend von Aachen im

¹⁹⁵ Sarah Bowden, *Bridal-Quest Epics in Medieval Germany: A Revisionary Approach* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2012).

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁹⁷ Michael Curschmann, *Der Münchener Oswald und die deutsche Spielmannsepik: mit einem Exkurs zur Kulturgeschichte und Dichtungstradition* (Munich: Beck, 1964).

mittelfränkischen Sprachraum entstanden sein. Von dort gelangte die Dichtung einerseits über erschließbare Zwischenstufen (MW, MZ) ins Bairische (MS), andererseits um etwa 1250 mit Kolonen ins schlesische Gebirge (wohl nur mündlich), wo sie am Anfang des 14. Jhs aufgezeichnet wurde (WO).¹⁹⁸

Schröder is not alone in remarking the difficulties surrounding the study of the *Oswald* manuscripts and the role that oral transmission might have played. With regard to the problematic manuscript tradition and to the significant contributions that Baesecke has made to scholarship on *Spielmannsepik*, in general, and on *Oswald*, in particular, Michael Curschmann acknowledges:

G. Baeseckes seit langem vergriffene Ausgabe, auf die sich seither die Forschung stützt, hat das große Verdienst, den Text als literarisches Denkmal bewahrt und in weitgreifenden Diskussionen und Anmerkungen in seinen literarhistorischen Rahmen gestellt zu haben. Ihre zeitbedingten grundsätzlichen Mängel folgen unmittelbar aus der doppelten Zielsetzung des Herausgebers: was die sehr späte Überlieferung bietet, sollte zwar möglichst vollständig und sorgfältig bewahrt werden, aber nicht als ‚der‘ Text des ‚Münchner Oswald‘, sondern als Endprodukt eines umfassenden Kontaminationsprozesses, hinter dem sich die Urform des 12. Jahrhunderts nur andeutungsweise verbirgt. Der Eruiierung dieser Vorform mit Hilfe der ‚Korruptelen‘ und ‚Interpolationen‘ der Überlieferung des ‚Münchner Oswald‘ wie auch der übrigen Fassungen ist der Hauptteil von Baeseckes Untersuchung gewidmet.¹⁹⁹

By describing the textual changes that must have taken place between the original composition of *Oswald* in the second half of the 12th century and the end of the 15th century as a “Kontaminationsprozess,” Baesecke sees the presumed *Ur-Oswald* as having a textual purity that the subsequent versions lack, and so the value of the later texts is somehow less than that of the original for him. As no extant manuscript from the first three generations—and three centuries—of the *Oswald* tradition has been discovered, such valuations must remain highly speculative and hypothetical.

¹⁹⁸ Schröder, *Spielmannsepik*, 48-49.

¹⁹⁹ Curschmann, “Einleitung,” *Der Münchner Oswald*, X-XI.

A related issue that must be examined is the division between the prose and verse iterations of the *Oswald* material and the structural motifs found within each grouping. Of the three narrative branches, two—the Munich and the Vienna—are primarily composed in verse form, and one—the *vitae*—is written in prose. When scholars analyze *Oswald* as a *Spielmannsepos*, they typically examine the verse tradition and transmission, especially the *Munich Oswald* because it is considered more complex than the *Vienna Oswald* and contains more *Spielmann*-like elements; the *Vienna* is generally thought to be more straightforward and to have a clearer sense of resolution. Schröder offers this general evaluation of the two branches of the verse *Oswald* material:

Im großen ganzen dürfte die Münchener Fassung den Inhalt des alten Gedichts wiedergeben, vermutlich um einiges erweitert. Der Wiener ›Oswald‹ weicht beträchtlich ab, sowohl im Inhalt wie auch im Ton der Erzählung, der trocken und frömmelnd ist. Ein inhaltlicher Vergleich aller erschlossenen Vorstufen der Hss. in tabellarischer Übersicht findet sich in Baeseckes Ausgabe [...], doch müssen alle solche Angaben naturgemäß unsicher bleiben.²⁰⁰

Studies of the hagiographical *vitae* typically position the z and n manuscripts within the larger traditions of saints' lives, in general, and within the tradition of the cult of Oswald, in particular. In her examination of the manuscript transmission and narrative branches of the medieval German *Oswald* material, Marianne E. Kalinke offers this assessment:

The life of St. Oswald was incorporated into the most popular vernacular legendary of the Middle Ages, *Der Heiligen Leben*, and subsequently into its Low German translation, *Dat Passionael*, the oldest extant imprint of which dates from around 1478. The metrical version, that is the *Münchner Oswald* and the *Wiener Oswald*, diverges from the prose version by lacking two essential components of the legend first told by Bede and compiled by Drogo: Oswald's *passio* and miracles. Loss of the account of Oswald's martyrdom in the two metrical versions resulted in the creation of a fictional saint at odds with the historically attested figure. The case is quite different in the *Heiligen Leben/Passionael* prose version and also the saga, where the legend is quadripartite, consisting of 1) a coronation legend, 2) a bridal-quest and conversion legend, 3) a martyr

²⁰⁰ Schröder, *Spielmannsepiik*, 49.

legend, and 4) a miracle sequence. The metrical version contains only the second part, the bridal-quest and conversion legend.²⁰¹

As Kalinke demonstrates, there is a clear division in the medieval German *Oswald* materials between the prose *vitae* and the verse epics. Kalinke attributes the traditional focus on the verse tradition of the *Munich Oswald* to Baesecke's influence, stating, "[i]n 1907 he concluded his analysis of every conceivable aspect of the work—from the language and rhyme schemes of the manuscripts to the author's acquaintance with goldsmithing—with the pronouncement:

'...O[swald muss] um 1170 im Bannkreise von Aachen entstanden sein.'"²⁰² Though some scholars—like Michael Curschmann—are ambivalent about this conclusion, others—like Rolf Bräuer—have offered alternative theories.²⁰³

Kalinke also maintains that since the *Vienna* narrative has more in common with the *vitae*, and since the story of St. Oswald must first have been transmitted via the *vitae*, then the *Munich* narrative must actually have derived from the *Vienna* tradition and, therefore, must be the youngest iteration of the *Oswald* tradition.²⁰⁴ Such a claim, as logical as it seems, directly contradicts the standard manuscript history established by Baesecke and utilized by many scholars even today. That is not to say, though, that Kalinke's is the only voice that has spoken out against the status quo, but those scholars are still in the minority. Regardless of which came first—the *Munich* or the *Vienna*—the *Munich* remains the usual text of study. Curschmann attributes this to the reliability of the M manuscript, which is part of the *Munich* tradition:

²⁰¹ Kalinke, *St. Oswald of Northumbria*, 31-32.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁰³ Rolf Bräuer, *Literatursoziologie und epische Struktur der deutschen Spielmanns- und Heldendichtung* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1970).

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 34-36.

Der allen anderen (auch W) gegenüber höhere Wert dieser Handschrift besteht also grundsätzlich darin, daß sie ‚passiv‘ überliefert. Ein Nebenergebnis dieser Passivität, das zugleich die auch *WS gegenüber größere Altertümlichkeit der Tradition M dartut, ist, daß M in Syntax [...], Wortwahl [...] und Formenbestand [...] bei weitem am häufigsten die *lectio difficilior* bzw. die ältere Form bietet.²⁰⁵

In other words, while no concrete evidence about the original *Oswald* poem exists, a direct comparison of the M manuscript to the others points to it being the oldest extant version of the epic.

Apart from exploring the uncertainty surrounding the composition dates of and the relationships among the *Oswald* texts, scholars should also acknowledge another serious issue that can affect how the narratives are read and understood. As previously outlined, all of the extant manuscripts of the verse *Oswald* date from the late 15th century. There is a great deal of evidence that suggests that the original epics can be traced back to the late 12th century (e.g., library catalogs or registers and the popularity of the cult of St. Oswald), but it should also be recognized that the number of 15th-century manuscripts also marks a significant development in the *Oswald* tradition. Simply put, it seems too coincidental that no manuscript exists from the three centuries between when *Oswald* was written and when all of the extant manuscripts were created. The flourishing of 15th-century manuscripts suggests that there may actually have been some specific impetus behind the extensive copying of the text at that time.

A similar gap between the estimated date of composition and the actual dates of the manuscripts can be seen in the *Orendel* tradition, and in that case, it is possible, as we have seen, that the reproduction of the epic was tied to a celebration or ceremony at the reliquary in Trier. Perhaps, then, there was a particular comparable event that spurred renewed interest in *Oswald*,

²⁰⁵ Curschmann, "Einleitung," *Der Münchner Oswald*, XLI.

or possibly the general historical and intellectual climate at the time led scholars and scribes to the themes of older narratives.

Not only must scholars consider why there was a revival of interest in *Oswald*, but they should also question how that resurgence might have altered the language, structure, and themes of the narrative. It would be imprudent simply to label the *Munich Oswald* (and, indeed, all of the *Spielmannsepen*) as pre- or peri-courtly without at least acknowledging that the manuscript evidence could indicate that the stories have been adapted. The 15th century, in general, was a time of great upheaval, and by the late 1400s, the world was a dramatically different place than it had been a mere century before. That difference would only be exaggerated in the three hundred years that passed between the original composition of *Oswald* and its later manuscript production.

The language of the poem—including its vocabulary, style, syntax, meter, and so forth—can also be revealing when considering the dates of manuscript production. On the one hand, certain terms or structures might point to a specific *terminus post quem* or *terminus ante quem*, but it is also possible that later scribes could use deliberately archaic forms in order to create the appearance of an older text. Regardless of scribal intent, the language of the late 15th-century Early New High German is quite different than that of 12th-century Middle High German. Many phonological changes, particularly in the vowel sounds, took place in the 15th century, and those changes, in turn, slowly began to affect the declension of nouns and the conjugation of verbs.²⁰⁶

The complete lack of any *Oswald* manuscript from the 12th or 13th century leads naturally, as Curschmann states, to doubts about a late 12th-century date of composition. He also

²⁰⁶ Curschmann, “*Spielmannsepik*”- *Wege und Ergebnisse*, 7-10; Schröder, *Spielmannsepik*, 49-50.

notes that it is difficult to offer alternative theories that are developed and supported by as much evidence as the Baesecke date is. One example Curschmann offers, though, is Ernst Teuber,²⁰⁷ who interprets the form and language of *Oswald* as evidence of a later composition date, but Curschmann finds Teuber's arguments unconvincing and believes those same linguistic forms point to an earlier date.²⁰⁸ Ultimately, modern scholars must recognize the problematic nature of the manuscript tradition and acknowledge that they are viewing a 12th-century text through a 15th-century filter.

The Crusades, as stated above, are a historical connection that might help bridge the gap between the 12th- and 15th-century versions of *Oswald*. If the epic's original composition was tied to or shaped by the historical events of the 12th century, then it stands to reason that the revival of interest in *St. Oswald* might also have been influenced by 15th-century occurrences. The advancement of the Ottoman empire, for example, could play a role in the resurgence of interest in the *Spielmannsepen*. The Battle of Varna, in which the Ottomans defeated Polish and Hungarian armies, took place in 1444, and Constantinople itself fell only a few short years later in 1453. This loss to the Ottoman Turks marked the end of the Byzantine Empire, and in the following decade, the Ottomans continued to advance into Europe.²⁰⁹ During the second half of the 15th century, then, central Europe was under the threat of invasion from non-Christian forces. Perhaps such a danger created a renewed interest in the *Spielmannsepen*, all of which contain themes and imagery of the Crusades.

²⁰⁷ Ernst Teuber, *Zur Datierungsfrage des mittelhochdeutschen Orendelepos* (Dissertation, University of Göttingen, 1954).

²⁰⁸ Curschmann, "*Spielmannsepik*"- *Wege und Ergebnisse*, 47.

²⁰⁹ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A Short History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 234-235.

With regard to the influence of the earliest Crusades that took place in the 11th and 12th centuries, Schröder has pointed out that:

Gemeinsam ist allen Denkmälern auch *der historische Hintergrund der Kreuzzüge*. Die gefährliche Fahrt über See, die überall eine bedeutsame Rolle spielt, ist immer die Fahrt ins Heidenland, die zu schweren Kämpfen führt. Der Raum der Handlung ist das christliche Abendland und das durch die See von ihm getrennte heidnische Morgenland mit seiner christlichen Enklave (Konstantinopel oder Jerusalem). Der literarische Typus der Kreuzzügsdichtung hat sich allen Spielmannsepen, freilich in unterschiedlicher Weise, aufgeprägt.²¹⁰

The Crusades, however, are not the only important historical connection to examine when assessing *Oswald*; another issue that should be considered is its connection to its probable source materials and to the prose *vitae* (introduced above). Oswald of Northumbria is a historically attested saint whose reign began in 634 and ended on August 5, 642 in the battle of Maserfelth; he was killed by Penda of Mercia who

[...] had Oswald's head and arms severed and impaled on stakes. Subsequently his head was buried in the cemetery at Lindisfarne, while his arms were sent to Bamborough; there the right arm was placed on a silver shrine, where, in fulfillment of Bishop Aidan's prophecy while Oswald was still alive, it was preserved incorrupt. The mutilated body was taken to the monastery of Bardney in Lindsey by Oswald's niece Osthryth.

The earliest account of Oswald's life, death, and miracles is given by the Venerable Bede (673/674-735) in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum* (concluded in 731). [...]

In Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* Oswald is presented as a "most Christian king" and "a man beloved of God," a proselytizing king who "held under his sway all the peoples and kingdoms of Britain, divided among the speakers of four different languages, British, Picts, Irish, and English." [...] Oswald stood godfather for Cynegisl, king of West Saxons, "the same man whose daughter Oswald was later to receive as his wife." Upon Oswald's death at the hands of the pagan Penda many miracles occurred.²¹¹

The story of Oswald's martyrdom and of the miracles that happened after his death spread quickly, and the cult of St. Oswald became popular not just in Britain but beyond,

²¹⁰ Schröder, *Spielmannsepik*, 14.

²¹¹ Kalinke, *St. Oswald of Northumbria*, 3-4.

including into Germany. In the mid- to late 11th century, a monk of St. Winnoc, Drogo († 1084), composed a *Vita Oswaldi* based on Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, and St. Oswald's fame continued to spread across Europe. In 1071, Judith of Flanders (c. 1027-1094; the widow of Earl Tostig of Northumbria) brought Oswald relics to southern Germany when she "married Duke Welf IV († 1101) of Bavaria."²¹²

The connections between the historical figure of St. Oswald and the transmission of the stories of his life, his martyrdom, and the miracles that occurred upon his death are all fairly well-documented, as is the expansive influence of the cult of Oswald, and in examining the key elements of the hagiographical accounts of Oswald's life and death, one finds traces of most—if not all—of the narrative elements that are later embellished by the poet(s) of the *Munich* and *Vienna Oswald*. In the *vitae*, for example, Oswald's body remains uncorrupted after his martyrdom. While the epic avoids the actual battlefield death scene, the idea of an uncorrupted hero can still be seen in the poem; Oswald and Paug's chastity, for instance, could be interpreted as a symbol of their physical and spiritual purity. Additionally, the two central figures are still relatively young when they ascend to heaven, thus ensuring that their bodies avoid the physical decline or decay of aging.

The chaste marriage and the bridal-quest themes may also be predicted by the ecclesiastical *vitae* because St. Oswald's marriage to King Cynegils' daughter (whose name is only recorded in one 12th-century *vitae* as Kyneburga) contains some parallels to the epic. Just as the historical St. Oswald presided over the baptism of Cynegils, king of the West Saxons and father of his future bride, so too does the fictitious Oswald witness the baptism of Aron, a king in his own right and the father of Paug.

²¹² Ibid., 5.

Another interesting connection between the hagiographical tradition and the *Spielmannsepos* is the emphasis on language—specifically, the multiplicity of language. In the *vitae*, Oswald is known for his linguistic skills and is even said to have acted as an interpreter in his own court.²¹³ In the epic transmission of the German *Oswald* material, this ability with (or gift for) languages is bestowed upon Oswald’s messenger, the raven who serves as a mediator between the hero and his future bride. As a literary device that forwards the plot of the narrative, the raven’s multilingualism simply smooths out potential communication difficulties that Oswald and Paug might have (considering their different origins). In this regard, the raven is—at a practical level—a tool to be used to help the story progress.

Beyond this, the symbolic value of the raven’s linguistic abilities should be considered. The unification of all languages in one being is a right reserved for God alone.²¹⁴ Thus, not only is it a miracle that the raven can speak at all, but it is doubly miraculous because he has been granted the ability to speak all languages. The allusion to the unification of the world under one language is, admittedly, faint, but it is there nonetheless, and the divisions during the 12th (and 15th) century between Western and Eastern Christendom, between Christianity and Islam, and between disparate nations are highlighted when drawn in contrast to the wholeness of the raven’s speech.

²¹³ Claudia Bornholdt, *Saintly Spouses: Chaste Marriage in Sacred and Secular Narrative from Medieval Germany (12th and 13th Centuries)* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012); Kalinke, *St. Oswald of Northumbria*, 50-51.

²¹⁴ Genesis 11 details the story of the Tower of Babel.

“Spielmann-esque” Elements and Genre Discussion

As previously stated, *Oswald* closely resembles both *Orendel* and *Rother* in a number of ways, particularly in their reliance on bridal-quest narrative devices. In fact, some scholars have even suggested abandoning the designation *Spielmannsepik* in favor of a new genre classification, *Brautwerbungsepik*. According to Sarah Bowden, for instance, “the idea of *Brautwerbungsepik* as a genre is relatively new,” and it “has not yet appeared in any literary histories, but is used increasingly in monographs and articles, and studies that discuss the bridal-quest schema usually understand it as a clear structural matrix in which the texts subsist.”²¹⁵ Using the works of Christian Schmid-Cadalbert and Hinrich Siefkin as a foundation for her own arguments,²¹⁶ Bowden goes on to outline the basic matrix of the bridal quest:

- The hero (usually a king) decides, or is told, that he needs a wife, usually to secure his lineage.
- There is a council scene, in which his most trusted advisers suggest a suitable bride. She lives across the sea.
- The hero or a messenger sets out to woo her.
- There is some kind of obstacle to the marriage.
- The hero returns home with his wife.²¹⁷

Although he did not call for the development of a separate *Brautwerbungsepik* genre, Theodor Frings was one of the first scholars to examine the patterns of bridal quests in Middle High German literature.²¹⁸ Frings’ 1939-1940 article, “Die Entstehung der deutschen

²¹⁵ Bowden, *Bridal-Quest Epics*, 103.

²¹⁶ Christian Schmid-Cadalbert, *Der Ortnit AW als Brautwerbungsdichtung: ein Beitrag zum Verständnis mittelhochdeutscher Schemaliteratur* (Bern: Francke, 1985); Hinrich Siefkin, *Überindividuelle Formen und der Aufbau des Kudrunepos* (Munich: W. Fink, 1967).

²¹⁷ Bowden, *Bridal-Quest Epics*, 103.

²¹⁸ See: *Ibid.*, 103-104.

Spielmannsepen” outlines a division of what he believed were two distinct bridal-quest traditions: the Northern German tradition of violence and action and the Mediterranean tradition of cunning and stealth; for Frings, the *Spielmannsepen* marked a merging of the two threads.²¹⁹ Many of Frings’ arguments have been disproved or dismissed by subsequent scholars, but some of his ideas still resonate, particularly the notion “that the *Spielmannsepen* (especially *König Rother*) should be considered as an early step on the path to the works of the *Blütezeit* and a midpoint between oral and written poetry.”²²⁰

Regardless its designation, *Oswald* resembles the other *Spielmannsepen* in style, language, and content. Not only does the action of *Oswald* center on common *Spielmann*-like plot devices, but it includes absurd adventures and colorful characters, too, and those absurdities naturally affect the overall tone of the poem. One interesting aspect of *Oswald* is the fact that the raven’s escapades—like his sojourn with the mermaids—are more ridiculous than those of the hero’s; this enhances the typical *Spielmann*-like mixing of seriousness and jest while still allowing the hero himself to be a more earnest figure. Of such *Spielmann*-like traits, Curschmann has noted:

[W]ichtig ist, aufs Ganze gesehen, nur die Frage der Methode, mit der man diese Motivparallelen auswertet. Die richtige Antwort hatte im Prinzip schon Baesecke selbst gegeben [...]: es ist “weit mehr nach dem Aufbau der Motive, als nach den einzelnen Motiven zu fragen”; “der Vergleich des Baus wird das Natürliche zeigen, daß eine Erzählung dem Abweichenden... ihr Leben verdankt: der Rest ist nichts als überlieferte Form[.]”²²¹

²¹⁹ Ibid., 104; Theodor Frings, “Die Entstehung der deutschen Spielmannsepen,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Geisteswissenschaft* 2 (1939): 306-21.

²²⁰ Bowden, *Bridal-Quest Epics*, 104.

²²¹ Curschmann, “*Spielmannsepik*”- *Wege und Ergebnisse*, 47-48.

It follows, then that while the narrative devices in *Oswald* may also occur in *Blütezeit* texts, the manner in which those elements are executed can vary dramatically. Thus, it can be seen that *Spielmannsepik* as a genre is defined not only by traits the poems share, but also by qualities they lack, particularly the polish of other Middle High German works.

Kalinke argues that the *Spielmann*-like qualities of *Oswald* overshadow the tradition of miracles associated with St. Oswald. While it is certainly true that the miracles documented in the *vitae* cannot all be found in both the *Munich* and *Vienna Oswald*, it would be absurd to claim that the poems avoid the legend of miracles altogether. One reason there is no direct correlation between the miracles of the prose *vitae* and the epics is simply that many of the *vitae* miracles occur after St. Oswald's martyrdom. Interestingly, although the poems do not include the historically attested battlefield martyrdom of St. Oswald, they do include numerous miracles. In fact, the hero, his bride, and their intermediary—the raven—all rely on answered prayers, visions, wondrous occurrences, and divine intervention throughout the entire text, and this pervasiveness of the miraculous is one of the strongest connections between the *Munich Oswald* and another *Spielmannsepos*, *Orendel*. Perhaps the raven's gift of speech and the many other wonders that occur throughout the *Munich Oswald* are one way in which the poet attempts to compensate for leaving out the story of Oswald's martyrdom.

Although it is impossible to understand the poet's motivations completely, it could be that the seriousness of such a martyrdom would have been at odds with the generally light tone found in the *Spielmannsepen*. In other words, if his purpose was to write an entertaining literary work rather than a more straightforward and serious hagiography, then perhaps the poet "rewrote" the end of Oswald's life so as not to have a heavy shift towards somberness or solemnity at the conclusion of the poem. The idea of the miraculous, which is so closely tied to

St. Oswald's life and his death, does not bear the same gravity of tone as martyrdom. In addition to avoiding the serious tone that the inclusion of a martyrdom scene would naturally cause, the *Oswald* poet regularly utilizes miracles as a literary device to complement the narrative; he seems to have chosen to employ only those elements of the historical St. Oswald's life that best fit the overall style and tone of the epic. Miracles, for example, provide opportunities for the poet to interject characters and situations that are both unexpected and unrealistic, which enhances the sense of absurdity throughout the poem. Countless fantastical elements are presented in the *Munich Oswald*—and in the other *Spielmannsepen*—under the guise of the wondrous.

While Kalinke's division between the prose and poetic transmissions of the Oswald material is a bit rigid, she does draw an intriguing conclusion when she states that the Oswald of the metrical tradition is "a fictional saint at odds with the historically attested figure."²²² The very fictionality of this "faux Oswald," though, is what puts both the *Munich* and *Vienna Oswald* firmly in the realm of literature, and it is also another thread that binds the epic more tightly to the other *Spielmannsepen*, which also all contain fictionalized accounts of "historically attested figure[s]." This does not mean, of course, that the poets of the *Spielmannsepen* worked deliberately to create a distinct literary genre; the similarity among the texts only serves—for a modern audience—as a means to help justify examining the epics together rather than as completely disparate works.

In addition to their potential reliance on historical inspiration, some of the *Spielmannsepen* also commonly share linguistic and metrical structures. According to Curschmann, "im ‚Münchner Oswald' bildet der epische Vierheber das formale Grundgerüst, reichlich, insbesondere bei der Einleitung von Situationen oder Reden, mit Dreihebern

²²² Kalinke, *St. Oswald of Northumbria*, 31.

durchsetzt.”²²³ He goes on to argue that the metrical elements in *Oswald* demonstrate “große Freiheit der Taktfüllung, zwischen Vortrags- und Lesemanuskript schwankende und deshalb unzulängliche und inkonsequente Fixierung metrischer Feinheit in den Handschriften und dazu überhaupt das Desinteresse der Schreiber am Rhythmus.”²²⁴ Similar claims have been made about the other *Spielmannsepen*, and this commonality is significant both because it speaks to the poetic quality of the epics, but also because the rhythmic structures employed by the *Spielmann* poets represent a different system of meter than is used in the slightly later texts of the *Blütezeit*.

Development of the Hero and Heroine

Beyond the structural and stylistic similarities between *Oswald* and the other *Spielmannsepen*, the poems also have many thematic elements in common (e.g. the bridal-quest motif). In both *Oswald* as well as in *Rother* and *Orendel*, the hero is not just part of the nobility; he is royalty—either a king himself or the son of a king—and each hero realizes that he must seek a worthy bride. At the outset of *Oswald* and of *Rother*, the impetus to find such a lady is—ostensibly—to preserve the realm and ensure proper succession to the throne by finding a suitable bride to bear the king’s heirs. Unlike *Oswald* and *Rother*, *Orendel* is not burdened as much with this responsibility because he is a younger son. When the three epics conclude, however, both *Orendel* and *Oswald* find themselves in chaste marriages, while only *Rother*’s marriage is consummated. Thus, it seems that the true purpose of the bridal quests must not always be literal; the symbolic—or perhaps even allegorical—value of these courtships and unions should also be examined. In order to explore the union between *Oswald* and *Paug*, we

²²³ Curschmann, “Einleitung,” *Der Münchner Oswald*, L.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, LV.

must first examine the hero and heroine as individuals and then consider the effects of the marriage of the two figures.

In looking first at the descriptions of the hero, we see that the poet establishes Oswald's great political power very early in the epic by cataloging all of the men who serve under him:

dem *dienten* chreftikleich
zwelf kun[i]kreich;
zwelf kunk die *dienten* im schon,
10 iegleicher under seiner gulden kron;
vier und zwaitzig hertzogen her
die *dienten* im durch sein grosse er;
sechs und dreissig grafen lobsam
die *dienten* im mit mangem werden man;
15 neun edel pischof
die *dienten* im auf seinem hof;
ritter und knecht
die *dienten* im gar recht.²²⁵

This list of loyal subjects would be impressive for any ruler, but it is especially striking for someone in Oswald's position. Not only is the hero only twenty-four years old, but he gained authority over his realm after being orphaned at a very young age. That detail demonstrates Oswald's perseverance and strength of character, for he "lebt mit sargen / abend und den margen; / des twang in grosseu not, / wann im was vater und muoter tod."²²⁶ Such a serious description seems almost out of place in a *Spielmannsepos*, because an emphasis on the weightiness of the hero's circumstances could indicate an overall tone of solemnity in the text.

²²⁵ "Twelve kingdoms served him mightily; twelve kings who served him well, each under his golden crown; four and twenty dukes they served him because of his great honor; six and thirty praiseworthy earls they served him with many worthy men; nine noble bishops they served him at his court; knights and servants they served him well."

²²⁶ Lines 21-24. "Lived in sorrow evening and morning; misery oppressed him for his father and mother were dead."

While it is certainly true that the story starts on a serious note, it also later contains some of the wildest, most entertaining episodes of any of the *Spielmannsepen*.

Beyond presenting Oswald as a young, powerful, and generous ruler, the *Oswald* poet also reveals a certain vulnerability in the hero that can be seen in Oswald's prayer for heavenly guidance:

[Oswald] sprach: "himlischer degen,
ich wil dir dienen die weil ich hand mein leben."
35 er sprach: "solt ich mich sein nicht schämen,
so wolt ich geren ain frauen nemen.
nun pin ich ain kindischer man:
herr, wie sol ich ez greifen an?
ich näm geren ain magedein,
40 möcht ez nür an sund gesein.
ei himlischer furst her,
nu gib mir rat und ler!"²²⁷

For all of his accomplishments, Oswald is a *kindischer man*, untrained in the art of love, and his intention to woo his future bride "without sin" actually foreshadows the ultimately chaste marriage that Oswald shares for two years with Paug.

Before this can happen, though, Oswald must seek counsel in order to find a suitable lady. Where Orendel is advised by his father, King Ougel, and Rother is advised by his councilors, Oswald's advisors are less effective and he ultimately receives a different sort of guidance. As noted above, after the angel appears to Oswald and tells him that he should seek a bride, the orphaned hero calls together all of his chief advisors and says to them:

"ir wist wol, () meine land stant an ein frauen:
chunt ir mir indert gezaigen
unter kristen und unter haiden
155 ein kungin edel und reich

²²⁷ "Oswald spoke: 'heavenly lord, I will serve you while I have my life.' He spoke: 'if I should be ashamed of it, then I would not gladly take a lady. Now I am a young man: lord, how should I begin with it? I would gladly take a maid if only it could be without sin. Heavenly prince here, now give me counsel and instruction!'"

der leib sei kluog und minnekleich,
ir er michel und groß
und diu müg wesen mein genoß?”²²⁸

Unfortunately for Oswald, his councilors spend three days agonizing over this question before finally acknowledging that they know of no woman in all of Oswald’s realm who would be worthy of him or who is his equal: “wir wissen nindert ain kun[i]gin / der wir des mügen getrauen, / daz si euch gezäm zuo einer frauen.”²²⁹ While it is a common trope of the bridal-quest narrative that no suitable wife can be found nearby (thus necessitating the hero’s journey abroad), it is not nearly as common that hero’s council, when pressed for guidance, can offer its sovereign no solution. More frequently, the advisers simply state that while there is no worthy lady in the hero’s realm, they have heard tell of a paragon of beauty and virtue. Instead of depending on his advisers, Oswald must instead rely on the guidance of the angel and, subsequently, of the pilgrim Warmunt.²³⁰

Without Warmunt’s counsel, Oswald could not have found or wooed his future wife Paug, who—like the brides in the *Rother* and *Orendel*—must be exceedingly beautiful and virtuous because she is meant to be a complement to the superlative hero. One particularly interesting note about the brides in these three epics is that the two wives who participate in chaste marriages are named and are given their own identities within the stories. Each of these women displays much more independence of thought and action—a greater degree of agency—than the unnamed wife of Rother, who is referenced only in terms of her relationships to others

²²⁸ ““You know well, () my land has no lady: could you show me among Christians and among heathens a noble and rich queen whose figure is fine and lovely, whose honor is great and who could be my companion?””

²²⁹ Lines 180-182. ““we know nowhere of a queen whom we might trust with, being suitable to you as a wife.””

²³⁰ See pages 81-83.

(e.g. Constantine's daughter). The degree of agency that the three heroes have, however, appears to be inversely related to that of their wives. Thus, Rother, whose wife has the least amount of autonomy, seems to be the most independent of the men, while Oswald and Orendel, whose wives are much more autonomous, have the least self-determination and must, therefore, constantly rely on intervention and intermediaries.

The inverse association between Oswald's autonomy and his bride's can most clearly be seen in the wooing phase of their relationship. Paug, for example, demonstrates intelligence, cunning, and bravery on many occasions when planning and carrying out her escape from Aron's castle. Although Oswald initiates the relationship by sending the raven to her, he comes to rely on her guidance from the time he leaves England's shores until the moment she runs into his camp outside her father's walls. When the two are finally united, Paug's independent nature recedes, and Oswald moves to the foreground to lead the Christian army to victory against the heathen fleet. This creates a striking contrast between the Paug of the first part of the poem and the one seen later.

Paug's independence and ingenuity are evident when she uses her own crown and robe in a faux coronation to disguise one of her attendants as herself while she, the true princess, dons the costume of a knight and escapes her father's stronghold. In Kalinke's evaluation of the verse versions of *Oswald* (discussed above), she argues that the coronation legend and martyr legend of the *vitae* are lacking from the *Munich* and *Vienna Oswald*. Paug's escape from her father's fortress, however, demonstrates that these elements may have been transformed, not eliminated, in the verse epics. The persistent imagery of Oswald and Paug's rings and the knights' golden crosses, for example, could all be interpreted as symbolic coronations, and Paug's placement of her crown on her attendant's head is a large part of this:

2491 si sprach: “liebeu gespil mein,
 tuo ez durch die true[e] dein:
 laß dir sein wol lon[n]
 und hab mir mein mantel und mein kron
 2495 und ste da her an mein[e] stat”
 [...]

die junkfrau tet durch not
 waz ir deu jung[e] kungin pot:
 umb schwaift si den mantel schon
 2510 und satzt auf ir haubt die chron;
 auf satzt si die chron eben,
 die jung kungin begund sich von dannen heben;
 die jung kungin huob sich aus der schar,
 die muoter het sein nicht genomen war:
 2515 die junkfrau stuond in aller der gepär,
 als ez die jung[e] kungin wär.²³¹

Despite leaving her crown behind when she flees, Paug still wears a golden headband,²³² and it is by this sign that Oswald recognizes her when she arrives at his tent outside the castle where he has been living disguised as a goldsmith:

der auserwelt degen
 2600 gieng der chungin pald enegen.
 si was *im* aus in allen erchant,
 wann si truog ain guldeins *harpant*:
 domit bezaichent si daz,
 daz si die jung kungin [selber] was.²³³

Thus, the theme of coronation—if not an actual coronation—can still be found in the verse *Oswald*. Similarly, the poet transforms the legend of the actual martyrdom of St. Oswald on the

²³¹ “She spoke: ‘my dear companion, do it by your faithfulness: let yourself be well rewarded and have of me my robe and my crown and stay then here in my stead’ [...] The maiden did through necessity what the young queen bade: she donned the beautiful robe and set the crown on her head; she set the crown levelly on her head, the young queen began then to leave; the young queen removed herself from the crowd, the mother had not noticed: the maiden stood in all of her behavior, as she were the young queen.”

²³² See pages 86-87.

²³³ “The great knight went quickly in front of the queen. She was recognized among all the others because she wore a golden headband with which she showed that she was the same young queen.”

battlefield to a symbolic martyrdom that includes a chaste marriage, death, and a journey to heaven. Clearly, the coronation and martyrdom legends that can be found in the *vitae* tradition differ greatly from the symbolic manner in which the poet of the *Munich Oswald* has utilized them, but traces of those two legends are present nonetheless.

Paug's disguise, her "coronation" of an attendant, and her flight from her father's stronghold mark a great transition both for herself and for the hero. Until this point in the epic, they had each been acting separately—albeit towards the same goal. From this scene forward, though, they are part of a union, and we begin to see the effects and the significance of the pair's chaste marriage. Shared faith strengthens the union between Oswald and Paug, and the union also changes Paug's degree of agency.²³⁴ The hero and the heroine have both withstood challenges independently, and those trials prepared the couple for the final test that they must face together: maintaining a chaste marriage.

The chaste—or "sinless"—marriage parallels the other major religious themes of the text, including the frequent wonderful occurrences and the baptism of Aron's heathen army. These elements rely on expression of faith, and they create a thematic cohesiveness within the poem. While Oswald and Paug's chaste marriage fits with the theme of faith, it does not resolve Oswald's previously stated need for an heir; the confines of an unconsummated marriage make that impossible. Bornholdt addresses this apparent contradiction by arguing that while the "idea of royal succession provides the initial motivation for the plot," the *Oswald* poet ultimately presents no negative consequences of the hero's chaste marriage.²³⁵ In other words, the poet's

²³⁴ Such a shift is also in keeping with the traditions of the Saracen princess in medieval literature. See: Preisig, "Epic, Old French," 255; Sahar Amer, "Muslim Women: Western Literature," in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Margaret Schaus (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 594.

²³⁵ Bornholdt, *Saintly Spouses*, xi-xii.

initial use of Oswald's need for an heir is simply a narrative device intended to push the hero into action. In the case of both Oswald and Orendel, that action proves to be much more significant than the motivation behind it.

Through the chasteness of Oswald and Paug's marriage, the poet highlights the theme of faithfulness, which he had foreshadowed at the outset of the epic. For example, both the angel and Warmunt emphasize the "heatheness" of Oswald's prospective bride and the necessity of travelling "over the sea" (i.e. to fight in the Crusades) to find her, thus highlighting the distinction between the Christian world of the hero and the "other" world he will face *uber mer*. Indeed, the hero is even exhorted to testify to his Christian faith whenever he encounters the heathens. The stress that the poet places on religion early on in the poem, of course, alerts the reader to the significance of such themes. In fact, the "heatheness" of Paug (who is, in these lines, still unnamed) is referenced more than the fact that she will one day be Oswald's queen, and nowhere does the angel say that she will bear Oswald's child. It is even possible that the mention of Mary in the angel's final line is a reflection on the ties between faith, chastity, and motherhood. In the *Munich Oswald*, faithfulness is a strong theme from the outset, and while the possibility of a chaste marriage is only hinted at, the reference to Mary is, perhaps, part of that subtlety.²³⁶

The *Oswald* poet goes to great lengths to demonstrate the isolation and lack of guidance that the hero must face in this epic, and since he is an orphan and his councilors do not offer ready advice, Oswald is even more likely to depend on his Christian faith. This can be seen in the hero's prayers, the angels who visit him, and the miracles that occur around him. Oswald's deep faith is further emphasized through his reliance on the pilgrim Warmunt as the poem opens and

²³⁶ Line 70.

his encounter with the disguised pilgrim Christ as it closes. In considering the poem's conclusion, where Christ exhorts Oswald and Paug to keep their marriage chaste, it can be seen that the poem's opening scenes mirror its close. One pilgrim sets the hero on his path to pursue Paug as his bride, and another attends their wedding and directs them to their heavenly reward. Both husband and wife must each be individually worthy and virtuous, and they must also balance one another.

If the pilgrim scenes frame the tale, then the miracles and the conversion of the heathens sustain it and show that the hero and heroine remain virtuous, patient, and faithful throughout. In fact, none of the baptisms would have taken place at all if it had not been for the union of Oswald and Paug, so in baptizing new Christians, the couple are symbolically birthing the next generation of believers. Ultimately, Oswald and Paug's faith—the fate of their souls—is far more important than ensuring the line of succession, and the heavenly rewards outweigh the earthly one. Thus, all of the gold and ornaments and jewels seen throughout the text must also be left behind; by offering to give up all of his possessions to the pilgrim, Oswald withstands the temptation of over-valuing earthly goods.²³⁷ All that remains, then, is for him and his bride to resist lust, and just as they have endured every other challenge set before them, both Oswald and Paug once again prove their worth and receive their heavenly rewards.

²³⁷ See pages 89-90.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of this study, I have examined three epics traditionally labeled as *Spielmannsepen* in modern scholarship. The epics—*König Rother*, *Orendel*, and *St. Oswald*—share many traits of language, style, and content that help support the notion that they fit together as a group and that distinguish them from other genres of Middle High German epic. Indeed, one of their most defining characteristics is that they differ from the classic texts of the *Blütezeit*. Because the poetic structures and language of *Rother* and *Orendel* seem to resemble Early Middle High German texts and despite the fact that very little early manuscript evidence exists, many scholars have argued that the original epics must be pre-courtly. The language of *Oswald*, however, points to a later composition date because the poet includes chivalric vocabulary (e.g. *ritter* or *ritterschaft*). When we consider *Rother*, *Orendel*, and *Oswald* from the perspective of Zumthor’s theories, though, the manuscript stemmata that reconstruct the archetypal poems lose some of their prominence, and this—in turn—allows us the opportunity to focus on the texts as they are rather than as they might have been. In providing an overview of each narrative and its manuscript history, discussing how each poem contributes to an understanding of *Spielmann*-like elements, and exploring some aspects of the development of the agency and identity of the poems’ central figures, I have hoped to encourage new discussions of the literary aspects of these epics and have laid a foundation for future study.

While the corpus of texts that scholars include under the term *Spielmannsepen* has shifted over the years, there are currently five epics that are generally classified together because of their similarities of “*Spielmann*-like” elements. I chose to focus on *König Rother*, *Orendel*, and *St. Oswald* because their narratives are the most similar; some of the aspects are practically identical, and this provides an opportunity to examine a few particulars of these works that may

otherwise be overlooked. It was important to me to provide summaries of the epics' plots before moving on to my analysis. One reason for including these *précises* was to highlight the parallel characters and devices among the three epics, and another was simply to provide information in English about the epics so that a broader audience can become familiar with the stories.

Some of the common narrative elements among the three epics can be found in the heroes themselves and others can be seen in the adventures they undertake. For instance, each of these epics centers on a hero who is a royal nobleman: Two are kings in their own right and one is a younger son. Each hero must find a suitable bride, so he seeks advice from trusted counselors and from wise visitors to his court. All three heroes must journey across the sea to woo their brides: Rother and Constantine's daughter, Oswald and Paug, and Orendel and Bride. Along the way, we see messengers, disguises, preparations, voyages, pilgrims, and gift exchanges in each poem, and all include Crusading elements and other battles. Ultimately, each hero and his bride are taken up to heaven at the end of the epics.

Interspersed with the many similarities, though, we can also find several key distinctions. For example, only two of the heroes—Orendel and Oswald—rely heavily on “miracles” and divine intervention throughout their journeys; Rother does pray before his final battle, but his faith is not woven so intricately into every part of his story. As noted above, one of the heroes—Orendel—is a younger son, and he seeks advice from his father as well as from other counselors. Additionally, there are important father characters in *Rother* and *Oswald*, too, but these are the fathers of the women, not of the heroes: Constantine, the Christian ruler of Constantinople, and Aron, the heathen ruler. In each case, the hero must either outwit or defeat his bride's father in order to complete his bridal quest. Only Orendel's wife Bride, the Lady of the Holy Sepulchre, is presented without such familial ties. One other significant variation among the heroes' narratives

can be found in their marriages. Both Orendel and Oswald participate in chaste marriages with their respective spouses; only Rother's marriage produces an heir for his kingdom.

After summarizing the plots and main characters in each chapter, I offer an overview of the manuscript history and scholarly traditions surrounding the poems. In these discussions, I include the traditional stemmata of the presumed manuscript development in order to show how the *Spielmannsepen* have generally been understood by medievalists in the 19th and 20th centuries and in order to demonstrate possible relationships among the surviving manuscripts, fragments, and printings of each poem. While I agree with Zumthor that such stemmata are problematic, I do not believe we should abandon them altogether. I value attempts to clarify the history of a work, but I do not think that history—or the supposed “original” texts it sometimes generates—should dictate the course of scholarship for a particular work. Traditional manuscript stemmata should be one aspect of analysis that informs contemporary interpretations of these epics, but they should not be the sole or, perhaps, even primary focus.

In addition to including discussions of textual development, my manuscript descriptions also include information about the dates, locations, and dialects of each epic's extant manuscripts and about the scholarly editions of the poems that I utilize in this study. As with the chapter sections devoted to narrative summaries of the *Spielmannsepen*, this section also provides numerous points of comparison for the works. For *König Rother*, for example, there exists only one (nearly) complete manuscript from the late-12th or possibly early-13th century; this manuscript is by far the oldest extant version of any of the *Spielmannsepen*. Even the four fragments of *Rother* that date from the 12th to the 14th century are older than the manuscripts for the other epics. In contrast, the oldest known manuscript of *Orendel* (which was destroyed in a

fire in the 19th century)²³⁸ dates to the 15th century, and two printings of the poem were also made in the 16th century. Of the three epics discussed in this study, *St. Oswald* has the most robust collection of extant iterations, including four 15th-century manuscripts, three 15th-century prose adaptations, and other 15th-century printings.

The dates of these manuscripts highlight another important distinction between *Rother* and the other two poems, namely that the manuscript evidence for *Rother* is considerably older than that of *Orendel* and *Oswald*. Of these epics, it is the only one for which the term pre-courtly can be applied without relying heavily on reconstructed texts and assumptions about potential archetypes. Considering this fact alongside one of the major narrative distinctions of *Rother*, namely that his is the only one of the three heroes' marriages that is not chaste, raises the question of whether the two details might not be related. In other words, perhaps the fact that *Rother* was most likely composed in the second half of the 12th century contributed to its themes of political continuity, stability, and succession. Maybe the birth of a legitimate heir and the successful transfer of power from father to son would resonate with a 12th-century audience in a way that would be less significant to an audience from a later era. Conversely, perhaps the themes of chastity and religious obedience found in the later manuscripts of *Orendel* and *Oswald* would be more fitting for their 15th-century audiences than for an earlier one.²³⁹

Due to the limitations of this study, further discussions of how literary themes potentially might have shifted over time must remain in the realm of speculation for now, but—as mentioned above—possible changes in the linguistic aspects of these poems have already been

²³⁸ As mentioned in Chapter 2, two 19th-century copies of this 15th-century manuscript still exist.

²³⁹ For further discussion of chaste marriage as an ideal of the late Middle Ages, see: Dyan Elliot, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

explored by a number of scholars who have theorized about the composition of the archetypal *Spielmannsepen* and who have attempted to recreate what they believe the language of the poem might have been. Editions of both *Rother* and *Oswald* that were published in the first half of the 20th century or before have fallen out of favor with contemporary scholars because they rely too heavily on textual reconstruction and conjecture. The more recent Stein edition of *Rother* and Curschmann edition of *Oswald* rely instead on extant manuscripts, and both editors employ widely accepted modern editorial practices like normalizing spelling and punctuation and distinguishing textual conjecture from certainty. Unfortunately, the most recent scholarly edition of *Orendel*, edited by Steinger, was published in 1935 and includes editorial practices based heavily on speculation and reconstruction. Although they were once the norm for some editors, such practices result in a version of the text that in all likelihood never existed.

In some ways, it is understandable that 19th- and early-20th-century medievalists would attempt to reconstruct a potential original version of one of the *Spielmannsepen* (or, for that matter, of any other epic). When the manuscript evidence offers conflicting information about what dialect the epic was composed in, for example, it is natural to question which was used first. The answer could reveal information about the poet or his audience, and it could help trace contact between scribes in different regions. To Zumthor, of course, a work is not inauthentic because its texts are composed in dissimilar dialects; those variations are simply part of the process of textual transmission. Most modern editorial practices seem to reflect this perspective in some ways since they present a text as close to its manuscript evidence as possible (i.e., a “Leithandschrift”). Frequently, editors must still make difficult decisions about which manuscript(s) to utilize or which dialect to preserve, and it is easy to see how alluring an archetype that explains all of the variations could be.

Even with each of the three *Spielmannsepen* explored in this study, there are dialect variations. The *Rother* manuscript and fragments, for example, contain elements of Middle and Lower Franconian and of Middle and Upper German, primarily Bavarian. *Orendel*, too, includes both Middle and Upper German, but the *Oswald* variations are mostly written in Bavarian and Swabian. These variations could be explained by Zumthor's theory of textual mobility (*mouvance*); if texts are dynamic and textual authenticity was virtually unknown before the end of the 15th century, then variants are natural, not inauthentic, and they all contribute to our understanding of the work that "floats" above them.²⁴⁰

Not only does Zumthor influence my discussion of the epics' manuscript traditions, he also informs my explorations of genre. In *Toward a Modern Poetics*, Zumthor describes grouping works into "registers," a term he uses in place of the more traditional "genre," to examine their similarities and gain a greater understanding of the poetry of the Middle Ages.²⁴¹ This theory of the relationship between works and registers parallels the relationship between texts and works described previously. Zumthor encourages scholars to build groupings by identifying defining characteristics in each work. In other words, the register (i.e. genre) should describe the works as they are, not prescribe how they should be in order to be part of a discrete category. If we apply this notion to the *Spielmannsepen*, we can see that in addition to the narrative commonalities discussed above, they also all demonstrate similarities in style and language. *Rother*, *Orendel*, and *Oswald* are all quick-moving, episodic tales in which miracles, wonders, and outrageous or even absurd occurrences frequently prevent the audience from focusing on any hardships the hero might endure. While they generally have a mixture of

²⁴⁰ Zumthor, *Towards a Medieval Poetics*, 46.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

seriousness and humor, their tones are light overall. In *Rother*, for example, we see the battles with giants, and the hero frequently uses disguises and cunning to outwit his opponents. *Orendel* is full of “miracles” whose sheer number borders on the absurd, and *Oswald* also contains numerous wonders, including a talking raven who has an undersea adventure with mermaids. Although the specifics vary, these encounters are all humorous and entertaining, and since they can be found in each work, they can also contribute to the idea of a “register” of *Spielmannsepen*.

Other elements that support the argument of grouping these poems together are their language and poetic structures. As is discussed in each chapter, *Rother* and *Orendel*, in particular, rely heavily on assonance. This means that they more closely resemble early Middle High German works than the works of the *Blütezeit* which have been influenced by French traditions of pure rhyme. *Rother*, *Orendel*, and *Oswald* also demonstrate a certain imprecision or looseness of languages that feels unpolished when compared to some of their better-known counterparts. On its own, this fact would not be enough to separate the *Spielmannsepen* from other medieval genres, but when combined with the works’ narrative and stylistic similarities, the elements of language help describe this grouping.

Finally, after I outline the poems’ narrative arcs, describe their manuscript histories, and discuss their “Spielmann-esque” elements, I close each chapter with an analysis of some of the key aspects of the heroes’ and heroines’ identities. *Rother*, *Orendel*, and *Oswald* are all superlative figures. Despite their similarities, however, the poets ultimately emphasize different traits for each hero. *Rother* is a savvy ruler whose powerful manipulation of space and circumstances ensures that his heir will inherit the throne. *Orendel* is faithful and obedient, and his devotion to God is reflected in his devotion to *Bride* and his protection of the Holy Sepulchre.

Oswald is also pious, and his sainthood carries associations of sacrifice and even martyrdom even though those events from St. Oswald's life are not included in the poem.

As is also discussed in each chapter, the three heroes also have varying degrees of agency, with Rother being the most autonomous and Orendel being the least. The levels of self-determination found in the heroes' brides differ, too, and there seems to be an almost inverse relationship between the degree of agency each hero has and the level his wife possesses. In other words, the less independent the hero is, the more autonomous his bride will be. For example, Orendel depends on divine intervention throughout his adventures; without the aid of Mary and the angels, he would not have survived. Bride, however, is already the Lady of the Holy Sepulchre when he decides to woo her, and over the course of their journeys together, she acts independently and rescues herself and Orendel (among others) on numerous occasions.

There are, naturally, limitations to this study. Because I wanted to include summaries of the texts and discussions of their manuscript histories and genre descriptions along with some interpretive analysis, I was not able to add extensive detail about all aspects of each text. I opted, instead, to provide a broad overview of multiple issues surrounding these works instead of given a narrower, deeper view of a single work, for example. I also decided to exclude two particular epics—*Herzog Ernst* and *Salman und Morolf*—from my study. *Ernst* and *Salman und Morolf* do share some traits with the other *Spielmannsepen*, of course, but the narrative structures are different, especially with regard to the bridal quest. These limitations help show, however, what direction future studies could take. There will always be room for focused interpretations that dive more deeply into single works. Additionally, an exploration of the secondary characters could also provide great insight, and finally, comparative analyses that include the

Spielmannsepen and other Middle High German works could offer a better sense of where this group of texts fits within the broader context of medieval literature.

Because very little contemporary scholarship focuses exclusively on one or more of the *Spielmannsepen*, I hope that this study contributes in several small ways to our overall understanding of *König Rother*, *Orendel*, and *St. Oswald* and that it shines a light on these works and brings attention both to the works themselves and to the broader issues that they represent, including the sometimes-problematic nature of medieval genre. This study also provides information about these works that is not readily available in English, which, in turn, promotes awareness of them to a much broader audience, and it is my hope that it will also serve as a foundation for future discussion and study.

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