"A Lock Upon All Conduct:" Modesty in German Courtly Literature (c. 1175-1220)

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"A Lock Upon All Conduct:“ Modesty in German Courtly Literature (c. 1175-1220)

Abstract
This dissertation examines notions of modesty in behavior and appearance as represented in romance and conduct literature of the German Middle Ages. I look to the Winsbecke poems and Thomasin von Zirclaria's Der Welsche Gast as representative samples of conduct literature, considering them alongside the four core courtly romances: Hartman von Aue's Iwein and Erec, Gottfried von Strassburg's Tristan, and Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival. The project is guided by four central areas of inquiry. First, I investigate the "cleavage" between the two genres of romance and conduct literature, exploring the ways in which they cling to each other as reference points and split off from the other's constructs. Second, I pay close attention to gender differences in the practice of modesty, investigating precisely what they are and how they structure gender roles and courtly identity. My third area of emphasis traces the ways in which sight and the body engage with notions of modesty. Finally, I examine the relevant changes the German romance authors make to their French source material.

My analysis relies on three primary keywords in locating medieval modesty (zuht, kiusch, and scham), and explores the intersections between scham "shame" and scham "modesty." I show that, compared to the French originals, the German romances demonstrate a far greater interest in the display of the naked or partially naked body. These scenes, which appear with regularity, follow particular patterns according to gender: for example, a naked man is uncourtly, but a partially-naked woman has a high status. Gender is also a determining factor in the overall importance of modesty, particularly as seen in conduct literature: for a man, it is one of several critical components for knightly success, while for a woman, it provides the fundamental structure for her life. I also find unexpected complexities in the relationship between romance and conduct literature. Each genre has its distinct areas of permissiveness and regulation with regard to modest behavior.

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“A LOCK UPON ALL CONDUCT:”

MODESTY IN GERMAN COURTLY LITERATURE (C. 1175-1220)

Kathryn Ann Malczyk

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Helen Shirley Masseth
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ABSTRACT

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Kathryn Ann Malczyk
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This dissertation examines notions of modesty in behavior and appearance as represented in romance and conduct literature of the German Middle Ages. I look to the Winsbecke poems and Thomasin von Zirclaria’s Der Welsche Gast as representative samples of conduct literature, considering them alongside the four core courtly romances: Hartman von Aue’s Iwein and Erec, Gottfried von Strassburg’s Tristan, and Wolfram von Eschenbach’s Parzival. The project is guided by four central areas of inquiry. First, I investigate the “cleavage” between the two genres of romance and conduct literature, exploring the ways in which they cling to each other as reference points and split off from the other’s constructs. Second, I pay close attention to gender differences in the practice of modesty, investigating precisely what they are and how they structure gender roles and courtly identity. My third area of emphasis traces the ways in which sight and the body engage with notions of modesty. Finally, I examine the relevant changes the German romance authors make to their French source material.

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Introduction

Early on in Hartmann von Aue’s romance Erec, the hero has departed Arthur’s court in search of adventure. In need of shelter for the night, he lodges with an impoverished duke. As the family is without servants, the duke commands his daughter to stable and feed their guest’s horse. Hartmann heralds her appearance with a description of her body:

The girl’s body was praiseworthy. Her dress was green, completely tattered, worn thin everywhere. Under that was her dirty chemise, also torn here and there, so that her body underneath shone through, white as a swan. They say that no girl ever possessed a body so much like the ideal, and if she had been rich, her body would have lacked nothing in making her a praiseworthy wife. Her body shone through her dirty clothing like a lily, standing white among black thorns. I believe that God put forth great effort towards her beauty and perfection.

The young woman, Enite, does not have a choice as to whether she exposes her body; her
poverty makes that decision for her. But there is a lack of concern about any potential
danger to womanly virtue. She is styled as exceedingly courtly, virtuous, and beautiful to
the point of unequalled perfection. Indeed, she is described as ideally modest:

ir gebærde was vil bliuclîch,
einer mägde gelîch.
sî gerette im niht vil mite:
wan daz ist ir aller site
daz sî zem êrsten schamec sint
unde blúc sam diu kint. (1320-21)

Her comportment was very modest, just like a maiden. She didn’t talk
with him very much, for that is how they all behave: first they are modest
and shy like children.

If her body can be put on display, revealed to men she does not know, and she can still be
praised for her maidenly behavior, this conflicts with unchallenged modern-day beliefs
about medieval modesty.

*Parzival* and *Iwein* provide similar examples of noble near-nakedness, and these
women are also perfectly courtly. The exposure of a woman’s flesh is apparently in
keeping with proper conduct in romance, yet it seems to be in conflict with courly norms
as modern scholarship understands them. Carla Casagrande, in *A History of Women:
Silences of the Middle Ages*, calls modesty “a particular brand of moderation” required
for the proper regulation of corporeal expression (95). By this Casagrande means

a series of rules, mostly from the monastic tradition, [that] recommended
that a woman’s gestures should be neither agitated nor lively; her ultimate
aim should be expressionless immobility. She should not laugh, but smile
without showing her teeth; she should not look straight ahead, wide-eyed,
but look down, with eyelids half-closed; she should not sob, wring her
hands, or shake her head, but weep in silence.¹ (95)

¹ Casagrande notes further: “When strolling, a woman had to be accompanied at all times by a member of
the family or by a servant; she had to walk through the crowd without looking around, ‘taking little steps,
True modesty meant keeping “every limb, every action, every expression under control” (95). The ultimate goal was the defense of “the supreme virtue of her chastity—decidedly at risk in the public display of her body” (95). Modesty functioned as a form of surveillance by “[keeping] women apart from the community, relegat[ing] them to enclosed, protected areas such as the home or convent, preserv[ing] their chastity, and [keeping] them on an instinctive, animal level” (88).

This and other scholarly conceptions of medieval modesty are based in no small part on the teachings found in pedagogical works of the Middle Ages. Joachim Bumke, in Höfische Kultur: Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter, observes that modesty heads the list of the top four “moribus et consuetudinibus bonis” recommended by Vincent of Beauvais in De eruditione filiorum regalium: “[1.] Schamhaftigkeit und Keuschheit, [2.] Demut [3.] Schweigsamkeit und [4.] Würde der Sitten und Gebärden” of equal size. Jerome of Siena and Antonino of Florence advised women to go from home to church as quickly and furtively as possible, “your eyes so low, that nothing but where you put your feet matters to you” (95). Further strictures were described by “lay writers such as Philip of Novara and Francesco of Barberino [who] went to great lengths to indicate acceptably modest, composed behavior in public: women were not to enjoy themselves too much, but affect superiority, eat little, dance with composure, and move measuredly” (85).


3 “Even a highlight in a woman’s social life—her wedding—when the whole community witnessed her passage from one family group to another [and indeed from childhood to adulthood], the ideal woman depicted by Francesco of Barberino (who even as a girl was always shy and reserved when she went out in public) was advised to reassert her social insecurity during the ceremony. Embarrassed, fearful, and immobile, she should not hold out her hand but wait until it was almost taken from her forcefully. Once installed in her new home, she should be timid with everyone, speaking only if spoken to, and even then, ‘briefly, in a low tone, fearful,’ revealing herself to her husband as ‘an untamed novice…in the work of love’” (Casagrande 88).
Modesty and chastity were to be demonstrated by the avoidance of “alle unnütze Ergötzung des Fleisches;” girls should eat and drink only to satisfy hunger, and they should not sleep too much or bathe (Höfische 471). The greatest danger to modesty and chastity came from girls’ “weltliche Putzsucht und durch schlechte Gesellschaft” (Höfische 471). Vincent thus exhorted readers to avoid wearing anything “was dazu diente, Wollust zu entzünden” (Höfische 471), for clothing “ist ein Zeichen der Seele” (qtd. in Höfische 471).

According to Siegfried Christoph, this sort of modesty is recognizable in romance literature. Christoph observes that

[o]f all the womanly virtues [in romance], i.e. the ability to love, joyfulness, piety, faithfulness, steadfastness, of all these modesty is, in fact, the quality upon which women’s excellence rests above all. Modesty is consistent with the passive, objective role which women like Belakane, Condwiramurs, Jeschute, Enite, Laudine and a host of others play. It is shamefaced modesty which so graces Enite when she enters the hall to be introduced to the assembled knights. (“Honor” 28)

In his volume Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality James A. Schultz notices the same theme:

Once Enite enters Arthur’s court, we hear nothing about her clothing or her courtliness. Instead, Hartmann focuses our attention for nearly thirty lines on Enite’s blushing, three times naming its cause as scham “modesty” (1711, 1725, 1732). This apparently is what makes her

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4 “Precipue uero in IIII eas instruere conuenit et informare, sc. in pudicicia siue castitate et in humilitate et in taciturnitate et in morum siue gestuum maturitate (S. 178)” (qtd. in Höfische 471 n.81).
5 This is because, according to Jerome, “[a grown maid] must blush at herself” if she sees herself naked. (See below.)
6 “animi est indicium (S. 181)” (qtd. in Höfische 471). Thus: “Sie sollten keine eng anliegenden Gewänder mit Schleppen und Schlitzen, keine Seide und Purpur, keine kostbaren Gürtel und Haarbänder tragen, und vor allem sollten sie sich nicht schminken und nicht die Haare färben: das war sündhaftes Teufelswerk, weil dadurch Gottes Schöpfung verfälscht würde. Statt mit leichtfertigen Mädchen und geschwätzigen Weibern umzugehen, sollten sie Witwen und Jungfrauen von erprobter Reinheit zur Begleitung wählen” (Bumke, Höfische 471).
beautiful (1727-31) and what plays the largest role in causing the knights of the Round Table to forget themselves and stare at her. [...] Gahmuret has a similar response to Belacane, who begins to weep as she concludes the story of Isenhart, who died in her service. [...] [Belacane] sighs often and looks at [Gahmuret] schamende “modestly” or “embarrassed” (28,29) through her tears, and that appears to do the trick [of causing Gahmuret to fall in love with her]. (Courtly 90)

Not only do “modesty and womanly devotion [...] stand at the head of any courtly catalog of womanly virtue,” but they in fact have “an aphrodisiac effect on [courtly] men” (Courtly 90).

Research Question

When the scholarship on the topic of modesty is compared to certain textual examples, it becomes evident that even the courtliest of romance women does not always act according to the standards of “womanly virtue” as they are understood to exist. Behavior that falls outside of the current scholarly understanding of “modest” can still be considered acceptably courtly and “modest” by the writers. Yet the courtly idea may in turn be something other than what contemporary pedagogues would call “modesty.” My dissertation seeks to answer the question, “How are notions of modesty in behavior and appearance represented in romance and conduct literature of German courtly culture in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries?” I investigate and then explain what a member of the nobility would have understood to be the ideals of modest behavior. I seek to do this by examining the texts that would have been most familiar and directly accessible to the court, including both works of fiction and conduct literature.

The term modesty itself is problematic from the outset in that, while the concepts associated with the English term may very well exist in German, there is no common
etymological root, so one must immediately define what German words will be used to approach an understanding of this theme. The three most relevant terms, which I examine thoroughly in my first chapter, are schame, kiusche, and zuht.

Schame is probably the one that most readily comes to mind. A word of unclear origin, the Old High German scama, as well as its Germanic counterparts in English, Swedish, and Frisian, meant “Beschämung, Schande” (Alsleben, “Scham”). The Old High German term carried the additional sense of “Schamgefühl” (Alsleben, “Scham”). Depending on the context, schame most often means either “shame” or “modesty,” and in some cases it could be understood as either or both. It often approaches the notion of “propriety,” which indicates the degree to which modesty is inseparable, perhaps even indistinguishable, from proper behavior as a whole.

Kiusche, a rather slippery term because of its variety of meanings, is most often taken to mean “chastity,” but in many instances it can also be read as “modesty.” Kiusche is derived from a borrowing from the Latin conscius, understood to mean “mitwissend, eingewehrt, bewusst” (Alsleben, “keusch”). Originally an early medieval religious term, the initial meaning of kiusche, “der christlichen Lehre bewusst,” had by the high Middle Ages turned into “tugendhaft, sittsam, enthaltsam, rein” (Alsleben, “keusch”).

Zuht is one of the most important concepts for courtly society; its primary meaning is something like “courtly breeding” or “virtuous behavior.” A derivative of ziehen, whose roots are Indo-European (Kluge), zuht was originally just an alternate

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7 As is well known from both literary and educational texts of the period, courtly society was founded upon certain ideal qualities. Some of the best known are moderation [mäze], steadfastness [staeue], and loyalty [triuwe].
nominative form of Ziehen (Alsleben, “Zucht”). It developed early on from the concrete—“das Aufziehen, Erziehung, Nachkommenschaft (besonders von Tieren und Pflanzen)”—to the abstract: “Disziplin, Strafe; Anstand, Sittsamkeit” (Alsleben, “Zucht”). In MHG it takes on an even wider array of connotations, such as “behavior that conforms to the standards of courtliness,” and the assortment of terms offered by Lexer: “bildung des innern u. äussern menschen, wolgezogenheit, feine sitte u. lebensart, sittsamkeit, höflichkeit, liebenswürdigkeit, anstand” (Lexer, “zuht”). Even where modesty is not the primary meaning, it remains a very closely associated concept, again suggesting that modesty is so closely intertwined with courtly manners as to be nearly inseparable.

Two more minor terms round out this array of keywords: blûc and sitelich and their derivatives. Sitelich, in addition to “dem brauche gemäss” can also mean “bescheiden, anständig” (Lexer, “sitelich”). BMZ lists modestus as the Latin equivalent of sitec “sittig, ruhig, anständig” (Benecke, Müller, and Zarncke, “sitec”). Blûc is defined as “verschämt, verlegen, betreten; unentschlossen, bedenklich” (Benecke, Müller, and Zarncke, “blûc”). Nigel F. Palmer notes that blûc is “much less commonly attested than the schame family” (62) and is regionally restricted to Upper German (69). Palmer makes the case for “two kinds of blûkeit,” which are “absolute modesty such as that attributed to the Virgin Mary” and “that which becomes apparent when a desire comes into conflict

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8 I decided against the term diemüete (“humility”) as a keyword. While the concepts may have some similarities, there is a significant difference between humility and modesty (see discussion in Chapter One). One word that must be put aside is bescheidenheit. Though its modern German meaning is “modesty, unpretentiousness,” its medieval definition “carries the basic idea of discernment, the ability to make (meaningful) decisions”(Gibbs and McConnell, “Introduction” 17).
Just as these terms establish the semantic borders of modesty, so too does conduct literature serve as a tool for establishing medieval rules and standards for modesty. Reading fictional literature through the lens of conduct literature helps me to approach the text as a medieval listener may well have done. By understanding the everyday requirements and conditions for behavior to which members of the court were expected to subject themselves, I can better understand how well romance heroes match up to real life ideals.

Appearance is a uniquely important aspect of modesty, as it applies to both dress and to decorum. A common theme in conduct literature for ladies is the way a woman looks—what she looks at and how her eyes move. Therefore, an examination of the sense of sight and the importance of vision and perception is crucial to the project. In addition, investigating what is known about clothing of the period is useful in determining what would have been considered appropriately modest dress in works of fiction.

**Research Design**

My study draws on some of the most well-known texts of Middle High German literature. The first pedagogical text I consider is *Der Welsche Gast* by Thomasin von Zirclaria, a lengthy and very popular conduct manual written around 1215. Extant in twenty-four manuscripts and fragments (Cormeau, “Thomasin”), it offers vast amounts of prescriptive advice for young men and women of the German court, explaining what they must do in order to be successful knights and ladies. The number of manuscripts suggests that this text was distributed widely and, whether in complete or excerpted form,
functioned as a manual, in the truest sense of the word, to which budding aristocrats could refer and from which they could take guidance. I also consider the pair of thirteenth-century poems known as Der Winsbecke and Die Winsbeckin, variants of which exist in sixteen surviving manuscripts and fragments (Schanze, “Handschriftencensus”). Die Winsbeckin, a composition of 37-39 stanzas depending on the manuscript (Rasmussen, “Fathers” 112), features a mother-daughter dialogue on proper courtly behavior for ladies. I set it in comparison to its companion piece, Der Winsbecke, a father-son discussion on proper courtly conduct for men. This text is somewhat longer, totaling 67-78 stanzas, depending on the manuscript (“Fathers” 111).

In addition to these important works of conduct literature, I examine the four texts that comprise the “core canon of the German courtly romance” (Meister 1): Erec and Iwein by Hartmann von Aue, Parzival by Wolfram von Eschenbach, and Tristan by Gottfried von Strassburg. Erec, the oldest of the four, has a composition date of 1175-1190. Iwein was composed around 1200, with Parzival and Tristan both following about ten years later. With the exception of Erec, which exists in its entirety in only one manuscript (Cormeau, “Erec”)—and even that one is missing the first hundred or so lines—the transmission history of these texts attests to their widespread popularity: thirty surviving manuscripts and fragments for Tristan (Kuhn), thirty-three for Iwein (Cormeau, “Iwein”), and eighty-six for Parzival (Bumke, “Parzival”).

9 I have chosen to exclude the genre of Minnesang because I believe the subject of this study is best examined through the dual lenses of conduct literature and romance. This is not to say that Minnesang is irrelevant; on the contrary, it should be noted that, for medieval audiences, the Winsbecke poems probably would have been strongly associated with Minnesang, since they appear in Liederhandschriften like the Codex Manesse. Nevertheless, the period of extraordinary creativity from about 1175 to 1220 is
There are four central areas of inquiry that structure my project. First, I investigate the “cleavage,” in both senses of the word, between the two genres of romance and conduct literature: in what ways do they cling to each other as reference points or split off from the other’s constructs? Past scholarship considered the two genres absolutely distinct, with conduct literature occupying the less worthy and less significant place. Recent scholarship has swung hard in the opposite direction, questioning the validity of these generic distinctions and pointing to the didacticism of virtually all medieval literature. I closely read the texts themselves and look to their engagement with the issue of genre to uncover what contradictions exist between the instructions given to courtly youth and the behavior practiced by their ostensible romance role models.

In addition to the question of genre differences, I am especially attuned to gender differences. Standards and practices of modest behavior are different for men and women, and my study pays close attention to both the differences and similarities. For example, in addition to scantily-clad heroines, romances also frequently feature their heroes without any clothes on at all. I explore these two similar yet decidedly different representations with regard to the characters’ courtliness. This illuminates much about medieval conceptions and constructions of courtly gender identities.

Third, I focus on the role of sight as related to the display of the body. This is a fundamental area of concern for the overall perception of courtly characters and their ability to measure up to particular standards. Much is typically made of not only the way a person appears but the very act of appearing in front of a particular person or people.

particularly notable in German literature for the flourishing of courtly romance and the creation of conduct literature.
Thomasin, for example, expresses strong disapproval of those young ladies who hide away in their rooms when a stranger comes to visit; instead, they ought to allow themselves to be seen. But when they do appear, proper behavior dictates that they not look at the guest too intently: their role is not to see but to be seen. Young men, on the other hand, can feel free to look at anyone they please. Examples such as these demonstrate the high stakes of seeing and being seen, particularly for women. Failure to act properly in either respect means running the risk of earning a bad reputation or, conversely, lifelong obscurity. Both the passive and active versions of seeing are fundamental and indispensable to praiseworthy conduct.

Finally, I compare and contrast the emendations, deletions, and additions the German romance authors make to their French source material. Such innovations indicate significant intentionality on the part of the adapter. For example, Chrétien’s Perceval does not undergo the awkward bathing scene that is forced upon Wolfram’s Parzival. Indeed, Wolfram’s narrative seems almost fixated on Parzival’s naked body before, during, and after his bath, while Chrétien’s telling maneuvers gingerly around any such suggestion. This and similar incidental scenes, which do not significantly alter the narrative or work to advance the plot, indicate a particularly German interest in courtly

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10 It is important to note the continuity in literary translatio from French- to German-language culture. As Bumke observes, the years between 1170 and 1220 were the apex of this transmission: “It involved almost exclusively those texts that were new and fashionable in France. In some cases the time lag between the appearance of an original in French and its German adaptation seems to have been less than ten years: a remarkably short time span, considering how long it must have taken in those days for a new work of literature to become internationally known, and how time-consuming the translation of a long epic was. It would appear that the German courts were well informed about the latest works on the French literary scene” (Courtly 89). Such intensity was a distinguishing feature of this period; “[a]fter 1220 the situation changed drastically. French taste did remain dominant, and the adopted French genres of the minnesong and the courtly romance continued to shape literary work for some time to come. But the direct adoption of French texts ceased as suddenly as it had begun” (Courtly 89).
behavior and the body. 

**Overview of Secondary Literature**

Courty *tugente*  

Recent literature on German medieval courtly virtues owes much to Norbert Elias, who in 1939 wrote that the “großritterlichen Feudalhöfen” enabled the “festere Konvention der Umgangsformen, eine gewisse Mäßigung der Affekte, eine Regelung der Manieren,” that is, “Courtoisie” (*Über*, vol. 2 115). Courtliness is, at its heart, conventionalized regulation and moderation. To this Schultz adds, “Courtly culture elaborated a class-specific ideal of social life that required a certain self-restraint—at table, in speech, in response to insult or challenge—and promised distinction in return” (*Courtly* xvi). This self-restraint is encapsulated in the terms *tugent*, *güete*, *êre*, and *zuht*; “[t]o invoke them is to invoke courtliness itself” (*Courtly* 84). These qualities or virtues (MHG *tugente*) can be attributed to women and to men, but often have meanings differentiated according to gender (*Courtly* 84). Ann Marie Rasmussen and Olga Trokhimenko point to *zuht* as one example: when associated with a man it means “self-control, self-discipline, restraint,” and, for a woman, “‘courteous behaviour,’ ‘modesty,’ or even ‘chastity’” (67). Schultz proposes that *tugente*, while not absolutely differentiated according to gender, are “inflected for gender,” in that they can be attached to men or to women while suggesting different things for each and having different effects on their perception by others (*Courtly* 85).

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11 While it would be anachronistic to talk about a single political entity called “Germany,” the shared language does seem to have a unifying effect on literary tropes, and I argue that certain changes to the romances do follow particularly German patterns.

12 “virtues” or “excellent qualities”
These standards of behavior were intertwined with a set of moral considerations that formed a “shame culture,” as Margaret Mead termed it in her 1937 *Cooperation and Competition among Primitives*. This contrasts with a “guilt culture” such as that of Christian-based morality (Szövérffy 40). Whereas a guilt culture demonstrates concern with the inner world and the status of one’s soul, a shame culture focuses on the external world and the status of one’s public image (Ward 4). Though not exclusively a shame culture, medieval Europe was “a society in which the shaming principle reigned supreme” (4). This motivates the decisions of characters in Arthurian romances, for whom the most important consideration is “whether or not these [actions] will increase their ‘reputations’ or enrich their ‘honor,’ their êre” (Szövérffy 41). They are driven chiefly by “the fear of ‘losing face,’ or the desire to regain it, at all cost, after its manifest loss” (41). David N. Yeandle, while noting that it is an oversimplification, agrees with Szövérffy’s view of this conception as “a valuable approach to Middle High German literature” (“Shame” 296).

The difference between shame and guilt cultures seems to be closely related to the question of whether or not shame is a virtue. Didactic writers coming from an educated, clerical background, made shame into a virtue stripped of its “naturwüchsigen, affektiven Charakter” (Krause 211). In *Parzival*, according to Yeandle, “Scham […] wird nicht nur als Tugend, sondern als wichtiger Oberbegriff aller anderen Tugenden gepriesen” (*schame* xii). He asserts that by the year 1230 “Scham” was securely positioned as an “Obertugend” in many MHG texts (*schame* xii). Other scholars, such as Allen and Krause, agree with this appraisal of its universality but also refer to shame as an emotion
or feeling. Allen suggests that shame is in fact “the primal medieval emotion, so ubiquitous and various are its applications” (192). Krause locates it according to its effect, calling it one of the “herausragenden Verhaltensregulatoren” (202).

Exactly what it is and how it functions is a complex subject, arising in large measure from the fact that MHG *scham(e)* and English *shame* each have multiple definitions, some of which seem to stand at odds with each other. The linguistic paradox is evident in the following statement: “a sense of shame can prevent shame or disgrace” (Yeandle, “Shame” 295). Yeandle observes that “Scham [ist] ein bipolarer Begriff” in that it can bring about, on the one hand, “die schlimmsten unangenehmen Gefühle der Peinlichkeit, der Schmach und des Hohns” (*schame* xiv). On the other hand, it can be a “Tugend […], die durch ihre hemmende Funktion vor falschem Handeln zurückhält.” This dichotomy can be called “das Negative und das Positive der Scham” (*schame* xiv).

Allen’s description embraces the ambiguities: “Shame happens somewhere between reason and passion, mind and body, choice and necessity. It tracks the existential line between flesh and the soul; it straddles, it is the boundary between choice and those disobedient, bothersome members” (198).

The Medieval Body

Physical appearance, even when presented in a fictional context, was of great importance at the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth. It was at this point that, according to Kathryn Starkey and Horst Wenzel, a “visual turn” led to the “overt development of a courtly culture that goes hand in hand with innovations in architecture, fashion, literature, and literary transmission” (132–33). Starkey and Wenzel
note that “[vernacular literature] was composed with visual communication in mind” (133), which is evident in “the emphasis on looking and appearance” (133). In *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages*, Suzannah Biernoff writes, “In the Middle Ages, vision was a way of relating to oneself, to the sensible world including other animate beings, and to God,” making sight “at once an extension of the sensitive soul towards an object, and the passage of sensible forms through the eye and into the brain” (3–4).

While courtly culture may not have followed the same strictures as the church fathers, it shows a great deal of agreement with John Chrysostom’s observation that “the eye not only of the wanton but even of the modest woman pierces and disturbs the soul” (qtd. in Caviness 21). Courtly love, the heart of courtly romance, “begins when the lover sees the beloved, the image of the beloved enters through the eyes, lodges in the heart, and takes the lover captive” (Schultz, *Courtly* 71). Despite some variations, “the efficient cause of courtly love is always external [...]. [It] enter[s] the lover and provoke[s] a reaction: love” (*Courtly* 71). Emphasizing the consistency of this pattern and its difference from most other models (*Courtly* 71), Schultz writes that the “origin of love [is placed] outside the lover” (*Courtly* 74).

Such literary constructions do not necessarily find direct correlates with real-life notions of women, however. Biernoff points out that in certain situations, a woman who allows herself to encounter love can be castigated “for compromising her eyes, and by extension her chastity” (Biernoff 53). This can be perceived as a failure to “behave[] with the modesty that becomes a lady” (53). A real woman, according to Carla Casagrande, was first and foremost a body whose value lay in its potential for commitment either to
the Church or family (84), and accordingly was to be “displayed as a status symbol,” and kept “inviolate, attractive, and healthy” (94). But the courtly body is something else. It is not “marginalized, transgressive, or queer,” observes Schultz, but rather “secular and vernacular and was idealized, at least in literary texts, at the very center of worldly power, the medieval court” (Courly 17–18).

Importantly, there is an absence of anatomical markers of sex difference; for example, “women’s breasts and men’s chests [...] are two variations of the same thing,” with women’s breasts functioning as “a gendered inflection of a body that is not sexually dimorphic” (Courly 42). The most striking distinction between “bodies is not between male and female bodies but between the bodies that provoke a love affair and those that are presented to the court. [...] MHG writers seem to think anatomical details matter less to a lover than to courtly society” (Courly 47) and make it clear that “the bodies that cause [courtly lovers] to fall in love [...] are bodies in which sexual difference does not matter” (Courly 27). This is because the most important marker of status for a body is not its sex but its nobility, which is “visible as radiant beauty” while sex remains unseen (Courly 83). Indeed, a body is beautiful, and solicits a response, only insofar that it is noble (Courly 169). This is so strong a marker that characters who try to go incognito can hide only their individual identity, not their status: “[t]heir bodies give them away” (Courly 80).

However, the significance of nobility and the lack of sexual dimorphism do not mean that gender is invisible; it is just marked rhetorically instead of morphologically (Courly 35). “[W]omen’s bodies are treated differently from men’s: more rhetorical
energy is invested in their description; their beauty has a more unsettling, more aphrodisiac effect on the viewers; they have less control over when and how they are displayed” (Courtly 46) and they “are viewed more aggressively” by the court than are men’s bodies (Courtly 44). In Gottfried, for example, “the descriptions and the reactions [when men’s bodies are on display] are straightforward but distant, and the ornaments are structural—lists, parallel syntax, anaphora” (Courtly 35). This in contrast to women’s bodies, to which “both the poet and the courtiers linger and attempt to get close,” indicated by the fact that “the language is densely figured and insinuating” (Courtly 35).

As Schultz and E. Jane Burns see it, the importance of clothing in creating gender is second to none. “[T]he manly creature’ is created, [...] the ‘knightly man’ is formed only when he gets dressed” writes Schultz of Gottfried (“Bodies” 98).13 “Ungendered body and suitable clothes together create the gendered man” who, without clothes, “remains ungendered” (“Bodies” 98). In Courtly Love Undressed, Burns comes at the question somewhat differently, locating courtly love

along a continuum from the naked to the dressed body, from the clerical presumption—reiterated in some literary formulations—that clothing conceals a natural, fixed, and biologically sexed body to the conception of a social body derived from the interaction of clothing and other cultural formations. (Courtly 73)

Burns and Schultz are in agreement that clothing functions as a replacement for “anatomy as the prime indicator of gender identity” (Burns, Courtly 132).

13 Burns says much the same thing regarding the depiction of Lancelot in the Charrette: “[T]he courtly knight’s masculinity and social status derive from the fact that his specific body parts are encased and literally unseen. He is gendered masculine precisely to the extent that his anatomical sex is concealed and unverified. He is a knight and a man, curiously, to the degree that he has no clearly sexed body” (Courtly 136).
Thus even though such “marks of gender” as “pronouns, names, behaviors, [and] clothes [...] enable the women and men [...] to keep themselves straight [...], clothing has a special status because of its proximity to the body” (Schultz, “Bodies” 99). Schultz quotes Roland Barthes: “the body is taken ‘in charge’ by an intelligible system of signs, and sentience is dissolved in the signifier” (qtd. in “Bodies” 98). If garments “clothe the body and disclose it at the same time, they create a woman. If they harmonize with the body and reveal the leg, they create a man” (“Bodies” 98). While Tristan’s clothing “collaborates” with his body and “confirms its nobility,” Isolde’s body “is exposed by its clothing and offered to public view [...] [and] turned into the object of voyeuristic fantasy” (“Bodies” 98–99). This is also the case more generally: “if you can see through the clothes, then it must be a woman’s body” (“Bodies” 98). Burns concurs, observing that romance writers “tend to fetishize their heroines [...] by describing clothed body parts as if they were naked” (Courtly 70).

The “as if” turns out to be key: Burns and Schultz differ as to the courtliness of partial or full nudity. “[T]he courtly lady [...] gains social status ‘as a woman’ to the extent that her flesh is exposed to view,” writes Burns (Courtly 137). In addition to the narrative energy invested in detailed descriptions of her clothing, “[m]uch is made, typically, of the white skin that covers the elite lady’s face and neck, chest, and hands. It is not that this lady is unclothed per se but that skin itself constitutes the aristocratic woman’s typical garment” (Courtly 137). In contrast, Schultz finds that, at least in MHG literature, “the bare flesh of a noble woman will not elicit an erotic response in a courtly knight,” no matter how perfectly formed and peerless it may be (Courtly 87). Indeed,
“[t]he naked body is not a courtly body and cannot provoke courtly love” (*Courtly* 87) and in fact “represents the greatest *challenge* to praiseworthiness” (*Courtly* 204–05 n. 22).

The not infrequent occurrence of naked bodies in romance is the subject of some discussion, which leads quickly to the question of whether public nudity, or nudity in front of members of the opposite sex, was an everyday occurrence in the life of the court. The medieval tradition more generally locates nakedness as the “root cause of the affect” of shame, in accordance with the accepted interpretation of the Garden of Eden story (Yeandle, “Shame” 313). Yet it receives ambivalent treatment from romance writers. Yeandle notes that “it was clearly part of everyday life in the private sphere and as such could be referred to in literature, but in the public sphere it was equally a cause for considerable distress or shame” (“Shame” 314). Commenting on *Parzival*, Palmer agrees and observes that, without audience expectations as to the embarrassing nature of Parzival’s bathing scene, the narrative would “fall rather flat” (59). Any idea that “[w]eibliche Bedienung im Bad ist die gewöhnliche im MA. [...] und die Gefahr für die Sittlichkeit wird nicht empfunden” (Ernst Martin qtd. in Palmer 60), a notion supported by Elias, is “wide of the mark” (60). Hans Peter Duerr similarly rejects Elias’s hypothesis by pointing out that, in a culture in which a young woman had always to keep her eyes lowered, it “ist mehr als unwahrscheinlich” that she ever would have had the chance to see a man in a bath. “Noch weit beschämender jedoch wäre es gewesen, wenn eine Frau den Mann *völlig* nackt gesehen hätte” (Duerr 31).

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14 Duerr disagrees with those who maintain that men and women bathed together in the public bathhouses
As for woman being seen naked by a man, the behavioral ideals seem somewhat clearer. The thirteenth-century moralist Vincent of Beauvais, in his text *De eruditione filiorum nobilium* (On the Education of Noble Children) quotes a letter written by Jerome: “I dislike baths very much in a grown maid, who must blush at herself and who should not see herself naked” (qtd. in Bumke, *Courtly* 338). If a woman ought not to see herself naked, that leaves very little opportunity for a man to see her naked. Duerr states unequivocally, “nur von einer Hure ist es denkbar, daß sie sich vor anderen, gar vor Männern entblößt” (32). Allen finds that female nudity in particular is centrally connected to shame, “and that the blush, shame’s sign, befits a woman more than a man” (192).

Medieval Conduct Literature

Conduct literature, which Kathleen M. Ashley and Robert L.A. Clark define as “written texts systematizing a society’s codes of behavior” (x), has only rather recently been promoted to scholarly significance. Earlier studies, such as those of Elias following the tradition of Erasmus, portrayed the genre “as rather simplistic tracts on crude manners” (Krueger xxvii–xxviii). Modern scholars now recognize these texts as important “not only in the evolution of European manners, but also as works that are compelling in their own right” which, whether in prose or poetry, exhibit “variety, rhetorical complexity, and important social function” (xxviii). Ashley and Clark attribute this intensification of interest to “the development of women’s history over the last generation,” which looked to conduct books in order to understand “normative female

that appeared in the twelfth century, saying that this claim has not been proven and the relevant sources demonstrate that “die meisten dieser Bäder eine Geschlechtertrennung hatten” (38).
behavior” and assumed that they “reflect[ed] the real lives of medieval women and [provided] information about their social roles and status” (xii).

“The traditional distinction between ‘didactic’ and ‘literary’ texts has been increasingly challenged” by modern scholars, note Ashley and Clark (xii), but even medieval treatises show an engagement with this division and a recognition that the line was easily crossed. Susanne Barth points to Thomasin von Zirclaria’s opinion on the matter, which is that courtly romances should be used “als Zuchtlehre für die Jugend [...] bis diese ze sinne (I, 1081) gekommen ist” (72). Courtly romance writers themselves would have agreed with the characterization of their work as “Zuchtlehre;” they routinely “begründen [...] den Wert und Nutzen ihrer Werke lieber über das prodesse als über das delectare” (Lähnemann and Linden 3). Crossover texts are common; Bernd Bastert points to Die Winsbeckin as evidence of a “didactic” text that seems to come straight from vernacular romance literature, having more in common with the Eneasroman or the beginning of Das Nibelungenlied than with any Latinate or grammar school paradigm (14). Roberta L. Krueger offers a reminder of the complexity of the genre’s messages: “[Conduct books] offer a perspective that is, in some respects, more down to earth than the view afforded by courtly romances and troubadour lyrics; on the other hand, their views on the sanctity of marriage and on women’s duties within the household seem idealized compared to the fabliaux” (xxviii). Helen Cooper observes the “narrative redundancy” inherent in the amount of instruction given to heroes who clearly do not need it and suggests that “the advice is not really aimed at the hero at all: romances serve primarily as an education for their readers, and so the instruction has a clear function so
far as the audience of the work is concerned” (103).

While the current consensus seems to be that “conduct” literature can be found in texts that are not conventionally understood to belong to that genre, such as romance, Rasmussen problematizes this for the field of German literature by asking, 

[I]s [there] any medieval German secular text that does not explore in some fashion the question of proper conduct that leads to good repute in this world or to salvation in the next[?] All medieval literature can seem at heart a moral-didactic enterprise; whence, from what place, arises a separate genre of conduct literature? (“Fathers” 106–07).

Lähnemann and Linden make a similar point, observing that “Lehrhaftigkeit ist [...] ein Schlüsselbegriff für das Verständnis mittelalterlicher deutscher Dichtung [...] und zwar gilt dies [...] als eine Dimension volkssprachiger Literatur von Beginn an” (1).

Rasmussen suggests that what modern scholars really mean by the limiting notion of conduct literature is “a clearly-profiled medieval topos—sage advice imparted by a mature and knowledgeable narrator to a young person (or all youth)” (“Fathers” 107).

While the literary construct is youthful, the real-life intended audience was not necessarily young. Indeed, writes Krueger, “most conduct books would have been read by a range of readers over the years, men and women, elite and upwardly mobile” (xix). This is not least because “manuscripts compiled, often in one volume, romances, religious poems, fabliaux, and moral treatises” (Ashley and Clark xiii). It therefore makes sense that scholars “view the ideals for young men and women in a comparative framework” (Krueger xix) and not assume that didactic treatises function as “snapshots or accurate reflections of medieval society” or “that their prescriptions for ideal behaviour
were faithfully enacted by readers” (xxviii). Instead, conduct books “convey how their moralist narrators wished social life might be organized and ordered; they portray fantasies of domestic order and fears of shame and failure” (xxviii). By theorizing “the link between prescription and historical practice,” conduct literature is made more interesting and useful “for our understanding of medieval culture” (Ashley and Clark x), demonstrating “the extent to which the encoding of social practice is a crucial but intriguingly variable function of medieval—and indeed of any—culture” (xvii). Rasmussen also problematizes the current “focus of scholarly thinking,” wondering, “[W]hat might it mean for scholarship to look at conduct literature as being fundamentally about debate and not a monologue of received truths?” (“Fathers” 127) Thinking more about “the processes of creating meaning that it harnesses and represents” (Rasmussen, “Fathers” 127–28) might productively challenge the “gendered component” of the fact that conduct literature is “(almost) invariably addressed by men to women” (Rondeau 187).

15 Albrecht Classen also supports this position, though perhaps for reasons other than those stated by Krueger (and Ashley and Clark x): “[A]s the vast corpus of mystical texts, mostly composed by female writers, suggests, these prescriptive guidelines [as recorded by Vincent of Beauvais, Giles of Rome, Thomasin von Zerclaere, Ulrich von Liechtenstein, and Hugo von Trimberg] did not necessarily offer an absolute framework for women’s education and literature. It would seem speculative to regard such didactic approaches as the norm prevalent at that time, because otherwise these authors would not have felt a need to formulate their statements about girls’ recommendable reading material. More important, these aforementioned authors, and probably many others, deemed it necessary to outline rules and guidelines for their educational system, hoping thereby also to influence the power relationship between men and women” (Power 16–17).

16 “Read in the light of the social history of their respective geo-linguistic settings, analysed in tandem with contemporary literature or material culture, conduct books help to flesh out our understanding of the contexts in which medieval social identities were shaped” (Krueger xxviii).

17 Lähnemann and Linden support this line of thinking: “Das lehrhafte Sprechen hat als methodisches Kriterium den Vorteil, dass es gattungsübergreifend ansetzt und, ohne sich zu einem Habitus verfestigen zu müssen, auch punktuell und momenthaft in Texten, die eben nicht primär lehrhaft argumentieren, aufscheinen kann. Dabei meint das lehrhafte Sprechen nicht nur die Vermittlung von Wissen im engeren
Jennifer Fisk Rondeau’s attempt at theorization involves a questioning of the tensions between prescription and practice; she distinguishes between the literary critics’ and the historians’ understanding of conduct literature (186–87). The former group sees it “as primarily prescriptive, as a set or sets of normative behaviors encoded in highly formalized texts” while historians view it as “primarily a descriptive term, and texts that encode it tell us about how people behave or behaved” (186). While the historians’ perspective “may seem like a naive definition, it is one that has been too often overlooked in the scholarship on medieval conduct literature” (186). Ashley and Clark similarly advocate for “[breaching] what used to be the high barrier between Literature and History” by historicizing texts and refusing to subscribe to the formerly widely-accepted notion that conduct books are “hopelessly contaminated by ‘history’” (xi).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in three main areas. First, it problematizes an aspect of current conceptions of courtly conduct. I ask what modesty really means, rather than going on assumptions or hazy concepts of chastity, veiled women, and well-covered bodies. Second, it contributes to a better understanding of representations of the body, gender, and courtly virtues. This may be most apparent in my study of nakedness, a theme that is quite prevalent but has not yet received adequate attention. Third, it expands current notions of the relationship that exists between German-language romance and conduct literature. I seek out connections as well as contradictions, trying to flesh out what turns out to be a highly complex tapestry of cultural values.

Sinne, sondern auch das Sprechen über Lehrhaftigkeit und die Möglichkeiten einer sprachlich vermittelten Autorisierung von Normen und Verhaltensvorgaben” (2).
I suggest that current misperceptions about notions of modesty result from them remaining hidden within terms whose traditional meanings are varied and unquestioned. Especially within the German-language literature, potentially problematic definitions are generally unquestioned because the modern-day cognate often does retain at least some sense of its antecedent. This oversight obscures a more critical and nuanced approach. For example, the equation of MHG *schame* with New High German *Scham* and/or with modern English *shame* is frequent and often unquestioned, with scholars sometimes using the terms interchangeably, as if they were all identical. It seems as if there is an underlying assumption that the definitions are taken for granted: works such as Otfrid Ehrismann’s *Ehre und Mut, Âventiure und Minne*, rather than questioning these assumptions or introducing fresh information, reinforce received truths.

**Scholarly Approach**

My scholarly approach involves close readings of texts with special attention to issues of gender, utilizing a cross-generic comparative approach informed by principles of literary influence, medieval understandings of the body, and the history of sexuality. I have narrowed my focus to an analysis of the texts themselves, as opposed to the manuscripts, with attention to predecessor texts in French. The keywords I outline give me a foundation for examining each text on its own terms. Using texts that were composed within fifty years of each other narrows the scope to a manageable amount and justifies this comparative approach. I interpret each scene or passage under discussion in its respective narrative or didactic context, as well as its sociohistorical context, and

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18 The one exception is *Die Winsbeckin*, since the manuscript variants are different enough that a standard version does not suffice. I address these differences in Chapter Two.
determine its function in contributing to or defining a notion, or notions, of modesty.

**Outline of the Study**

In my first chapter, “Translating Modesty: Thomasin von Zirclaria’s *Der Welsche Gast,*” I focus on that text to introduce and examine the key terms of the study. This well-known and widely-read manual makes an excellent entry point to my topic: Thomasin is well aware of his social and cultural milieu, referencing contemporary secular and church politics and bringing in examples from a wide array of familiar romances. He recognizes that his young audience is used to legends and romances but offers none of that, aspiring to what he sees as a higher good: pure pedagogy containing nothing but unadulterated truth. I turn my attention to the first of Thomasin’s ten books-within-a-book, since that is the one most concerned with proper courtly etiquette as opposed to personal virtue. It is also the book that contains more gender-specific directives than any of the others, which are much more concerned with advising young knights and knights-to-be. Though himself a cleric, Thomasin does not expect his audience to conform to religious standards of virtue; rather, he shows that modesty is a quality essential for success at court.

Thomasin’s book is also a unique intersection between the Latin and German vocabulary for modesty, and between the religious and secular traditions. As a cleric, he is likely to have been immersed in a Latin-language, religious tradition. And as a non-native speaker of German, he is likely to have used references like a Latin-German glossary to compose his text. While very few of these glossaries from the thirteenth century are extant, I examine what evidence there is in the medieval and early modern tradition for reconciling German and Latin terms. This provides valuable evidence for the
links between Thomasin’s religious, educated tradition and his audience’s lay vernacular customs.

My second chapter, “Modesty Made Flesh: The Winsbecke Poems,” closely examines the importance of modesty in relation to the body, particularly as it exists in the liminal space between courtly romance and courtly real life. The poems are very explicitly conduct literature, but their style and references rely heavily on romance idioms. Der Winsbecke features a father telling his son everything he needs to know about how to behave properly as a knight. Rather than the all-consuming goal that it represents for the daughter of Die Winsbekin, modesty is one of a number of components that will ensure the son’s success at court. Women themselves are a means to this end, as a woman’s body literally blankets the man who is worthy of honor. The son’s response to the father’s extensive advice sets off an unexpected chain of events: claiming that he much prefers the religious life, he convinces his father to renounce his worldly possessions and retreat from the world.

Whereas the lengthier father-son poem offers far more monologue than dialogue, the mother-daughter counterpart features lively exchanges and the sharing of ideas. Lady Winsbeckin answers her daughter’s many questions and engages her in debates about the dark, foreboding nature of minne before the two reach an optimistic conclusion. The focus on the sense of sight looms large: a well-bred young lady must guard what her eyes see, as well as how they are seen by others. While most potential problems are easily solved, a personified minne/Venus becomes the ineluctable threat the virtuous daughter must eventually face. Worried that minne might prove too great a force for her to resist,
the daughter implores her mother to compel her to modesty by keeping her under *huote* “surveillance.” But her mother refuses her insistent pleas and convinces her daughter that the only way to reckon with the violence of *minne* is to follow the rules of *minne*. The pair ends up in a female-only, convent-like space of learning, echoing the father and son’s decision to embrace a monastic lifestyle.

The third chapter, “‘In rit schemelicher name:’ Locating Knightly *scham*” examines those scenes in *Parzival*, *Iwein*, and *Tristan* in which the heroes are depicted naked. All three tales feature a scene in which the hero is stripped of his clothing so that courtly women may heal him of his wounds. Both Gawan’s (in *Parzival*) and Iwein’s physicians demonstrate concern for the patient’s would-be shame at being naked. For Tristan and Parzival, no similar worry is expressed. It is a close visual examination of Tristan’s body that leads Isolde to discover the truth about his identity, following which she, her mother, and Brangaene all confront him while he is in the tub. In Parzival’s tub scene, the maidens who attend him combine concern with curiosity, treating his bruises while hoping to catch a glimpse of his private parts.

Comparing these scenes reveals several consistent patterns: the naked men are all in conflict in some way with the ideals of knighthood. They have either failed to live up to its standards, or are not yet properly trained. The women doing the caring are almost exclusively maidens, and there is nothing immodest about their gaze in itself. Any shame comes solely from the disgrace of the man’s nakedness being seen at all. In the end, the nakedness works to reintegrate the men into courtly life.

My fourth chapter, “Tattered Gowns and Silk Chemises: The Courtly Lady
Exposed” examines the scenes in Parzival, Erec, and Iwein in which a courtly lady is depicted with minimal clothing. Like naked knights, the presence of partially-dressed ladies is a common thread in romance. In Erec and Iwein, when Enite and Laudine make their first appearances they are both wearing torn clothing that reveals their beautiful white skin. In Parzival, Condwiramurs comes to visit Parzival at night wearing a cloak and very little else. Parzival’s Jeschute forms the counter-example to these three characters, revealing the disastrous consequences of a non-knight seeing a partially undressed lady. She remains hopelessly miserable until Parzival, now having achieved knighthood, is able to restore the damage he has done.

In every scene except Jeschute’s, partial nakedness increases the heroes’ interest in the ladies. The effect may be instantaneous, as with Iwein falling immediately in love with Laudine, or it may happen more gradually, as with Parzival and Erec. But the hero eventually takes this semi-naked woman as his wife, falling in love with her while she is in a state of partial undress. She is shown to be eminently courtly; her modesty is never questioned, only accentuated.
Translating Modesty: Thomasin von Zirclaria’s *Der Welsche Gast*

Sometime in the first part of the fifteenth century, an Austrian noble named Elisabeth von Volkenstorff compiled a list of the volumes in her personal library. “Nota hie ist ze merkchen, waz ich Elspet Volchenstorfferin pueher hab deutscher” begins her strikingly lengthy catalogue (Volkenstorff 106). The Bible is listed first, followed by almost a dozen other works of scripture, exegesis, commentary, and hagiography. Item 13, out of a total of forty-four, is “der waelhisch gast.” It immediately succeeds the library’s most significant religious and ethical holdings and precedes medical books, law books, and other genres including romance and maer “story.” That it was being read some two hundred years after its creation, and by someone whose tastes in literature also included “modern,” popular texts, suggests that it continued to be seen as relevant even to readers whose world looked quite different from the one described by the author. While the historical references might not have applied, its exhortations to virtuous behavior retained a timeless quality.

Thomasin von Zirclaria’s thirteenth-century book of manners, the earliest such text extant in German, offers a heavily didactic perspective on etiquette, courtesy, ethics, and virtue.\(^{19}\) Coming from a cleric—and a foreign one at that—the advice has to be specially tailored for a lay courtly audience. Thomasin recognizes that his young charges are used to legends and romances, but he offers none of that, aspiring to what he sees as a higher good: wholly unliterary pedagogy containing nothing but unadulterated truth. For

\(^{19}\) In verse 75, the author calls himself “Thomasîn von Zerclære,” a Germanized form of Tommasino dei Cerchiari (Gibbs and McConnell, “Introduction” 1 n.1). I follow the spelling found in most English-language secondary literature, “Thomasin von Zirclaria.”
Der Welsche Gast, one particularly important tugent is modesty, which young people should seek to cultivate instead of fame and fortune. Particularly in the first of his ten books-within-a-book, Thomasin advises his readers of the significance of modesty as a principal component of courtly education. But the result of this quest is not necessarily the self-effacement that the notion of modesty might seem to imply: rather, it is a way to garner approbation and, in turn, increase one’s reputation. In this hybrid market of spiritual and courtly values, modesty functions as a tool that will make one an outstanding participant in courtly life.

Der Welsche Gast offers, for the first time in German vernacular literature, a conduct manual whose nearest ancestors could be found only in religious Latin literature. Two aspects of this fact, as seen in Book I, make it particularly important and striking: the text’s vernacularity, and the author’s own awareness of genre differences. In multiple ways, Der Welsche Gast carves out space for a new kind of writing while inserting itself into a dialogue with the “other” vernacular literature: romance. Simply by writing in the vernacular, Thomasin anticipates and fulfills the need to defend the importance of his writing, which he does on the one hand by appealing to the reading interests of his audience, and on the other, by attacking the same reading interests, creating a gap that his work is designed to fill. His text embodies non-fictionality in a way that makes it impervious to the critiques he launches at those he sees as his competitors. He instigates a debate for a lay audience about the utility of popular vernacular texts, displaces those texts, and effectively presents his work a distillation of truth, free from the taint of

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20 I use the standardized New High German form of the title as taken from line 14681, “der welhisch gast.” The variant form Der wälsche Gast is also seen in German-language publications.
All of this comes from someone who is very much invested in his own foreignness and status as an outsider to his target culture. The work’s title doubly emphasizes and exclusively conveys the otherness of both author and book: *welhisch* signals the foreign roots and *gast* the continued status of alien (14681).\(^{21}\) That Thomasin takes the step of assigning a title at all indicates how important this context is for the proper understanding of his book. Thus it is helpful to look closely at what makes up this context: the author’s clerical background as source culture, the valorization of German as target language, and the *translatio* of concepts from one culture to another. Among the most significant of these concepts is that of *modestia*.

Thomasin performs acts of genre-bending: he effectively dresses up to make himself and his product even more German than the Germans themselves. The Germans’ penchant for *welhisch* texts can and should now be satisfied with this German-speaking *welhisch gast*. Never mind that the genre has changed from romance to conduct literature: drawn in by the allure of anything *welhisch* and by a work written for them in their own language, German speakers may get a healthy dose of truth and courtliness and not care

\(^{21}\) Worth noting is the possibility that this authorial persona is entirely or partially invented. The vast majority of scholarship seems willfully to overlook this option, apparently firmly invested in the purported facts of Thomasin’s existence as they are attested in the work itself and in tidbits of historical evidence. This is probably because he is such an extreme exception to the rule of anonymity, vagueness, and uncertainty that plagues what little we (think we) know about most medieval authors. I therefore acknowledge that Thomasin may indeed be, to a greater or lesser extent, a work of fiction himself. But even if this is the case, it is a highly convincing fiction, one that infuses and inflects so much of the work that it is not only worth exploring but impossible to ignore. Thomasin expects his audience to understand him as an Italian, a cleric, and a non-native speaker of German, and since there is no evidence that his audience received him in any other way, modern critics have no plausible alternative to this reading. Should it someday be discovered that Thomasin was not who he claims to be, the arguments made here should be able to stand anyway, as they are based on the truth as constructed in and by the text.
too much that it has been delivered in a way that is the opposite of the exciting, adventurous romances they love.

**Historical Background**

In contrast to most medieval texts, the completion of *Der Welsche Gast* can be dated with near certainty. This comes from the author’s indication in lines 11709-18 that it has been twenty-eight years since Christ’s grave was lost (to Muslim control). Saladin took control of Jerusalem in 1187 (which is incidentally roughly contemporaneous with Thomasin’s birth, as he states in line 2445 that he has not yet turned 30). In his imaginative dialogue with his pen in lines 12277-12282, Thomasin tells his exhausted veder that, since the first eight books have taken eight months to write, he can expect to wait another two months for a respite. If one takes Thomasin at his word, then his timetable for *Der Welsche Gast* was a ten-month period from 1215 to 1216.

Assigning a geographical origin to *Der Welsche Gast* is somewhat less straightforward. Traditionally it has been assumed that Thomasin was active in the region in which he was born, which he identifies in lines 71ff. as Friuli/Lombardy. His likely benefactor would have been Wolfger von Erla, bishop of Passau, patriarch of Aquileia, and patron of artists including Walther von der Vogelweide. Yet Eva Willms has pointed out that the text lacks the dedication to Wolfger that would have been expected of a protégé (Willms 3). In addition, Thomasin expresses harsh criticism of the religious nobility (6521-80) and clear opposition to Wolfger’s political interests in Book VIII (Gibbs and McConnell, “Introduction” 2). Hints from Thomasin, or, more specifically, from his personified pen, indicate in Book IX that he is now looking back on an earlier
secular career from a place of remove from the court.

Archival evidence offers evidence for the historical existence of this author and seems to confirm Thomasin’s claims as to his origins and vocation. A document from 1217 in Friuli’s Bibliotheca Civica Cividale contains a reference to a “Thomasin canonicus Aquilegensis” (Neumann 9), and a necrology of the patriarchate of Aquileia records the death of a canon named “Thomassinus de Cerclara,” though without giving a date (Resler 136). Other documents confirm the existence of a family of aristocrats by some variant of the name de Circlaria in Cividale near Friuli around 1200 (136). Michael Resler suggests that he may have been a secretary or adviser, or even a translator and interpreter, to Wolfger (136).

To date, a total of twenty-four manuscripts have been identified; fifteen of these are more or less complete (Willms 15). This large number indicates that the text enjoyed widespread popularity from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century (Starkey 123). Gibbs and McConnell suggest that this was due in large part to the abundant illustrations found in almost all of the complete manuscripts. These were an integral part of the work; the author himself alludes to the illustration accompanying his words in lines 11970-71 (Gibbs and McConnell, “Introduction” 6). Today it is widely thought that they were part of Thomasin’s original conception of the work and it is quite possible that he played an active role in their selection and placement (“Introduction” 6).

Thomasin divides the text into ten parts plus a 140-line preface. There is also a synoptic table of contents in prose, which is found in most manuscripts (Rückert 415). I

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22 “Book” is the term used in modern English-language editions and scholarship to describe the different sections; Thomasin himself uses teile to describe the parts and buoch the whole.
take as my text the 1852 edition by Heinrich Rückert.\textsuperscript{23} It consists of 14,742 lines\textsuperscript{24} of mostly four beats each in rhyming couplets. Of the ten books, the first is the one most concerned with courtly conduct and appearance, and is addressed explicitly to young noblemen and noblewomen.\textsuperscript{25} Unlike later works of conduct literature, Thomasin has an aristocratic audience in mind: his readers are “vrume rîtr und guote vrouwen/und wîse phaffen” (14695-96) (“pious knights and good ladies and wise clerics”). They are also an audience that extends well beyond the borders of the German-speaking court at Aquileia (Resler 137).

**Genre**

Kathryn Starkey calls Der Welsche Gast “the first didactic text written in the German vernacular” (123). This means that it is the first with the express claim of functioning as a didactic text, and which purports to serve no other function. While, as Ann Marie Rasmussen points out, “[a]ll medieval literature can seem at heart a moral-didactic enterprise” (Rasmussen, “Fathers” 106–7), it is nevertheless significant that Thomasin sees his own text as something quite different from the vernacular romances of his time. Creating a new genre in German literature (Starkey 123) requires some extra

\textsuperscript{23} Rückert’s text is based on four manuscripts: Heidelberg cpg. 389 (MS A), dating from shortly after the middle of the thirteenth century and considered the oldest and closest to the original; the Gotha Pergament Codex (G) dated to 1340; the paper manuscript from Dresden (D) from the mid-fifteenth century and related to A; and Gr, dating from the thirteenth century. The two other complete editions are those by F. W. von Kries (1984-85) and Raffaele Disanto (2002). The former exhibits less than ideal editing (Willms 18) and the latter lacks normalization and many of Rückert’s emendations (Gibbs and McConnell, “Introduction” 4). To avoid confusion, I also follow Rückert’s incorrect numbering of the lines, which are miscounted between verses 1290 and 1300 (skipping 1295) and between 1490 and 1500 (skipping 1495).

\textsuperscript{24} This number does not include the prose synopsis, which Rückert places in the critical apparatus rather than in the main body of the text.

\textsuperscript{25} The remaining nine treat virtues, vices, and topics such as the liberal arts, the ordering of the universe, and politics. In several books, most notably Book VIII, Thomasin addresses contemporary issues of concern to him, including the pope, the Crusades, and European leaders.
legwork simply to establish its merits, but for Thomasin, it is very much worth the effort.

Of course, this innovation does not emerge from a vacuum; Thomasin is relying on a centuries-old tradition of scholastic ethical literature (Starkey 123).\(^{26}\) This is not to say that he performs a simple translation of his sources into German; rather, he reworks and adapts them for a courtly audience, including a healthy dose of his own opinions, advice, and commentary along the way. In so doing, he turns scholarly ethics into courtly conduct. Mark D. Johnston offers a summary of the distinctions between the two genres:

> [...] “ethical literature” refers generally to works, usually written in Latin, that attempt to systematize ethics or morality as a science or body of knowledge; these include treatises on the virtues and vices, accounts of moral theology and philosophy, or compendia of Classical authorities on morals. On the other hand, “courtesy literature” refers generally to works, usually written in the vernacular tongues, that attempt to formalize courtly conduct: books of courtesy, guides to courtly love, manuals of chivalry, or treatises on table manners. (22)

Thomasin’s text relies on the former genre to try to create the first German example of the latter.

But much more than introducing a genre that was not previously present in German, Thomasin upends contemporary conceptions of vernacular literature. He does not sneak in quietly, hoping that romance fans will want to pay attention; rather, he charges out in front of the competition and tells readers in unmistakable language that what they may have thought was an end in itself was only a baby step toward true courtly refinement. Where others have served up beautiful lies that make their kernels of truth

\(^{26}\) In addition to the Bible, Thomasin’s sources include Boethius, Cicero, Seneca, Horace, Augustine, John of Salisbury, Isidore of Seville, Ambrose of Milan, Hildebert of Lavardin, Honorius Augustodunensis, Petrus Alfonsi, Guillaume de Conches, and Alan of Lille. These antecedents have been revealed by scholars; only once does Thomasin refer to a source by name (Pope Gregory I’s *Moralia*, 4795ff) (Resler 133).
palatable, Thomasin presents a hearty meal of solid truth. Thus, instead of simply ignoring or dismissing the texts that he sees as diversions from truth, he engages with them fully, acknowledging their limited strengths while fervently insisting on their inherent inferiority. In the process, he offers his own text as a suitable replacement.

Though a cleric, Thomasin makes it clear that his is the world of the court, not the church. While he himself is in many ways a bridge between the two, it is a one-way path. He does not expect his audience to conform to religious standards of virtue; rather, he shows that modesty is a quality essential for worldly advancement and success. He works up to his expressions of contempt for romance in a gradual way, demonstrating himself to be enough of a political pragmatist that he will use his opponents’ material to make his own point. Fully aware that his audience is avidly consuming adventure tales as didactic material, he uses this to communicate his own message on the strengths of didacticism. One of his first steps is to warn against emulating the behavior of unsavory characters in romance:

Juncvrouwen bezzernct klein ir sinne
von der schonen kœginne
diu wïlen dâ ze Kriechen was;
diu tet unreht diuz êrste las,
wân bœse bilde verkèrent sêre
quote zuht und quote lère.
wir mugen doch bœsiu mære lesen,
daz man ir baz kœnn âne wesen.
ders niene kan, dern weiz niht wol
wâ vor er sich behüeten sol. (773-82)

Young ladies do not improve their understanding much by [reading about]
the beautiful queen who once lived in Greece. The woman who first read
about that did wrong²⁷, for evil examples greatly pervert good discipline

²⁷ Michael Curschmann has suggested to Gibbs and McConnell that this may refer particularly to Dido,
and good teaching. Nevertheless, we may read tales of evil that it would be better to leave alone; whoever does not will not know what he should be guarding against.

There is therefore merit in understanding the dangers posed by the surrounding world and learning about those things that one should avoid engaging in, and romances provide an acceptable medium to transmit this knowledge. Thomasin begrudgingly acknowledges some level of utility in romances, but does not omit to say that it would be better to leave them alone.

But this sounds a bit hollower when he picks up the thread again later. Romances are really only appropriate for children, and not for “die ze sinne komen sint” (1081) “those who have reached the age of reason.” At the threshold of adulthood, “die suln anders dann ein kint/gemeistert werden, daz ist wâr” (1082-83) “truly, they should be guided differently from a child.” Adulthood means possessing reason and understanding. Yet both groups, adults and children, still require being “gemeistert” “mastered.” It is the forms this takes that differ: “wan si suln verlâzen gar/diu spel diu niht wâr sint:/dâ mit sîn gemüet diu kint” (1084-6) “for they [adults] should completely leave behind tales that are not true: only children busy themselves with such things.” While children can do quite well learning from tales of adventure, adults are to move on to the pursuit of undiluted truth, understanding, and courtly behavior.

who has her palace painted with the story of Helen of Troy (Gibbs and McConnell, “Notes” 229 n.6). If so, Thomasin is playing on the two meanings of bilde: (role) model and literal image: “dúi tet unreht diuz érste las,/wan bœse bilde verkêrent sûre/guote zuht und guote lêre” (776-78).
“Der gut rat gebe” “The man who gives good advice,” holds a banderole reading “Volgt guter lere” “Follow good instruction.” He is grasping the arm of the unnamed woman in the center, whose banderole says,” “Ir schone macht ir schande” “Her beauty causes her shame.” To her left, “Der ubel ratgeber” “The giver of bad advice” reaches for her other arm, holding a banderole with the words “volge mir disen tach” “follow me today.” Given the manuscript context, the fact that she is wearing red, and the text of her banderole, the woman is very likely Helen of Troy, caught in a moment of indecision between good and evil.
To do otherwise is to waste one’s time. Only children and others who lack proper understanding have Thomasin’s blessing to improve themselves by the reading of romances:

*daz selbe sol tuon ein man*  
der tiefe sinne niht verstên kan,  
der sol die åventiure lesen  
und lâz im wol dermite wesen,  
wan er vindet ouch dâ inne  
daz im bezzert sîne sinne,  
swenner vûrbaz verstên mac,  
sô verlies niht sînen tac  
an der åventiure mære.  
er sol volgen der zuht lêre  
und sinne unde wârheit. (1107-17)

A man who cannot understand deep meaning should do the same [as children]. He should read adventure stories and enjoy himself, for in so doing he will also find that his understanding is improved. Whoever has a deeper understanding than this should not waste his days on tales of adventure. He should follow courtesy’s lesson and reason and truth.

Thomasin is effectively encouraging a practice similar to what would be found at a monastic grammar school: entertaining stories and texts are used as incentives to keep the young learners interested and to help them remember their grammar. At a certain point, they are expected to leave them behind in favor of the more advanced study leading to the higher arts. For the courtly audience, the grammar of *åventiure mære* should eventually be replaced by the rhetoric and logic of “zuht lêre/und sinne unde wârheit.”

Stories that do not function as wholehearted aids to that end are dangerous, as they are “clothed” and “crowned” in lies. But they are not dangerous for children and those with a less developed ability to understand. Perhaps children are not so concerned about the danger of lies, or perhaps they understand the texts on such a superficial level.
that this never comes up. Perhaps children see the moral very easily and do not concern
themselves about anything else. For whatever reason, lies are dangerous only to those
with understanding, and not to those who have not yet developed it:

Adventure stories are thickly clothed with supremely beautiful lies:
falsehood is their adorned crown. I am not damning adventure stories,
even though the message of the adventures directs us toward lying, for
they do contain depictions of courtesy and truth. Their truth has just been
folded with lies.

Clothing becomes a metaphor for lies, which cover up what ought to be the naked truth.

Despite his firm language, Thomasin ends his discussion on a rather ambivalent
note. Perhaps because he knows he must pick his battles, and this is not one he expects to
win, his conclusion is a bit gentler than his earlier arguments:

Clothing becomes a metaphor for lies, which cover up what ought to be the naked truth.
Even if adventure stories are not true, they do very often depict what a person should do who truly wants to strive for righteousness. For that I want to thank those who have translated many adventure stories into German: good adventure stories multiply courtesy. But I would thank them much more if they had written something that was entirely without lies. Then they would have had greater honor.

Thomasin manages to insert himself into direct competition with adventure stories. He begins by discussing them in his preface as a way of showing that Romance-language culture and texts are already familiar to his audience in their German instantiations, so the way should be clear for his work as well. Here, well into Book I, he implicitly points to himself an ideal author who writes an ideal text for secular consumption: he is able to “getihten” a text that is entirely “ân lüge,” as opposed to those less honorable writers who fall short of this mark by resorting to lies.

The Vernacular

Thomasin’s mother tongue is Italian, a fact emphasized in the very title. The “guest” can be understood as both Thomasin and his book: it is clear that he is talking about himself when he writes, “Tiusche lant, enphâhe wol./als ein guot hûsvrouwe sol./ disen dînen welhschen gast” (87-89) “German lands, receive kindly this Italian guest like a good hostess should.” At the very end of the text he reprises this theme: “Mîn buoch heizt der welhisch gast./wan ich bin an der tiusche gast” (14681-82) “My book is called The Italian Guest, for I am a guest to German.” He spends much of his preface reminding readers of his acquired knowledge of German. He encourages them to be patient with his mistakes and correct them where necessary. This seems to be more

28 “Because Aquileia was on the fringes of the German empire and German was the chief language of the court, it is not surprising that Thomasin acquired a knowledge of Middle High German; on the other hand, that he gained such proficiency as to compose a major work in the language is remarkable” (Resler 133).
rhetoric than reality, however: the finished product exhibits linguistic fluency and familiarity with contemporary literary language (Gibbs and McConnell, “Introduction” 28). The text does not exhibit any particular stylistic merit, but this could be seen as a strength coming from an author determined to avoid entertainment in favor of unadulterated pedagogy (“Introduction” 29).29

Interestingly for a text whose reception will be severely curtailed by its being in German, Der Welsche Gast demonstrates interest in the universal nature of its project. Thomasin cites his own knowledge of international standards of behavior among “vrumen liuten” “accomplished people,” and he specifically addresses his instructions to both men and women of any age:

Ich hän gehœret lange vristol
daz in der werlde gevrumt ist
von vrumen liuten harte vil:
u ist zît daz ich sagen wil
waz vrümkeit und waz zuht sî
und waz tugende unde wî
beidiu wîp unde man,
swerz von im selben niht enkan,
ze guoten dingen komen sol.
swer zühté ëre merket wol,
ez mag im vrumen an der tugent
bèdiu an alter unde an jugent. (21-32)

I have heard for a long time that a great deal is accomplished in the world by accomplished people. Now it is time for me to say what it means to be accomplished, what courtesy and virtue are, and how both women and men can come to do good, even if they cannot achieve it on their own.

29 “[Thomasin’s weakness of style is not] due, as he implies, entirely to his uncertainty in the command of a language not his own. His German is actually extraordinarily good, and it is likely that some of the problems the modern reader encounters with it may even stem from the fact that he was most closely acquainted with the language of the region where he had spent much of his life and possibly uses idioms and linguistic features current there but not part of the language associated with his linguistically more sophisticated predecessors and close contemporaries.” (Gibbs and McConnell, “Introduction” 29)
Fig. 2. The delivery of Der Welsche Gast to the German-speaking world, from Thomasin von Zirclaria, Der Welsche Gast (cpg 389, c. 1256, Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, fol. 2r)

A female figure sits below an arch with the label “teuscheu zunge” “German tongue” and holds a banderole reading “Seit mir chan si daz” “Tell me, can she understand this?” The kneeling man is identified as “der bot” “the messenger” and he holds out an open book with the words “Der welsch gast” “The Italian guest.”

These elements show an intriguing confluence with a well-known contemporaneous historical event of some relevance to Thomasin. If his autobiography is to be trusted, he was composing his text at precisely the same time that Pope Innocent III was convening the ecumenical assembly that would become known as the Fourth Lateran Council. In November 1215 hundreds of delegates representing both church and secular authorities approved decrees that touched on a multitude of issues related to church reform and doctrine.

Of the seventy canons, two are of particular relevance to Thomasin’s mission as self-appointed cultural ambassador to the Germans. Canon nine decrees that all people must have priests to minister to them in their own language and according to their rites. Canon ten requires that all laypeople have clergy available to them for preaching, “hearing confessions, imposing penances, and in other matters that pertain to the salvation of souls” (Schroeder). These two aspects of priestly duties are functions that Thomasin takes on in a broadly interpreted way: he speaks to his audience very deliberately in their vernacular, and he “ministers” to them according to their own rites, which for them means keeping to the standards of courtly living. In trying to get his Romance text admitted through the portal of the German-speaking lands he is encapsulating the heart of IV Lateran.
Whoever follows courtesy’s lesson will be accomplished in virtue in old age as well as in youth.

Though he is only addressing a courtly audience, using the terms wîp and man as opposed to vrouwe and rîter lends a universal tone to his instructions: no one, regardless of rank, age, or marital status, is exempt. This universalizing statement of purpose differs from the usual framing device for conduct literature, which is to provide instruction to youths (Krueger xvi). Under this paradigm, older people might benefit collaterally, but the primary intent is to instruct young people. In contrast, Thomasin very deliberately addresses his work to everyone: age is never an excuse for acting contrary to zuht, and young people should follow the lessons of courtliness not simply for the sake of the immediate future but also for the long term.

Thomasin carries this generalizing principle through to his self-identification with the broader Romance language family, rather than with a specific regional or national group. He uses welhsche (“Romance,” “Italian,” or “French”) to describe both the Italian and French languages, rather than differentiating by using the more precise franzois:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{du hâst dicke gern vernomen} \\
\text{daz von der welhsche ist genomen,} \\
\text{daz hånt bediutet tiusche liute.} \\
\text{dâ von solt du vernemen hiute,} \\
\text{ob dir ein welhischer man} \\
\text{liht ouch des gesagen kan} \\
\text{tiuschen daz dir müge gevallen. (93-99)}
\end{align*}
\]

You have often eagerly heard things that were taken from Romance, having been translated by German people. Today you shall hear whether a Romance man might also say things in German that may please you.

We can assume that Thomasin is referring to French in line 94, since it is

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30 The term itâlsch is so infrequently attested in MHG that would not be reasonable to expect it here.
overwhelmingly French sources that provide the material for German translations. But in line 97 he uses the same word to mean “Italian.” By conflating French and Italian as one language and reminding his audience of their affinity for that language, he confers a degree of familiarity on his own textual visitor. But if the audience is expecting the exotic linguistic ornaments often retained in German romances, it will be disappointed, for Thomasin is determined not to mix the two languages. His composition is going to be one hundred percent German:

Hie wil ich iuch wizzen lân,
swie wol ich welhische kan,
sô wil ich doch in mûn getiht
welhischer worte mischen niht.
der zühte lêre gewant sol gar
von sîme gebote sîn einvar. (33-38)

Now I want to let you know that, no matter how well I can speak Romance, I do not want to mix Romance words into my poem. The garments of courtesy’s lesson should, by their very nature, be monochromatic.

Only thirty-eight lines in, Thomasin is already making a very definite distinction between his text and the sort of text his readers are eager for. Just as in lines 1118-26 (see above), Thomasin uses the metaphor of clothing to make a point about unnessary “adornment.” In his earlier example, fiction was clothing; now, language is the color of clothing. As much as an audience might crave the stylish tunic in mi-parti, what it is about to receive is more like a monk’s habit

Nevertheless, Thomasin does not find fault with those who create multihued texts, and indeed he commends multilingual writing when received with the right intentions:

daz ensprich ich dâ von niht
I do not mean to say that it displeases me when someone sprinkles his German with Romance as much as he is able, for that allows a German person who does not know Romance to learn many a clever word, should he like to do so.

It is only the didactic potential of multilingualism that warrants Thomasin’s approval, rather than any literary or other effect such a technique may have. Nevertheless, his project has other aims, and his conscientious and exclusive use of German serves as a constant reminder of the distinctions:

ich vühr, ob ich iuch lêren wolde
wie man welhische sprechen solde,
daz mîn arbeit wär verlorn:
ich hân einn andern sin erkorn,
daz ich mich des gern vlîzen wil
und wil dar üf gedenken vil
daz man mir verneme wol[.]

I fear that if I were to teach you how to speak Romance, my work would be in vain. I have something else in mind, to which I will apply myself industriously and think about a lot so that people can understand me well.

Thomasin is not interested in form except insofar as it aids his function. He wants to be understood, and does not want anything to endanger that project.

**Tracing Thomasin’s translatio**

Thomasin’s book provides a particularly fruitful field for etymological study and comparison. We know he is fluent in Italian, and given his clerical background, he almost certainly knows Latin. As an admitted outsider to German, he is poised between Europe’s
majority linguistic group and a minority language. He is at least as likely as any author in the Middle High German corpus to have been immersed in the Latin tradition and thus to utilize tools such as a Latin-German glossary to translate concepts from Latin into German. This makes him the strongest linguistic link between German and Latinate languages.

Therefore, it is reasonable to begin with a Latinate notion, or notions, of modesty in order to define the scope of the search in the Middle High German text. The primary term is modestia, defined by Lewis and Short as “moderateness, moderation; esp. in one's behavior, unassuming conduct, modesty.” In particular, as opposed to general, applications, its primary meaning is “[u]nassuming conduct, discretion, moderation, sobriety of behavior.” It can also mean “[s]hame, shamefacedness, modesty,” and “[s]ense of honor, honor, dignity.” In the language of the Stoics it becomes a translation of the Greek εὐταξία “eutaxia,” which is “the quality of saying and doing everything in the proper place and at the proper time, correctness of conduct, propriety” (Lewis and Short, “modestia”).

Two other words also emerge as key related concepts: verecundia is “the natural feeling of shame, by whatever cause produced, shamefacedness, bashfulness, shyness, coyness, modesty, etc.” In general, it is synonymous with pudicitia, castitas, and pudor. It can sometimes mean “bashful redness, blushing,” “dread of wrong-doing,” or “respect for, reverence.” In particular usage, it has “an implication of censure” and in post-Augustan Latin can mean “[o]ver-shyness, bashfulness, sheepishness, timidity.” It can also mean “[a] shame, disgrace,” and “a sense of shame” (Lewis and Short,
“verecundia”). Similarly, *pudor* can mean “shame, a sense of shame, shamefacedness, shyness; modesty, decency, good manners, propriety, etc.” This is the general idea, and *pudicitia* is the particular. In transferred usage, it can mean “[s]hame, a cause for shame, ignominy, disgrace” or blushing (Lewis and Short, “pudor”).

However, tracing a Latin term to and through German vernacular literature requires a slightly more meandering route. Here a comparison of medieval glosses is a useful tool but very limited tool, given how few of them remain extant, so bringing in their lexicographical descendants helps round out the picture. Even a work as late as Johann Leonhard Frisch’s 1741 *Teutsch-Lateinisches Wörter-Buch* owes a great, and acknowledged, debt to its predecessors from the High Middle Ages. This and many intervening dictionaries can be used to fill in the gaps left by the few cryptic glossaries extant from the time of Thomasin’s writing. Referring to German-Latin and Latin-German dictionaries ensures a strong connection not only to the language from which Thomasin embarked on his vernacular enterprise but also to a language whose rate of change is comparatively much more conservative, anchoring the German terms to a relatively stable reference point.

It is therefore possible to say that this historical overview of lexicography aids in an understanding of *modestia* as Thomasin would have understood it and as he communicates it in the vernacular to his lay audience. The words *scham, kiusch*, and *zuht* emerge as the primary German equivalents. This does not mean that these terms are

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31 Though this date pushes even the “Early Modern” label, the work is unquestionably historical in its orientation, and its thoroughness earned the Grimms’ appreciation of it as “das erste gelehrte deutsche wörterbuch” (J. Grimm and W. Grimm, “Vorwort”). Frisch includes examples of “veraltet” usages of words where appropriate, and the sources for his dictionary extend to the earliest German texts.
precise equivalents of *modesty*, or even of each other, but they are all very closely connected. Similarly, while it can be a useful umbrella term, *modestia* is not sufficient to encompass all the valences of these words, and to it are added *pudor/pudicitia* and *verecundia*. Tracing the terms in each language reveals a cloud of terms that intersect and overlap in the dictionaries and become the backbone of much of Thomasin’s writing.

**Manuscript Evidence: Latin-German**

Medieval Latin-German glosses are single-word entries almost always followed by single-word equivalents, a format that necessarily leaves out nuances. Designed as they were to fulfill particular narrow sets of requirements, they do not always include *modestia*, and when they do, their unanimity is limited. Each one-word German “equivalent” expresses only one aspect of what must be a much broader notion. It is here in the variances and discrepancies that intriguing possibilities open up.

One thirteenth-century manuscript glosses *modestia* as *kusheit* (Mone 49) and *modestus* as *kuch* (50), showing a high level of internal consistency. But in a fifteenth-century manuscript, *modestia* is glossed as *mesickeit* “moderation” (Diefenbach, *Mittellateinisch* 184), departing quite a bit from *kuch* or *kusheit*, which are nowhere to be found. Rather, there is *pudicicia*, glossed as *schemikeit*, and there is *pudor*, glossed as *scham* (*Mittellateinisch* 227). Another manuscript from the twelfth century, while failing to include *modestia*, brings *rubor*\(^\text{32}\) (Hoffman von Fallersleben 15) and *verecundia* (20) into the mix, glossing both as *scham*. Diefenbach’s *Glossarium latino-germanicum*

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\(^{32}\) However, this definition is the exception rather than the rule. Where it is defined elsewhere, *rubor* is usually “[r]öte” (Cholinus and Frisius 951), indicating that it is less associated with terms such as *pudor* and *verecundia* than might otherwise be thought.
mediae et infimae aetatis, compiled from both manuscripts and early printed books, brings together a wealth of evidence to include definitions for modestia, pudicitia, and verecundia. It follows Mone’s thirteenth-century manuscript in confirming the definition of modestia as kuscheit (Glossarium 364). Pudicitia, following the fifteenth-century manuscript, is defined as scham, but, unlike others, pudicitia also includes kuscheit (Glossarium 470). Verecundia, in agreement with the twelfth-century manuscript, is scham (Glossarium 612).

To sum up, manuscript evidence generally defines modestia/modestus as kusheit/kuch; pudor/pudicitia as schem/schemikeit; rubor as scham; and verecundia as scham. Rubor is the least frequently attested. There is a clear tendency to condense these four distinct Latin terms down to the two German terms scham and kuch, of which scham is the most common.

Early Print Evidence: Latin-German

Johannes Melber’s Vocabularius praedicantium, with an estimated compilation date of 1455, is among the first printed Latin-German dictionaries (Hass-Zumkehr 47). It permits slightly more verbosity in its definitions, potentially offering greater nuance. Melber falls into a regular rhythm of associating scham and kusch: Verecūdia is defined as “schemūg. kusch schamhafftikeit.” Similarly, pudor is defined as “kusch schamhafftikeit.” Modestia is messikeit, while rubor is not to be found.

Petrus Cholinus and Johannes Frisius’s 1541 Dictionarium latinogermanicum introduces zucht to the list of German equivalents, including it among the definitions of
modestia (682) and verecundia (1097). Following what by now is a standard pattern, pudor is scham (885), and verecundia is also scham (1097).33

In summary, the evidence from early print Latin-German dictionaries shows that pudor is consistently defined as scham, while verecundia and modestia have a slightly greater range of meaning, depending on the source. Modestia can mean messikeit, zucht; pudor can mean kusch, scham; and verecundia can mean scham, kusch, zucht.

Importantly, we see that scham is closely associated with kiusch and with zuht by virtue of being linked under the same Latin terms.

Early and Later Print Evidence: German-Latin

With the introduction of German-Latin dictionaries, rather than only Latin-German dictionaries and glossaries, a fuller picture of the German words emerges. Petrus Dasypodius’s 1537 Dictionarium latino germanicum defines Keüscheyt as “Castitas, Castimonia, Pudicitia” (362b). Scham, as usual, is both Pudor and Verecundia (409b). Zucht is also Verecundia, as well as “Modestia, Continentia, Pudor, Honestum, Disciplina, Ciuititas” (467).

Josua Maaler’s 1561 Die Teütsch spraach lists one of the meanings of Keüsch as synonymous with Züchtig, which translates as “Pudicus, Castus, Continens, Temperans, Intemeratus, Immaculatus” (243). Scham is “Pudor, Verecundia” (344). Scham, like Keüsch, is also equated with Zucht, which is in turn equated with Forcht; all three are translated into Latin with “Pudor, Verecūdia” (346b). Several of the sample phrases continue the association: “In dem kein Scham und zucht ist” is glossed as “Inuerucundus,

33 Künsch (kiusch) is found under Castus (Cholinus and Frisius 174).
Impudens, Os durum,” while the opposite, “[m]it Scham und zucht” is “Pudenter” (346b). The adjectival and adverbial forms are also synonymous, as in “Schamhaftig/Züchtig,” which is “Pudicus, Pudens, Verecundus,” and “Schamhaftigklich/Züchtigklich,” which is “Pudice” (346b). Turning to the entries for Züchtig, one does not find an equal emphasis on Scham, but some of the Latin definitions overlap with those for both Scham and Keüsch: “Vrbanus, Verecû dus, Modestus, Honestus, Castus, Pudens, Moratus, Ciulis, Ciucus.” The German synonyms listed are Höflich and Zimlich. “Züchtig seyn” is “Moderationem adhibere, Vereri, Verecundari, Còtinere, Modeste se gerere.” “Züchtigklich” can be a synonym of “Mässigklich,” in which case it is defined as “Modeste, Temperanter, Caste” (524).34

Thus in these early German-Latin dictionaries, the three German terms Zucht, Scham, and Keüsch share a common link to pudor/pudicitia/pudens. Scham and Züchtig are defined as verecundia, and modestus/modestia is reserved for Züchtig. Zucht is closely linked to both Keüsch and Scham.

The associations between Zucht, Scham, and keusch are crystallized most clearly in Johann Leonhard Frisch’s Teutsch-Lateinisches Wörter-Buch of 1741. While it would be inaccurate to say that Frisch considers the three German terms to be precise synonyms of each other, Zucht, Scham, and Keuschheit are all defined as pudicitia. Keusch is “castus, purus, pucicus” (Teutsch 1 512). Scham is “pudor, verecundia, pudicitia”

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34 This indicates that it is possible for zuht to have the same connotations with “moderation” and “temperance” as are inherent in the Latin modeste, despite the fact that there is no common root. Indeed, it could be that association of zuht with modestia eventually led to its being ever more closely associated with that term in all its breadth of meaning. Furthermore, the fact that Züchtigung means “Domatio, Domitura, Castigatio, Correctio, Corruptio, Moderatio” (524b) may have had an influence on bringing together various strands of meanings associated with the root zuht—or perhaps the association went the other way.
(Teutsch 2 160), and Zucht is “pudicitia, verecundia.”

“[Z]üchtig” is “modestus, castus, verecundus, pud[i]cus,” and the phrase “er lebt züchtig” means that he lives caste (Teutsch 2 483). The associations between Scham and Zucht and between züchtig and keusch are strong, which is in keeping with the dictionaries printed two hundred years earlier.

**kiusch**

While a comparison of the terms to Latin equivalents reveals an integrally important part of understanding notions of modesty, a more complete picture emerges from a look at the etymologies of the German terms and their connotations as attested in vernacular sources. *Kiusch* is derived from a borrowing from the Latin *conscius*, understood to mean “mitwissend, eingeweiht, bewusst.”

Originally an early medieval religious term, the initial meaning of *kiusch*, “der christlichen Lehre bewusst,” had by the high Middle Ages turned into “tugendhaft, sittsam, enthaltsam, rein” (Alsleben, “keusch”). A rather slippery term because of its variety of meanings, it is most often taken to mean “ chastity.” But this may often be an oversimplification due to the many possible definitions, which are not always narrowed down by contextual clues. In contrast to the more limited meaning of “rein in geschlechtlicher beziehung, unberührt von (unerlaubten) geschlechtlichen lüsten, leiblich und sittlich” that keusch retains in New High German (NHG), MHG *kiusche* “war auch enthaltsam in andrer beziehung, im

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35 This is one of three distinct definitions. Frisch helpfully differentiates between this, the first meaning of Zucht, that of “disciplina,” and that of “generation, propagatio” (Teutsch 2 483).

36 This is no doubt the ultimate source of the variant künsch, which appears in dictionaries as an alternate version of keusch as 1741 (Frisch, Teutsch 1 551). It is possible that Thomasin might have been aware of the connection between the Latin and German terms and might have used kiusch in a way that would have reflected its early roots, though there is no evidence of this in the spellings passed down in the manuscripts.
sinnengenussz überhaupt, auch in essen und trinken” (J. Grimm and W. Grimm, “keusch”). The Grimms trace a direct line from the Old High German (OHG) meaning of “reinheit […] nicht nur im hause, sondern auch an kleidung und leib,” which was an essential part of religious rituals and celebrations, to the word as used in Der Welsche Gast (“keusch”). Thus presentation and proper appearance remain primary significations of the term well into the Middle Ages.

*scham*

A word of unclear origin, the OHG scama, as well as its counterparts in English, Swedish, and Frisian, meant fundamentally “Beschämung, Schande,” while the German term carried the additional sense of “Schamgefühl” (Alsleben, “Scham”). The Grimms suggest that, due to this more prevalent “objective anwendung” of the OHG term, it may have the same root as schade, but this is not certain (J. Grimm and W. Grimm, “Scham”).

Indeed, very little about *scham* is certain: to borrow a Freudian term, it is an unheimlich word in that it can mean both the desirable quality that seeks to avoid dishonor as well as the undesirable feeling of dishonor. “A sense of shame can prevent shame,” observes David N. Yeandle (“Shame” 295). He explains, “Scham [ist] ein bipolarer Begriff” because it can bring about, on the one hand, “die schlimmsten unangenehmen Gefühle der Peinlichkeit, der Schmach und des Hohns” (*schame* xiv). On the other hand, it can be a “Tugend […], die durch ihre hemmende Funktion vor falschem Handeln zurückhält.” This dichotomy can be called “das Negative und das Positive der

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37 *Schem(e)* is also used in addition to *scham(e)*, though here too the precise reason for this variation is not known. The final *e* is a remnant of the OHG, which in MHG was gradually falling out of use; both variants can be seen in, for example, Wolfram von Eschenbach, who uses the word frequently (J. Grimm and W. Grimm, “Scham”).
Scham” (schame xiv).

The Grimms also differentiate these two meanings in roughly the same way, designating them as subjective and objective. The former is “zur bezeichnung eines affectes, einer empfindung, eines gefühls, confusio, pudor, verecundia.” The latter is used “im sinne von schimpf, schmach, schande, herabsetzung der sittlichen werthschätzung, verurtheilung durch andere” (J. Grimm and W. Grimm, “Scham”). They note that while this second usage has been reduced to dialectal conventions in NHG, it was much more common historically. The subjective usage is the more nuanced of the two, as it has a number of sub-definitions. The Grimms note the importance of appearance in connection with scham: the feeling forces blood into the cheeks, leading to terms such as schamrot, but turning pale is also an associated manifestation. Similarly, downcast eyes are an outward sign of scham.

zuht

Zuht is one of the most important concepts for courtly society; its general meaning is something like “courtly breeding” or “virtuous behavior.” A derivative of ziehen, whose roots are Indo-European (Kluge), zuht was originally simply a nominative form meaning „das Ziehen” (Alsleben, “Zucht”). It developed early on from the concrete—“das Aufziehen, Erziehung, Nachkommenschaft (besonders von Tieren und Pflanzen)”—to the abstract: “Disziplin, Strafe; Anstand, Sittsamkeit” (“Zucht”). In MHG it can take on an even wider array of connotations, being particularly associated with “das selbstbeherrschte verhalten in bezug auf den geschlechtstrieb, in naher berührung mit scham” (J. Grimm and W. Grimm, “Zucht”). Its MHG meaning of “inbegriff des durch
die höfische erziehung gebotenen verhaltens” fell out of use after the sixteenth century (“Zucht”). Even where “modesty” is not the primary meaning, it remains a very closely associated concept, suggesting that it is so intertwined with courtly manners as to be nearly inseparable.

**diemüete**

At first glance *diemüete* “humility” might seem like a possible keyword for modesty. However, it is not listed in the dictionaries cited above. Looking to Thomasin for evidence, one finds only one instance of the term in Book I, indicating that this concept does not have a very big role in etiquette and courtesy. It becomes more important in later books, whose themes shift to the topics of ethics and spiritual values. When it does come up in Book I, it is during a discussion of which qualities are best suited to which gender. Among such virtues as *milte, vrümkeit,* and *triuwe,*

   diemüete zimt in beiden wol:
   ein rîter und ein vrouwe sol
   diemüete sîn; doch stêt diemüete
den vrouwen baz, wan ir güete
   sol sîn geziert mit der tugent
   beidiu an alter und an jugent. (977–82)

   Humility suits both well: a knight and a lady should be humble; nevertheless, humility suits ladies better, for their goodness should be adorned with this quality both in old age and in youth.

The discussion stops here without any further description; it is apparently self-explanatory. Unlike *scham,* for example, Thomasin does not see a need to go into further detail about how and why one should exemplify humility.

When Thomasin discusses humility in later books, he associates it with the realm of the spiritual much more than the courtly, indicating that though young members of the
nobility should practice humility, it is primarily a spiritual discipline that must be made to fit the courtly world. As it “suits ladies better,” it may be something of a hard sell for the men of the audience. Because of its clear etymological connection to diener “servant” it is entirely conceivable that diemüete would be seen by noblemen as a virtue ill-suited to their position. This could explain why, when Thomasin picks up the subject in Book VI, he allegorizes it as a spear with which a young man might conquer sin. Turning it into an unquestionably masculine fighting implement perhaps implies that the audience needs to be persuaded of the power and necessity of humility—though this metaphor might have been lost on an audience wondering why knights, and not foot soldiers, were carrying spears into battle at all. This connection with spiritual battles and, elsewhere, with contemporary rulers and Crusaders, suggests that Thomasin is applying it to a distinctly religious context and does not see it as broadly applicable to courtly life. It is something altogether different from modestia, indicated both by the way in which Thomasin uses it and by the lexicological evidence.

The Hostess and Her Guest

Modesty as the Best Policy

As early as his prologue, Thomasin makes himself an example of modesty in

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38 “du solt mit der Diiumuet sper/an dem êrsten poinder sîn./daz du dich, rîter, lâzest schîn.” (7498-7500)
39 This would also explain why, in Book VIII, Thomasin reminds his listeners at great length of the fates of the self-assured rulers Otto and Philipp, telling them that “swer sich diumüeteget under got./der wirt niht schentlich ze spot” (10557-58). He also reminds aspiring crusaders of the humility of the one whose cross they intend to carry into battle, exhorting them to emulate that virtue in particular and to give up their own will: “man sol sich selben spannen gar/an das kriuze, daz ist wâr./daz man sînen willen niht entuo,/wil man dem kriuzer komen zuo/der ze sînem vater sprach./dô im daz kriuz ze lîden geschach./diemüeteclîche und stil/’niht als ich wil, sî swie du wil” (11657-64).
40 This is in agreement with Joachim Bumke’s assessment of humility as the most important religious virtue for a knight (Courtly 302).
action. He begins by asking that the reader be patient with his inadequacies and not take offense at his mistakes. By putting the reader in a superior position as far as language abilities, Thomasin demonstrates to his audience one conventional application of modesty: that of an affected self-effacement which is actually intended to have the opposite effect that it claims. For Thomasin certainly knows how outstanding his German is, but by assuming an air of modesty about his abilities, he lays a foundation for his readers to think all the better of him once they see his talent for themselves. Though this stylistic formality is quite common, it makes an impression given his insistence on his inability and the thousands of lines of impeccable poetry that follow. This is the essence of the modesty to which he exhorts his readers: it is not a virtue practiced for the sake of spiritual fulfillment but a valuable quality that can be practiced in the pursuit of courtly success.

Thus by the time he first exhorts his listeners to *scham* less than 200 lines into Book I, they have already been given a clear example of it. But what exactly this quality encompasses is defined by what it is not, rather than what it is. Thomasin sees it as the antithesis to a host of vices:

Si sulen schamen sich ze mâzen,
wan swer sich schamt, der muoz verlâzen
ruom, lüge, spot und schalkeit,
und manger slaht unstætekeit. (189-192)

They [young people] should practice modesty in moderation, for whoever practices modesty must abandon boastfulness, lies, ridicule, baseness, and all kinds of inconstancy.

Interestingly, *scham* is first defined by what it excludes. This seemingly simple lesson
points to the all-encompassing nature of modesty: it destroys the very roots of an impressive catalogue of weaknesses. And by improving oneself in this area alone, one prevents a number of character flaws detrimental to proper courtly life.

Thomasin goes on to explain what this practice entails, noting three primary ways in which *scham* should be apparent:

\begin{align*}
\text{an drin dingen man haben sol} \\
\text{schem, swer ir wil phlegen wol:} \\
\text{ein, daz man niht spreche unêre,} \\
\text{diu ander, daz man habe die lêre,} \\
\text{daz man gebâr reht unde wol,} \\
\text{diu drite, daz man tuo, daz man sol.} (193-198)
\end{align*}

There are three areas in which one should have modesty, if one wants to preserve it: first, one should not speak dishonorably, second, one should keep to the teaching that one behave properly and well. Third, one should do what one ought to do.

Organizing his exhortations into *drin dingen* gives the initial impression that the practice of modesty is narrowly focused and manageable. But the description that follows indicates it is quite the opposite. It is not overstating the case to say that virtually everything comes back to the observance of modesty.

Because of these far-reaching effects, it is striking that the next words refer to women only, the first instance, of many to follow, in which Thomasin makes a clear gender distinction.\footnote{He repeats what he has just said about speech, bearing, and actions, but specifies ladies as his particular audience:}

\begin{align*}
\text{swâ ein vrouwe reht tuot,} \\
\text{ist ir gebêrde niht guot} \\
\text{und ist ouch niht ir rede schône,}
\end{align*}

\footnote{Previous to this he only uses the term *man*, which could be understood as either *Mann* or *Mensch* in NHG.}
Even if a lady acts rightly, if her manner is not good and her speech is not beautiful, her good actions are without a crown. For a beautiful manner and good speech crown what a lady does. I am telling you that her good actions also may not be long-lived if she cannot conduct herself well and speak the way she should speak. An ugly manner displays inconstancy; after evil speech come misdeeds. Some [women] believe they are acting in a ladylike manner when they behave haughtily: [but] those who want to behave in a ladylike manner must guard themselves against haughtiness.

Nearly every line of this excerpt contains some form of at least one of the following words: rede, tuot, and gebærde. Such repetition strongly underscores the threefold nature of scham in daily life as well as the interconnected nature of these three aspects of conduct. Thomasin closes the section by singling out haughtiness, giving the sense that he sees this misguided behavior as a popular trend among the women of his intended audience.

Unsurprisingly for a world in which moderation reigns supreme, one can have too much of a good thing. Particularly for women, to develop good sense beyond the fundamentals is unnecessary and could even be a liability. They should, therefore, be prepared to curtail their personal development:
Ein vrouwe hât an dem sinne genuoc
daz si sî hüfsch unde gevuoc,
und habe ouch die gebærede guot
mit schœner rede, mit kiuschem muot.
ob sî dan hât sinnes mère,
sô hab die zuht und die lêre,
erzeig niht waz si sinnes hât:
man engert ir niht ze potestat.42 (837-44)

A lady has enough sense if she is courteous and polite and also has good behavior with beautiful speech and with a modest spirit. If she has any more sense, then she should have the good breeding and training not to show what sense she has: no one wants her to be leader of a city.

This is hyperbole almost to the point of mockery, more vivid even than Thomasin’s earlier condemnations of young people who act like tavernaere “pub-goers” (340) or a schalc “servant” (219). This sarcastic edge appears more often in later books, but it is unusual for the first book, and its use indicates particularly strong feeling on the part of the author.

Despite these sentiments, Thomasin uses very polite terms throughout these passages: vrouwe, juncherr, and rîtr. The avoidance of wîp and man suggests intentionality on the part of the courtier: modestia must be tended to and worked on in order for a person to be truly deserving of such titles as vrouwe and juncherr. There is a consistent refrain that true nobility must be learned; it does not spring fully formed from the minds of noble men and women, a notion that might not sit well with romance conventions. In a bolder departure from romance, Thomasin states that far from signaling nobility, beauty on its own is meaningless: “schœne ist enwiht, dâne sî/sin und ouch zuht

42 The potestat (Ital. podestà) served as the supreme leader of a city, ruling in the place of the emperor (Born 865). A particularly Italian office held by nobility (often of foreign extraction), it was created by Frederick Barbarossa in 1158 (864). After the Peace of Constance in 1183 it was generally an elected rather than appointed position, though details of the office varied at different times and in different cities (866).
“Beauty is nothing unless accompanied by good sense and courtesy.” Beauty and nobility are as much nurture as they are nature.

While Thomasin would certainly not deny that there exist essential differences between nobles and non-nobles, these distinctions are in danger of being elided if the nobility do not make it their goal to follow the lessons Thomasin gives them and conduct themselves in a way befitting their status. True courtesy may not be innate, but it is not easy to fake:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Swer ze hove wil wol gebârn,} \\
\text{der sol sich deheime bewarn} \\
\text{daz er nien tuo unhüffchlîchen,} \\
\text{wan ir sult wizzen sicherlîchen} \\
\text{daz beidiu zuht und hüffcheit} \\
\text{koment von der gewonheit. (653-58)}
\end{align*}
\]

Whoever wants to behave properly at court should also take care not to act discourteously at home, for you should certainly know that both good breeding and politeness come from habit.

Even when one’s reputation is not visibly at stake, one should still maintain the highest level of courtly behavior. One must practice excellent qualities where they will not “count,” in order to have them for when they do matter.

Thomasin continues in this vein, communicating his message that simply being noble is not enough; one must demonstrate nobility and show how qualitatively different he is from those who are unworthy of respect. Instead of reducing themselves to the level of pub-goers by shouting and yelling, young nobles ought to rise above their inclinations and remember to follow the dictates of courtesy:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Schallen und geuden sint mir swære/man seit des phlegen tavernære/jà phlegents leider ùch diu kint/die in guoten hoven sint./si schallent unde geudent mère/dan schoëniu hovezuht si lêre. (297-302)}
\end{align*}
\]
ich wil daz edeliu kint
die zühte lêre volgent sint:
schallen, geudn sî gar unmære;
man sol ez dem bösen tavernære
lân, wan ez ir ambet ist
daz sî schallent zaller vrist. (337-342)

It is my wish that shouting and yelling be unacceptable to young nobles who are following courtesy’s lesson. They should leave that to the vulgar pub-goers, for it is their job to shout all the time.

By using galvanizing language such as “bösen tavernære,” Thomasin further incites his listeners to follow his advice, which is synonymous with courtesy’s lesson, and to distinguish themselves as nobles not merely by their titles but by their actions.

Doing so is a smart choice not only for one’s current reputation, but also for the long term. Good habits in youth will pay dividends in the future:

swelch vrouwe kiusche ist in ir jugent,
hât sî dar zuo dan dise tugent
daz sî vor hôhvart sî behuot,
und daz sî meine ir man mit guot
und sî im ouch mit triwen holt,
diust ein gimm vîr allez golt. (1362-67)

If a lady is modest in her youth and also possesses the virtue of guarding against haughtiness, and if she loves her husband and is loyaly devoted to him, then she is a gem above all gold.

This echoes what Thomasin says several lines previously, that a man will be happy with a poor but virtuous wife and miserable with a wealthy, malicious one. Regardless of the state of her finances, a modest woman is her own fortune and, Thomasin implies, should be prized above material wealth. Modesty might seem intangible and difficult to define or

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44 wan mit eim armen wîbe guot/mac man wol hân vrœlichen muot,/und mit eim rîchn unguotem wîp/mac man hân unvrœlichen lip. (1326-29)
identify, but by attaching it to the metaphor of wealth, Thomasin gives it a concrete identity. There is nothing ephemeral about a treasure or a gem; the trick is simply to hold on to it, which one can do by following Thomasin’s lessons.

In tracing the outlines of Thomasin’s usage of the words *scham, kiusch*, and *zuht*, several patterns emerge. It is evident in the discussions of *kiusch* and *scham* that *zuht* is frequently brought up in relation to both of these traits. *Kiusch* and *scham* do not usually stand alone; rather, both are part and parcel of *zühte lêre* “courtesy’s lesson.” This lesson is all about very clear practical expectations for behavior, not abstract ideas. Its applications fall into two main categories: speaking and listening, and seeing and being seen. These are by no means disconnected from each other; indeed, success in one category is dependent on success in the other. But by highlighting these distinct areas of concern for Thomasin one can better understand the components that make up practices of *modestia*.

**Speaking and Listening**

Thomasin repeatedly emphasizes the importance of speech at the right times and to the right people, and above all the importance of listening. As early as the preface, Thomasin warns his audience that this book is intended for those who are receptive to its message, and his treasure trove of advice is contingent on the willingness of his audience to listen:

```
Tiusche lant, enphâhe wol,
als ein guot hüsvrouwe sol,
disen dînen wellhschen gast
der dîn êre minnet vast.
der seit dir zühte mære vil,
ob du in gern vernemen wil. (87-92)
```
German lands, receive kindly, like a good hostess should, this Italian guest who dearly loves your honor. He will tell you much about courtesy if you want to listen to him.

If the hostess chooses to remain quiet and listen, her knowledgeable guest will reward her graciousness with useful information. Thomasin strays into the language of courtly love in saying that he *minnet* “loves” the honor of his hostess, suggesting that he can easily speak the language of chivalry and is trustworthy.

Later, warmed up to his audience and no longer quite so formal, Thomasin explains that if a lady wishes to demonstrate good etiquette, she should not have to be enticed with incentives in order to keep her mouth shut:

    ein juncvrouwe sol selten iht
    sprechen, ob mans vrâget niht.
    ein vrowe sol ouch niht sprechen vil,
    ob si mir gelouben wil,
    und benamen swenn si izzet,
    sô sol si sprâchen niht, daz wizzet. (465-470)

A maiden should speak only rarely unless someone has asked her a question. A lady should also not speak much, and if she wants to believe me, note that she should certainly not speak when she is eating.

It is unusual for Thomasin to distinguish between maidens, young unmarried ladies, and (married) ladies, but even when he does, the difference is almost negligible. Whatever a woman’s marital status, she is to remain silent, ready to listen for a question or perhaps for advice offered by an Italian guest. Courtesy is not a dialogue.

Modest behavior is not just for ladies, though: “si suln bêde schamec sîn/juncherren unde vröwelîn” (215-16) “both young gentlemen and young ladies
should be modest.” Thomasin explains *scham* by describing the attributes that are directly opposed to it:

Ruom, lüge, spot, swer die drî hät, der mac niht heizen vrî.
wan der ist schalc der schalkeit,
im sî mîn dienest widerseit.
daz ist der zühte gebot
daz nieman habe des andern spot,
und daz weder wîp noch man
niht enliege den andern an. (217-224)

Boasting, lying, mocking: whoever possesses these three things cannot be called free, for he is a servant to servitude. May my helpfulness be denied to him! It is the command of courtesy that no one ridicule others, and that neither women nor men lie to others.

This is strong language for Thomasin, who generally refers to courtesy’s lessons rather than its commands. These traits are unforgivable and cause the guilty one to be anathema to Thomasin’s teachings. They form a triad of anti-*scham*; one is never far from the other two:

ruom ist diu meiste schalkeit;
spot von ruom nimmer gescheit.
der ruomær ist aller schame vrî,
die lüge sint im nähen bî. (225-28)

Boasting is the lowest servitude. Mockery is never separate from boasting. The boaster is entirely without modesty, and lies are always close to him.

If one boasts, one is also a mocker and a liar, not to mention lacking in modesty.

In cpg 389, this section is accompanied by an illustration of these three vices personified and standing next to an unnamed woman. *Luge* is a female figure wearing a cap, her face pointed towards *ruom* with her hand on his shoulder. *Luge’s* banderole, which she appears to be addressing to *ruom*, reads, “Sprich ich han si gehabt” “Say, ‘I
have had her.” Ruom is a completely naked man who holds up one hand up to his grinning face, which is directed straight at the viewer. His other hand clutches his banderole, which says, “Da ist si mir holt” “She is devoted to me.” Spot appears to be dressed in only a shift and a cap, which, to the medieval viewer, would be almost the same as nakedness (Wright, Weaving 4), and while his finger is pointing toward the anonymous woman, he is looking toward ruom, appearing to address the words on his banderole to him: “Wi si dich an chapht,” “How she stares at you!” The way the woman holds her mantle is a familiar gesture connoting modesty and good breeding (Starkey 132). She does not know why the man next to her is pointing at her, and she is not involved in their conversation; she is the one figure who clearly does not fit in with them. That her hair is visible suggests that she is unmarried, and the way it encircles her head looks something like a nimbus, associating her with depictions of saints. Her red and blue garments suggest an affinity with the Virgin Mary. Like ruom, she too looks out at the viewer, who seems to be the intended audience for her caption: “Zweu zeiget er an mich” “Why is he pointing at me?” While the three personified vices lie, boast, and mock, the woman at the center of their attentions remains innocently unaware of what is going on.

This array of characters seems to correlate perfectly with Thomasin’s description of the three vices as they relate to scham. The anonymous woman is the embodiment of scham and thus the opposite of luge, ruom, and spot, who, in their own ways, display an utter lack of modesty. Given the uncontrolled, unchaste placement of one hand near her

45 There is no label for ruom here, as there are for spot and luge, but the same ensemble reappears in other manuscripts, and those identify the naked figure as ruom.
Fig. 3. Lying, Boasting, Mockery, and a woman, from Thomasin von Zirclaria, Der Welsche Gast (cpg 389, c. 1256, Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, fol. 4r)
genitals and the other on the shoulder of a naked man, *luge* is most likely inspired by iconography of Mary Magdalene (Starkey 133), contrasting with her Marian counterpart on the far right. *Spot*, too, suggests something outside what the text alone would suggest: given his prominent facial features and dark hair, Starkey suggests that this is a depiction of an infidel (133). The inclusion of a naked figure is highly unusual for representations in the thirteenth century; when it does occur, it is usually as a sign of sin and the Fall, “trigger[ing] associations with sin and shamelessness” (134).

The reason for such an association becomes clear throughout the passages that follow. Thomasin uses *ruom* to mean a particular type of boasting: bragging about love affairs and conquests. Judging by the proportion of remarks addressed to each gender, the offenders are primarily men. They are acting directly against their own best interests, as Thomasin explains. He outlines a number of possible scenarios in which boasting either proceeds from or leads to diminished success with women, after showing that the worthy man (“ein biderb man”) has no need of boasting:

\[
\begin{align*}
s\text{în ruom ist gar ein niht,} \\
wan des ein iegelifcher giht \\
daz er kan erwerven guote minne, \\
kêrt er dar an sîne sinne. 
\end{align*}
\]

(253-256)

[A worthy man’s] boasting is all for nothing, because everyone realizes that he can attain worthwhile love if he puts his mind to it.

A man who is viewed as worthy by those around him does not need to prop up his actions with words. His actions will speak on his behalf, and boastful words would be meaningless in the face of such powerfully communicative behavior.

In contrast, the boaster, who by definition is not “ein biderb man” but “ein
bœsewiht” (“an evildoer”) is damaging not only himself but possibly also the reputation of the woman he involves in his assertions:

\[
\text{ist aver er ein bœsewiht,} \\
\text{ern darf sich rüemen dá von niht,} \\
\text{daz man in handel deste baz.} \\
\text{er erwirbt mit ruome niwan daz,} \\
\text{daz ein ieglich man giht} \\
\text{daz siz tæte durch einn bœsewiht} \\
\text{und daz si sî ein übel wîp,} \\
\text{daz si gelastert habe ir lîp. (257-264)}
\]

But if he is a scoundrel, he should not boast to get others to treat him better. The only thing he will achieve with his boasting is that everyone will say that she did what she did for the sake of a scoundrel and that she is a bad woman who has defiled her body.

If a worthy man were to boast, he would simply be wasting his time. The scoundrel, on the other hand, may do real damage to his paramour without helping himself at all.

Thomasin gradually escalates the negative consequences of boasting so they are more and more undesirable to the boaster:

\[
\text{swelich man sich rüemen wil,} \\
\text{der erwirvet lasters harte vil} \\
\text{den wîben und im kleine êre:} \\
\text{ez ist gar wider zühte lêre. (265-268)}
\]

Any man who boasts about himself earns disgrace for the women and little honor for himself: it is completely contrary to courtesy’s lesson.

Boasting cannot help, and it may hurt. If this is still not enough to convince a man of the imprudence of boasting, perhaps the notion that boasters are unpopular with women will:

\[
\text{niemen wirt ze eim ruomære} \\
\text{wan der vrouwen ist unmære.} \\
\text{swer den vrouwen ist enwiht,} \\
\text{der enist âne rüemen niht. (271-274)}
\]
Fig. 4. A teacher, a child, Courtesy, and Fear, from Thomasin von Zirclaria, *Der Welsche Gast* (cpg 389, c. 1256, Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, fol. 10r)

Zuht, her hand on the shoulder of an authoritative man, holds a banderole reading, “Gebar reht und wol” (“Conduct yourself correctly and properly”). The man’s banderole commands the child (*daz chint*), “Tu swaz zuht gebiuet” (“Do what courtesy commands”), to which the child replies, “vil gern maister” (“gladly, master”). The child is naked, perhaps as a sign of his innocence and obliviousness to the world. His *maister* extends a branch that helps to cover his chest, and he uses one of his own hands to cover his genitals. Finally, *diu vorht* (“Fear”), her hand on the shoulder of the boy, commands him, “merch es wol wil du genesen” (“remember it well, if you want it to go well for you”).
No one becomes a boaster unless he is detestable to a lady. Whoever is worthless to ladies is never without boasting.

Thomasin’s trump card is the association between boasting and a lack of success with women, which shows that the man’s own interests are diametrically opposed to the effect of his actions. Thomasin uses the term *vrouwen* here, as opposed to *wîben* in the previous excerpt. *Wîben* are associated with boasters, while *vrouwen* have nothing to do with them. This status marker increases the discomfort of being detestable.

As bad as it is for a man, it is much worse for a woman to boast. The one who does is, of course, called a *wîb* rather than *vrouwe*. She will create much more trouble for herself than will the man who boasts, bringing everyone involved down with her:

\[
\begin{align*}
ob & \text{ si ir manne saget daz,} \\
er & \text{ wer umbe sî werb, sî swige baz.} \\
ir & \text{ ruom und ir lôsheit} \\
vüegent & \text{ ir manne grôzez leit} \\
unde & \text{ ir selben arcwân,} \\
wans & \text{ ir getrouwet wirs ir man,} \\
und & \text{ vüeget ir vriunden grôzen haz,} \\
den & \text{ in ir man treit, wizzet daz.} \\
si & \text{ verliuset ouch ze jungs æn} \\
der & \text{ in ir people dient etwenn. (279-288)}
\end{align*}
\]

Rather than tell her husband who is courting her, it would be better for her to keep silent. Her boasting and her frivolity bring great sorrow to her husband and suspicion on herself: when he trusts her less and hates her friends, then he will turn against them, you may be sure. And in the end she will also lose the one who had wanted to serve her.  

Whereas a man’s boasting grows out of his limited success with ladies, a woman’s

---

46 dehein dinc stät sô bœselîchen/dem man sô rüemen sicherlichen./doch stät rüemen einem wîbe vil/wirs, swer ez verstên wil. (275-278)

47 Not only does this passage offer strong evidence for the actual practice of at least some form of courtly love service, but Thomasin the cleric does not condemn it. It is only the boasting which he forbids, and he paints the consequences in such a way as to make it incompatible with a lifestyle of courtly love, thereby making it the incentive for courteous behavior.
boasting derives from her good fortune. But whether it is a man or a woman who is
boasting, the consequences are exactly the opposite of what the boaster intends.

Seeing

At least as important as refraining from boasting is guarding what one sees and
how one is seen, particularly for ladies. There are some instructions for knights, but in
general, “ein edel juncherre sol/bêde rîter unde vrouwen/gezogenliche gerne schouwen”
(402-404) “a young nobleman should feel free to look courteously at both knights and
ladies.” The one thing he may not do is look at his own body too much:

zuht wert de rîtern alln gemein
daz si niht dicke schowen ir bein,
swenn si rînt; ich wæne wol
daz man üf sehen sol. (433-436)

Modesty prohibits all knights from looking too often at their legs when
they are riding. I truly believe that they should look up.

Admiring one’s own legs while riding is not only discourteous but, one might imagine,
potentially dangerous. By following Thomasin’s advice, knights are doing themselves a
favor.

But concern for safety does not apply to a lady. When on horseback, “si sol ir
ougen und ir houbet/stille haben” (439-40) “she should keep her eyes and her head still.”

Thomasin explains further:

ein vrouwe sol niht hinder sich
dicke sehen, dunket mich.
si sol gên vür sich geriht
und sol vil umbe sehen niht;
gedenke an ir zuht über al,
ob si gehære deheinen schal. (459-464)
A lady should not often look behind her, it seems to me. She should continue straight ahead and not look around very much. If she hears any noise, she should remember modesty above all.

It does not matter who might be around to see the lady looking; it is simply unacceptable behavior. Modesty precedes any other concerns, so that any startling noises that might accompany a walk or ride through a forest are to be ignored. In this way, a lady’s eyes become virtually useless organs, a theme that we will see again in the next chapter’s discussion of *Die Winsbeckin*. If she wishes to follow the lessons of courtesy, she may not even attempt to discern any potential danger, leaving the outcome to forces entirely out of her control.

It is not surprising, therefore, that a lady must also be careful when in the presence of a guest: “ich wil ouch des verjehen,/ein vrouwe sol niht vast an sehen/einn vromeden man” (399-401) “I also want to say that a lady should not look directly at an unknown man.” While that man may feel free to examine the lady visually as much as he pleases, she may not meet his gaze. But if she thought to remain safely out of sight, she should reconsider:

Ein vrouwe sol sich sehen lân,
kumt zir ein vromeder man.
swelihiu sich niht sehen lât,
diu sol ûz ir kemenât
sîn allenthalben unerkant;
büeze alsô, sî ungenant. (391-396)

A lady should let herself be seen if an unknown man comes to visit her. As for any [lady] who does not let herself be seen, may she be utterly unknown outside of her chamber; may she pay the price for that, may she remain unknown.

The cultivation of a good reputation means making oneself visually available to an
unknown visitor. Shyness is not an option outside of a cloister. Thomasin condemns to permanent obscurity those who do not wish to submit to a guest’s ogling, which is encoded here as the dictates of hospitality. In a world where reputation is everything, obscurity is a heavy price to pay. Being seen and known by a guest is, for Thomasin, the foundation for being seen and known elsewhere.

Conclusion

Thomasin’s unique book offers valuable insights into the importance of modesty, the influence of foreign culture on German culture, and the stakes of language and genre. The first example of conduct literature in German, it is very much concerned with that status. Rasmussen wonders where this separate notion of conduct literature arises, implying that it is a modern construct: “All medieval literature can seem at heart a moral-didactic enterprise; whence, from what place, arises a separate genre of conduct literature?” (“Fathers” 106–07) As we have seen, the separation is present from the very first example of conduct literature in German. Thomasin understands his book to be significantly different from romance, and is very invested in that difference. Realizing that his work lacks inherently engaging material, he emphasizes its unique content: it is unalloyed truth, free of the lies of romance. He packages his text as the only type of reading material appropriate to a person who has reached the age of reason.

Writing in the vernacular is a hugely important aspect of Thomasin’s work, one that he explicitly addresses and that persists as a fundamental difference throughout: this is a text written in German for Germans, not a translation. Nevertheless, it celebrates its status as foreign: Thomasin takes pains to show that his identity as welhisch, and as a
gast, confers some level of importance on his subject. By making those terms the work’s title, they become the lenses through which a reader must understand the text. But it does not emerge *ex nihilo:* it bears the influence of a centuries-long tradition (Resler 133), a Latin tradition, and when combined with Thomasin’s clerical background, it is logical to explore the Latinate side of one of his most important concepts, modesty. Examining the evidence from dictionaries and glosses reveals that the primary Middle High German words for modesty are *scham, kiusch,* and *zuht,* and each one is more or less equivalent to the Latin terms *modestia,* *pudor,* and *verecundia.* Even though each of the German terms represents a range of meaning, modesty stays in the mix, and is shown through Latin glosses and German etymologies to be very closely related to notions of chastity and of good breeding overall.

Thomasin must be understood simultaneously as part of the conversation of popular vernacular literature and as a self-proclaimed alternative to it. *Der Welsche Gast* suffices as a guide even for the young person who finds himself without a teacher:

*dâ von suln diu edelen kint*  
diu âne meisterschëfte sint  
dar üf gedenken unde wachen  
daz si in selben vorhte machen.  
ir scham in vorhte machen sol,  
daz si niht sprechen min dan wol,  
nien wider zuht noch wider êre.  
si suln haben dise lêre  
von ir sinne und von ir muot:  
der ist edel der daz tuot.  
swâ meisterschaft noch vorht ist,  
zuht und êre da gebrist. (601-612)

Therefore, those young nobles who have no one to teach them should bear this in mind and see to it that they teach themselves respect. Their modesty
should teach them respect so that they do not speak other than well or say anything against courtesy or honor. They should learn this lesson from their reason and their spirit: the one who does that is noble. Where there is no leadership or respect, courtesy and honor will be lacking.

Thomasin clearly recognizes that characteristics such as _scham_, _sinne_, and _muot_ require cultivation—otherwise he would not have written ten books about them—but he refers to these with possessive pronouns, suggesting that the young person already possesses them as latent virtues. There remains a balance between natural qualities and cultivated behavior, with modesty, when necessary, stepping in as ersatz instructor. Indeed, _der welhisch gast_—understood as the book and/or its author—is essentially equated with _scham_, since _der welhisch gast_ both delivers this message and functions as a substitute teacher. Thomasin’s work becomes a key to all good qualities, staking a claim on truth that no tale of the Round Table can match.
Modesty Made Flesh: The Winsbecke Poems

In 1690, a Latin teacher in Breslau named Christian Gryphius\(^1\) held the premiere of his educational play about the history of the German language. In one scene, a select few representatives of Middle High German literature have assembled at the court of Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa. Among the worthies are the chronicler Otto von Freising and a certain Sir Winsbecke. Having mentioned his upcoming crusade, Winsbecke is asked how he will handle the long separation from his “unvergleichlichen Ehegattin.” Winsbecke replies that Lady Winsbeckin will do just fine on her own, because she “weiß schon/ was Ehr und Tugend erfordert/ und wird sich unterdessen zu Hause mit Unterweisung unserer Kinder und Aufsetzung lehrreicher Gedichte unterhalten” (76). Otto bursts into effusive praise for the “edle Belustigung tugendsamer Frauen.” Women like the Winsbeckin stand in stark contrast to the vast majority of literate women who are “sonst nichts nütze/ und wissen ihrem Haus-Wesen wenig vorzustehen; bekümmern sich auch mehr um närrische Liebes-Grillen und schnöde Buhler-Briefe/ als Küche und Keller” (76–77).

Following such an assessment, one is left to wonder whether Otto has in fact read the poem of which he speaks. While the Winsbeckin’s daughter is far from overcome by paramours or love letters, Die Winsbeckin contains no references to anything remotely related to kitchen or pantry. And yet, the poem’s real subject, minne, perhaps has more to do with Haus-Wesen than is immediately apparent. Both women strive above all to live lives worthy of admiration—to keep their house in order, as it were. As Otto puts it, “ein

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\(^1\) son of the well-known lyric poet and dramatist Andreas Gryphius
weises Frauen-Bild/ und alle/ die auf Tugend etwas halten/ wie ein guter Baum nicht
allein mit Blättern und Blüthen/ nehmlich ausbündigen und köstlich lautenden Worten/
sondern auch mit Früchten/ das ist/ lüblichen Wercken prangen solle” (78).

Gryphius’s presentation attests to the continued relevance of the texts known as
Der Winsbecke and Die Winsbeckin well into the early modern period. In Der Winsbecke, a father advises his son as to proper conduct in all aspects of life (stanzas 1-56 in the standard edition). This includes topics such as his relationship to the church, his treatment of women, his actions at court, and his embodiment of ideal knightly qualities. Once he declares that he is finished speaking, the son steps in and vehemently rebuffs his father’s worldliness, advising that they instead relinquish their possessions and found a hospital (stanzas 57-61; 64). The father agrees with his son, repents of his ways (stanzas 62-63), and offers a prayer of contrition, asking for mercy and forgiveness before finally declaring that he and his son shall embrace poverty and enter their own hospital (stanzas 65-80).

In Die Winsbeckin, a mother and her daughter engage in a dialogue about proper conduct, specifically as it relates to minne. Their conversation, totaling forty-five stanzas in the standard edition, alternates almost stanza-by-stanza between speakers, with the mother speaking slightly more than the daughter. They are concerned above all with correct behavior and how they are perceived by others, which leads them to discuss topics such as the eyes, surveillance, and minne. Over the course of the poem, the younger woman expresses her apprehension about and resistance to the perils of minne,
prompting her mother to correct her perceptions and to conclude by promising to teach her minne’s rules.

While both poems are believed to have been composed during the first half of the thirteenth century (Rasmussen, Mothers 137), Die Winsbeckin is thought to have been written slightly after Der Winsbecke, and is never found transmitted without it (Schanze, Verfasserlexikon 1225). Other, structural similarities such as rhyme scheme and framing device belie the poems’ fundamental divergences. Each text presents an alternate, gender-specific view of the practice of modesty: in Der Winsbecke, the father teaches his son that modesty is very closely linked to the chivalric ideal of serving women and the attendant rewards. In Die Winsbeckin, the daughter learns that she must negotiate modesty, and, by extension, her reputation, through and around the figure of minne. In both poems, modesty comes to be presented as a highly embodied concept. For Der Winsbecke, the female body becomes both a reward for knightly service and a symbolic extension of it. It protects him from the possibility of feeling shame at

2 A more precise date is hard to pin down, but based on the allusion to Wolfram’s Parzival in stanza 18, Der Winsbecke is often dated to c. 1210-1220 (Schanze, Verfasserlexikon 1224–25). The only known external clue as to the date of composition comes from Hugo von Trimberg’s Der Renner, which is thought to predate by a few years the Codex Manesse’s compilation around 1305-40 (Rasmussen and Trokhimenko 62).

3 There is a third, less widespread component of the Winsbecke material: the Winsbecke parody. Bavarian fragments of this text are found in two manuscripts and date from no earlier than the fourteenth century (Schanze, Verfasserlexikon 1226). Removed as the parody is from the context of courtly life and manners, it is also removed from the primary subjects of this study. It is nevertheless fascinating for its unabashed contempt for courtly ideals and courteous language. Though only a few stanzas survive, it seems that they are meant to correlate to Der Winsbecke stanza by stanza, taking each piece of the father’s advice and turning it on its head, e.g., stanza 17: “Kint, ob dein jugent wil klaiden sich,/daz si dem weisen missehage,/so sneid unzuht, untugent an dich/und fluuch, wa man die warheit sage./lug unde trug ze oren trage,/und wirr ains hin, daz ander her,/dem armen ab sein habe nage./mein kint, und ainer dinge gewon:/so du ain urliug hast geprooft,/daz du zehant da fliehest von.”

4 The stanzas of both poems are comprised of ten lines in iambic tetrameter with the rhyme scheme ababcbcded. This associates them most closely with the ballade stanza, somewhere between the ten-line ballade (ababccdcD) and the chant royale (ababccdedE) (Beckson and Ganz 22).
disarmament, even as it itself is less than fully clothed. In Die Winsbeckin, mother and daughter argue for their respective beliefs as to the proper regulation of the daughter’s body. In the end, the daughter finds that minne’s force, initially terrifying, can be compatible with her pursuit of modesty.

Both poems comprise an interesting counterpoint to the romance literature from which they clearly take their cues. Though they are properly categorized as conduct literature, they sit at the nexus of romance and conduct literature by combining a narrative frame and behavioral advice in a conversational tone. Der Winsbecke tips toward the side of practical advice, though it is not without its share of eloquent soliloquy on the idealized merits of knighthood. Die Winsbeckin is a bit harder to place; its metaphors and hyperbolic language situate it in a romance register, yet its topics are decidedly not storybook fare. The hybridity of the two texts provide rich interpretive possibilities and the opportunity to examine the shared spaces between conduct and romance literature.

Gender, Authorship, and “Authenticity”

There are a few manuscript fragments of Der Winsbecke that do not include Die Winsbeckin (or even much of Der Winsbecke, for that matter). But in all of the complete texts, the two appear together (Rasmussen and Trokhimenko 61). This unity is accentuated in the Weingartner manuscript, where there is no separation between the two

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5 Though portions of the works are found in several manuscripts, the three oldest and most complete versions are found in the Codex Manesse (Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, cpg 848), which is identified as C; J (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz, mgf 474) from 1323; and B, the Weingartner Liederhandschrift (Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, cod. HB XIII.1), from c. 1290-1310 (Rasmussen and Trokhimenko 67).
on the page: the final line of *Der Winsbecke* is followed immediately by the first line of *Die Winsbeckin*, as if they were indeed a single text. Such evidence strongly suggests that the works’ patrons, audiences, and scribes tended to see them as a unified ensemble, not two separable pieces (Rasmussen and Trokhimenko 62).  

This is further confirmed in the well-known illustrations from the Codex Manesse. The similarities between the two images serve as visual validation that the poems should be seen in close connection with each other. The frames of each portrait use the same colors but in the opposite order. Both parents, clad in fur-lined robes, instruct their children from atop red and yellow benches set on green pedestals. The parents, each one on the left side, wear gender-appropriate headdresses, while each child, standing on the right, wears a *kranz* “garland; crown.” The green and red of the daughter’s clothes repeat the green, red, and pink of the Winsbecke’s clothes, and the Winsbeckin’s blue and pink echo the son’s blue and red. Neither of the children is disproportionately small, which is elsewhere a common signal of lower status or childhood. This is a clear signal that the members of each pair are addressing each other on equal footing. The only markers of hierarchy are the throne-like raised seats and indications of age (the father’s beard and gray hair).

The most significant difference between the two illustrations, aside from the Winsbeckin’s gender-neutral set of arches replacing the masculine-coded shield and helmet, is the gestures: the son’s crossed arms indicate that he is listening rather than

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6 However, despite the matching names, the poems do not suggest any familial relationship between their speakers. For example, it would be difficult for the father to give up all of his possessions and begin a monastic-like existence if he still had a wife dependent on him.
speaking. He is receiving his father’s wisdom, which is represented by the father’s hand gesture. In the Winsbeckin portrait, the mother raises her hand in a typical teaching gesture, but her daughter’s raised hand indicates that she too is involved in the conversation. Their heads, inclined toward each other, lead the viewer’s eyes to circle from one to the other and back again, perhaps wandering up toward the arches but then deflected back down and around. This sense of insularity and containment contrasts with the effect of the men’s portrait, where the two figures look at each other but hold their heads up straight, directing the viewer’s gaze upwards to the floating knight’s gear. Rather than containing the gaze, these two defensive implements, prominently decorated with a reflective coat of gilt paint, direct the viewer’s attention out of the picture, back toward himself or herself.

Though subtle, these pictorial dissimilarities point to the divergent views presented in each text. These differences have led scholars to assume that the works must have had two different authors. Who those authors were, however, remains an unsolvable mystery. The Codex Manesse, in naming them “Der Winsbeke” and “Diu Winsbekin,” is the only surviving manuscript to give any sort of attribution to either of the poems (Rasmussen and Trokhimenko 62). Perhaps the names are pseudonyms, borrowed from the Franconian city Windsbach or the noble family von Windesbach (Bumke, Geschichte 333). Alternatively, perhaps “Winsbecke” and “Winsbeckin” are the actual names of the authors, a hypothesis bolstered by no less an authority than the compiler of the Codex

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7 In the Weingartner manuscript, the word “Winsbeck” appears next to the first poem and “Winsbeckin” next to the second. However, both are written in a hand that is newer than the original scribe’s.
Fig. 5. The Winsbecke and his son, from the Codex Manesse (cpg 848, c. 1300-1340, Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, fol. 213r)
Fig. 6. The Winsbeckin and her daughter, from the Codex Manesse (cpg 848, c. 1300-1340, Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, fol. 217r)
Manesse. Given that in the rest of the manuscript, accompanying portraits tend to indicate a work’s authorship, it would be reasonable to take those accompanying the Winsbecke texts as representations of the poems’ authors (Rasmussen, “Fathers” 129 n.9).8

While this inference must remain inconclusive—there are also a few poets depicted in the manuscript for whom no evidence of their historical existence survives, and several others who are surely fictional (Rasmussen and Trokhimenko 62)—it nevertheless raises interesting possibilities regarding female authorship of secular works. Modern scholars are understandably inclined to consider female authorship highly unlikely, given that German-language literature does not include a known lay female author until the fifteenth century (Rasmussen, “Fathers” 120). However, since at least two sources much closer to the composition of the work, the compiler of the Codex Manesse and Christoph Gryphius, seem to have seen things differently, female authorship should not be ruled out entirely.9

As for Der Winsbecke, the centuries-long assumption was that its creator was an actual knight from the city of Windsbach. With a few notable exceptions10, the question of authorship was more or less settled as early as Melchior Goldast’s 1604 edition of the

8 Hugo von Trimberg falls into this camp as well. In his early fourteenth-century didactic poem Der Renner, he names an assortment of nobleman-poets, and Sir Winsbecke is included among the ranks of those whose historicity is uncontested: “Von Botenloube und von Mörungen./Von Limburc und von Windsbecke,/Von Nifen, Wildonie und von Brûnecke./Her Walther von der Vogelweide” (1184-87).
9 Ann Marie Rasmussen, reversing the question, offers an astute observation: “If Die Winsbeckin’s title came from a compiler, if its author was anonymous, and its female narrator a fiction, why could the same not be true of Der Winsbecke?” (Fathers” 120)
10 For example, Swiss enlightenment thinker Johann Jacob Bodmer was of the belief that both poems had been composed by Wolfram von Eschenbach and that Sir and Lady Windsbach were probably “nur erdichtete Personen.” He adds that if Melchior Goldast’s hypothesis were correct, and they were indeed real people at the court of Frederick Barbarossa, the texts were nevertheless not their work but a false attribution made by Wolfram to honor them (Bodmer and Manesse VII–VIII).
poems: even if pseudonymous, *Der Winsbecke* originated with a real knight offering the authentic wisdom of his experience (Rasmussen, “Fathers” 118–19). But this left the problem of how to account for the pair’s eventual rejection of knightly culture and embrace of the religious life. In 1845, Moritz Haupt contrived to separate the poem into two pieces, assigning the subtitle “das alte Gedicht” to what he saw as the authentically knightly portion, and “die Fortsezungen” to the “frommen aber albernen” remainder (viii). This he attributed to a meddlesome cleric whose concern for religious sentiment and practice was an absurd supplement to a text praising essential knightly principles (ix).

With the publication of Haupt’s standard edition, this distinction between an “Old Poem” and its “Continuations” became enshrined in literary histories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The current standard edition of the *Winsbecke* poems preserves the separation without comment in either a footnote or the introduction (Rasmussen, “Fathers” 119). Frieder Schanze’s article in the *Verfasserlexikon* supports the status quo, citing as evidence not only the “unübersehbare Differenz der Teile,” but also the fact that there exist manuscript fragments containing excerpts from the “Old Poem” only (*Verfasserlexikon* 1227).11 To this rather skeletal evidence Schanze adds another equally precarious hypothesis: the author of *Die Winsbeckin* concluded his poem with three pieces of advice so that it would more closely match the three pieces of advice that conclude the “Old Poem” (*Verfasserlexikon* 1227). This would mean that the author of *Die Winsbeckin* probably thought of *Der Winsbecke* as ending with the “Old Poem,”

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11 The evidence cited includes manuscript g (Gotha, Forschungsbibl., Cod. Chart. B 53), which contains 52 stanzas of the first part only; E (Krakau, Bibl. Jagiellońska, Berol. mgq 1532), containing fragments of 31 stanzas; and M (Münster, Universitäts- und Landesbibl., Hs. 1053), containing fragments of 21 stanzas (Schanze, *Verfasserlexikon* 1226–27).
which would detract significantly from any claim to authenticity made for the
“Continuations.”

However, Schanze does not address the fact that there is only one manuscript (B) in which both poems include those three pieces of advice, and that manuscript also includes the “Continuations.” Given that most manuscripts contain both parts of the poem, the evidence would suggest that contemporary audiences did not recognize the split posited by modern critics. Even if Haupt’s hypothesis is correct, and a chivalrous Ur-poet’s noble “Old Poem” was later defaced by the heavy-handed admonition of an overzealous cleric, audiences at least as far back as the early fourteenth century received them as a single work, and judging by the poem’s presence in manuscripts of such importance, they seem to have done so favorably.

As abrupt and jarring as the shift in life goals may seem, we must consider how medieval audiences received it, and what led patrons and compilers to swaddle it in other courtly, secular works. There must be a reason for its inclusion in manuscripts as important as the Codex Manesse and for its continued popularity centuries after its composition. One solution that preserves the integrity of the whole text is to see it as a conduct manual not merely for young men, but for older men as well. The son manages to get a few important words in, but the father does almost all of the talking. The spotlight remains firmly trained on the one whose life has exemplified courtliness to such an extent that he can now teach it. The son never acquires a significant voice. His interjections are limited to less than a tenth of the poem’s total length, and he exists primarily as the interlocutory catalyst his father needs to transcend worldliness, which is
an utterly appropriate step for his stage in life. The Winsbecke fits in neatly with aged romance heroes such as Arthur and Anfortas, who, while maintaining their authority and status, willingly step into the background as others take center stage. He belies the commonly held assumption that conduct literature is meant primarily for young people. Der Winsbecke provides advice to multiple generations.

When considered against the backdrop of history, the father and son’s decision is perfectly in keeping with contemporary trends in courtly living, making them not only selfless but also fashionable. According to research currently being conducted by Adam Davis, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw a tremendous increase in the practice of wealthy laypeople across Europe founding hospitals. These institutions provided for those in need, which would have included everyone from the sick to the poor to pilgrims (Gilchrist 47). They operated in the tradition of monasteries, usually under the Augustinian Rule, and the founder often entered the hospital as either a *conversus* or a full-fledged brother or sister (Davis, “Founding”). By the thirteenth century, hospitals were “one of the most popular recipients of charitable bequests,” and in many regions a majority of testaments “included bequests for hospices, hospitals, and leprosaries” (“Sweet”). This outpouring of resources may have its roots in guilt about prosperity, fear of purgatory, concern for personal salvation, or some combination of these and other elements (Davis, “Hospitals” 1–3). These are precisely the sentiments of the Winsbecke

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12 “For example, a study of thirteenth-century testaments in Flanders found that eighty-five percent of testaments included charitable bequests (to aid lepers, hospitals, beguinages, widows, the ransoming of captives, etc.), and forty-four percent included a bequest to at least one hospital. Two-thirds of all wills from c.1300 in east-central France included distributions of coin and/or food to the poor. Forty percent of all testaments in thirteenth-century Barcelona included bequests to a hospital, as did ninety percent of testaments in Rodez in the south of France c. 1300” (Davis, “Hospitals” 6–7).
and his son. Rather than the work of a cleric out of his depth, the so-called Continuations may actually express a popular, and perhaps even heartfelt, charitable conviction among courtly society.

The same narrow readings that literary critics have historically applied to the second part of Der Winsbecke have also been used on Die Winsbeckin. Haupt sees Die Winsbeckin as an unsuccessful imitation of its companion piece and dismisses it as “viel schwächer, redseliger, ärmer an gedanken” (xiii). This trivialization is replicated by Leitzmann, who accuses the poem of “gedankenarmut” (König 7) and “wiederholung” (Kleinere xx). Helmut de Boor calls it “äußerlicher, flacher, mehr auf formale Erziehung als auf Charakterbildung gerichtet” (409). These highly gendered critiques based on notions of female superficiality and imitation have limited the scope of criticism for much of the history of Winsbeckin scholarship. It is only comparatively recently, with the advent of feminist criticism, that the text has received meaningful academic attention.

This renewed interest has brought to light not only the importance the text itself, but also an array of related oversights and misrepresentations in the scholarship. Work by Ann Marie Rasmussen in particular has done much to demonstrate Die Winsbeckin’s innate worth as an object of research, revealing the prejudices inherent not only in literary criticism but also in the standard edition of the poems. By compiling all manuscript versions of each poem into one text, editors Albert Leitzmann and Ingo Reiffenstein present a deceptively unified whole.13 The standardized Winsbeckin, for example,

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13 The volume’s introduction does include a chart detailing which stanzas come from which manuscript, but absent any footnotes or written explanation, such a presentation is unnecessarily misleading, particularly for non-specialists or anyone encountering the material for the first time.
contains a total of forty-five stanzas, even though the two longest manuscript versions are only thirty-nine stanzas in length. This effectively creates a new poem, one that never existed for any medieval audience. Perhaps more troubling is that Leitzmann and Reiffenstein, working more than a century after Haupt, tacitly follow Haupt’s cue in passing judgment on the “authenticity” of particular stanzas, extracting those portions of certain manuscripts they consider “[u]nechte und zweifelhafte Strophen” and quarantining them in an appendix.\(^\text{14}\)

Given the intricacies of the manuscript tradition and the scholarship built up around it, I strike a compromise between manuscript evidence and standardization. I take as my text the version of the two poems found in the Codex Manesse as reproduced in the Leitzmann/Reiffenstein edition. This allows for an examination of a text that is known to have actually existed in the Middle Ages. The Codex Manesse is also one of the oldest versions, and all of its stanzas are replicated in at least one, and usually several, other manuscripts. This means that, as far as modern scholarship is able to ascertain, the Codex Manesse version is probably representative of both poems as they were most widely known.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{14}\) Notably, these are the two stanzas unique to the Berlin manuscript (J) that constitute a fascinating late-medieval prologue to the mother-daughter dialogue. A choir of lyric voices identifying itself as “wir frawen” makes its case for less surveillance. Grounding their argument in concerns about the low moral standards of the men who practice wrong-headed meisterschaft, the lyric voices claim moral superiority. They exercise their own powers of judgment to determine that such unfit guardians have no business evaluating what constitutes irreproachable behavior for a woman.

\(^{15}\) Because there is no standard edition following just the Codex Manesse, I use the Leitzmann/Reiffenstein transcription while adhering to the manuscript’s ordering of the stanzas. This means that the stanza numbers as presented in print do not match the chronological order of the manuscript. For ease of reference, I use the numbers given in the standard edition.
Der Winsbecke: The End Justifies the Modesty

In his early fourteenth-century didactic poem Der Renner, Hugo von Trimberg praises the way in which poets like the Winsbecke repudiate immodest behavior:

Gitätkeit, luoder und unkiusche,  
Muotwille und unzimlich getiusche  
Habent manige herren alsô besezzen,  
Daz si der wise gar hânt vergezzen  
In der hie vor edel herren sungen:  
Von Botenloube und von Môrungen.  
Von Limburc und von Windesbecke,  
Von Nîfen, Wildonie und von Brûnecke, Her Walther von der  
Vogelweide: Swer des vergêze der tête mir leide[.](1179–88)

Greed, gluttony, and immodesty, arrogance and shameless deception have possessed many lords so that they have completely forgotten the tunes that noble lords used to sing: von Botenlauben and von Morungen, von Limpurg and von Winsbecke, von Neifen, Wildonie and von Bruneck, Lord Walther von der Vogelweide. I am sorry for anyone who forgets these men.¹⁶

This near-contemporary of the author of Der Winsbecke calls on his audience to “remember the Winsbecke” and reverse their immodest and shameless behavior. In aligning Der Winsbecke with poets such as Heinrich von Morungen and Walther von der Vogelweide, Hugo attests to the authority and status of the work, and therefore the relative importance of modest behavior for anyone who wishes to emulate true knightly behavior. He also shows that, especially compared to Die Winsbeckin, modesty does not play as critical a role for a young man as it does for a young woman. While it is a key component of true chivalry, it does not occupy center stage, instead working in concert with a number of other traits to produce ideal knightly behavior.

¹⁶ Incidentally, all of these “noble lords” are found in the Codex Manesse, with the exception of von Bruneck. The identity of this poet is unclear, however, and could refer to a poet known today by another name, perhaps also in the Codex Manesse.
For a young man, modesty means keeping his behavior under strict controls. By practicing \textit{scham}, he may in fact do things that seem contrary to logic but which will increase his honor. In stanza 44 the father tells the son that, when invited to a friend’s council, “sò sliuz die scham vûr dînen munt” (44.9) “make sure that modesty seals your lips.” This seems counterintuitive: if someone invites a friend to a council, it seems natural to assume that the friend is there to give his opinion. But the father subverts expectations and advises his son to keep quiet, “daz sich diu zunge iht übertrete” (44.10) “so that your tongue does not run away with you.” Fundamentally, \textit{scham} means keeping one’s behavior under strict controls, thereby avoiding dangerous extremes. In stanza 46 the father opposes \textit{scham} to uncouthness, saying that the likelihood of “ein ungerâten lîp” (46.9) “an uncouth person” developing a heart “daz sich scham” (46.10) “that knows shame” is the same as that of a wild colt breaking itself. Extending the analogy, the effect of \textit{scham} is to civilize, restrain, and make one a useful member of society.

The same word that means “shame” in the sense of modesty or the “right perception of what is improper or disgraceful” (“shame”) can also refer to the shame of nakedness. Near the beginning of the poem, the father uses this stark imagery to demonstrate the importance of this world relative to the next: “swie hôch an guote wirt dîn nam,/dir volget niht wan alsô vil,/ein linîn tuoch vûr dîne scham” (3.8-10) “no matter how much good is attributed to your name, there you will be accompanied by not so much as a linen cloth for your genitals.” Before it is ever used in the sense of an admirable courtly quality, the word \textit{scham} is invoked to conjure a vivid description of spiritual vulnerability, showing that while \textit{scham} as a courtly attribute will not matter in
heaven. *scham* as a religious matter may very well be present if the son does not direct his life properly.

By the same token, modesty is that which metaphorically covers one, at least in the courtly context. The theme of clothing is used again later to evoke the way that the son should approach *zuht* and *reine tugent*:

Son, wiltū kleiden dîne jugent,
daz si ze hove in ēren gê,
snît an dich zuht und reine tugent.  
ich weiz niht, waz dir baz an stê,  
wiltū si tragen in rehter ê.  
si machet dich den werden wert  
und gît dir dannoch sælden mê:  
ich meine reiner wîbe segen.  
der ist ein sô genæmer hort,  
in möhte ein lant niht widerwegen. (22.1-10)

Son, if you wish to clothe your youth so that it will be respected at court, fashion for yourself [a garment of] modesty and pure virtue. I do not think that anything could look better on you as long as you wear those with proper honor. They will make you worthy of worthy people and give you even greater happiness beyond that—I am talking about the favor of flawless women. That is a treasure so pleasing that not even [possession of] a land can outweigh it.

Like Thomasin in *Der Welsche Gast*, the father sees youthful good behavior as a wise investment: if his son does the work now of tailoring his own garment of *zuht* and *reine tugent*, in the future he will fit in with the company he wishes to keep. There is even a nod to the fashion statement that it makes, with the father assuring his son that he can do no better. This garment is not only a prerequisite for a noble lifestyle; it is also a prerequisite for a reward that is even greater, the favor of women.
Here and elsewhere, the favor of women\(^{17}\) is presented as the highest reward, associated strongly with both material possessions and the practice of modesty. To serve women and win their favor is to prove one’s own successful practice of modesty. To go on to win a woman is to prove one’s worthiness as a knight. Winning a woman and knightly worth are intricately connected, and the father accords equal status to the rewards of knighthood and of female companionship. Furthermore, to win a woman may mean an increase in material wealth. The father points to the example of Gahmuret as proof: “weistû, wie Gahmuret geschach,/der von des schiltes werdekeit/der mœrin in ir herze brach?” (18.5-7) “Do you know what happened to Gahmuret who, following the worthiness of the shield, broke into the heart of the Moorish woman?” By following the ethical system symbolized by an implement of defense, Gahmuret achieved the results of an offensive attack. He broke into the heart of the “Moorish woman” much as if it had been a Moorish town. The resulting plunder is thus to be expected: “si gap im lîp, lant unde guot:/er gît ouch dir noch hôhen prîs,/gîstû im lîp, herze unde muot” (18.8-10) “She gave him her body, lands, and possessions. The shield will win high praise for you, too, if you give it your body, heart, and mind.” In order to win a prize such as the here-unnamed Belacane and everything that comes with her, one must abandon oneself fully to the shield, the emblem of knighthood. The vocabulary evokes the language of the Deuteronomic command: the son must love the chivalric ethos the way the Lord’s people

\(^{17}\) Der Winsbecke does not make any distinction between wiben and vrouwen. Die Winsbeckin similarly prefers wiben, using vrouwen (or jauncvrouwen) only a couple of times. By using only wiben, the texts emphasize that gender is a more important distinction, at least for their purposes, than the different levels of status, both sexual and social, that might be conveyed by “lady” and “maiden.” This aligns them with Thomasin’s usage, but, as we will see in Chapter Three, the terminology is significantly different in romance.
must love him. In exchange for entrusting to the shield his body, heart, and mind, he can hope to be repaid by a woman who will give him her own body, lands, and possessions.

The rest of Gahmuret’s story is strikingly absent, though any audience member who knows of Gahmuret’s success must also know that things do not end well for Belacane. After a brief honeymoon period, Gahmuret feels himself once more compelled to seek adventure and abruptly deserts his pregnant wife. He leaves only a brief farewell note before stealing away and abandoning her to her grief. She soon gives birth to Feirefiz and then fades from the story while Gahmuret proceeds to take a second wife. It is significant that the prize of Belacane’s body, lands, and possessions is seen in Der Winsbecke in total isolation, valuable in spite of the eventual outcome for her, and in spite of the fact that Gahmuret does not enjoy those new lands and possessions for any length of time. For the medieval pedagogue, context is apparently unnecessary; it is perfectly legitimate to pull from a story only the details that one wants and ignore the consequences even of the actions being praised. This attitude, also apparent in Die Winsbeckin’s discussion of Lunete, is very likely the reason why Thomasin is so ambivalent as to the use of romance stories for the teaching of good behavior. Like thirteenth-century sound bites, these cherry-picked examples can neatly underscore the point being made and provide a handy mnemonic device. But when detached from their contexts, they become unpredictably versatile and applicable to any number of situations, based purely on the purpose of the one referencing the story.

As one of the core functions of the chivalric ethos, love service is presented as part of what it means to be human. To “minne und êre guotiu wîp” (11.3) “love and
honor good women” is to engage in a cycle of giving and taking that is utterly natural:

“der tugent uns ie von sorgen nam./si sint der wunne ein bernder stam./dâ von wir alle sin
geborn” (11.4-6) “Their [women’s] excellent qualities take our cares away. They are a
branch on which joy grows, from which we are all born.” Women’s excellent qualities, a
catalog of which would most certainly include modesty, are a source of joy to those who
would serve them. This service, in turn, is characterized as something like a repayment of
the debt of birth as well as a practice which contains its own rewards. Simply by
recognizing women’s excellence, the men prove their own worth, specifically in the
practice of modesty:

er hât niht zuht noch rehter scham,
der daz erkennet niht an in:
der muoz der tôren einer sîn,
und hete er Salômônes sin. (11.7-10)

Whoever does not recognize this in them lacks courtesy and proper modesty. He is truly a fool, even if he were to have the wisdom of Solomon.

*Tugent* self-selects and thereby excludes anyone who does not possess it, so it takes a
modest, courteous man to recognize a modest, courteous woman. Wisdom is fine, but it is
no substitute for *zuht* and *rehter scham*.

Not only can women function as proof of a man’s inherent modesty, but they can
also function figuratively as a way of preserving his modesty. The father’s description of
the requirements and rewards of knighthood culminates in a description of what happens
to a man who has been successful in earning women’s favor: “dem stêt der schilt ze halse
wol,/im kumt ze lône ein blanker arm,/dâ im der rieme ligen sol.” (16.8-10) “It is good
for him to take up his shield: his reward will be a bright white arm [embracing him]
where the straps [of his shield] should lie.” With the armor removed, a woman becomes
the ersatz shield. The knight is never without his protective clothing, whether literal or
figurative, and is thus marked, night and day, as a knight.

The imagery of the shield serves a dual purpose: it is not only a common symbol
of knighthood, but also a signal that the time for sorrow is over (Benecke, Müller, and
Zarncke, “schilt”). The poem makes a strong connection between women and the shield
by using the same language to describe both. Throughout the poem, women are ascribed
similar sorrow-effacing properties; their main function is to serve as antidotes to men’s
sadness. The father attributes to women great êren “honor” and werdikeit “worthiness”
(12.2) and calls them “der werlte an vreuden zuoversiht” (12.3) “the expectation of joy
for the world.” Soon after that, the same words are used to describe the shield: it
represents “werdekeit und êren vil” (17.2) “worthiness and great honor,” which, for a
knight, “ist zer werlte sunder wân/ein hôchgemezzen vreuden zil” (17.6-7) “is without a
doubt a lofty, joyous goal in this world.”

This means that the woman-as-armor becomes not only an article of clothing but
also the quintessential and indispensable symbol of male courtly culture. As E. Jane
Burns notes, “the properly socialized body in Arthurian romance results from encasing
the male anatomy so fully in armor that no skin shows. Knights are by definition ‘totes
armez’ […].” (Courtly 135, emphasis added). Conversely, to be without one’s armor in

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18 Connecting it even more strongly with women, the shield is traditionally representative of female
genitalia (Simons 47–48). Because lances are “not only penetrative but also ejaculatory,” when one is
broken it is a symbolic ejaculation on its target, the shield (Simons 113).
public is to be less than a knight, and in a position of great shame: “Indeed, when we
encounter [Lancelot] stripped of his armor and most all his weapons, we confront a man
‘stripped bare’ (pur le cors, 2: 306) we are told, though he remains fully clothed”
(Courtly 136).

Yet even in romance, knights have to take their armor off at some point, if only to
sleep. But Der Winsbecke elides the difference between public and private, between
shield and shield’s reward, by bringing armor and a woman’s arm onto the same space,
the knightly body. The worthy knight retains his public persona even when operating in a
space of physical intimacy with a woman. He has no need to feel any shame in
disarmament; the visible, tangible honor of knighthood is extended to a space where it
normally does not operate, and the properties of the shield are transferred to the object for
which it is exchanged, a woman’s body. The flip side of this arrangement is the
suggestion that there is shame even in a private disarmament if a woman is not there to
function as armor, since, without a woman, one is less armed than one’s woman-clad
peers.

The knight’s own symbolic nakedness is covered up by a woman, yet the woman
herself is apparently not so covered up. Since the costume of a fully-dressed courtly
woman would most certainly include long sleeves, there are two situations in which she
might have a “blanker arm.” Either she has followed the practice, commonly seen in
romance, of detaching her sleeve and giving it to her knight as a token, or she is wearing
little to no clothing. The latter option seems more likely, since this imagined scene takes
place at the end of the day, when the tourneying is over. The disarmed man’s body is
shielded by an unclothed woman’s body.

Thus *Der Winbecke* introduces a new reward for following the shield: never
having to lay the shield aside. The rewards of knightly life do not end when the fighting
is over; the honor and joy of the shield remain, day in and day out. This means that the
knight’s status remains unquestionably in place even with his armor off. And since it is
his encasement in armor from which the knight’s gender and status derive (Burns,
*Courtly* 136), the woman, by taking over these functions, becomes the conferrer of
knightly status and masculine gender.

*Die Winsbeckin: Negotiating minne*

The female body continues to play an important role in the second of the two
*Winsbecke* poems. In *Der Winsbecke*, it comes to bear the message of secular
masculinity, while in *Die Winsbeckin*, it bears the violent attacks of *minne*. While the
men understand their own practice of modesty as a means to an end, for the women, it is
the end. The only question is how it should be worked out in relation to the force of
*minne*.

Unlike the father-son poem, in which the father offers advice to his son
unprompted, the daughter’s role in the advice-giving is emphasized from the beginning.
The poem starts with the mother and daughter expressing their love and appreciation for
each other, and then the daughter asks her mother for advice. *Die Winsbeckin*, like *Der
Welsche Gast*, identifies modesty and moderation as particularly womanly traits whose
cultivation in youth will pay off in old age:
Scham unde mâze sint zwô tugent,  
die gebent uns vrouwen höhen prîs.  
wil si got lieben mîner jugent,  
sô gruonet mîner sælden rîs  
und mac in zühten werden grîs. (6.1-2)

Modesty and moderation are two excellent qualities that earn high praise for us ladies. If God will gladden my youth with them, the tree of my happiness will flourish, so that I may age with good breeding.

The only surprising thing about this passage is that it is placed in the voice of the daughter, who by all indications is still a stranger to life at court. Unlike Thomasin, she is not an elder instructing a potentially unwilling or impious youngster: this young woman consistently outdoes her mother in her desire to practice virtue, and must have her comparatively extreme views tempered by her mother’s knowledge of the world of the court. The mother is still in the role of teacher, but her pupil is advanced. The Winsbecke’s son does not ever engage with the advice his father gives; he is a silent absorber of information. In contrast, this daughter is well-informed to start out with, and she uses all her powers of reasoning and questioning to expand her understanding. She has mastered both the letter and spirit of the kind of advice Thomasin gives, and quickly shows that she is ready for more difficult material.

Also like Der Welsche Gast, Die Winsbeckin understands a woman’s eyes to be hugely important as an external meter of modesty.\(^\text{19}\) Rather than subjects who actively see, the women define themselves, and particularly their eyes, as objects of the gaze.

Eyes are only secondarily sight organs: their primary value for a woman is to show others

\(^{19}\) Both of these texts are reminiscent of early church tradition: fourth-century church father John Chrysostom wrote that “the eye not only of the wanton but even of the modest woman pierces and disturbs the soul” (qtd. in Caviness 21).
how modest she is. The ideal woman takes care to guard against *wilder blicke* “wild looks,” which are directly opposed to modesty and moderation. But the daughter needs more detail: she does not understand what wild looks are, exactly, though she does know that they are something she wants to avoid.

The mother explains:

_Ez heizent wilde blicke wol,_
ał ich ze hove bewiiset bin,_
ał ein wip vür sich sehen sol,_
daz ir diu ougen vliegenent hin._
_sam ob si habe unstäten sin,_
und âne mâze daz geschiht._
daz ist ir lobe ein ungewin:_
die melder merkent unser site. (7.1-8)

As I was taught at court, wild looks mean that, instead of gazing straight ahead like a woman should, her eyes flutter about. It gives the impression that she is inconstant and lacks moderation. It is damaging to her reputation: traitors are watching our behavior.

A woman cannot be seen to look; to do anything other than stare ahead at a fixed point is to display immodesty. The danger of wild looks has nothing to do with what the daughter might see; rather, it is about how she will appear to those watching her. The *merker* “spy,” or *lauzengier* in troubadour lyric, is a common fixture in the literature of courtly love, and the mother warns her daughter of the danger he presents. He is particularly interested in discerning the signs of an illicit romantic relationship, eager to

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20 und lâz in dîinem herzen sweben/scham unde mâze ūf stäten pîn./schiz wilde blicke niht ze vil./dâ lôse merker bî dir sîn. (5.7-10)
21 bewise, liebiu muoter, mich/der rede baz (ich bin niht wîs),/wie wilde blicke sîn gestalt./wie, wâ ich die vermöden süül./daz si mich machen iht ze balt. (6.6-10)
22 For example, the fifteenth-century archbishop Antoninus of Florence advised women to walk with their eyes so low “that nothing but where you put your feet matters to you” (qtd. in Casagrande 95).
spread rumors and gossip to the detriment of the subjects’ reputations. And, according to
the mother, he is especially attentive to women’s behavior.

The daughter agrees completely. It turns out she does know what wilder blicke are
when she sees them:

swelch wîp diu ougen ūf, ze tal,
und über treit als einen bal,
dar under ouch gelachet vil:
diu prîset niht der zühte ir sal. (8.4-6)

Any woman who moves her eyes up, down, and around like a ball,
laughing all the while—her chamber is unadorned by modesty.

This young woman does not hesitate to judge her peers. She may not be a merkerin, but
even as she keeps her eyes still and straight she manages to see what others are doing.
She is simultaneously learner and teacher, encouraging her audience to identify with her
innocence and naivety before indirectly condemning any inappropriate behavior they
might have engaged in.

The standards embraced by the mother and daughter are exactly what was
historically expected of medieval ladies. Modesty meant following

a series of rules, mostly from the monastic tradition, [that] recommended
that a woman’s gestures should be neither agitated nor lively; her ultimate
aim should be expressionless immobility. She should not laugh, but smile
without showing her teeth; she should not look straight ahead, wide-eyed,
but look down, with eyelids half-closed; she should not sob, wring her
hands, or shake her head, but weep in silence. (Casagrande 95).

The truly modest woman should end up looking a lot like a statue. One thinks especially
of medieval sculptures and paintings of the Virgin Mary, who, even when watching her
son die, keeps her expressions to a minimum.
Though the mother does not refer explicitly to the Virgin Mary, she does suggest an appropriate exemplar:

\[
\text{weistû niht, wie diu süeze maget} \\
\text{Lûnete nach lobe mit tugenden ranc?} \\
\text{vil lihte dir ouch daz geschicht,} \\
\text{ob man dich niht durch vrien muot} \\
\text{ûz wîbes tugenden brechen siht. (11.6-10)}
\]

Don’t you know how that sweet maiden Lunete struggled virtuously for a good reputation? That could easily happen for you too, if you are not seen impulsively breaking with women’s virtues.

Like the Winsbecke’s reference to Gahmuret, this sampling from Lunete’s life story leaves out a lot of details. It seems to be culled from the very end of \textit{Iwein}, where Lunete’s role in uniting Iwein and her mistress is emphasized. But it is a stretch to say that Lunete’s primary goal is to cling to womanly virtues. The text is clear: her abiding purpose is to convince her mistress that Iwein is a suitable husband, no matter what the cost may be to her mistress or herself.\footnote{23} The Winsbeckin fails to mention the many troubles that this goal causes Lunete, including very nearly being executed because the court perceives her to be a traitor to her mistress: “daz ez schüefe niuwan min list/daz ez ir sus missegangen ist” (4125-26) “[they say] that it is due entirely to my cunning that things have gone badly for her [my mistress Laudine].” She is, in fact, guilty of at least that allegation.\footnote{24} But here too, as with the father’s allusion to Gahmuret, the mother seems to be selectively seeing one aspect of Lunete that disregards her as a whole. But

\footnote{23} hie was vrou Lûnete mite/nâch ir dienesthaften site./diu hete mit ir sinne/ir beider unminne/brâht zallem guote./als sî in ir muote/lange hâte gegert/ir dienest was wol lônes wert:/ouch wæn ich daz sis alsô gnôz/daz sî des kumbers niht verdrôz. (\textit{Iwein} 8149-58)

\footnote{24} Hartmann does not give the details of all the charges: Lunete only says, “nû velschent sî mich sêre” (\textit{Iwein} 4134).
there may be a subtler reason for the allusion to this particular character: Lunete is one of the very rare female characters in courtly romance who remains single at the end of the story. And it is not in any way a blemish on her reputation: she lives happily ever after. The mother seems to be saying to her daughter that, if romances are any indication, it may indeed be possible for her to remain single and happy at court.

But romances do not seem to be a reliable indicator of reality, at least not enough to satisfy the daughter. They are only at the beginning of their discussion, and there is much the daughter wants to learn about honor and correct conduct. She is interested in details, but that does not mean that romance is forgotten entirely. Their conversation continues to straddle metaphorical and literal registers.

That the daughter should think of her eyes more like ornaments than organs may not matter too much, since sightedness turns out to be fairly useless:

wer weiz nú, wâ die stæten sint?
vîl missewendiíc sint die man;
sî tragent helekäppel an.
ze guoten wîben süeziu wort
diu meiste menge sprechen kan,
doch mërenthalp niht âne schaden.
versnîdent dich ir käppelsnite,
dû muost diu wange ûz ougen baden. (17.3-10)

Who knows now where the constant ones are? Men are very tricky; they wear invisibility cloaks. Most of them know how to speak sweet words to good women, but usually not without harm. If the cut of their cloak cuts you, your eyes will bathe your cheeks with tears.

25 und lêre mich nách êren leben,/gebâren unde sprechen eben[..] (12.4-5)
26 In this section of the Codex Manesse, the stanzas are in a very different order from the standard edition. This is stanza 13 in the Codex Manesse.
Listener discretion is advised: we are not in Der Welsche Gast anymore. The passage is nevertheless as tricky as a helekäppel: how can a man in an invisibility cloak be dangerous? Would not a disembodied voice, no matter how sweet its words, raise suspicion?

A closer look at the key terms, helekäppel and käppelsnite, helps shed some light. There can be little doubt that käppelsnite is referring to sex; the topic has already come up previously. The snite connotes violence and pain, and, because it is part of the invisibility cloak, it is hidden and thus unexpected. Both helekäppel and its more familiar synonym tarnkappe combine a word that means “hidden” or “to hide” with a word for “cloak.” Invisibility cloaks are far from wardrobe essentials in courtly literature, but there is one infamous example. In the Nibelungenlied, Gunther is able to wed and bed Brunhild only with the help of Siegfried in his tarnkappe. Gunther repays Siegfried by promising him his sister Kriemhild in marriage. The two men use the invisibility cloak to work together and get the women they want. For Brunhild, Siegfried’s devious wielding of the tarnkappe/helekäppel means the loss of her kingdom, and, along with her virginity, the käppelsnite takes her miraculous strength. Siegfried is, nevertheless, portrayed as the ultimate hero, the constant lover of Kriemhild.

Reading the mother’s statement in light of literary tradition, we can understand it as both a critical reading of Siegfried’s supposed constancy and a warning to her daughter. Men, she implies, are collectively devious and willing to work together to

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27 Sol, muoter, mir daz ère sîn,/ob man mîn wünschet ûf ein strô?/es ahtent niht die sinne mîn,/daz im von wärheit sî alsô./ich wil in zühten wesen vrô,/als mînen jâren wol an stât./mîn lop in êren ziehen hô,/als ie der werden wille was./ich wil dar an unschuldic sîn,/ob man mîn wünscht ûf daz gras. (This is stanza 9 in the Codex Manesse and stanza 14 in the standard edition)
achieve what each one wants. Any particular man cannot be trusted; there is no way to know what tricks he has up his, or his friend’s, sleeve.

The daughter, with characteristic bravado, is unconcerned about this threat:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Waz ahte ich üf ir käppelîn,} \\
dâ si ir vriunt versnîdent mite? \\
ich getrû dem stæten hertzen mîn: \\
mich våhet niht ir wehselsite. \\
môn stætez herze ich wol erbite, \\
daz ez mich vride vor ir untât. \\
ich vûrhte niht ir spæhen snite: \\
die suln mich vinden in der aht, \\
daz mich iht triege ir lösiu rede. \\
got gebe in allen guote naht. (18.1-10)\footnote{This is stanza 14 in the Codex Manesse.}
\end{align*}
\]

What do I care about their little cloaks that they use to cut their friends? I trust in my own constant heart: their changeability will not capture me. I will bid my constant heart to protect me from their evil deeds. I do not fear their artful cuts: they will find me on my guard so that their loose talk will never deceive me. May God give them all a good night!

If we continue to read this through the lens of the *Nibelungenlied*, the daughter is planning to be more steadfast and more guarded than Brunhild, which would be quite a feat indeed. If she can guard against their words, she will never be deceived, and will never fall prey to the *käppelsnite*. She is taking the rules of modesty even farther than necessary: not only will she keep her eyes still and downcast, she will make herself as good as deaf to the words of men.

In stark contrast to the portrayal of women in *Der Winsbecke*, so far men have been constructed solely as sources of potential danger. The mother and daughter do not mention any redeeming qualities or legitimate attractions. Women are generally unable to
recognize, either through sight or hearing, the danger men pose until it is too late. The daughter’s defense is total guardedness, and her heart is the source of this ability.

The mother praises her daughter’s intentions, and encourages her to keep defending herself against love-blindness. But she is not convinced that this will be enough:

vil wîsiu herze enzündet sint
von ir gewalt, dêst mir wol kunt:
die rede ze beine niht enbint.
wiltû dich ir gewaltes wern,
sô müeze got dînen jungen lip
mit sîner starken kraft ernern. (21.5-10)

Many wise hearts have been inflamed by her [minne’s] force, as I well know. Words are meaningless [against it]. If you want to defend yourself against her force, then God must preserve your young body with his great might.

This stanza marks the first mention of minne, but the imagery of violence starts right away. It is the daughter’s best defense, her heart, that is in direct danger of incineration. She has a far weaker defense than she thinks: the only real protection is God.

The daughter says that this is all new information to her; she knows her own heart, and knows that minne has not entered it. She is essentially disagreeing with her mother by arguing from her own experience, though she quickly picks up on the association of violence:

ich wart nie von ir strâle wunt
und lebe noch her der nôt gesunt.
vrou Minne weiz diu herzen wol,
diu si mac twingen an den grunt:

29 Dû bist der sinne üf rehtem wege:/des vreu ich mich, vil liebez kint./behalt si wol in dîner phlege,/daz
dich diu minne iht mache blint. (21.1-4)
30 Mîn herze ich selbe erkennen sol:/der minnen kraft ist mir unkunt. (22.1-2)
der herzen ich niht einez trage,  
daz von der minne meisterschaft  
an sîner werdekeit verzage. (22.4-10)

I was never wounded by her arrow and until now have been free from distress. Lady Minne is well aware of which hearts she can force to the ground [in submission]. I do not have the kind of heart whose worthiness wavers under minne’s mastery.

As Ann Marie Rasmussen has noted, the rape imagery here and throughout the discussion is unmistakable (Mothers 146). Minne starts off sounding very conventionally Cupid-like, but by the end of this stanza there is no question: she is something much more sinister.

The mother rejects her daughter’s notion that her heart is the wrong “kind” for minne; all hearts are susceptible, and no single heart could possibly be strong enough to resist.31 She intensifies her description of the force of which minne is capable, continuing to emphasize that there is only one possible protection: “wil si dir in dîn herze smiden,/des mahtû nimmer dich erwern,/dich enwelle got bevriden” (23.8-10) “If she wants to pound into your heart, you will never be able to withstand it unless God alone wants to shield you.” Minne is likened to a smith, capable of forging even the most durable metal into the shape she wants. Even if the daughter’s heart were made of iron, it would be no defense.

This tone of violence is unusual for courtly literature. Courtly romance certainly understands minne to be capricious, dominating, and inescapable, but this imagery is always softened by its counterpart, the beauty and perfection of the beloved. It is also

31 Ob hundert tûsent herzen kraft /in einem herzen möhte ligen,/ir ungemezzeniu meisterschaft/im kurzlich möhte an gesigen./si hât vil starkiu herze erstigen:/kûene Salomôn, swie wîse er was,/ir wart sîn herze niht verzigen. (23.1-7)
mitigated by the eventual course of love: once the lovers are brought together, minne is no longer a torment. Even in Tristan, where love is the cause of pain as much as it is of pleasure, the pain is a necessary component of the pleasure, says Gottfried, and that pleasure is worth every bit of suffering.\(^{32}\) Minne is probably at her worst in Iwein, since the hero finds himself in the unfortunate position of having fallen in love with his mortal enemy.\(^{33}\) But even if she does render him helpless, wounding him more gravely than a lance, there is something qualitatively different about a female force dominating a strong male knight: it is more obviously fantastical. When it is a modest, virtuous, courtly lady being forced to the ground, made to submit, and having her heart pounded into, it is very much in the realm of reality, and it has very different ramifications for the understanding of minne. Romance may portray her as a warrior, but Die Winsbeckin thinks of her as a rapist.

Thus the daughter insists that she is prepared to go to extreme lengths: “ich lâze ê tragen mich ze grabe,/ê si mîn herze mit gewalt/alsam ein spiegelholz ergrabe” (24.5-7). “I will go to my grave before she engraves forcefully on my heart as on a mirror frame.” The daughter elides metaphorical and literal registers, indicating that she sees no difference between a personified idea and physical death. Death is preferable to having her heart tattooed by minne, and if that is the only way out, the daughter is willing to take

\(^{32}\) War umbe enlite ein edeler muot/niht gerne ein übel durch tûsent guot,/durch manege fröude ein ungemach/?swem nie von liebe leit geschach,/dem geschach ouch liep von liebe nie./liep unde leit diu wären ie/an minnen ungescheiden. (Tristan 201-07)

\(^{33}\) vrou Minne nam die obern hant,/daz sî i
\(v\)ienc unde bant./sî bestuont in mit überkraft,/und twanc in des ir meisterschaft/daz er herzeminne/truoc sîner viendinne./diu im ze tôde was gehaz./ouch wart diu vrouwe an im baz/gerochen danne ir ware kunht:/wan er was têtlichen wunt./die wunden sluoc der Minnen hant./ez ist der wunde alsô gewant,/sî wellent daz sî langer swer/dan von swerte ode von sper:/wan swer von wâfen wirt wunt./der wirt sîchere gesunt./ist er sîm arzâte bî:/und wellnt daz disiu wunde sî/bî ir arzâte der tôt/unde ein wahsendiu nôt. (Iwein 1537-56)
it. Calling her heart a *spiegelholz* “mirror frame” is apt, as *spiegel* can be a metaphor for the heart or soul (J. Grimm and W. Grimm, “Spiegel”). A *spiegel* is also a common attribute of *minnel/Venus*. But we need to read this image more closely, since the daughter refers to her heart as a mirror frame, not a mirror. Connected with the sin of *superbia*, the opposite of modesty, the act of looking in a mirror provides the ideal meeting place for temptation and gratification (Garnier 224). For a woman to choose to look at all, and especially at herself in a mirror, is to demonstrate her immodesty; it is an act associated with Venus.

In referring to her heart as a *spiegelholz*, the daughter is both nodding to the conventional metaphor and distancing herself from it. Her heart is not a mirror but its frame, and therefore cannot be a locus of *superbia*. Despite her brave declarations, the daughter’s comparison establishes her heart as a material highly vulnerable to attack. *Ergraben* is something one does to metal or stone (Benecke, Müller, and Zarncke, “ergrabe”); if *minne* were to hew away at a *spiegelholz*, the result would be a pile of splinters. The only escape might be through destruction, but if necessary, the daughter is willing to take it.

But she does allow for the possibility that *minne* might outwit even her willingness to become a martyr to self-possession: “kumt aber si drîn und sperret zuo./genise ich oder bin tôt./sô sage mir danne, waz ich tuo” (24.8-10). “But if she does come inside [my heart] and lock [the door], whether I survive it or whether I am [as good as] dead, tell me what I should do then.” The daughter seems to cede the point that she may not be entirely impervious. The mother also changes tone, and begins
emphasizing the positive qualities of minne: “swen hôhiu minne twingen gert,/der sol unvuoge lâzen gar/und machen sich den werden wert.” (25.8-10) “The one whom lofty minne wants to compel shall renounce all uncouth behavior and become worthy of worthy people.” This is starting to sound a bit more familiar—this is the minne we are used to. Despite the fear she may instill, minne makes her victim worthy of worthy people—a primary goal of any aspiring courtier.

The daughter is still fixated on the violence, however, and understands her mother to be approving of minne’s force, which troubles her: “Bin ich dir deste lieber iht,/ob minne twinget mînen sin/und von gewalte daz geschiht?” (26.1-3) “Would I be dearer to you if minne compelled my mind and did so violently?” Her mother does not give her a direct answer, but her response begins by addressing the importance of a chaste and modest heart: “mahtû ein kiuschez herze tragen,/des muostû lop und êre hân” (27.3-4). “If you maintain a modest heart, you will be praised and honored.” It sounds almost as if we have come back to the poem’s comfortably familiar opening sentiments: if the daughter maintains modesty, all will be well and she will have a praiseworthy reputation. But the very next lines remind us that we are still in dangerous, unfamiliar territory:

ob dir diu minne des niht engan
und wil betwingen mit gewalt
dich, daz dû minnest einen man,
der sælden ist und êren wert,
der sol doch nách dem willen mîn
von dir belîben ungewert. (27.5-10)

If minne does not let you go but compels you with force to minnen a man who is worthy of blessing and honor, then it is my desire that he not remain unworthy of you.
The mother states unequivocally that, if the daughter truly wants to obey her, she will give in to *minne* and the man. That is the way she can maintain her modesty and her overall honor.

Because the daughter greatly values obedience to her mother, the stakes are very high. The mother may finally have brought her around to her way of thinking: she has put her own seal of approval on *minne’s* machinations and instructed her daughter to obey *minne* as she would obey her own mother. But even as the daughter vows her loyal obedience, she has one more plan for escape:

> ob mich diu minne niht enlât/si welle twingen mir den sin/wirs, danne ir zühten wol an stât./vil liebiu muoter, sô ger ich./ob dû die volge sehest an mir./daz dû mit riemen bindest mich. (28.5-10)

If *minne* will not release me, wanting to compel my mind lower than would suit her modesty, then, dearest mother, if you see these signs in me, I wish you to tie me up with ropes.

The attribution of *zuht* to *minne* is paradoxical, given how she has been and continues to be described. She does not seem to be either modest or courteous. The escape is also a paradox: virtual imprisonment is the daughter’s best hope for eluding *minne*. If the mother is going to align herself with *minne*, the daughter insists she take it one step further and, like *minne*, also hold her captive, but for a very different purpose.

Whether she means that she literally wants to be bound with ropes is not clear, but the mother understands it to be a plea for surveillance. This she refuses to administer:

> “Ich wil dîn, tohter, hüeten niht:/dîn stæter muot dîn hüeten muoz” (29.1-2) “I will not put you under surveillance, daughter: your own constancy must do that.” The poem’s subject has become very practical again: *huote* “surveillance” or “custody” is not
something we often see in romance, but it was definitely a part of lived medieval life.

Carla Casagrande provides a helpful explanation of what surveillance entailed:

> It meant, on the one hand, to repress, watch over, and shut in; on the other, to protect, preserve, and care for. A woman in custody was loved and protected like a jewel of inestimable value, hidden like a fragile and precious treasure, guarded as a source of imminent danger, imprisoned as a well of inevitable evil. (87)

Though the motives for surveillance were many and varied, perhaps even contradictory, the result was a “complex series of operations, ranging from the strictest repression to the most loving care” that had to be imposed throughout a woman’s life (95). They were predicated on keeping the woman separate from the larger community and restricting her to the enclosed, protected space of the home (88). Surveillance is essentially involuntary modesty. It forces its subjects to adhere to the letter of the law even if they disagree with its spirit.

As we know, the daughter has no problem with the underlying principles of modesty. She is as eager as any woman to refrain from wild looks and laughter. But in a reversal of standard family roles, the daughter pleads for strict controls on her behavior while the mother encourages her to be her own guardian. The daughter seems to understand very well Gottfried’s message in *Tristan: huote* is “diu vîndin der minne” *(Tristan 17849)* “the enemy of love.” If the daughter is unable to stop *minne* with her own insignificant defenses, and if God’s willingness to protect her is not assured, surveillance is the answer. It is not just a defense against *minne*; it is a combatant.

But the daughter is unaware of the real lesson in Gottfried. *Huote* keeps Tristan and Isolde from *minne* in the sense that they cannot be together physically. It does
nothing to dampen their affections, especially not for Isole, the one upon whom the restrictions are placed. Gottfried feels so strongly about *huote* that he spins out what could be called a *huote* excursus, a description of about 200 lines detailing the evils of *huote* and the blessings of a woman’s right to choose virtue for herself. He goes so far as to cite *huote* as the probable cause of the Fall: if only Eve had not been forbidden to eat from the tree, very likely she would have had no problem denying herself.\(^{34}\)

The Winsbeckin and Gottfried agree on many aspects of surveillance; indeed, she may well have been inspired by him. When applied inappropriately, surveillance can cause problems worse than those it is meant to prevent.\(^{35}\) The mother does not rule out surveillance entirely; it may be appropriate, if ultimately ineffective, for foolish women who lack self-control.\(^{36}\) But those who are already well-practiced in modesty have no need of an external guardian; they should be trusted to surveil themselves.\(^{37}\)

The mother turns the conversation away from *huote* and back to *minne*. She seems now to acknowledge the possibility that her daughter might be able to guard herself from her power.\(^{38}\) If she is successful, then her beauty will not matter: “ez mac ein wîp wol schöner sîn:/deheiniu lebet in zühten baz.” (33.3-10) “There may be a more beautiful woman, [but] none [who] lives more modestly.” Again we hear faint echoes of Thomasin,
for whom *schoene* is meaningless without *zuht*.\textsuperscript{39} The daughter responds by telling her mother how much she loves her. This affectionate interlude seems to work like an apology: the daughter is no longer agitated, and the mother no longer strident. The daughter now asks about the objective nature of *minne*: “nû sage mir, ob diu Minne lebe/und hie bî uns ûf erde sî/oder ob uns in den lüften swebe” (34.8-10) “Now tell me if *minne* lives and exists among us here on earth, or if she dwells above us in the sky.”

For all the distress she has already inspired, the outlines and a clearer description of *minne* have thus far remained elusive. The mother obligingly explains:

\begin{quote}
Ein wîser man Ovidîus
der tuot uns von ir wunder kunt:
er giht, si sî genant Vênus,
sî mache süeziu herzen wunt
und nâch ir willen wider gesunt,
diu selben aber wider siech.
daz ist ir wehsel zaller stunt.
ir willen niht entrinnen mac:
si vert unsihtic als ein [g]eist;
si hât niht ruowe naht noch tac. (35.1-10)
\end{quote}

A wise man, Ovid, tells us about her wonders. He says she is called Venus, and that she wounds sweet hearts, then heals them again as she pleases, but then makes them sick again. She is always mercurial like that. None can escape her will; she travels as unseen as a ghost, resting neither day nor night.

*Minne* and Venus are interchangeable, both in *Die Winsbeckin* and throughout medieval German literature, and refer to the goddess-like personification of love (Schnell 29).

Rather than a reference to the author or any of his texts, *Ovidius* is most likely shorthand

\textsuperscript{39} *schoene* ist enwiht, dâne sî/sin und ouch zuht bî (*Der Welsche Gast* 859-60)
for “Liebeslehre” (Kugler 254). The poets of the German Middle Ages had only a very removed understanding of Ovid, whose name was simply a way to invoke the greatest authority in matters of erotic love (261). The mother now has a great deal of weight behind her arguments. She is not speaking only from experience or observation; she has her information directly from the source. She goes on to explain that minne makes sure to seek out those worthy of her:

\[
\text{sint si an hôhen tugenden wert,} \\
\text{die si mit zühten vindet vrô,} \\
\text{die ziuhet si mit ir sô hô,} \\
\text{daz si versmæhent swachen muot. (37.3-6)}
\]

If she finds those who are happy while maintaining their modesty, and if their excellent qualities make them worthy, she raises them up with her so high that they scorn baseness.

It turns out that the daughter’s aspirations to modesty and virtue also make her the perfect potential candidate for minne.

But no matter how much courtly acclaim it might bring her, she is still not convinced that it would be a good thing: “Vür wâr, si tæte mir gewalt,/ob si betwunge mir

---

40 There are certain passages in Ovid’s Ars Amatoria and Remedia Amoris that are closely related to the mother’s descriptions of Venus, but this may be coincidence. For example, in those passages it is Cupid, not Venus, who is responsible for the things Die Winsbeckin attributes to Venus, such as wounding hearts and healing them again: “Ad mea, decepti iuvenes, praecepta venite,/Quos suus ex omni parte fefellit amor;/Discite sanari, per quem didicistis amare;/Una manus vobis vulnus opem que feret./Terra salutares herbas eadem que nocentes/Nutrit, et urticae proxima saepe rosast./Vulnus in Herculeo quae quondam fecerat hoste./Vulneris auxilium Pelias hasta tulit” (Remedia verse 27). Die Winsbeckin’s description of Venus mirrors Ovid’s description of Cupid as fickle, wandering, and unpredictable in Ars Amatoria, Book II: “Magna paro, quas possit Amor remanere per artes,/Dicere, tam vasto pervagus orbe puer./Et levis est et habet geminas, quibus, avolet, alas:/Difficilest illis inposuisse modum” (Ars II verse 15). And while the theme of education figures prominently in Ovid just as at the end of Die Winsbeckin, it is Ovid, not Venus or Cupid, who is called the “praeceptor Amoris” (Ars I verse 17).

41 This Ovid bears little resemblance to any modern conception of the poet and his works, given the very different selection of sources available to medieval writers. Indeed, as Ernst Robert Curtius notes, Ovid “hat für das MA ein ganz anderes Gesicht als für uns” (28). To cite Ovid is to claim authority in discussions of love and its torments.
“Truly she would be doing violence to me if she forced my mind.”

Though the violence is less vivid than before, she still thinks of *minne* as a force that will undo all the good qualities she has cultivated in herself. But she is ready to start thinking about concession: “wil ir gewalt mich niht verbern,/sô twinge nâch ir êren mich:/des muoz ich ûf genâde gern” (38.8-10) “If her force will not spare me, then direct me towards her honor. If I can trust her goodwill, I must desire that.” After her mother resolves a few lingering questions and doubts, the daughter is ready for the last step:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Hât minne sô hôchgelobete site,} \\
\text{als mir dîn munt verjehen hât,} \\
\text{daz ich dâ langer wider strite,} \\
\text{daz wære an mir ein missetât.} \\
\text{sît daz ir hof in êren stât,} \\
\text{wolte ich gesinde drinne sîn.} \\
\text{ist ez dîn wille und ouch dîn rât,} \\
\text{ob si mich in ir schuole neme,} \\
\text{sô lêre mich ir regel sô,} \\
\text{daz ez mir wol an êren zeme.}
\end{align*}
\]

This is effectively her surrender, and the last time she speaks. Rather than waiting for *minne* to force herself on her, the daughter submits to the inevitable by offering herself up as a willing participant.

The mother praises her daughter for her good sense and assures her that she, knowing all of *minne*’s rules, is just the person to teach her. She gets started right away

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42 Vûr wâr, si tête mir gewalt,/ob si betwunge mir den sin,/daz mir mîn herze würde balt/ûf mîner sælden ungewin/und wider mînen muot dâ hin,/dâ von mîn êre würde kranc,/des ich dâ her erlâzen bin. (38.1-7)
with the first lesson: “ein wîp, diu lobes und êren sî,/diu nîde ein ander drumbe niht,/diu ouch sî missewende vrî” (43.8-10) “A woman who is honorable and praiseworthy should not envy another woman who is also free of reproach.” The daughter’s big moment of enlightenment has arrived, and it turns out that minne has nothing to do with men after all. The daughter is taught how to relate to other women without so much as a mention of minne as the ultimate goal. This is the first and only rule of minne in the Codex Manesse version, but the two additional rules found in other manuscripts are equally unconcerned with men. The space carved out for learning about matters of courtly love ends up having everything to do with reputation. The personified minne makes the rules about honor, and while these rules are indispensable, the ultimate goal is not love, but reputation. And reputation is dictated not just by what those of the opposite sex think, but also by what other women think.

Given that this text, the longest female-only dialogue in the entire Middle High German corpus, has clear formal parallels to an academic disputation (Rasmussen, “Fathers” 126), it is fitting that the space the women create should be one of learning. The daughter’s foreseeable future is defined by education and the reclamation of the otherwise masculine space of the school. With Venus as head teacher and the mother as instructor, Die Winsbeckin turns the preparation for and practice of courtly love into a female-only center of learning.

43 These additional rules are as follows: “wir suln uns vlîzen alle zît,/daz wir den wîsen wol behagen/und vliehen ungemuote zagen,/die wîbes êre gremic sint/und eiter in den zungen tragen,/besnîden sinneclîch diu wort/und grüezen, dâ wir grüezen suln” (44.3-10); and “wir sin in zühten wolgemuot,/gar âne nit, gar âne haz,/wîplîcher site, wîplîchen guot,/dar under tugentlichen vrout” (45.2-5).
Women’s romantic relationships with men may be the impetus for the poem’s entire conversation, but only rarely are men ever discussed explicitly, and they are conspicuously absent by the end. *Minne*, not men, is the force to be feared and ultimately reckoned with. Questions and concerns about opposite-sex attraction and relationships have faded into the distance, now replaced by an entirely female space in which the involvement of men is only incidental. *Minne* takes the place of the threat initially posed by men; as the designer and orchestrator, she is also the one who implements the perceived threat. Female figures are thus both the source and the potential targets of assault. The incessantly violent imagery is particularly striking for its contrast with the father-son advice. Despite the fact that it is knights whose bodies would seem to be much more often in harm’s way, *Der Winsbecke* associates relationships with women as a sign of reward and a symbol of safety. The women, in contrast, face threats like a cloak that can cut and a love that can brutally engrave.

The solution to this predicament, which is presented as a problem only for women, is to realign one’s own thinking and to see *minne* as a bringer of honor rather than of uncontrollable and dangerous desire. The daughter must adjust her own thinking about *minne* to better reflect the personality her mother describes to her. This follows in a well-established literary tradition of distinguishing between two Venuses. Dating from classical times, the trope was a useful way to show that all sexual love was not equal (and thus not automatically opposed to divine love) (Economou 17). Earthly love could be either shameful or virtuous (Economou 17). As Johannes Scotus Eriugena puts it, “Est etiam amor castus et amor impudicus” “Thus there is a love that is chaste and a love that
is immodest” (qtd. in Economou 21). By reading and writing two Venuses into myth and allegory, these two types of love could be brought into clearer focus.

The dual Venuses feature in medieval allegorical poetry, with one representing the good, honorable love meant for procreation, and the other the bad, unbridled love headed for destruction (Dieterich 9). The commentary on Virgil’s *Aeneid*, attributed to Bernard Silvestris, describes two Venuses. The first is *Venus legitima* “lawful Venus,” who is the *mundanam musicam* “harmony of the world” and the even proportion of all worldly things and beings (Schreiber 522–23). The second is *Venus impudica* “the shameless Venus,” also known as *petulantiae deam* “goddess of wantonness” and *carnis concupiscentiam* “carnal concupiscence” who is responsible for all fornication (Schreiber 522–23). Following this tradition, Alan of Lille’s *De planctu naturae* demonstrates an obvious familiarity with the notion of the two Venuses, even as it combines them into one figure (Economou 24).

If, as George D. Economou claims, Alan of Lille’s work was well known among at least some of medieval Europe’s greatest poets (23), it is possible that the author of *Die Winsbeckin* was not only aware of the two-Venus tradition, but also of Alan’s reunification of the two. Even without pushing it so far as to say that the author of *Die Winsbeckin* was working deliberately in Alan’s tradition, it is certainly plausible that the writer had at least a passing knowledge of the mythographical tradition. *Die Winsbeckin* thus unites *Venus impudica*, whom the daughter fears, with *Venus legitima*, who could be thought of as the daughter’s idealization or fantasy. This synthesis is what the mother presents as the true description of *minne*. She is not the *Venus legitima* known from
scholastic sources; marriage and childbearing are never mentioned. But neither is she the
Venus impudica who brings wanton concupiscence; instead, she is drawn to worthy
people and supports their honor. The mother rehabilitates the daughter’s conception of a
Venus impudica without resorting to the other extreme of Venus legitima. She finds a
mediating synthesis by describing an eminently courtly force that we might call “Venus
pudica.” She is a Venus who supports and encourages modesty while furthering her own
program of romantic love, a Venus for the court. By describing her in all of her aspects,
the mother seeks to prepare her daughter for her inevitable future.

**Conclusion**

The conclusions of both poems are perfectly parallel: while the mother and
daughter plan for their single-sex school, the father and son craft their own single-sex
space. After the father finishes giving all of his advice, the son briefly agrees with his
father’s desire to live virtuously before taking a rather abrupt turn: “disiu werlt ein goukel
ist” (58.2) “this world is an illusion.” Any joy or comfort derived from it is temporary at
best and manure at worst.\(^{44}\) He has harsh words for his father’s decision to serve the
world rather than the heavenly kingdom, and suggests that the best way for him to atone
for his many transgressions would be to endow and then enter into a spitâl (61.5)
“hospital.” The father agrees without hesitation, saying that he has been waiting for his
son to suggest this very thing.\(^{45}\)

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\(^{44}\) ir vreude erlischet als ein kol,ir bestiu wunne wirt ein mist,ir trôst ist gar ein ungenist. (58.3-5)
\(^{45}\) dîns râtes wil ich sîn volleist,wan dâ stuont ie mîn will nâch:/doch liez ichz durch dich allermeist. (62.5-7)
The narrator interjects here, the only such interpolation except for the first three and a half lines of the poem: “Üz ougen muoste er wangen baden:/von herzenliebe daz geschach” (64.1-2) “Tears flowed down his cheeks: this happened out of heartfelt love.” Apparently not realizing that it comes from love, or else simply intolerant of such a display, the son accuses his father of expressing the opposite of what his words have conveyed:

der sun sprach: ‘vater, ir tuot iu schaden,  
ir volget wîbes siten nâch,  
die man ie lîhtet weinen sach:  
dâ hœret niht wan vreude zuo  
und hie des lîbes ungemach.  
ez ist niht ein kindes spil,  
der mit des libes arbeit  
ze rehte sünde bürze wil.’ (64.3-10)

The son said, “Father, you are embarrassing yourself. You are acting like women do: they are always seen to cry easily. There is nothing but joy [in heaven], and fleshly sorrow here [on earth]. The one who wants to do proper penance for sins with the labor of the flesh is not engaging in child’s play.

The son begins by insulting his father’s masculinity, blaming his tears on earthly sorrows rather than fatherly affection. By associating crying with women, and heaven with the absence of crying, heaven itself becomes a space better suited to men. The practice of penance is similarly only for the strong.

Rather than respond directly, the father begins his lengthy prayer, which focuses primarily on repentance and contrition. This continues until the final stanza, in which he forgives all who have ever wronged him and frees his vassals. He transfers all remaining debts and tax burdens to his new hospital which “sol vürbaz der armen sîn” (80.8) “shall
be for the poor in perpetuity.” He then briefly summarizes his future plans: “ich und mîn eingeborner sun/zuo in uns wellen ziehen drîn” (80.9-10) “My only son and I will go and live there [in the hospital] with them [the poor].” Rasmussen and Trokhimenko note that the stanza is composed of “specific legal terms” (104 n.15), and, as noted above, it is perfectly in line with thirteenth-century aristocratic trends. Even after rejecting secular knighthood, the father continues to embody typical noble practices; it is simply in a form other than what the romances present.

Not only will the two men no longer interact with women (except possibly hospital patients), they will not have any need for them. The happiness that they were to derive from their interactions with women is now a goal for the afterlife. Every concern they had for honor and success in the world of the court will now be replaced by a new culture with different values and concerns. Modesty is replaced by the extreme humility of the father’s anguished prayer of contrition. Though it may be essential for the court, modesty is not counted among those virtues the male pair will need in their new life. It is, at its core, a courtly practice.

For the daughter, on the other hand, nothing about her own desire for modesty has changed. Rather, everything she aspires to leads up to her final decision to enter minne’s school. All of her concerns about modesty, worthiness, and reputation culminate there and will continue to be significant for her life even in this pseudo-conventual environment.

In its own way, each poem shows very clearly that courtly romance and courtly real life are not the same thing. The ways of romance and the standards to which its
characters adhere are judged as admirable: both parents make explicit and implicit references to these courtly exemplars. But the children, the ones who have to do the work of learning and living out these standards, are aware of the incompatibilities. The son brings his father’s romantic descriptions of knighthood crashing down, applying a heavy dose of religious reality to the supposed glories of chivalry. His fears for his soul’s salvation cannot be assuaged by the way, the truth, and the life of chivalry. In the end, the men reject both the literature and the life of the court. For the mother and daughter it is less black and white. Throughout their dialogue they weave in and out of romance tropes and conduct literature proper. Amid all the practical suggestions and obscure advice, minne is initially revealed as a force of unmitigated violence, and finally understood to be a teacher mediated by the mother. The daughter embraces this form of education as the best way of preparing for her lot as a courtly woman.
In the previous chapter, I discussed the embodiment of modesty as seen in the *Winsbeke* poems. I showed how, in the process of relocating to their respective single-sex worlds, the mother/daughter and father/son come to very different realizations regarding modesty and the body. For the father and son, modesty is a component of secular, knightly pursuits, and, in its role as shield, the female body extends the benefits of those pursuits. For the mother and daughter, modesty must be negotiated in relation to the overwhelming force of *minne*, and the young female body becomes the locus of that negotiation.

Notions of modesty and the body continue to be major themes in courtly romance. This chapter and the following one examine the relationship of modesty to naked and partially naked bodies. In this chapter I consider the pattern of naked knights. Each scene features a variation on a common theme: several ladies discover a wounded, and usually unconscious, knight whom they rescue, bathe, and heal. These scenes are predicated upon three fundamental commonalities: the knight being in a state of transition in his courtly development, the virginity of the female attendants, and the active female gaze. These themes coalesce around the term *scham*, which, as discussed in the introduction and first chapter, means modesty just as much as it means shame, and the two meanings are not necessarily independent of each other.

This convergence is seen perfectly in the Genesis account of humanity’s first sin. While courtly audiences may not have been reading the Latin Vulgate, they did have access to vernacular translations or interpretations of the Bible. One of the most famous
is the *Christherre-Chronik*, which is thought to have been composed in the 1250s or 1260s. Its author, probably a monastic, names his patron as Heinrich, Landgrave of Thuringia. An uncompleted world chronicle *cum* vernacular Bible, it features both biblical and apocryphal narrative and commentary. This project of “Bibeldichtung” (Dunphy 14) breaks off after 24,330 lines, at which point the narrative has only gotten as far as the first chapter of Judges. But the book of Genesis is related in its entirety, with much attention devoted to the story of the Fall. It focuses on Eve’s consumption of the forbidden fruit, Adam’s observation that she does not die after eating it, and his eventual complicity.

Eve does not feel shame immediately upon eating the fruit. Shame arrives only after Adam has also partaken, at which point the consequence is swift:

```
[...] zuhant
Wart in beiden irkant
Schame vnd iroffent ir ougen
Mit warheit sundir lougen
Irkantens ir schemde schame
In rit schemelicher name
Daz si sich schamen kunden
Zu machene si begunden
Von uigen loube questin dic
Daz irn weders ougenblic
Des andern schemde mochte sehin (2345-55)
```

Both of them immediately recognized shame and their eyes were opened by the certain truth of recognizing their shameful shame. The state of shame arrived. Because they knew to be ashamed of themselves, they began to make thick coverings of fig leaves so that the eyes of neither would see the shame of the other.

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1 Also known as Markgraf Heinrich (“der Erlauchte”) von Meißen, he was not only a supporter of the arts but also a talent in his own right; his portrait and selected works appear in the Codex Manesse.
It is the power of recognition, _irkennen_, that prompts them to cover their bodies. It has not yet occurred to them to fear God, but the power of another human’s _irkennen_ is enough for them to take steps to correct for their _scham_. This emphasis on _scham_ goes much further than the comparatively terse Vulgate.\(^2\) Expanding one sentence to a full ten lines, the _Christherre-Chronik_’s author works in the word _scham_, or a form of it, six times. The interpretive possibilities proliferate: while the root word stays the same, a medieval reader could understand it to mean _shame, dishonor, humiliation, or genitalia_, depending on each iteration’s context.

It is only when they hear God walking angrily through the garden that Adam and Eve remember that they are not the only ones with the power to recognize their shame.

However, the root cause of their fear stays the same:

\begin{verbatim}
Si burgen sich von der geschicht
Vnd schemeten sich der angesicht
Daz man si nacket sach
Got rief Adame vnde sprach
Adam wo bistu. hi bin ich
Ich horte dine stimme. vnd barc mich
Wan ich nacket bin irkant
Daz vorcht ich. (2363–70)
\end{verbatim}

They hid themselves from it [God’s angry voice] and were ashamed of their appearance should anyone see them naked. God called to Adam and said, “Adam, where are you?” “Here I am. I heard your voice and hid myself. I was afraid that I would be seen naked.”

Adam does not fear God’s anger; he fears being seen naked. He does not express worry over potential retribution or consequences of his actions. The only thought on his mind,

\(^2\) “Et aperti sunt oculi amborum; cumque cognovissent se esse nudos, consuerunt folia ficus, et fecerunt sibi perizomata” (Genesis 3:7). “And the eyes of them both were opened: and when they perceived themselves to be naked, they sewed together fig leaves, and made themselves aprons” (Douay-Rheims).
from the moment he eats the fruit, is how best to prevent himself from being seen, first by Eve, and then by God.³

While the Christherre-Chronik postdates the major MHG romances by a few decades, it offers a helpful window into how a medieval lay audience around 1200 might have understood the Fall. According to this version, scham before other people is at least as important as scham before God. And the linchpin of scham is irkennen: without the potential of being seen there can be no shame. This interest in the perspective of the other, in the recognition that shame comes only from one’s relation to the other, is one that is also drawn out and explored in courtly romances. Most have their own “Garden of Eden” episodes: Parzival, Iwein, and Tristan all contain scenes in which the eponymous hero is displayed naked in front of others, specifically women. But while drawing on the same themes, they also invert the Eden narrative: precisely through the act of irkennen, the knight is (re)inscribed into courtly mores. The standard accompanying bath is a literal cleansing and healing, as well as a metaphorical baptism. The hero’s eventual re-dressing similarly functions on dual levels: apart from his physical body being clothed, he must also put on the garment of courtliness.

Seeing and Seeing to: The maget’s Gaze

The theme of naked knights was of such particular interest to German authors, and presumably also to their patrons and audiences, that the German versions insert such

³ In The City of God, Augustine very delicately explains that Eve’s body remained intact before the fall. Even though she and Adam followed God’s command to “be fruitful and multiply” by engaging in sexual intercourse (Book 14, Chap. 21), Adam’s seed entered Eve’s uterus without her hymen breaking, via the same route by which menstrual blood exits the body of a virgin (Book 14, Chap. 26). Of course we do not know how familiar the romance writers would have been with the theological notion of Eve’s virginity, but it is possible that they would have seen a stronger link than we might think between her and the courtly maidens who heal and bathe knights.
scenes where none exist in their French originals. They form a daisy chain of helpless heroes and curious, concerned maidens. As an important and unignorable deviation from the standard model of knight in shining armor rescuing damsel in distress, these damsels, while distressed, are the bringers of health and restoration. They save knights on the brink of death by bringing their knowledge of herbal remedies and magic salves to the aid of their patients’ noble but wounded bodies. This physical action mirrors the sensual action of gazing: the women are active, the men passive.

It is invariably virgins who witness men’s nakedness, a fact of some significance. Rather than the marked absence it represents in modern conceptions, female virginity was for the Middle Ages a “bodily presence and theoretical morphology,” consistently likened to balsam contained in a fragile vessel (Wogan-Browne 25). Anything else, including chaste marriage or chaste widowhood, was only second best: virginity sat at the top of the hierarchy of the three non-sinful options. “[F]emale virginity [was] a reminder and a promise of pre-lapsarian and post-Resurrection integrity” (Wogan-Browne 26), that is, bodily intactness. In romance, these virgin women serve as an affirmation of the men’s own physical perfection and embodiment of noble ideals: whether or not the men have had sexual relationships, their “vessels” preserve their integrity and deserve only the best treatment.

The one original we cannot consult is Gottfried’s source for Tristan. His adaptation comes from the French version by Thomas (c. 1160), but “[b]y a curious fate,” Gottfried’s unfinished translation leaves off where the remaining fragment of Thomas’s picks up (Hatto 9–10). Thomas makes radical revisions to an earlier legend (c. 1150), now lost, that was probably composed in Anglo-Norman (Hatto 8). That narrative is more faithfully reflected in Eilhart von Oberge’s North German version (1170-1175) and Béroul’s continental Norman version (c. 1200) (Hatto 8).

Only Parzival is explicitly without any extramarital sexual experience, since he needs to practice lifelong chastity in order to be the Grail King. For the other heroes, we do not know whether they have had any
According to the church fathers, “virgins can be said to be distinct from women, and quite possibly to escape the inferiority of women” (Salih 24). Sarah Salih points out, however, that secular virginity is distinct from religious virginity in that it is a provisional rather than intentional state: it will “be converted to something else, to marriage or to consecrated virginity, but [is] not in itself a definite identity. Ways of speaking of secular and religious virginity can at times feed into one another […], but they are nevertheless distinct concepts” (19). However, even though secular virginity may be liminal, if womanhood is indistinguishable from being a wife and mother, then “female persons who do not play these roles are not part of the cultural category of ‘woman’” (24).

Courtly literature demonstrates clearly that it sees female virgins as belonging to a distinct social category, even if they are not a different gender. The distinction between women and maidens is made most often in Parzival but is no less clear in other romances. In Iwein, Hartmann specifies that it is both women and maidens who provide the knights at Arthur’s court “ein wunschleben” “a dream life;” “in liebte hof und den lip/manec maget unde wîp/die schoensten von den rîchen” (44-47) “Many a maiden and woman, the most beautiful in the kingdom, made life at court pleasant for them.” When Wolfram wishes to invoke the sense of “all people,” his preferred construction is “maget, man und wîp.” While wîp can be used to mean all members of the female sex, or to identify a woman whose sexual status is not yet known, there is a general effort to

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sexual experience prior to marriage. It is simply not an issue. It could be that male virginity is something associated only with clerics as one aspect of their gender identity, since it is marriage and fighting that mark secular masculinity (Salih 17). Either way, in the view of the church fathers, “[f]or men, virginity held no special magic. Having had sex once did not make a man permanently impure, because men in heterosexual intercourse were not penetrated” (Karras 36).
maintain a distinction between known virgins and other women. Especially when
speaking of an individual woman, there is rarely any ambiguity as to her status. Narrators
assure their audiences that characters like Parzival’s Sigune and Belacane, though deep
in the throes of grief for the deceased lovers they revere as husbands, are still virgins. The
distinction is preserved even when the context is exclusively noble: vrouwe, like wîp,
may mean noble ladies in general or a lady whose virginal state has yet to be verified, but
a juncvrouwe is a noble, virgin female.

The transition from one category to the other, from virgin to woman, happens
only rarely in romance, and the very possibility usually provokes commentary. After
sharing a bed with Parzival, Condwiramurs thinks she is now a woman/wife, but
Wolfram tells us she is in fact a “magetbæriu brût” (202, 27) “maidenly bride.” He wants
to make very clear that that which every listener assumes has happened has not actually
taken place. Gottfried is particularly interested in the tension between and transition from
maiden to non-maiden. Without even using the word wîp, he shows how virginity is not
only liminal but fleeting. In describing Isolde’s reaction after drinking the love potion, he
notes that her eyes and her heart struggle against each other:

ir herze unde ir ougen
diu missehullen under in:
diu schame diu jagete ir ougen hin,
diu minne zôch ir herze dar.
diu widerwertige schar,
maget unde man, minne unde scham
diu was an ir sêre irresam:
diu maget diu wolte den man
und warf ir ougen dervan;

6 Den man den rôten ritter hiez./die künegîn er maget liez./si wânde iedoch, si wær sîn wîp:/durch sînen
minneclîchen lîp/des morgens si ir houbet bant. (202, 21-25)
Her heart and her eyes fought with each other: modesty chased her eyes away, *minne* drew her heart back. The warring company—maid and man, *minne* and modesty—was very confusing for her: the maid wanted the man yet turned her eyes away from him; modesty wanted to *minnen* yet revealed it to no one. [But] what good did it do? Modesty and maid, as all the world says together, are such a flighty thing, so short-lived a blossoming, that they do not resist very long. Isolde yielded her fight and did as she was bound to do: the vanquished lady immediately resigned her body and her senses to the man and *minne*.

This rich passage explicitly lays out the opposition between modesty and *minne*, constructing modesty as a co-militant with virginity, struggling against *minne* in cooperation with a man. It is not a fair fight: virginity and modesty are bound to lose out eventually, and the terms of the truce are the woman’s resignation, body (*lîp, maget*) and soul (*sinne, scham*), to the superior power of *minne* and man.

In addition to occupying a very particular status, virgins are active gazers upon the male body. They feature as spectators of naked men who, far from being inspired by the women’s visual attention, are often unaware of it and always helpless to do anything about it. While the female gaze is in some situations a commonplace of romance—female spectators are an integral part of knightly tournaments, where their enthusiastic watching
inspires their men to greater valor (Caviness 21)—these very different scenes of female interest in naked men have largely escaped scholarly notice. Among the few to devote attention to the topic is A.C. Spearing, who notes that the reversal of gender roles “is sufficiently important to warrant a digression” (46). He points to Lavine in Chrétien’s Eneas and Guinevere in the thirteenth-century prose Lancelot as examples of women “exercising precisely that analytic mastery usually attributed to the ‘male gaze’” (47), but Spearing’s “digression” remains just that and is not further developed. Madeline H. Caviness observes that the lady’s gaze is allowed, and sexualized, inasmuch as it plays a role in knightly combat, but it remains an exception within the “scopic economy” (21).

Through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the thought took hold “that women’s gazes, like their rapacious sexuality, must be controlled” (21). Caviness draws her observations from the widespread medieval belief that pregnant women must be especially careful about what they look at (lest the object of their gaze create a fetal monstrosity), and from the famous thirteenth-century rulebook for anchoresses, the Ancrene Wisse, which warns its cloistered readers against the grave dangers of seeing and being seen (21–22).

However, anchoresses and pregnant women feature very rarely in medieval romance. Furthermore, women in romance do not conform to standard religious rhetoric.

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7 Sandra Lindemann Summers disagrees that the public female gaze is in any way sexual; it is instead “communal and social […]. The gaze of the ladies at tournaments supported the community of nobles, [sic] it acted as a device for inclusion” (116).

Summers’ 2004 dissertation, Frouwen Schouwen: The Female Gaze in Middle High German Texts, evaluates some of the same themes and scenes discussed in this chapter. At the heart of her project is the gendering of the gaze, and her research is informed largely by psychoanalytic theory. Regrettably, Summers in her analyses does not distinguish between virgins and non-virgins, which, in my view, not only misrepresents her subject but misses a very productive area of inquiry.
predicated on the notion of their “rapacious sexuality.” Even in the case of Erec and Enite’s sexual immoderation, Enite is not censured for her desires. To draw conclusions about the characterizations and perceptions of women in romance based on the Ancrene Wisse and contemporary medicine is limited at best.

However, this is not to say that there is no way of engaging with romance through the lens of external societal values. As Chapter One showed, Thomasin leaves no doubt as to his opinions of the female gaze. Writing not just about virgins but all ladies, he says, “ich wil ouch des verjehen,/ein vrouwe sol niht vast an sehen/einn vrömeden man” (399-401) “I also want to say that a lady should not look directly at an unknown man.” Given that conduct manuals are much more prescriptive than they are descriptive (Krueger xxviii), it would be inaccurate to conclude from this statement that medieval noblewomen never looked at a male stranger. But it does give solid evidence for this as the societal ideal. Thirteenth-century educator Vincent of Beauvais finds that, for virgins, the look is the place where modesty, or immodesty, is most apparent: “maturitas puellis seruanda sit in omni gestu, precipue tamen in aspectu, in quo precipue apparet pudicia et econtrario similiter impudicia” (qtd. in Bumke, Courtly 642 n. 84) “Die Mädchen sollen in jeder Gebärde Würde bewahren, vor allem aber in ihren Blicken, denn darin wird ihre Keuschheit und auch das Gegenteil, ihre Unkeuschheit, am meisten deutlich” (Bumke, Höfische 471). Just as we learned from the Winsbeckin, the look is the sign of im/modesty, the primary indicator to others that a woman is truly tugenthaft. The physician Gilbertus Anglicus, writing around 1230-1240, lends medical credence to the same idea, stating that a woman’s virginity can be discerned by her modesty, by which he
seems to mean her gait, her speech, and the way she looks at men: with her eyes averted to the side (Lastique and Lemay 66). By nature, then, a virgin is modest, and that modesty exhibits itself in her glances, her looks, her gaze. Even taking into account that Thomasin, Vincent, and Gilbertus are not necessarily describing life as it was actually lived, it seems inconceivable that a virgin of the noble class would have had any opportunities to gaze at an unknown, unclothed man. Despite the fact that romances as well as manuscript illustrations suggest that courtly women routinely bathe naked knights (Piponnier and Mane 100)—evidence that has convinced scholars such as Norbert Elias and Ernst Martin—it is difficult to reconcile this with the solidly reality-based mores of conduct and medical literature. In a culture in which a young woman was expected to keep her eyes lowered in a stranger’s presence, we must agree with Hans Peter Duerr that it is “mehr als unwahrscheinlich” that she ever would have had the chance to see a man in a bath, let alone “völlig nackt” (Duerr 31).

That it happens in romance indicates the degree to which romance tales offered an alternate reality in which women have agency, desire, and power over men, in ways that extend beyond the model of courtly love. The ladies who care for the naked Iwein, Parzival, and Tristan are not those men’s lovers, and the men have not offered them love service. Were this the case, the ladies would certainly have not only agency but, particularly in the case of Minnesang lyric, subjectivity. Yet when the men are naked, and

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8 “Virginitatis autem signa sunt pudor et verecundia cum casto incessu loquele gestus, gressus cum despectu applicationis ad virum quodam torvo aspectu” (qtd. in Lastique and Lemay 77 n. 78). This is very similar to a passage in De secretis mulierum, which adds that women can be deceiving, so for a greater degree of certainty, one should test the subject’s urine (66): “Signa custitatis sunt haec, pudor, verecundia, timor, cum casto incessu, et loquela, cum despectu applicans se viris et virorum actibus: sed quaedam ita astutae inveniuntur, quod omnibus istis obviare sciunt, et tunc homo covertat se ad urinam” (qtd. in 77 n. 79).
their relationship to the ladies is not in any way bound by the strictures of courtly love, the ladies nevertheless exercise both agency and subjectivity.

Prequel: Parzival’s Birthday Suit

Baby Parzival’s entry to the world is marked by a particularly difficult childbirth; he is of “sölher lide” (112, 7) “such limbs” that his body nearly kills his mother as it exits the womb. When she regains consciousness, the first thing she does is gaze at those members, and one in particular:

\[
\begin{align*}
dô diu küngîn sich versan \\
und ir kindel wider zir gewan, \\
si und ander frouwen \\
begunde betalle schouwen \\
zwischen beinn sîn visellîn. (112, 21-25)
\end{align*}
\]

When the queen had woken up and taken her baby back to her, she and other ladies all began to gaze between his legs at his little penis.

The wonder of Parzival’s body is concentrated in his genitals, which provoke not just a glance but prolonged looking. Of course the baby Parzival has no understanding of shame, but neither do the women ogling him. This is not to say that they are necessarily sexualizing him, but with the firmly-established characterization of his body as large and manly, and Wolfram’s foreshadowing of his future heroism,⁹ they see him not as an infant but as a knight in miniature, a body as worthy of their ocular attention as any full-grown knight. They attend to him as they would to any knight in need of care: “er muose vil getriutet sîn,/do er hete manlîchiu lit” (112, 26-27) “he was to be caressed much, for he had manly limbs.”

⁹ er wart mit swerten sît ein smit,/vil fiwers er von helmen sluoc:/sîn herze manlich ellen truoc. (112, 28-30)
His mother, Herzeloyde follows suit. After kissing him over and over, she assigns him the cumbersome but effective name “bon fiz, scher fiz, bêâ fîz” (113, 4) “good son, dear son, beautiful son.” She makes the unusual decision to breastfeed her own child and presses into Parzival’s vlänsel “frownlet” “diu rôten välwelohten mål:/ich meine ir tüttels gränzel” (113, 6-7) “the red, shrieved dots: I mean her titlets’ nozzlets.” From there she slides very rapidly into imagining that her new son is her dead husband: “si dürht, si hete Gahmureten/wider an ir arm erbeten” (113, 13-14) “it seemed to her that she had Gahmuret back in her arms again.”

The imagery of a lone breastfeeding mother and her naked baby boy would have been unmistakable to a medieval audience as the Madonna and child. This is one of the first of many ways in which Parzival is strongly associated with Christ, as “[Christ’s] sex was commonly visualized by way of a babe’s naked genitals” (Simons 6).¹⁰ Herzeloyde’s own justification for her decision only vocalizes what a medieval audience would already be thinking: she is merely following the precedent of “diu hœhste künneginne” (113, 18) “the highest queen” nursing the infant Jesus. While this of course secures Parzival’s position as a type of Christ, and thus a worthy Grail King, it also emphasizes his status as a proper replacement for his father and demonstrates his intense and singular connection to his mother, also the Grail King’s sister. He is both son and lord to her, effectively

¹⁰ See also Leo Steinberg’s “classic study on the ‘sexuality of Christ,’” which, in Patricia Simons’s view, “[r]ather than sexuality, […] really considered Christ’s sex, as a sign of God’s advent in human, mortal flesh, and thus the chaste savior’s anatomy was not exceptional” (6).
replacing her husband. In this he is all the more like the infant Jesus, for whom Mary was both earthly mother and, especially in the guise of Ecclesia, bride (Caviness 3). Though this depiction differs from the depictions of naked adult knights, it does follow some of the same conventions. Herzeloyde is not a virgin, but as a loyal widow with an unmistakable resemblance to the Virgin Mary, she is the next best thing. She and the other women gaze actively at Parzival and admire his body with their eyes and hands. This scene also sets up the distinction between noble and knight: Parzival is nowhere near being a knight, but his body proves how stunningly noble he is.

Parzival’s Bath

After Parzival leaves home in pursuit of knighthood, he finds lodging with the wise old knight Gurnemanz, who takes him under his wing by offering him hospitality and, eventually, knightly instruction. On the day he arrives, he has not yet begun to develop his courtly sensibilities and has only just started learning what it means to be a knight. He is in the midst of his courtly development: not yet transformed from a noble but uncouth young man into a future king replete with courtly discipline and manners (Schultz, “Parzival” 37).

Nowhere is this clearer than in his fool’s clothing, which robs him of not only his dignity but also his manhood. The sackcloth one-piece Herzeloyde designs for him,

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11 Perhaps that is why, in Wolfram’s version of the tale, Parzival is not guilty of the sin of matricide, the unwitting crime that plagues him and his quest in Chrétien’s Perceval. This birth and breastfeeding scene, Wolfram’s own invention, proves that Herzeloyde considers Parzival to be much more than a son. Parzival is not responsible for the fact that his departure devastates her to the point of death, a reaction that suggests an abandoned lover much more than a mother. (The entire prologue, from Gahmuret’s backstory to Parzival’s younger years, is Wolfram’s own invention; Chrétien’s Perceval begins with a young Perceval shooting birds in the forest.)
12 As Bernard of Clairvaux puts it in his forty-third sermon on the Song of Songs (c. 1135-1153), “Maria gestavit in utero, fovit in gremio, sponsa sibi inter ubera collocavit” (43.5).
which sounds something like a loose-fitting romper, goes as far as “enmitten an sîn blankez bein” (127, 4) “the middle of his bare legs.” The length does not seem to be the issue, since contemporary manuscript illustrations and sculptures show well-dressed nobles wearing tunics of the same length. But these knee-length skirt-like garments flow over legs encased in tight hose; Parzival, in contrast, sports something akin to culottes, with nothing underneath. His mother completes the look with a pair of rough boots cut to fit his legs. The overall effect causes great sorrow; Wolfram’s descriptions of it bookend the account of Herzeloyde’s foray into fool’s fashion design: “ôwê der jæmerlichen dol!” (126, 30) “alas, what sorrowful suffering!” and “dâ wart grôz jâmer niht vermitn” (127, 10) “great sorrow was not avoided there.” But Parzival, pleased as can be to be on his way, is not the one lamenting. Herzeloyde is also very satisfied with the clothes; she sees them as a means to ensure Parzival’s speedy return. Rather, it is the poet, and presumably the servants seeing Parzival dressed like this, who exclaim over the disgraceful costume.

Later, the squire Iwanet points out to Parzival that his clothing is a problem. As he helps Parzival into his newly-won armor he says that the fool’s clothes have to go: “diu ribbalîn/sulen niht underem îsern sîn:/du solt nu tragen ritters kleit” (156, 25-27) “these boots shouldn’t go under the iron: you should wear knights’ clothes now.” Parzival, dismayed to hear this, refuses to remove any of the clothing his mother has given him. Iwanet complies and slides “zwuo liehte hosen îserîn” (157, 7) “two bright iron hose” over the rough calfskin boots. Parzival, a knight in nothing but name, is ignorant of the

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13 Blank is, of course, “white,” but it is equally “bare,” since it is only bare legs that appear white.
These two images highlight the differences between typical fool’s clothing (left) and typical courtly dress (right). In particular, the fool is marked by his baggy breeches and bare legs. Adam, depicted here as a typical courtly man, wears well-cut clothes and skin-tight hose.
shame that he should feel at being so ill-clothed, and Iwanet, in a subservient position, is wise enough to bite his tongue and do as Parzival asks.

When this travesty of fashion is discovered by the attendants at Gurnemanz’s castle, it causes disgrace not for Parzival, who remains blissfully unaware of the reports circling him, but for those who must see it: “si erschrâken die sîn pflâgen./vil blûgez wart ze hove gesagt:/der wirt vor schame was nâch verzagt” (164, 9-10) “Those attending to him were horrified. With great mortification they told the court [about it]. The host was nearly overcome with shame.” It is as if his guest were wearing nothing at all, so overwhelmed is Gurnemanz at the mere news of Parzival’s appearance. He does not even need to see him to feel the shame of his inappropriate clothing. One knight, particularly moved by the scene, says “durch sine zuht” (164, 11) “in his modesty,” “mich jâmert immer daz ich vant/an der werlde freude alsöll gewant” (164, 17-18) “I will lament forever having found the joy of the world dressed in such clothing.” Others need to be ashamed for Parzival; they must make up for his own lack of decorum by feeling it for him.

None of this happens in Chrétien’s version, apart from a similar scene in which Yonet (MHG Iwanet) helps Perceval put on his armor. When Perceval’s armor is initially removed by Gornemant’s squires, no one remarks on his clothing.14 Later, just before Perceval’s departure, Gornemant must argue with him to convince him to lay aside his clothes in favor of true knightly garb, but there is no mention of shame or

14 Uns des vaslez son cheval prant./des .ii. qui furent venu la ;/et li altres le desarma,/si remest an la robe sote,/es revelins et an la cote/de cerf mal fete et mal taillée/que sa mere li ot baiilee. (1416-22)
embarrassment. Chrétien’s intended effect seems to be humor above all. Perceval’s appearance and behavior is merely foolish, not shameful. It is in a German context that the focus expands to include shame. Parzival develops more richly into not just a foolish but a very particularly pre-courtly figure whose clothing, as much as any other aspect of his character, designates his place and the way in which he should be received.

Parzival’s clothing is the opposite of what it should be, and so is his unwillingness to get undressed before bed. His reluctance to sleep naked, with nothing but a bed-covering over his bare body, is a trait that will soon be driven out: the fact that Wolfram remarks upon it at all shows just how notable it is. A proper courtly hero goes to bed without comment; he does not need to be asked to remove his clothing. Indeed, sleeping naked is itself a sign of wealth and privilege. It is not clear whether Parzival is accustomed to sleeping with or without clothes, but given how uncourtly his upbringing so far has been, it would not be a stretch to think that he has been sharing accommodations, and perhaps a bed, with his mother, and is thus in the habit of sleeping with some clothing on, as would befit a person of lesser means and status than he. To sleep naked in one’s own chamber was in the Middle Ages reserved for those with the luxury of privacy—and bed linens (Piponnier and Mane 99). But Parzival is finally convinced to take his clothes off, which marks the end of his egregious uncouthness.

15 Por ce que vestir li feïst/li anvea et se li dist :"Amis, ces dras que ci veez/vestiroiz, se vos me creez."/Et li vaslez resposted : "Biau sire,/vos porreiez asez mialz dire./Li drap que ma mere me fist,/dont ne valent il/mialz que cist ?/Et vos volez que je les veste !/-Vaslez, foi que je doi ma teste/fet li prodon, ainz valent pis./Vos me deïstes, biax amis/qant je vos amenai ceanz,/que vos toz mes comandemanz/fereiez. -Et ge si fera/.fet li vaslez, ja n'an serai/ancontre vos de nule chose." (1601-17)

16 While previously he refuses to take off his clothes because they were given to him by his mother, here the issue is his reluctance to be naked, since he makes no mention of the significance of his clothing. In Chrétien, by contrast, he asserts that he will never take off the clothes his mother gave him.
Before Gurnemanz educates him in fighting skills and chivalric duties, Parzival is symbolically stripped of his ignorance, embodied by his fool’s clothing.

After a restful night’s sleep, he is ready to begin his education, which starts with a rosewater bath. He awakes, alone, to find that a bath has already been prepared for him, and he seats himself in the tub. He is promptly attended by a flock of maidens whose presence is officially unaccounted for: whereas it is explicitly his host who orders that a bath be drawn, these ladies appear without Wolfram knowing who bid them come (167, 1). But their arrival is heralded by all the ideals of courtly ladies: “juncfrowen in richer wæte/und an libes varwe minneclîch,/die kômen zühte site gelîch” (167, 2-4) “luxuriously-dressed maidens with lovely bodies arrived, as befits courtesy’s custom.”

Their bare hands bathe and massage Parzival’s bare skin, smoothing away his bruises and recalling the first time the naked Parzival was caressed. To be in the company of ladies is a familiar experience for Parzival. Baths themselves are particularly feminine spaces, given that they are places defined by the female humoral qualities of humidity and wetness (Régnier-Bohler 365).

Unlike the *frouwen* who were present at his birth, however, these are *juncvrouwen*. Their physical therapy eases any chance that he might feel like a stranger (“jane dorft in niht ellenden” [167, 8]), which both recalls the many caresses he received from ladies as a baby and hints at the familiarity with which the maidens handle him. They treat his body as they would that of an intimate; there seems to be nothing of the unknown about him. Such informality earns them the appellation “kiusche unde balt”
(167, 12) “modest yet bold,” a rare, virtually oxymoronic combination. The term balt is usually reserved for a degen “knight.” It is a strong formulation, but then these maidens have, as far as Wolfram knows or is willing to say, arrived unbidden. For them to be “modest yet bold” is for them to embody not only their own traditional role as ladies-in-waiting to an honored guest but also to take on the bold curiosity the guest himself would normally have. For instance, when in Book VIII of Parzival Gawan first meets Queen Antikonie, he requests that she kiss him, which they do in an ungastlich “intimate” way (405, 21). Gawan waits watchfully for his opportunity, and as soon as they are alone, he, much to her delight, reaches up and touches her hüffelin “hiplet” (407, 2ff.). This sort of suave courtliness is completely lacking in Parzival, emphasized further by the fact that the maidens “curry” (“kunrierten” [167, 13]) him, which makes him sound like a horse. He is certainly as silent as a horse, further emphasizing his lack of cultivation: “swâ von si parlierten./dâ kunder wol geswîgen zuo” (167, 14-15) “he was very good at keeping silent about whatever they spoke of.” So far Parzival is good at all the wrong things.

The maidens’ unusual boldness is matched by Parzival’s undue modesty, reversing the usual attributions of modest maiden and bold knight:

| man bôt ein badelachen dar:                |
| des nam er vil kleine war.              |
| sus kunder sich bî frouwen schemn,      |
| vor in wolt erz niht umbe nemn.         |
| die juncfrouwen muosen gên:             |
| sine torsten dâ niht langer stên.       |

17 The two terms occur together only one other time in Parzival, and that is in the description of Obie’s feelings regarding Meljanz. Her sadness over his angry departure increases until “ir kiusche wart gein zorne balt” (365, 17) “her modesty became bold against anger”—that is, she became angry, an emotion that is directly opposed to modesty. Modesty is normally preventative of anger, and to overstep it to the point of anger requires a person to be balt, which is by extension a trait incompatible with modesty.
ich wæn si gerne heten gesehn,  
ob im dort unde iht wre gechehn. (167, 21-28)

A bathrobe was offered, of which he [Parzival] took little notice. He was so good at preserving his modesty before ladies that he did not want to put it around himself in front of them. The maidens had to leave: they couldn’t stay there any longer. I think they would have liked to see if anything had happened to him down there.

The meaning of these lines has been variously interpreted, and no doubt the ambiguity was intentional on Wolfram’s part. David Yeandle argues that because Parzival “kennt noch keine Scham” he fails even to notice the bathrobe; he simply stands up in the tub. This forces the ladies to leave the room quickly (schame 153–55). Siegfried Christoph similarly reads Parzival as being entirely innocent, but simply avoids the troublesome question of why the ladies leave (“Limits” 283). Such readings are less than convincing: Christoph’s indefatigable attempt to expunge all innuendo creates a self-contradicting Parzival who is at once excessively modest and a shameless exhibitionist. Yeandle correctly takes Wolfram’s humor and irony into account, but he fails to explain why the ladies have to leave. Surely if they were interested in seeing Parzival “dort unde,” they would have taken the chance he offered them. We already know how bold they are, so it seems strange that they would knowingly forego that opportunity. Even ignoring that, no doubt it would have been difficult to avoid seeing what Parzival stood up and showed them, so there would be no need for the subjunctive in line 28.

There is a way, however, to read the passage that does not discount its innuendo and humor, and does not settle for what Yeandle calls an “arglos” interpretation (schame 153). In order to put on a dry robe, Parzival would have to stand up. If he stood up, he
The Minnesinger Herr Jacob von Warte is immortalized in the Codex Manesse as an old man enjoying a bath amid the attention of ladies. The two standing are probably noble maidens, as indicated by their loose hair. (The disproportionate size of the woman tending the fire probably indicates that she is a servant.) Unlike the lady on the far right who wears both a dress and a mantle, the two ladies on the left are wearing only their gowns, suggesting a state of undress. Herr Jacob himself is naked except for the flowers strewn over his torso and the water in the tub. The water’s opacity, especially compared to the translucent fire, and its flower-strewn surface seem to indicate that the ladies cannot see in.
would be naked in front of the ladies. Therefore, because he “sich bî frouwen schemn,”
he chooses to remain seated in the tub. The ladies are boldly curious but not discourteous,
and they do not want to keep him stuck in the bath all day. They leave so that he may
complete his toilet. Despite his being in a tub, it may be that the ladies are not able to see
clearly anything submerged in the water, perhaps because of all the roses on the surface
(166, 26) or because, like many medieval tubs, it might be covered with a canvas tent-like
structure to prevent therapeutic vapors from escaping (Piponnier and Mane 100). This
would explain why they are never able to see if anything “happened to him down there.”

Further support for this interpretation comes from the parallel scene in Tristan.
Brangaene, having walked in on the two Isoldes arguing over the bathing Tristan,
suggests that the queens withdraw: “gât hinnen, lât in úz gân./die wîle muget ir rât
han/waz iu daz wægeste sì” (10411-13) “Leave [this room]; let him get out [of the tub].
While he does that you can discuss what your best option is.” It would appear to be
customary to let the bather get out of the tub on his own. In neither the Tristan scene nor
the Parzival scene is there any evidence that the ladies are there when the men get into
the tub. As far as the text indicates, they attend on the men only during the time they are
actually bathing.

The reader’s sense of voyeurism is contained by the ladies: we see only as much
of Parzival as they are allowed to see. After they have gone, he is attended to by other,
apparently male, courtiers, who dress him in suitably fine clothing and who do not cause
him to fear for his modesty. If any of them observe Parzival’s naked body, this is not
commented on. We see only the “al wîz gewant” “a pure white garment” with “von golde
unde sîdîn einen bruochgürtel” “a belt made of gold and silk” (168, 2-4). We are then led
to admire his fine legs, but only once they have been properly encased. The ecstatic burst
of admiration (“Avoy wie stuonden sîniu bein!” [168, 7] “Avoy! What legs he had!) is
prompted not by Parzival’s legs themselves, but by his legs only once he is wearing
“scharlachens¹⁸ hosen rôt” “red scarlet hose.” As it is (properly-clad) legs that signify
courtly masculinity (Schultz, Courtly 87) this is the first time the world is able to behold
Parzival as a properly gendered being. Previously, the foremost marker of his gender had
been obscured by his fool’s clothing. Seen in this way, perhaps the ladies’ unusual
curiosity about the anatomy of their bathing guest is borne out of a desire to verify his
masculinity. Like a baby, the only thing marking him as a male would be his visel(lîn).
Now, reborn from the baptismal font of the bathtub, and his gender confirmed by his
beautiful legs, he will be seen as a grown man instead of a child, a nobleman instead of a
fool, and an educated knight instead of an undisciplined pretender.¹⁹

Iwein’s scham Transferred

Iwein’s nude scene occurs when he is in exile from the courtly world. When he
hears the message from Lunete that, because of his disloyalty, his wife has renounced

¹⁸ a luxury woolen fabric (Brüggen 282)
¹⁹ There is one other scene in which it seems that Parzival is glimpsed naked by maidens. When at the Grail
Castle for the first time, pages take his clothes off in preparation for bed. Next, “dar nach giene dô zer tür
dar in/vier clâre juncfrouwen:/die solten dennoch schouwen/wie man des heldes pflæge/und ober sanfe
læge./als mir diu äventiure gewuoc,/vor ieslier ein knappe truoc/eine kerzen diu wol bran./Parzivâl der
snelle man/spranc underz declachenn./sie sagten ‘ir sult wachen/Durch uns noch eine wîle.’/ein spil mit der
île/het er unz an den ort gespilt./daz man gein liechter varwe zilt./daz begunde ir ougen süezen./ê si
enpfienge sîn grüezen” (243, 20-244, 6). Parzival, in keeping with medieval bedtime customs, is probably
naked, so he tries quickly to hide his nakedness from the maidens. He is mostly successful, which indicates
how far he has come in knightliness since the last time maidens wanted to see him naked. In addition, these
maidens are different: they appear to have been sent with the express purpose of checking on Parzival and
tucking him in, unlike the other maidens who appeared out of nowhere, just to see Parzival. Furthermore,
the maidens are not alone; there are squires and pages around too, so the scene has a very different
character from the more usual ones where we see a maiden or maidens alone with the hero.
him and declared him a traitor, his only thought is to escape courtly society. He leaves the tents of King Arthur’s court and heads for the open field, where anger and madness assail his brain. At this point,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{er brach sîn site und sîne zuht} \\
\text{und zarte abe sîn gewant,} \\
\text{daz er wart blôz sam ein hant.} \\
\text{sus lief er über gevilde} \\
\text{nacket nâch der wilde}. \quad (3234-38)
\end{align*}
\]

He broke with custom and modesty and tore off his clothing so that he was as bare as one’s hand. Naked, he ran across the fields toward the wilderness.

He wishes to hide from anyone who knows him, so he flees civilization completely. His break with courtly life is demonstrated by his removal of clothing. It is a striking reversal of the Garden of Eden story: in order to hide from those who would recognize his shame, he removes his clothing.

Providentially, a page manages to follow him and provide him with a bow and arrow, which Iwein uses to catch game and sustain himself. One day he comes to a clearing and surprises a hermit, who can tell that Iwein is not in his right mind and flees into his hut. Fearful, he hands Iwein a loaf of bread in the hope that the act of kindness will save his own life. Eventually, the two wordlessly work out an exchange whereby Iwein leaves his game on the hermit’s doorstep and the hermit gives him bread and water and roasts the meat for them to share.

After living like this for an unspecified amount of time, Iwein’s already-altered appearance metamorphoses further:

\[
\text{sus twelte der enwîse}
\]
ze walde mit der spîse
unz der edele tôre
wart gelîch eim môre
an allem sîme libe.
ob im von guotem wibe
ie dehein guot geschach,
ob er ie hundert sper zebrach,
gesluoc er viur ûz helme ie,
ob er mit manheit begie
dehinen loblichen prîs,
wart er ie hövesch unde wîs,
wart er ie edel unde rîch,
dem ist er nû vil ungelîch.
er lief nû nacket beider,
der sinne unde der cleider (3345-60)

With this food the demented man dwelt in the forest until that noble fool’s entire body became like a Moor. If he had ever received the favor of a good wife, if he had ever broken a hundred lances, ever struck fire from a helmet, if he had earned praiseworthy fame with manliness, if he had ever been courtly and wise, if he had ever been noble and rich, he was completely unlike that now. Now he ran around denuded of sense and clothing.

Iwein is not only unrecognizable as his former self, he has taken on a new identity. The text has not called him Iwein since his first day in the forest: now he is an unrecognizable wild man.²⁰ He is nothing like the man he was before—indeed, the language indicates the split by comparing him, “der edele tore,” to his former self, a man who seems not to have

²⁰ The depiction of Iwein fits perfectly with the “composite picture of [the] traits” of wild men in the Middle Ages (Bernheimer 9). First, he is intellectually deficient (9) while possessing exceptional strength (10–11). He shuns human contact and lives in a remote part of a forest, “reduced to the plain fare of berries and acorns or the raw flesh of animals,” (9) and can carry a deer through the woods on his back. (Iwein, of course, is lucky enough to find a hermit who makes bread and cooks the meat, so he has it a little better than most wild men.) Second, he is spiritually deficient: incapable of “any knowledge of God” (11–12), he does not even recognize his own nakedness. Third, he is insane, “debarred from communication with other human beings” (12). This is wildness par excellence: “[w]e find in consequence that to the Middle Ages wildness and insanity were almost interchangeable terms; and that, for Malory for instance, ‘wylde’ is synonymous with what we call mad or frenzied. To the present day, in certain country districts of Bavaria, a mentally deranged person is actually called a wild man” (12).
existed. The narrative begins to treat as a dream what Iwein will soon believe to have been just that.

Yet even as the narration begins to disassociate Iwein from the noble fool, a lady who happens to be riding by is able to recognize the man beneath the filth. His identity is not instantly apparent, but “diu eine vrouwe von den drin,/dô kêrte sî über in/und sach in vlîzeclîchen an” (3369-71) “one of the three ladies bent over him and studied him carefully.” It is no wonder that it takes her awhile to make the identification, given his current appearance. But it is precisely that naked body, so alienating to the hermit, that allows the lady to make a positive identification. Iwein’s lack of clothing is enough to disguise him to the hermit, who, it is hinted, might not have felt the need to pray for deliverance if he had known what a great knight it was taking his bread. The same nakedness that drives the hermit to avoid direct contact with him acts as a draw for the ladies. Upon seeing a dark-skinned, naked man lying unconscious next to the highway, their first impulse is to stop and investigate:

> und alsô schiere do in ersach
diu eine vrouwe von den drin,
dô kêrte sî über in
und sach in vlîzeclîchen an. (3368-71)

And as soon as one of the three ladies saw him she bent over him and studied him carefully.

This is apparently prompted by the missing person reports that have been circulating since Iwein’s disappearance from court. But it is nevertheless remarkable that so

---

21 wand er vil lützel weste/wie ez umbe in was gewant. (3318-19)
22 nû jach des ein ieglich man/wie er verloren wäre:/daz was ein gengez mere in allem dem lande (3372-75)
uncourtly a body can inspire such curiosity. The hermit, though potentially privy to the same knowledge that has been circulating throughout all the land—he has contact with the outside world when he goes to sell the skins from Iwein’s game—never connects the two. It takes the eyes of an attentive maiden to discover Iwein’s true identity.

Hartmann stresses that the outside knowledge of Iwein’s disappearance is only partly responsible for the maiden’s ability to identify him. It is equally due to her recognition of a scar on his body. Whereas in so many other scenes of courtly romance the knight must actively identify himself, and goes unrecognized even by close friends and family until he says his own name, the Iwein who is currently un-courtly is recognized passively, and by a feature visible only on his naked body. The fact that he is unconscious mitigates, for the time being, his crazed behavior: he cannot act; he is acted upon, and he cannot see; he is only seen.

Instead of inspiring fear, as he has done with the hermit, Iwein inspires only sorrow. The lady who recognizes him

vil sêre weinen began
daz eim alsô vrumen man
[d]iu swacheit solte geschehn
daz er in den schanden wart gesehn. (3391-94)

began to weep copiously that infirmity should befall so great a man that he should be seen in such a shameful state.

Her eagerness to look, to study, and to identify transforms into sorrow over the fact that the object of her gaze is there at all. This allows for only one conclusion: he is mad.23 His injuries, the ladies quickly agree, are mental, and could only have been caused by either

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23 vrouwe, ir mugt wol schouwen/daz er den sin hât verlorn (3398-99)
poison or minne. Nothing else could satisfactorily explain how so well-bred a knight could end up in such a shameful condition.\(^{24}\)

Luckily, the lady who is mistress of the other two is in possession of a magical salve. The ladies go home to get it, and the maid is given strict instructions to use it sparingly, only in the place where Iwein needs it. The maid returns with the salve, along with new clothes and an extra horse, and promptly disobeys her mistress’s orders. She applies the salve everywhere “über houpt und über vüeze” (3477) “from head to toe.” Her intentions are so sweet (“ir wille was sô süeze” [3478]) that she cannot help herself. She seeks to heal Iwein’s mind by applying medicine to his entire body, something that Hartmann insists is unnecessary. Nor does she stop with a single coat; she keeps going until she has emptied the container. She does not even remember that her mistress threatened her with execution if she fails to obey.\(^ {25}\) Her desire to heal Iwein is so great that she is willing to expend whatever resources she possesses, however unnecessary, as a natural outpouring of her concern. Hartmann says that even if she had had six times as much medicine she would have applied it all.\(^ {26}\)

Hartmann’s adjustments to his source text form an interesting counterpoint to the narrative. His retelling of the maiden’s therapy is quite a bit blander than Chrétien’s version, which goes into great detail in its description of the maiden applying ointment:

\[ \text{Et prant l'oignemant, si l'en oint} \]

\(^{24}\) von bezzern zühnten wart geborn/nie rîter dehein/danne mı̈n her Îwein./den ich sô swache sihe lebn./im ist benamen vergeben./ode ez ist von minnen komen/daz im der sin ist benomen. (3400-06)

\(^{25}\) diu vrouwe gebôt ir an daz lebn./dô sì ir häte gegeben/die bühsen mit der salben./daz sì ir allenthalben/niht bestriche dâ mite. (3439-43)

\(^{26}\) des wär doch alles unnöt, dá zuo und man irz verbôt/wan daz sì im den willen tuoc./esn dühtes dannoch niht genuoc./[u]nd wär ir sehsstunt më gewesn:/sô gerne sach sì in genesen. (3481-86)
Tant con en la boiste an ot point,
Et tant sa garison covoite
Que de l'oindre par tot espoite ;
Si le met trestot an despanse,
Que ne li chau de la desфанse
Sa dame ne ne l'en sovient.
Plus en i met qu'il ne covient ;
Mout bien, ce li est vis, l'emploie :
Les temples et le front l'en froie,
Trestot le cors jusqu'an l'artuel.
Tant li froia au chat au soloil
Les temples et trestot le cors
Que del cervel li trest si fors
La rage et la melencolie.
Mes del cors fist ele folie,
Qu'il ne li estoit nus mestiers.
S'il en i eüst .v. setiers,
S'eüst ele autel fet, ce cuit. (2985-3003)

She took the ointment and rubbed it over him until there was none left in the box: she was so eager to heal him that she applied the ointment everywhere. She lavished it all upon him, not heeding her mistress’s warning, nor even recalling it. She applied more than was necessary; but she used it to good purpose, so she thought. She rubbed his temples and his forehead and his entire body down to his toes. She rubbed his temples and his whole body so vigorously under the hot sun that she expelled the madness and melancholy from his brain; but she was foolish to anoint his body, for it was of no avail to him. Had there been five gallons of the ointment she would have done the same, I believe. (Chrétien de Troyes, “Grail” 332–33)

She then dashes off to wait behind a tree.27 We assume she sees Iwein wake up, but the text is not explicit. It is her waiting, not her looking, that is foregrounded. But we the readers see Yvain very clearly:

Mes nuz se voit com un yvoire,
S'a grant honte28, et plus grant eüst

27 La boiste an porte, si s'an fuit./Si s'est vers ses chevax repose ./Mes la robe mie n'en oste/Por ce que, se cil se ravooie./Vialt qu'apareenlie la voie/Et qu'il la preigne, si s'an veste./Derriers i. grant chasne
s'areste/Tant que cil ot dormi assez,/Qui fu gariz et respassez./Et totoz son san et son mimoire. (3004-13)
28 honte is derived from the Old Low Frankish *haunirh “opprobre, déshonneur” (Möhren)
Se il s'aventure seüst,
Mes ne sot por coi nuz se trueve.
Devant lui voit la robe nueve,
Si se mervoille a desmesure
Comant et par quel aventure
Cele robe estoit la venue ;
Et de sa char que il voit nue
Est trespasnez et esbaïz,
Et dit que morz est et traïz
S'einsi l'a trové ne veü
Riens nule qui l'ait coneü.
Et tote voie si se vest
Et regarde vers la forest
S'il verroit nul home venir. (3014-29)

But then he saw that he was as naked as an ivory statuette; he was ashamed, and would have been more so had he realized what had happened to him, but he didn’t know why he was naked. In front of him he saw the new gown; he wondered greatly how and by what chance this gown had come to be there. And he was disturbed and embarrassed at seeing his own bare flesh and said that he would be dead and betrayed had anyone who knew him found or seen him in this state. None the less he dressed and looked out into the forest to see if anyone was approaching.

(Chrétien de Troyes, “Grail” 333)

Yvain is not just ashamed; he is shocked and horrified, and this consumes his thoughts immediately upon his return to consciousness. As disturbed as he is to see himself, he is even more disturbed at the thought that someone else might see him. The convenient supply of clothes seems to raise his suspicions, but he does not wonder too long; he simply needs to get out of his state of nakedness before it is too late.

In the German version, the notion of scham is developed in a very different way. The feeling of shame shifts completely to the maiden: the same person who cares nothing for the consequences of disobeying her mistress is almost consumed with worry that
Iwein will feel shame. Hartmann takes a full eighteen lines—over half a manuscript page—to explain her rationale and describe the preventative measures she takes:

> und dô siz gar an in gestreich,
> vil drähte sî von im entweich,
> wand sî daz wol erkande
> daz schemelichiu schande
> dem vrumen manne wê tuot,
> und barc sich durch in höfschen muot,
> daz sî in sach und er al niht.
> sî gedâhte “ob daz geschih
daz er kunz ze sinnen,
> und wirt er danne innen
daz ich in nacket hân gesehn,
sô ist mir übele geschehn:
wan des schamt er sich sô sêre:
dazer mich nimmer mère
willelichen an gesiht.” (3487-3501)

And once she had smeared it all on him, she quickly withdrew from him (for she certainly recognized that the shame of genitalia brings pain to a virtuous man) and in her courtesy she hid herself so that she could see him and he could see nothing. She thought, “If it should happen that he comes to his senses and finds out that I have seen him naked, it will go badly for me, for he will be so ashamed of himself that he will never again willingly look me in the face.”

Until this point she has not worried about the possibility of Iwein waking and discovering her. Only once she has finished spreading the salve does she worry that he might regain consciousness, see her, and fear for his modesty. She herself is not ashamed to have seen his body: nowhere does the text indicate that there is anything immodest about a *juncvrouwe* seeing a man’s naked body. The ladies have nothing to be ashamed of; there is no harm in looking. Shame would enter in only if the man knew that he had been seen naked. Just as in the *Christherre-Chronik’s* Garden of Eden story, it is the naked person’s knowledge of having been seen that would be so damaging, and Hartmann emphasizes
this. In a pointed reversal of the Garden, the clothed maiden hides herself from the naked Iwein. Instead of Iwein taking on the role of Adam, naked and fallen from grace as he is, it is she who fears the negative consequences of him noticing her. Recognition, *irkennen*, unlocks the shame of nakedness: the maiden possesses this (3989), but until Iwein’s senses are restored, he can have no recognition of, and thus no potential shame in, his nakedness.  

Whereas this situation is the cause of humanity’s fall in the Garden of Eden, in *Iwein* it is the moment of the hero’s rebirth into knighthood. The forbidden fruit, passed from the serpent to Eve and finally to Adam, is represented here by Morgan le Fay’s fairy salve. Morgan is a highly ambiguous figure for German romance; her powers are welcome even as their provenance invites censure. In *Erec* Hartmann has quite a lot to say about her: despite the magical healing powers of her bandage, she is a *gotinne* (5161) “goddess” who relies on the companionship and sponsorship of the devil to practice her magic. Nevertheless, both Guinevere and the maiden in *Iwein* transmit Morgan’s ill-gotten gains to the warriors who need healing. Just as the forbidden fruit comes to Adam from the serpent by way of Eve, so does Iwein obtain the magic salve from Morgan le Fay by way of the maiden. Both the fruit and the salve confer the knowledge of

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29 Albrecht Classen proposes that this woman is of a lower social class than Iwein, seeing no other plausible reason that Iwein might feel shame. Classen offers no textual support for this proposal, nor does he explain in any detail what he means when he says that “the erotic dimension of this entire scene is undeniable” (“Naked” 157). Nevertheless, he goes on to treat these suggestions about class difference and eroticism as accepted facts and uses them to explain why there is potential shame in this scene and none in the “countless” examples in MHG literature of erotic encounters between men and women of the same social class. This conflation of eroticism and shame is, given the lack of further explanation, problematic. In addition, as far as the major MHG romances go, all courtly characters are members of the same social class. There are certainly levels in the hierarchy, but these are treated as utterly superficial even when romantic partners are mismatched, cf. Giburc and Willehalm, and Erec and Enite.  

30 *der tiuvel was ir selle/der sante ir ze stiure/ûf ûz dem fiure,/swie vil sî des wolde. (Erec 5205-08)*

nakedness on their consumers, but to two very different ends. Rather than a sign of damnation, leaving this topsy-turvy Eden is Iwein’s path back to courtliness. His “paradise” is in fact an exile from the proper world, the locus of manners and discipline, and to be brought out from this Eden and into the court is to be delivered.\textsuperscript{31}

As the maiden waits, she follows Iwein’s every move. She is the picture of a voyeur, gazing on him as she remains unseen. As in Parzival, we see, and hear, what she does. But Iwein defies her expectations, and those of any listener who knows Yvain. He is not ashamed of his nakedness; clothes, it turns out, are the last thing on his amnesic mind. Immediately upon waking he launches into a lengthy monologue detailing his “dream” of knightly greatness. Believing himself to be a peasant, he expresses his yearning to become the adventure-seeking knight he dreamed that he was. But he is discouraged by the ugliness—not the nakedness—of his own body, and seems ready to reject his dreams because he lacks the body and the wealth (“libes unde quotes” [3582]).

Iwein happens to see the clothes the maiden has left out for him, and though surprised at their presence he is not curious as to their provenance. Unlike Yvain, he takes them not out of any sense of shame, but because they are available—no one else is around to claim them—and they fulfill a basic need.\textsuperscript{32} One gets the impression that if someone were there to claim them, Iwein would good-naturedly find some other solution. As it is, he is curious as to whether they will look as good on him as he imagines. It is at the point of putting his clothes on that he transforms from noble savage into disciplined

\textsuperscript{31} Here I differ from Peter Meister, who identifies the site of Iwein’s healing as a \textit{locus amoenus} (9–10). It is instead an anti-Eden, and is missing those key identifying descriptions of the beauty of the surrounding nature that mark a \textit{locus amoenus}.

\textsuperscript{32} ichn sihe niemen des sî sîn:/ich bedarf ir wol: nû sints ouch mîn. (3589-90)
knight: once the clothes cover his black body (“swarzen lîch” [3595]), “dô wart er eime rîter glich” (3596) “he was just like a knight.” Even with his dirt-encrusted skin, and, perhaps more strikingly, still lacking a horse and armor, Iwein makes an utterly convincing knight. He is ready to reenter the world he left.

When transferred from a French to a German context, shame becomes something that has meaning only in society. From the moment he takes his clothes off, Iwein is naked and yet feels no shame. For all his uncourtly behavior, he inhabits a prelapsarian world. The maiden plays postlapsarian Eve to his innocent Adam, appearing as his helpmeet while he is in a deep sleep. But the assistance she offers is not that of a companion; rather, she is a healer who brings him out of his foolishness and back to courtly discipline.

Tristan’s Center Cannot Hold

Gottfried’s Tristan/Tantris also experiences the courtly female gaze on his unclothed body. Having already made one trip to Ireland to procure by deception the healing help of the elder Queen Isolde, he returns to woo the younger Isolde and bring her back to Cornwall as King Marke’s fiancée. In order to carry out this plan, he must defeat the dragon that has been terrorizing the countryside, which he does. Taking the creature’s tongue as a trophy, he places it under his armor, next to his chest. But soon the poisonous fumes overwhelm him and cause him to drop into a pool of water, where he remains unconscious.

The two Isoldes and Brangaene go out to discover the truth of who really killed the dragon, and it is the younger Isolde who spots Tristan, “ir leben unde ir tôt,/ir wunne
unde ir ungemach” (9376-77) “her life and her death, her delight and her torment.” The ladies remove his helmet and his coif, the elder Isolde verifies that he is alive, but barely, and they continue to remove his armor to determine the cause of his infirmity. They find the dragon tongue, and once they take it away and administer dřïakel (9440) “theriac” he regains consciousness. He recognizes the Isoldes and Brangaene but instead of acknowledging it, plays dumb and asks who they are. Almost immediately “diu junge Îsot diu sach in an:/'diz ist Tantris der spilman,'/sprach sî, ‘ob ich in ie gesach’” (9475-77) “the young Isolde studied him. She said, ‘If I ever saw him, this is Tantris the minstrel.’”

Even though the elder, wîse “wise” queen possesses invaluable medical knowledge, it is the younger one who possesses a special ability to see Tantris/Tristan. She is the one who spots him in the pool and who, studying his disarmed body, quickly guesses his identity. At no point does the elder Isolde discern anything exceptional about him by studying his body. Despite ample opportunity at the time of his first injury, and now at his second injury, her interactions with him consist of medical care and conversation. In contrast, her daughter takes the opportunity to study his body at her leisure. Hidden as he is from the world, with only the two queens and Brangaene tending to him, she finds many opportunities to gaze upon him (9987ff.). This is an opportunity not previously afforded to her when Tantris was first in her care (7814ff.), when his wound exuded such a stench that no one could stay in his presence for more than an hour (7837-42). Now that his injury comes from a dragon’s tongue and not Queen Isolde’s
poison, it is possible for the younger Isolde to remain in his presence as he heals and to regard him as she pleases.

Gottfried’s description of her appraisal characterizes Tristan/Tantris as pure object and Isolde as actively seeing subject. He has no agency; he is but a body to behold, a body that is at least partially unclothed and probably naked. Gottfried does not specifically say that he is unconscious, but since he does not do or say anything, he certainly seems to be. In contrast, Isolde’s spectatorship is both strikingly active and frequent: “nu nam Ísôt sîn dicke war/und marcte in ûz der mâze” (9996-97) “now Isolde beheld him often and observed him to excess;” “si blicte im dicke tougen” (9999) “she often looked at him discreetly;” “si besach sîn arme und sîniu bein” (10001) “she studied his arms and his legs;” “si bespehete in obene hin ze tal” (10004) “she examined him up and down.” It is as if Gottfried has leafed through a thesaurus and found a way to embroider every synonym for look that he can find, jamming them in as densely as possible. He makes it abundantly clear that Isolde is looking, looking actively, and looking frequently.

Other passages that describe Tristan or other male characters focus more closely on what it is that the beholder sees. But Gottfried emphasizes the seeing itself: the audience will get an updated description of Tristan in all of his courtly glory when he is presented to the court (11085ff.). For now, Tristan’s pre-courtly alter ego is a jumble of body parts that Isolde’s keen eyes and sharp mind disassemble and then put back

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33 His return to strength is verified by the healthy color of his skin (“ouch was er iezuo wol genesen,/lieht an dem lîbe und schöne var,” 9994-95), which would not be apparent unless it were unclothed. Furthermore, given the upcoming scene in the bathtub, it seems that all three ladies are very used to attending to a bathing, and therefore unclothed, Tantris.
together. After studying him as a whole (sîn [9996]), she visually deconstructs him: she looks “an lîbe und an gelâze” (9998) “at his body and his appearance,” “an die hende und under ougen” (10000) “at his hands and at his face,” and at “sîn arme und sîniu bein” (10001) “his arms and his legs.” He is gradually reduced from Tantris/Tristan to his component parts. It is specifically his arms and legs that give away his secret, that belie his pretensions to minstrelsy: “si besach sîn arme und sîniu bein,/an den ez offênliche schein,/daz er sô tougenliche hal” (10001-3) “She studied his arms and his legs, where everything that he kept so secret was obviously apparent.” Without him saying a word, his body speaks volumes to Isolde’s rapacious looks.

After deconstructing him, Isolde puts him back together. Yet the term used now to refer to him as a whole, geschepfed “figure,” is distinctly impersonal. It is the word used in the Christherre-Chronik to describe Adam and Eve, and here too it recalls the vocabulary of creation and God’s status as creator in relation to the beings he is responsible for creating. It is also the same word used to mean “genitals” (the two meanings are distinguished only by the noun’s grammatical gender), which introduces a humorous and, considering the author, not at all surprising play on words:

\begin{verbatim}
u nu daz dü schêne guote
  sîne geschepfedo sô rích
  und sîne site sô hêrîch
  sunder bespehete und besach,
  ir herze tougenlíche sprach (10008-10012)
\end{verbatim}

Now that the good, beautiful [Isolde] had carefully examined and studied his exceptionally marvelous figure [or: genitals] and his exceptionally splendid manner, her heart spoke within her.
Even taking the less titillating, grammatically correct understanding, Tristan is described as a creation, making him sound more like a work of art than a person. Gottfried’s technique of describing Tristan’s body is a classic *effictio*, a “minute enumerative description” in the tradition of the *artes poeticae* (Spearing 45). Tristan is a being to behold, an object of study, not someone with whom Isolde evinces any desire to interact. She is entirely a non-desiring subject, and he a wholly passive object, utterly ignorant of the thoroughness of her examination.

Gottfried keeps further specifics to a tantalizing minimum: “swaz maget an manne spehen sol,/daz geviel ir allez an im wol” (10005-06) “Whatever a maid might spy in a man, those attributes in him were greatly pleasing to her.” Isolde’s gaze is as powerful as any man’s: she knows what to look at and how to look in order to discern beauty and nobility. As she looks at Tristan, Isolde begins to discover his secrets; she holds complete power over him. His wiles are useless against her perceptive gaze and detective instincts.

Such powers of observation suggests that there is more at play in *Tristan* than the “reflect[ion] and reinforce[ment of] the hegemony of men and of men’s desire for women” so present in Gottfried’s own culture (Schultz, “Bodies” 103). While the conventions of romance mean that Isolde does not and could not *desire* a non-noble merchant minstrel, she finds the inexplicably noble body pleasing, and it pleases her in a way specific to a maid looking at a man. In addition, the only hegemony in this episode is that of courtly manners: both here and in the bath, Tristan is at the mercy of his hostesses.
The only reason he is not killed is because the elder Isolde has promised him her protection and, despite the personal cost, will not renege.

After visually “reassembling” him, Isolde recognizes a disjunction between what she believes to be true and what she sees to be true, between Tantris’s body and his personhood. Gottfried tells us that this manifests itself in an oft-repeated prayer: “got hêrre, dû hâst ime gegeben/dem lîbe ein ungelîchez leben” (10035-36) “Lord God, you have given him a life unequal to his body.” Forced to dissociate his lîbe and his leben, and to reconcile the determinism of the body with the determinism of status, she comes to a striking conclusion: God must have made a mistake. Tristan’s noble body is truer than theology.

Notably, it is not the wife and mother but the virgin daughter who essentially reveals Tantris/Tristan’s secret by means of the gaze. Despite the elder Isolde’s epithet wîse, her daughter possesses a measure of discernment that her mother does not. Despite having never known a man in the biblical sense, the younger Isolde knows exactly how to study a man’s body. This, in connection with the evidence of Tristan’s splintered sword, enables her to recognize the truth to which her mother is oblivious. Like the maiden who recognizes Iwein, Isolde identifies Tristan based equally on his body and one external piece of evidence. And this recognition also leads Tristan out of the “wilderness” of deception and trickery and back into the courtly world, where he belongs. But instead of a return to grace, it amounts to a fall: the intimacy they once shared as tutor and student, and then as patient and nurse, has been destroyed. It will only be restored, and even then,

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34 got hêrre, wunderære./ist iht des wandelbære/destu ie begienge oder begâst./und destu an uns geschaffen hâst./sô ist hie zwâre wandel an[.] (10013-17)
in a very different and uncourtly form, when they drink their communion from the love potion.

**Gawan’s Modesty Preserved**

One final example serves to show what happens to a robustly courtly knight when his injuries require maidens’ healing touch. Having overcome one challenge after another in the epic battle of the Lit marveile, Gawan passes out on top of the lion he has mutilated and killed. Even though the ladies of Schastel marveil do not know who he is, they fully recognize his knightly fame, and this determines their standard of treatment. When they peek in on him, they are extremely careful to be quiet and not make any noise or disturbance until they have ascertained whether or not he is still alive. When they confirm that he is breathing, they gently pour water into his mouth to restore him to consciousness. Once awake, he reflexively expresses his thanks and his willingness to serve them, right before lamenting his improper appearance: “daz ir mich soldet vinden/sus ungezogenliche ligen!” (576, 22-23) “That you should find me lying here in such an ill-bred way!” He entreats them to keep their silence, saying that he would consider it a kindness if “iur zuht iuch dran behüete” (576, 26) “your modesty guarded you from [telling anyone about this].” The only articles of clothing they have thus far removed are his helmet and ventail and pieces of his surcoat, but that is more than enough. As E. Jane Burns notes, a man’s visible flesh, particularly that of the uncovered head, is a sign of formal defeat and can be enough to qualify the knight as disarmed
Courtly 136. Gawan’s knightly reputation is so fully established that, to him, nakedness is a missing helmet.\(^{35}\)

He readily admits to his wounds when prompted, but he also insists on his ability to continue fighting if necessary. He seems to want to make up for having been seen while unconscious and helpless, unable to greet or even see the ladies who see and see to him. Fortunately, his time on the Lit marveile is over, and he can commend himself to the capable care of the castle maidens. They are not given nearly the license permitted to those attending Parzival, however: Queen Arnive, Gawan’s as-yet unrecognized grandmother, makes it clear that the ladies must take every precaution so “daz er sich des iht dorfte schemen” (578, 17) “that he does not feel at all ashamed.” Gawan does not need to protect his own modesty, but the maidens are not left to their own devices. Arnive does the job for them: “einen pfelle sult ir umbe iuch nemen,/unde entwâpentn in dem schate” (578, 18-19) “You must hold a silk [sheet] between you and disarm him in its shadow.” And this is precisely what is done.

**Contextualizing Nakedness: The Elias-Duerr Debate**

As this chapter has shown, male nakedness is a standard feature of romance, and even though it signifies a character’s break with courtliness, it is a feature of the courtly literature landscape. This raises a neutral question about the place of the naked body in

\(^{35}\) One could read even further into this unclothing and see the discarded helmet and coif as continuing the sexualized motifs of Gawan’s battle (all of which, of course, takes place on a bed): after defending himself from a swarm of arrows, which pierce his shield but not him, and after tangling with the lion, whom he finally sates with a well-placed thrust of his sword, his “head” is now unable to struggle any further, and baring it only emphasizes its current lack of potency. For more on the imagery of the bared head, see Simons 39; 46–48.
courtly culture. Were naked knights as common an occurrence in real life as they were in romance?

The two main sources of insight are the cultural historians Norbert Elias and Hans Peter Duerr. Elias’s two-volume Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation, first published in 1939, discusses nakedness in medieval, especially German, culture. Duerr’s five-volume series, Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, begins with Nacktheit und Scham, which appeared in 1988. As the series title indicates, it was conceived with the object of critiquing Elias’s arguments. In his recent article, “Naked Men in Medieval German Literature,” Albrecht Classen addresses the clash between the two thinkers and shows where the arguments of both scholars fall short, pointing primarily to the same literary and pictorial evidence mustered by Duerr. Classen’s article is a helpful starting point (and particularly valuable for introducing Duerr’s work to medievalists who, given the lack of an English translation, may not know it). In the section that follows I expand on Classen’s work: after a summary of the salient features of each argument, I address them in light of the conclusions drawn in this chapter.

Elias’s thesis states that nakedness was a fairly common feature of medieval courtly life, citing as evidence two sets of customs: those surrounding sleeping and those surrounding bathing. He notes that it was common for many people to sleep together in the same room: the lord with his servants, the lady with her maids, and even a host with overnight guests (Über, vol. 1 222). There was no such thing as pajamas; sleeping naked was normal, and anyone who did not risked raising the suspicion that she was hiding a physical defect (Über, vol. 1 222–23). As for bathing, Elias seems to take for granted that
a bather would not wear any clothing. He accepts as fact that bathing knights were
attended by ladies (Über, vol. 1 223). He quotes approvingly from Wilhelm Rudeck’s
*Geschichte der öffentlichen Sittlichkeit in Deutschland*: “Es ergibt sich das überraschende
Resultat, daß...der Anblick völliger Nacktheit die alltägliche Regel bis ins 16. Jahrhundert
war” (qtd. in Über, vol. 1 224). Elias does not distinguish upper from lower classes, nor
does he see any reason to distinguish Germany from other western cultures: “Und das gilt
ganz gewiß nicht von Deutschland allein” (Über, vol. 1 224). Not only were people
“unbefangener” in relation to the body, they were also “kindlicher” (Über, vol. 1 224).

This childlike uninhibitedness began to disappear in the sixteenth century, starting
with the upper classes and trickling down slowly to the lower ones (Über, vol. 1 224).
Pajamas appeared at the same time as forks and handkerchiefs, says Elias, which
demonstrates an increasing concern about the things that came in contact with the body
(Über, vol. 1 224).36 Only now did people experience the “psychische Vorgang, der
schon in der Bibel geschildert wird – ‘und sie sahen, daß sie nackt waren und
schämten sich,’” and the “Schamgrenze” gradually shifted (Über, vol. 1 224). With the
growth of the European middle class came an increased awareness of and interest in
moderating and controlling one’s natural inclinations (Über, vol. 2 428–29). As time
went on and the middle class moved into its ascendancy, its members sought to define
themselves as virtuous against the comparative frivolity of the nobility (Über, vol. 2 429),
whose members, one assumes, were clinging to the old ways of routine nudity.

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36 However, according to Gervase Mathew, handkerchiefs were invented in the 1390s at the court of
Richard II (21), and spoons, if not forks, were most likely also used there (24).
In *Nacktheit und Scham*, Duerr addresses Elias’s argument in light of his own conviction that “es gehört zum *Wesen* des Menschen, sich seiner Nacktheit zu schämen, wie immer diese Nacktheit auch historisch definiert sein mag” (12). He points to a variety of literary and pictorial evidence to prove that medieval people were not as uninhibited as Elias would have it, and that nakedness, when not occurring in an erotic context, is accompanied by shame. He reads conduct literature as a record of life as it was lived, citing it as evidence that all women were forbidden to talk to anyone in public and young women always kept their eyes lowered and never looked more than a short distance ahead (30–31). Duerr also tends to read courtly literature as a similarly accurate account of medieval practices. He cites the *Nibelungenlied* as evidence for the supposed custom of totally separating men and women, pointing out that Siegfried is at the court of Worms a full year before he is allowed to see Kriemhild (30).

I agree with Classen that neither scholar proves his case beyond a reasonable doubt. The two might be said to have the opposite problem: Duerr reads evidence from a variety of sources as if it were all coming from the same place and saying approximately the same thing, while Elias does not cite examples beyond the limited evidence he gives for bathing and sleeping customs. Neither one discusses the possibility that perspectives

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37 In this Duerr is in complete agreement with Augustine’s sentiments in *De civitate Dei* book 14, chapter 17: “*ex hoc omnes gentes, quoniam ab illa stirpe procreatae sunt, usque adeo tenent insitum pudenda uelare, ut quidam barbari illas corporis partes nec in balneis nudas habeant, sed cum earum tegimentis lauent. per opacas quoque Indiae solitudines, cum quidam nudi philosophentur, unde gymnosophistae nominantur, adhibent tamen genitalibus tegmina, quibus per cetera membrorum carent*” (*De civitate*). “And since that time [of the Fall], the custom of concealing the shameful parts has taken so firm a hold upon all peoples – for all derive from the same stock – that certain barbarians refrain from exposing those parts of the body even in the baths, and keep their coverings on while they wash. And in the dark solitudes of India, those who practice philosophy naked, and hence are called gymnosophists, nevertheless have coverings on their genitals even though they have none on the other parts of their bodies” (Dyson, *City* 616–17).
might have changed over time, or might not have been the same for all medieval people in all European places. Classen, lamentably, follows suit, making generalizations about “European society.” One is left with the impression that Europe as a whole was trudging along monotonously on a treadmill from the Fall of Rome until the Renaissance, at which point it could finally get out and run.

Indeed, Elias’s argument rests mostly on the fact that after 1500 there was a marked increase in literary discourse on the regulation of the body. Unfortunately, this is not very solid evidence: not only did literature of all kinds increase after 1500, but the Middle Ages had its own widespread interest in bodily regulation, apparent in, for example, conduct literature. Except for references to monastic rules, Elias does not address this. This is a strange gap, since elsewhere he quotes heavily from Erasmus to bolster arguments about secular society in the late Middle Ages. In at least one area, though, Elias is quite correct: as discussed in this chapter, it does indeed appear that sleeping naked was the norm, at least among those who had their own bed.

Duerr, despite criticizing Elias for overly literal readings, also takes texts at face value when it suits his purposes. He evinces a lack of nuance in reading the multivalent messages of romances, illuminations, and woodcuts, seeking out those that lend support to his thesis and leaving out those that do not. In addition, as Classen notes, “any close

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38 “Zunächst läßt er völlig außer acht, daß es sich hier nicht gleichsam um eine Photographie einer ländlichen Szenerie des ausgehenden Mittelalters handelt. Das Bild gibt nicht die täglich erlebbare Wirklichkeit des Dorfes wieder, vielmehr führt es moralisierend vor Augen, welche Eigenschaften Menschen haben, die im Zeichen des Planeten Venus geboren sind” (Duerr 36).

39 For example, the passage he selects from the Nibelungenlied works well to support his point that men and women lived very physically separated lives, and so he takes it as gospel. But he ignores the fact that nowhere in the major courtly romances do we see anything approaching such an extended separation between the sexes. He also does not consider the possibility that the narrator only mentions it because it
examination of Duerr's sources and references would indicate considerable ignorance and naive reliance on secondary sources, which altogether led him to commit a number of mistakes” (“Naked” 159 n. 40).40 Certainly it does not seem that courtly audiences were terribly straitlaced. Wolfram makes sexual jokes, Hartmann uses very thinly veiled sexual euphemism, and Gottfried does both. Clearly their audiences were not, as Caviness suggests, prudes for whom a naked male body was most closely associated with a corpse “stripped on the battlefield” (93).

Duerr’s thesis, nevertheless, seems to come closer to the truth, but not for the reasons he thinks, and perhaps not when applied to the entire medieval period. We have seen in this chapter that shame is indeed an accompaniment to nakedness. But it is not necessarily felt by the man being exposed; rather, it is context-dependent: if the man is recognized as a knight, others take on the feeling of shame for him, or prevent it from happening at all. If he is not seen as a knight, then he may feel shame, or we may not hear anything about his feelings at all.

But while shame may or may not play a role in these scenes, eroticism does not. It is not as simple as Duerr’s binary, which argues that nakedness must be either shameful or erotic. Classen seems to orient his own analyses according to the same dualism, doing his best to wedge eroticism into the scene in which the maiden takes care of Iwein (“Naked” 157). As he himself admits, this is utterly anachronistic and a misreading of the

40 These mistakes include, for example, incorrectly attributing the Stricker’s Der nackte Bote to Hartmann von Aue (Classen, “Naked” 159 n. 40).
text. In MHG romance, male nakedness is simply not connected with eroticism. Instead, it signals exclusion from courtliness. It is only men who in some way fall short of the ideals of knighthood who are ever seen naked. Their nakedness is followed directly by their being dressed again and (re)joining the company of knights.

A knight’s nakedness, therefore, functions as a catalyst that brings about his renewal and rebirth into society. In Parzival’s case, he has been knighted by Arthur but has yet to learn the discipline and manners that will mark him as a true member of that elite society. It is at his last moment of childlike, foolish innocence that his body becomes an object of curiosity for the maidens attending him. Iwein is in a similar state of foolish innocence, brought on by the minne-driven madness that has deposed him and led him to live like an animal in the woods. His nakedness in front of women directly precedes the restoration of his senses and his return to the role of a disciplined warrior. Tristan’s barrier to knightly behavior is deception; he is unclothed in front of Isolde during the time when she believes him to be Tantris, a minstrel of humble station. It is while he is naked in the bath that she discovers the splintered sword and his true identity, forcing him to own his status as a knight and allowing him to finish the mission King Marke assigned him.

Each of the men is trapped, whether by disability or shame. Each one is reliant on the help of ladies to heal him and/or protect his modesty. The baths they give perform a kind of secular baptism as the knights submit to the process of (re)birth into the court. The care the ladies provide is accompanied by gazing: given the chance, they eagerly pore over their bodies, using their eyes or hands or both. The ladies at Gurnemanz’s
castle are eager both to massage Parzival’s body and to catch a glimpse of whatever body parts they have not been able to see. The lady who discovers Iwein begins with a thorough visual examination, and then goes on to heal him by spreading the healing salve over his entire body. Isolde studies Tristan’s body very thoughtfully and shows intense interest in understanding the information it has to offer her. Far from displaying the aggression conventionally associated with “the gaze,” these healing ladies have visual “analytic mastery” (Spearing 47).

Significantly, these ladies are all virgins and they are not romantically involved with the men. Rather than experiencing any sort of desire or sexual attraction, the maidens’ reactions are either sorrow, at seeing so great a knight in so humiliating a state, or curiosity, provoked by the beauty of the body. Minne does not make an appearance in these scenes. She waits until the hero is dressed and armed, and she almost always waits for another woman, one who has not yet seen him unclothed. With the sole exception of Isolde—who is the exception in virtually every way including her method of falling in love—these maidens do not play any further role in the story, and in fact remain nameless. The same does not hold true when the sexes are reversed, as we will see in the next chapter.

41 While the elder Queen Isolde is an exception, she is not the one who peruses Tristan’s naked body. Apart from her conversations with Tristan, she is not portrayed as interacting with him in any significant way.
Tattered Gowns and Silk Chemises: The Courtly Lady Exposed

Modern royalty is carrying on medieval traditions in more ways than its members might realize. The point at which Britain’s Prince William first regarded his future wife as anything more than a casual friend was at a fashion show, where Kate Middleton modeled an item of clothing that prompted a change in his perspective. “Legend has it,” reports the Mail Online, that his response upon seeing her in the see-through slip was a stuttered, “Wow, Kate’s hot” (English). “[J]ust two pieces of black and gold silk knitted together with blue ribbon trim” for a total cost of £30 (Littlejohn), the outfit falls somewhere between underwear and a tattered dress—the perfect combination, it turns out, for attracting an aristocratic husband at a Scottish university in the early 2000s, and in a German romance of the early 1200s.

According to the Mail, it was not until later that the prince and the future duchess formed a romantic attachment, but the fashion show is nevertheless seen as the turning point of their relationship. The title of one of the Mail’s articles, “The moment I wooed Wills in a see-through dress,” encapsulates perfectly the parallel situation in medieval German romance. When a knight sees a woman in a see-through dress or in her underwear, he is effectively “wooed.” There is a delay between his seeing her and the commencement of their relationship, but the result is the same: when an unattached lady is seen partially undressed by an unattached knight, they will end up married.

James Schultz has shown how, in contrast to men’s clothing, women’s garments “clothe the body and disclose it” (“Bodies” 98). He points to Tristan as a prime example: though fully clothed as she stands before the court, Isolde is described as if she were
Fig. 10. Kate Middleton on the catwalk at a fashion show at St. Andrews University, 2002 (Mail Online, Web. 1 Mar. 2013. Available: http://i.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2012/11/09/article-2230101-00002B4900000CB2-351_306x842.jpg)
naked, as if one could “see through the clothes” (“Bodies” 98). Isolde’s body “is exposed by its clothing and offered to public view [...] [and] turned into the object of voyeuristic fantasy” (“Bodies” 98–99). But there is a clear distinction between real and imagined nakedness, and Schultz argues that not only does a noble lady’s bare flesh not elicit an erotic response in a courtly knight, but “[t]he naked body is not a courtly body and cannot provoke courtly love” (Courtly 87–88). Indeed it “represents the greatest challenge to praiseworthiness” (Courtly 204 n.22).

This analysis, while making the important distinction between real and imagined nakedness, and acknowledging the eroticism of the seemingly-naked courtly lady, falls short on two accounts. First, it does not address the example of Iwein, who falls in love as soon as he sees Laudine’s exposed flesh. Second, it fails to distinguish between total and partial nakedness. For Schultz, any exposure is full exposure. But despite the apparent similarities, it is important not to conflate these two states of undress, which in MHG romance splits sharply along gender lines. Male characters are occasionally naked; female characters never are. In addition, a partially-dressed body is qualitatively different from a naked body in the way it is perceived. As clothing historian Anne Hollander notes, rather than the “disturbing, crude eroticism” of stark nakedness or its unpleasant reminders of the Fall, partial undress offers fashionable clothing, draped material, and bare flesh “all interacting in one visual scheme and all bearing the sanctifying cachet of mythic drama, sacred or otherwise” (185). Though she is writing

1 The obvious exception that comes to mind is Hartmann’s Der arme Heinrich, but as this tale is not a romance, and does not locate its narrative anywhere near the court or even among members of the nobility, it should be considered separately.
about visual art, Hollander’s observations are borne out in literature as well: the partially-dressed body “seems to have everything” (185).

The partial undress can take one of two forms. The first is regular clothing that has been torn and partially reveals the wearer’s bare body. This can be the result of self-inflicted, grief-driven violence. Alternatively, it might be worn out and unable to be replaced either because of poverty or as a punishment. The second type of undress is the shift, the medieval equivalent of underwear. As the last thing to be taken off and the first thing to be put on, the shift or chemise is “also an essential domestic accompaniment to any actual nakedness” (Hollander 159). Indeed, “[i]t stood for the humility of nakedness at a time when real nakedness was usually very well covered” (159). Accordingly, those doing public penance or receiving public punishment would wear only a shift (MHG hemde), which was the equivalent of being stripped naked (159). When not a symbol of public shame, it represents privacy and intimacy, which probably accounts for the lack of visual evidence for the styling of shifts at the turn of the thirteenth century. We do know that women did not wear anything underneath their chemises, and there is evidence that they would have been quite fitted around the torso and arms (Brüggen 72–73).

As the previous chapter has shown, the naked body on display is a pre- or extra-courtly body. Invariably male, it does not provoke an erotic, or minne-driven, response in those who see it because it is not currently in a world in which that would be possible. It

\(^2\) Cf. Iwein’s Lunete, who is stripped down to her chemise in preparation for execution (5145ff.). For an interesting look at the parallel episode in Chrétien’s Yvain, which differs significantly from Hartmann’s retelling, see Wright 85-86.

\(^3\) “[Underpants were not] worn by most women in the western hemisphere until the middle of the nineteenth century. [...] [T]he separation of women’s legs, even by a single layer of fabric, was thought for many centuries to be obscene and unholy” (Hollander 132).
is not the cause, but it is a symptom of the naked man’s conflict with courtly values. Partially naked women, however, are never uncourtly; indeed, their partial nakedness usually occurs when they are at court or in the company of courtly people. Their noble ranks are strikingly similar: each one is a current, future, or former queen. In contrast to the ladies whose job it is to heal wounded knights, the virginity of the partially naked lady is unimportant. The status that matters is her marital availability, along with her role as the future spouse of the tale’s hero.

And just as there are more accounts of naked heroes in German romance than in their French originals, the partially naked ladies show a lot more skin in German romance. All the characters have direct counterparts in Chrétien, but the changes they undergo in the translatio make for a significant and surprising inversion of the French treatment. Not only are the clothes skimpier, but the ladies more fully embody courtly values, including modesty. Joan M. Ferrante observes that “German romances are more concerned than their French counterparts with preserving chivalric values and the social order, so they emphasize marriage and mutual love as the basis of social harmony” (66 n.1). German authors have a habit of turning lovers into spouses: for example, while their French counterparts are only amîs and amîe, Orilus and Jeschute are married, and so are Parzival and Condwiramurs (Green 230). This intensification of “family values” is inversely proportional to the amount of clothing worn by the heroes’ wives-to-be.

The four women who are depicted partially undressed are Erec’s Enite, Iwein’s Laudine, and Parzival’s Jeschute and Condwiramurs. Enite, Laudine, and Condwiramurs each end up marrying the titular hero after he has seen her partially undressed. In each of
these cases, the future husband is more or less established as a knight, but is at the very beginning of his adventures. As noted above, the ladies’ status as virgins is a non-issue; Enite and Condwriramurs are unmarried, but Laudine is a widow. In addition, at the time of their partial nakedness, all three damsels find themselves in some sort of distress that will be alleviated with the help of each one’s knight. Jeschute is the anomaly: she is a married woman, Parzival meets her well before he becomes a knight, and she appears partially unclothed in two different scenes. It is only the second time he meets her that Parzival can lend her his assistance—ironically, since he causes all of her problems in the first place.

Sometimes the ladies are partially naked of their own volition (Laudine, Condwriramurs, Jeschute’s first scene) and sometimes it is out of their control (Jeschute’s second scene, Enite). Except in Jeschute’s second scene, this difference does not seem to matter. The ladies do not comment upon or even acknowledge their partial nakedness in any way. It can be a discussion topic for other characters, as in Enite’s case, but it generally goes unremarked upon by both hero and heroine. Interestingly, Jeschute in her first scene does not say that she has any shame in her appearance, nor does she make an attempt to cover herself up. Since she tries so hard to hide her nakedness in the second scene, it would seem to suggest that, outraged as she is at the violation of her body, she is not ashamed of her appearance.

Partial nakedness, as I will demonstrate, is a sign of a woman’s queenly status and role as the future wife of the protagonist.\textsuperscript{4} Far from being immodest, the women who are

\textsuperscript{4} The only other possibility is that it is forced upon a woman in preparation for the death penalty (cf.
undressed are exemplars of womanliness, with their modesty either overemphasized or never coming into question. The hero who sees her may or may not have an immediate erotic response, but he will eventually fall in love with her, and he will do so while she is partially undressed. The example of Jeschute shows how delicately balanced this pattern is. When anyone other than a knight sees a partially naked woman, the result is disaster.

A Grief Observed: Laudine & Iwein

In MHG literature the eroticism of the female body is frequently, and to modern sensibilities disturbingly, tied in with the lady’s grief. She does not have to be partially undressed for the “aphrodisiac effect” (Schultz, Courtly 90) to kick in, but the combination of the two proves to be irresistible. Iwein is not only attracted to this erotic grief, he is also the cause of it. Having mortally wounded Askalon, defender of the forest fountain, in knightly combat, he chases the fleeing man back to his castle. The fortress’s defenses trap Iwein in between two portcullises while Askalon disappears inside. Iwein, disappointed that he did not get to finish the job, begins to wonder how he will escape from his prison. Suddenly a maiden, whose name we later learn is Lunete, appears through a little door and tells Iwein that Askalon has died. This puts Iwein’s own life in danger. But the maiden wants to save him, so she gives him a magic ring, which he need only hold in his bare hand to be hidden “sam daz holz underr rinden” (1208) “like wood under bark.” She makes him comfortable and then departs.

As Iwein waits apprehensively, Askalon’s funeral procession passes by with his new widow following behind the bier. Laudine is the most beautiful woman Iwein has

Lunete), which is a historically accurate representation of contemporary traditions. As noted above, partial nakedness in any other public situation does not seem to have been a typical courtly convention.
ever seen, but he does not yet fall in love with her. First he watches her engage in a
display of grief not atypical of women in MHG romances: “von jâmer sî ûz brach/ir hår
und diu cleider” (1310-11) “in grief she tore at her hair and her clothes.” Her mental
anguish manifests in self-inflicted violence to her body, which is the first step in the
grieving process for a courtly lady. As Hartmann explains in Erec, women are naturally
and exclusively inclined to harm themselves as an expression of misery.6 By rending her
clothes, a woman shows how womanly she is: the greater her violence, the nearer she
approaches the ideal. This must lead to the further conclusion that women who do not
display their grief in such a way are something less than womanly, because proper gender
performance means self-mutilation. As proof not only of her love but of her adherence to
womanly ways, a lady is expected to self-harm.

Laudine is exceptionally good at grieving, making her an exceptionally womanly
woman: “ez is wîplich daz ir clagt,/und muget ouch ze vil clagen” (1800-01) “it is
womanly for you to lament, but you may be lamenting too much.” No woman could be
more sorrowful than her, Hartmann tells us, and no woman could impose more suffering
on herself than she did.8 After fainting multiple times, “sô sî wider ûf gesach/und weder
gehôrte noch ensprach,/sone sparten ir hende/daz hâr noch daz gebende” (1327-1330)
“she woke up and did not hear or speak. But her hands did not spare her hair or her
wimple.” In attacking the headdress that marks her as a married woman, the very act of

5 und nâch der bârê gienc ein wîp./daz er nie wîbes lip/alsô schœnen gesach. (1307-09)
6 daz hâr sî vaste ûz brach/an ir lîbe sî sich rach/nâch wîplîchem site:/wan hie rechent sî sich mite. (Erec
5760-63)
7 ezn dorft nie wîbe leider/ze dirre werlde geschehn[. ] (1312-13)
8 ezn mûhte nißherhein wîp/gelegen an ir selber lîp/von clage selhe swære./der niht ernest wäre.
(1317-20)
her mourning reveals her as available to Iwein’s covert gaze. She transforms herself symbolically and visually from unavailable wife to available widow. Her newly-freed hair does not go unnoticed, especially once Iwein gets a better look at her body:

swâ ir der lîp blôzer schein,
da’rsach sî der herre Îwein:
und dâ was ir hâr und ir lîch
sô gar dem wunsche gelîch
daz im ir minne
verkêrte die sinne,
daz er sîn selbes gar vergaz
und daz vil kûme versaz
sô sî sich roufte unde slouc. (1331-39)

Whatever parts of her body shone bare, that’s what Sir Iwein glimpsed. And her hair and her body were so much like the ideal that love of her confused his senses; he completely forgot himself and watched, with difficulty, as she hit herself and tore out her hair.

It is very explicitly her exposed hair and body that causes Iwein to fall in love: he already knows she is superlatively beautiful, but that is not enough to confuse his senses. There is an unsettling but unmistakable progression from killing a knight to gazing on, and then falling in love with, the semi-naked female form.

Though Hartmann conveniently sidesteps the issue of who caused Laudine’s grief, no one hearing this story has forgotten it. Hartmann’s own narratorial insertion in a similar scene in *Erec* offers a damning rebuke: causing a woman to grieve (by killing her spouse) is neither manly nor good, and Hartmann personally wishes misfortune upon such men. In breaching this code of romance conduct Iwein is, theoretically, condemned by the narrator of *Erec*, but he is rewarded by the plot of his own tale. For far from

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9 dâ von müez er unsælic sîn/(des wünschet im der wille mîn)/swer den wîben leide tuot:/wan ez ist manlich noch guot. (5770-73)
meeting with unpleasant consequences as a result of his actions, he is gifted with a knightly autoerotic fantasy: it is his own fighting prowess that has caused the most beautiful woman he has ever seen to rip off her clothing in grief. Furthermore, this will eventually be the reason he is able to marry her. Lunete’s flawless if heartless reasoning later paves the way for Iwein to marry Laudine:

Ich geziuges iu genuoc,
der in dâ jagte unde sluoc,
der ist der tiurer gewesn:
mîn herre ist tôt und er genesn. (1967-70)

I’m making it clear enough to you. The one who chased and killed him [Askalon] was the worthier one: my lord [Askalon] is dead and he lives.

Since Iwein is, logically, the better knight, and Laudine needs someone to protect her country, he becomes the best choice for her new husband.

The funeral scene sets up quite a contrast to Chrétien’s *Yvain*, in which Laudine’s grief-driven violence is so extreme that she nearly kills herself.

Quequ’il aloient reverchant
Desoz liz et desoz eschames,
Vint une des plus beles dames
Conques veïst riens terriene.
De si tres bele crestiene
Ne fu onques plez ne parole ;
Mes de duel feire estoit si fole
Qu'a po qu'ele ne s'ocioit.
A la foiee, si crioit
Si haut com ele poot plus,
Et recheoit pasmee jus.
Et quant ele estoit relevee,
Ausi come fame desvee,
Se comancoit a dessirier
Et ses chevols a detranchier ;
Ses mains detuert et ront ses dras,
Si se repasme a chascun pas […] (1142-58)
While they were upending beds and stools, there entered one of the most beautiful women ever seen by human eye – such an exceptionally beautiful lady has never before been reported or told of. But she was so crazed with grief that she was on the verge of killing herself. All at once she cried out as loudly as she could and fell down in a faint. When she was lifted back to her feet, she began clawing at herself and tearing out her hair like a madwoman; her hands grabbed and ripped her clothing and she fainted with every step. (Chrétien de Troyes, “Lion” 309)

Chrétien’s Laudine is beautiful, certainly, but rather than her mourning enhancing her beauty, it effectively overrides it. There is nothing at all erotic about her grief, even though there are other examples in French (and German) romance in which grief is portrayed as an aphrodisiac. Rather than having an erotic effect on Yvain, her grief delays his feelings of attraction. While she does tear her clothing, there is no indication that her body is showing through. Yvain must see her, since she is passing right by him, but Chrétien tells us only that he hears her:

Messire Yvains oï les criz
Et le duel, qui ja n’iert descriz,
Ne nus ne le porroit descrivire,
Ne tex ne fu escriz an livre [...] (1171-74)

My lord Yvain heard the indescribable cries and moanings, which surpassed all words and could never be recorded in a book.

Despite the obligatory introductory remark regarding her exceptional beauty\(^{11}\), she is hardly an object of desire.

\(^{10}\) Some examples in French and German romance include Enide/Enite and the evil count; and Blancheflor/Condwiramurs and Perceval/Parzival. German romance also features Belacane and Gahmuret.

\(^{11}\) [...] Vint une des plus beles dames,/C’onques veist riens terriene/De si tres bele crestiene./Ne fu onques plez ne parole (1144-47)
With the help of Lunete, Yvain contrives to watch the burial through a window.\footnote{This is a provocative and complex reversal of the more common trope of the lady being seen at the window: Yvain is the one on the inside, but he is invisible as he watches Laudine on the outside. Chrétien tells us that love enters through the window ("An ce voloir l'a Amors mis,/Qui a la fenestre l'a pris," 1425-26), a faint suggestion of the consequences of Yvain’s somewhat gender-transgressive behavior. Interestingly, Hartmann’s version removes the mediation of a window so that Iwein falls in love with Laudine while they are in the same room.}

It is only after hearing Laudine deliver a coherent graveside eulogy that Yvain feels compelled to help her:

\begin{verbatim}
Lors se deront et se dessire
Trestot quanque as mains li vient.
A mout grant poinne se retient
Messire Yveins, a que qu'il tort,
Que les mains tenir ne li cort. (1298-1302)
\end{verbatim}

Then [after her eulogy] she ripped at her clothing, tearing whatever came into her hands. Only with great difficulty did my lord Yvain restrain himself from running to seize her hands. (Chrétien de Troyes, “Lion” 311)

Again, she tears her clothing, and again, there is no mention of her skin being visible.

Perhaps Yvain’s desire to restrain her comes from nascent feelings of affection, or perhaps it is inspired by chivalry. But it is only when he sees Laudine’s husband buried that love captures his heart. Yvain needs to hear her speak coherently, in a way that does not directly threaten him, and see her husband buried before love truly takes over. The narrator makes the conventional claims that love entered through Yvain’s eyes\footnote{Que par les ialz el cuer le fiert (1370)}, but it is clear that speech plays an equally important role. Even as he enjoys gazing at her, what he really wants to do is talk to her: “Ce qu'ele plore et qu'ele list/Volsist qu'ele lessié eüst/Et qu'a lui parler li pleüist” (1422-24) “He wished that she would cease her weeping and her reading [of psalms], and that it were possible for him to speak to her” (Chrétien de Troyes, “Lion” 312).
Hartmann’s changes are significant: he de-privileges Laudine’s speech and focuses Iwein’s attention on her body. He also exposes that body and makes her grief a positive attribute rather than a terrifying outpouring of emotion. This ratifies her womanliness and the prized virtues of loyalty and constancy without Hartmann even needing to mention these qualities. Her bare skin is a positive attribute, a way of assessing her beauty and suitability as a wife, and Iwein is immediately drawn to her. For Yvain, without the help of erotic grief, the process of falling in love takes a lot longer, and must be assisted by de-privileging the role of sight.

**Body/Armor: Erec & Enite**

Hartmann’s other hero, Erec, meets his future wife under somewhat similar conditions: she too is partially naked. But the cause is different: rather than grief-stricken, she is poverty-stricken. Erec’s reaction is also different. When Iwein sees Laudine the narrator describes her according to what Iwein took note of, and what affected him. In Erec, however, the protagonist does not notice Enite at all, despite the fact that “diu war ein diu schœnste magt/von der uns ie wart gesagt” (310-11) “she was the most beautiful maiden that anyone has ever told us about.” The first-person plural perspective is representative of the entire passage: Enite is described from the narrator’s point of view, for the benefit of the audience, without any reference to Erec’s impressions. Hartmann’s listeners view Enite through the narrator’s words alone, unmediated by Erec’s reaction:

```
der mägde lîp was lobelich.  
der roc was grüener varwe,  
gezerret begarwe,  
abehære über al.  
dar under was ir hemde sal  
und ouch zebrochen eteswâ:```
sō schein diu lîch dâ
durch wîz alsam ein swan.
man sagt daz nie kint gewan
ein lîp sō gar dem wunsche gelîch:
und wære sî gewesen rich,
so gebræste niht ir lîbe
ze lobelichem wîbe.
ir lîp schein durch ir salwe wât
alsam diu lilje, dâ sî stât
under swarzen dornen wîz.
ich wæne got sînen vlîz
an sî hâte geleit
von schœne und von sælekeit. (327-341)

The girl’s body was praiseworthy. Her dress was green, completely
tattered, worn thin everywhere. Under that was her dirty chemise, also torn
here and there, so that her body underneath shone through, white as a
swan. They say that no girl ever possessed a body so much like the ideal,
and if she had been rich, her body would have lacked nothing in making
her a praiseworthy wife. Her body shone through her dirty clothing like a
lily, standing white among black thorns. I believe that God put forth great
effort towards her beauty and perfection.

A comparison with Chrétien’s description shows that Hartmann is quite familiar with the
original but chooses some very different focus points:

Li vavasors sa fame apele
et sa fille qui mout fu bele,
qui an .i. ovreor ovroient,
mes ne sai quele oevre i feisoient.
La dame s’an est hors issue
et sa fille, qui fu vestue
d’une chemise par panz lee,
deliee, blanche et ridee.
.i. blanc cheinse ot vestu desus,
n’avoit robe ne mains ne plus,
et tant estoit li chainses viez
que as costez estoit perciez.
Povre estoit la robe dehors,
mes desoz estoit biax li cors.
Mout estoit la pucele gente,
car tote i ot mise s’antante
Nature qui fete l'avoit ;
elle mesma s'an estoit
plus de .v.c. foiz merveilliée
comant une sole foie
 tant bele chose fere pot,
car puis tant pener ne se pot
qu'elle poïst son essanplaire
an nule guise contrefaire.
De ceste tesmoingne Nature
c'onques si bele criature
ne fu veüe an tot le monde.
Por voir vos di qu'Isolz la blonde
n'ot les crins tant sors ne luisanz
que a cesti ne fust neanz.
Plus ot que n'est la flors de lis
cler et blanc le front et le vis ;
sor la color, par grant merveille,
d'une fresche color vermoille,
que Nature li ot donee,
estoït sa face anluminee.
Si oel si grant clarté randoient
que .ii. estoies ressanbloient.
Onques Dex ne sot fere mialz
le nes, la boche ne les ialz.
Que diroie de sa biauté?
Ce fu cele por verité
qui fu fete por esgarder,
qu'an se poïst an li mirer
ausi com an .i. mireor. (397-441)

The lady came out as did her daughter, who was dressed in a flowing shift
of fine cloth, white and pleated. Over it she wore a white dress; she had no
other clothes. And the dress was so old that it was worn through at the
elbows. On the outside the clothing was poor, but the body beneath was
lovely. The maiden was very beautiful, for Nature in making her had
turned all her attention to the task. Nature herself had marvelled more than
five hundred times at how she had been able to make such a beautiful
thing just once, for since then, strive as she might, she had never been able
to duplicate in any way her original model. Nature bears witness to this:
ever was such a beautiful creature seen in the whole world. In truth I tell
you that Isolde the Blonde had not such shining golden hair, for compared
to this maiden she was nothing. Her face and forehead were fairer and
brighter than the lily-flower; contrasting marvellously with the whiteness,
her face was illuminated by a fresh, glowing colour that Nature had given her. Her eyes glowed with such brightness that they resembled two stars; never had God made finer nose, mouth, nor eyes. What should I say of her beauty? She was truly one who was made to be looked at, for one might gaze at her just as one gazes into a mirror. (Chrétien de Troyes, “Erec and Enide” 42)

This description makes Hartmann’s look terse. But Hartmann does not condense for the sake of economy: his Erec is some 3000 lines longer than Chrétien’s. Rather, he focuses on the most salient points. Strikingly, Hartmann downgrades Enide’s poor but serviceable dress to a dirty, tattered one. Chrétien’s Enide is exposed only at the elbows, but Hartmann’s Enite is partially undressed. He follows Chrétien in giving a description of her clothing, but Chrétien cares a lot more about sartorial details. For Hartmann, the clothes are a means to an end: they are the thing the narrator conventionally focuses on, so where they do not exist, he can talk instead about Enite’s beautiful bareness. This absorbs all his attention: we hear nothing about her hair or her face, which are the aspects that most interest Chrétien.

Burns observes that in French romance, “[m]uch is made, typically, of the white skin that covers the elite lady’s face and neck, chest, and hands. It is not that this lady is unclothed per se but that skin itself constitutes the aristocratic woman’s typical garment” (Courtly 137). French courtly romance remains content to describe the clothed female body as if it is naked without ever actually exposing her flesh (Burns, Bodytalk 109). But Hartmann does away with the “as if” and enables the gaze to touch on the actual flesh. He takes the French convention to the next logical step, removing part of that extraneous layer, clothing, to get to the real garment: skin. In nodding to the convention of
describing the lady’s costume, he can fill in the gaps and tears with flesh. Over and over he praises her lip, five times in the space of fifteen lines. Changing her dress from white to green not only suggests hope and new beginnings but also makes her body sound that much more like a lily flower sprouting from a dirt-encrusted stem. The comparisons to an inanimate object and an animal (her body is “swan-white”) encourage the audience’s visualizations: there is no person returning the gaze of the eager voyeur. The audience takes on an Iwein-like persona, watching eagerly from behind a curtain of invisibility, seeing but not seen.

Hartmann’s compliment about Enite’s marriageability cloaks the insurmountable criticism: a woman so poor that she cannot afford to clothe herself is not quite wife-material. As it is, if she will not make for a suitable wife, the body on display still leaves much to be appreciated. Her partial nakedness reflects only on her marriageability, not on her beauty. Her body remains visually available, and desirable, to desiring looks even as she is matrimonially undesirable. Continuing to stand in for the lack of an interested suitor, Hartmann concludes with his first-person opinion: “ich wæne got sînen vlîz/an sî hâte geleit/von schöne und von sælekeit” (339-41) “I believe God directed his skills of beauty and perfection onto her.” The description of her appearance thus begins and ends with a first-person reference.

After so conspicuous a silence from Erec, it seems almost inevitable that the next words out of the narrator’s mouth will be something like “Erec was amazed at her great beauty.” After all, that is exactly what happens in Chrétien. Hartmann does revert back to Erec, but it is not to show his reaction to Enite’s stunning beauty. Instead, Erec is only
apologetic that Enite has to take care of his horse—a horse that, unlike its owner, recognizes a beautiful lady when it sees one: “im zam von solhem knehte/sîn fuoter wol mit rehte” (364-65) “Naturally, it was quite pleased to get its feed from such a squire.”

In contrast, when Chrétien’s Enide and Erec encounter each other unexpectedly, their reactions are quite marked:

Quant ele le chevalier voit
que onques mes veü n’avoit,
un petit arriere s’estut :
por ce qu’ele ne le quenut,
vergoigne en ot et si rogi.
Erec d’autre part s’esbahit
quant an li si grant biauté vit. (443-49)

When she saw the knight, whom she had never seen before, she stayed back a bit because she did not know him; she was embarrassed and blushed. Erec, on the other hand, was astonished when he saw such great beauty. (Chrétien de Troyes, “Erec and Enide” 42)

It is not just Erec observing Enide; she notices him too. Both react in the usual ways, their first glances forecasting their future love. Their reactions to each other are equal and opposite, Erec gaping in amazement, and Enide blushing in reticence.

But the only one blushing in Hartmann is Erec, and he has been doing so regularly since his opening encounter with the dwarf. While he, Guinevere, and her lady in waiting are riding through the woods, a knight, a dwarf, and a maiden appear in the distance. Guinevere’s maiden rides out to find out who they are. The dwarf refuses to answer, and when she persists, he strikes her head and her hands. Erec then rides over to the dwarf and asks him again to identify the knight and the lady. The dwarf metes out the same punishment he dealt the maiden. Erec is unable to avenge either himself or the lady,
because he happens to be unarmed: “der ritter het im gnomen den lip/wand Êrec was blôz
als ein wîp” (103) “the knight would have taken his life, because Erec was as unarmed
[literally: naked] as a woman.” Without his armor, he is in no position to challenge the
dwarf’s master, the knight. He is as unable to defend himself as the maiden is.

At this point the entire episode becomes laden with scham: the fact that the queen
and her lady are witnesses to his naked humiliation is the cause of the greatest shame of
his life (“und schamt sich nie sô sêre/wan daz dise unêre/diu künegin mit ir frouwen
sach” [106-08]). It is “mit grôzer schame” (110) “with great shame” that he rides back to
the queen, in front of whom his cheeks turn “schemvar” (112) “red with shame,” and to
whom he declares, “des schem ich mich sô sêre/daz ich iuch nimmer mère/fûrbaz getar
schouwen/und dise juncfrouwen” (122-25) “I am so ashamed of this that I will never
again dare to show myself before you and this maiden.” He, like Adam, wants to hide
himself from those who recognize his shame. As in so many other cases, it is the other’s
recognition of one’s nakedness that causes shame, and it will not end until Erec can cover
himself, thereby gaining the ability to assert his honor and manliness. He vows that the
queen will not see him again unless he avenges his honor. Until he performs this act of
penance, he remains in a state of disgrace, an excommunicant from the privileges and
joys of courtly life that Guinevere symbolizes.

Once he has followed the unknown knight to his lodgings at the castle of
Tulmein, Erec finds himself in need of his own accommodations. His search in the town
is unsuccessful because it is crowded and he has no money to offer a potential host.
When he eventually happens upon Enite’s father, Koralus, and requests lodging, he turns
“schamerôt” (303) “red with shame,” no doubt fearing the shame of rejection. Later that evening, when Koralus does not immediately grant his request for Enite’s hand in marriage, Erec once more turns red, ashamed that Koralus does not take him seriously.14

Given all that has happened to Erec leading up to meeting Enite, it is not surprising that he does not notice her beauty. As long as he is dominated by scham, he cannot be ruled by minne. Cut off from his own world, Erec cannot enjoy the delights it has to offer until he proves himself worthy. His consuming goal is to do just that, and in talking with Enite’s father, he devises a plan. He will enter Enite into the local beauty contest where the knight’s lady friend always unfairly takes the prize. When the knight, Iders, refuses to back down from Enite’s claim to the sparrow-hawk, it will amount to Erec picking a fight with him, creating an opportunity for Erec to overcome his scham and regain his honor.

Seen in this light, Erec’s refusal to let Enite wear proper clothing until after the beauty contest emerges as a parallel to his own lack of proper clothing in his encounter with the dwarf. Even if clothes make the man, they do not make the woman. Erec says as much to Enite’s uncle, Duke Imain: “man sol einem wîbe kiesen bî dem lîbe/ob sî ze lobe stât,/unde niht bî der wât” (646-49) “a woman should be judged praiseworthy or not based on her body, not based on her clothing.” As in Der Winsbecke, a woman’s body is equated with weaponry: here, it is her weapon in the combat of beauty. If a woman’s body itself is not enough to win, a knight’s sword and lance can stand in for her body, winning the contest and praise of her: “und wär sî nacket sam ein hant/unde swerzer

14 Êrec wart von der rede rôt. (560)
danne ein brant,/daz mich sper unde swert/volles lobes an ir wert” (652-55) “and if she were as naked as my hand and blacker than a coal, lance and sword will assure me full praise of her.” It is irrelevant to Erec whether Enite is actually beautiful or not. Her body is useful to him only because it will enable him to substitute it with his weapons and get the fight he seeks. And indeed, when the contest comes there is no actual discussion over the relative merits of Erec’s and Iders’s companions. Erec simply instructs Enite to take the sparrow-hawk as her prize, inciting Iders’s rage and sparking a fight. Her partially-clothed body becomes the first thrust at Iders.

Erec remains in the depths of scham until he wins the victory over Iders. It is the memory of his scham, as much as the sight of Lady Enite, that gives him the final burst of energy needed to win the battle.15 When he has triumphed, he explicitly transfers the shame from himself onto Iders: “nû schamt iuch durch meine bete,/als ich mich gester tete,/dô ich von iuwern schulden/die schame muoste dulden” (990-93) “now you will be shamed at my command, just as I was yesterday when I had to endure shame at yours.”

With this task completed, Erec is fit to rejoin courtly life and can enjoy his victory party and Enite’s company. The latter divertissement takes the form of Enite having Erec lie down and put his head in her lap. This seating arrangement suggests the myth of the unicorn, who can be found only in the lap of a virgin, and emphasizes Enite’s maidenhood and the qualities associated with it. Hartmann buttresses this imagery by describing Enite’s manner:

```
ir gebærde was vil bliuclîch,
```

15 weder gevelie der gewin./des was zwîvel under in;/unz daz Êrec der junge man/begunde denken dar an/waz im ûf der heide/ze schanden und ze leide/von sîme getwege geschach. (927-34)
einer mägde gelîch.
sî gerette im niht vil mite:
wan daz ist ir aller site
daz sî zem èrsten schamec sint
unde blûc sam diu kint. (1320-21)

Her comportment was very modest, just like a maiden. She didn’t talk with him very much, for that is how they all behave: first they are modest and shy like children.

Enite’s modesty is notable, but it is not extraordinary. She is behaving true to the nature of all maidens.

Modest bashfulness is not a sustainable practice, however; it is very much tied to the state of maidenhood. While attractive premaritally, it becomes an impediment once marriage vows are taken. At that point, explains Hartmann, maidens come to know better: “daz in liep wære/daz sî nû dunket swære” (1328-29) “they desire the thing that seems uncomfortable to them now.” This is apparently drilled into them by the consequences of not learning quickly enough: a slap and a miserable day, when they could have gotten a kiss and a good night.16

Indeed, from the perspective of medieval medicine, modesty is fundamentally linked to the physical state of a woman’s virginity (Salih 21). According to Sarah Salih, whatever the “cultural reality” of the hymen may have been, “medical texts and perhaps practices seem to avoid it as much as possible” (21). Instead, “an intact body is inferred from outward signs: the bodily stylisation of dress and demeanour; the modest gait and the downcast eyes” (21). Female modesty, at least where sexual activity is concerned, presents a considerable obstacle to a happy marriage.

16 unde daz sî næmen,/swâ sis rehte bekæmen,/einen kus für einen slac/und quote naht für übeln tac. (1330-33)
But for now Enite’s modesty presents no impediment, since she and Erec are not yet married, and not yet even in love. During the party, they are not said to either talk to or look at each other. When they get up to leave, the narrator describes Enite’s joy at winning a sparrow hawk and a husband in the same day.\(^\text{17}\) While it is clear that the husband makes her happier than the sparrow hawk, it is a difference of degree, not of kind. She does not yet love Erec; she feels about him the way she feels about her new pet. Erec similarly does not experience any attraction to Enite until the next day, when, for the first time, he truly notices her. So far he has only looked at her twice, both times while fighting Iders: once when he notices her weeping, and later to derive strength and encouragement from her beauty. This functions in \textit{Erec}, as elsewhere, as a good luck charm, an action that is performed only for its expediency in helping the hero win the fight. It does not cause Erec to fall in love; it only sharpens and strengthens his fighting abilities.\(^\text{18}\) It is clear that this time, alone in the meadow and on their way to King Arthur, things are different: “Êrec begunde schouwen/sîne juncfrouwen” (1486-87) “Erec began to look at his maiden.” She is already “his” by betrothal when he begins to look at her. Until that happens, there is no chance of him falling in love. Enite responds with many a modest (“bliuclîchen,” 1489) glance of her own. Amid all their amorous (“friuntlîchen,” 1491) visual exchanges, each finds the other increasingly attractive. Very soon they are in

\(^{17}\)dô het sî wünnen genuoc./wan sî ûf ir hant truoc/den gwunnen sparwære:/daz was freudebære./sus hâte diu magt/sæeleclîche bejagt/von lobe michel êre:/doch freute sî sich mère/von schulden ir lieben man./den sî des tages dô gewan. (1376-85)

\(^{18}\)und als er dar zuo an sach/die schœnen frowen Ênîten./daz half im vaste strîten:/wan dâ von gewan er dô/sîner krefte rehte zwô. (935-39)
love (“ir herze wart der minne vol,” 1492)—all while Enite is still wearing the same tattered rags that Erec found her in.

Once back at court, Guinevere dresses Enite in sumptuous clothes. Then Enite goes out to join the company of knights. When she comes to the doorway of the room where they are sitting and enjoying the celebration of Erec’s victory, she reacts the same way Chrétien’s Enide does when she first sees Erec:

schame tet ir ungemach.
diu rôsen varwe ir entweich,
nû rôt und danne bleich
wart sî dô vil dicke
von dem anblicke,
ze glicher wîse als ich iu sage.
als diu sunne in liehtem tage
ir schîn vil volleclîchen hât,
und gâhes dâ für gât
ein wolken dünne und niht breit,
sô ist ir schîn niht sô bereit
als man in vor sach:
sus leit kurzen ungemach
diu juncfrouwe Ênite
von schame unlangle zîte. (1711-25)

Modesty made her uncomfortable. Her rosy color disappeared. She kept turning first red and then pale at the sight, in exactly the way that I will tell you: when, on a bright day, the sun has its full brilliance, and suddenly a thin, narrow cloud comes in front of it, then its brilliance is not as complete as it appeared before. That’s how the maiden Enite felt this small discomfort for a short time, due to her modesty.

In contrast to when she had Erec’s head in her lap, Enite’s modesty now appears to be exceptional. None of the other ladies react this way; indeed she does so only because she has never seen so many knights in one place before. Then she steps through the door:

ir schœnez antlütze gevie
der wünneclîchen varwe mê
Her beautiful face regained its delightful color again and became more beautiful than ever. Ah, how well it became her when her color alternated! That happened out of great modesty.

Her modesty, which causes her complexion to visibly “flare up,” works to enhance her beauty, both to the narrator and to the knights. Her lack of experience in the world makes her more-than-usually modest, which makes her more beautiful. Her modesty is in every way an expedient: it is with her modest looks that the affection between her and Erec begins to grow, and this continued display secures the court’s approval and intensifies Erec’s feelings of love.

At the point of minne’s ultimate victory, however, Enite is no longer characterized as modest. In Chrétien the transformation is explicit: Chrétien states plainly that on the wedding night, their mutual love makes Enide bolder. In Hartmann, there is no wedding night scene, but their intense gazing at the celebration does not fall too far short. Their desire is unabashedly sexual, and with the arrival of such a desire, Enite is no longer bashful. As with Isolde’s internal war pitting modesty and maidenhood against minne and the man, any struggle is short-lived.

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19 Schultz notices this theme as well, though he sees it through the frame of grief. He labels Enite’s discomfort a form of grief and places her alongside the grieving widows Laudine and Belacane, the latter of whom “looks at [Gahmuret] schamende ‘modestly’ or ‘embarrassed’ (28,29) through her tears, and that appears to do the trick [of causing Gahmuret to fall in love with her]” (Courtly 90).

20 De l’amor qui est ant’ax deus/fu la pucele plus hardie /de rien ne s’est acoardie, /tot sofri, que qu’il li grevast ;/ençois qu’ele se relevast, /ot perdu le non de pucele ;/au matin fu dame novele. (2048-54)
The Rape of the Ring: Parzival & Jeschute

Enite and Laudine provide examples of women who are wearing all the appropriate layers of clothing and are exposed because of tears in that clothing. Though they arrive at that point for very different reasons, it enhances the beauty of both and eventually secures each one an advantageous husband. In Jeschute’s first scene, we see a woman who is partially undressed not because her clothing is torn but because she is wearing only a chemise.

Parzival’s blundering interaction with her is his first experience of the world outside his mother’s estate. In Chrétien’s version of events, Perceval enters a tent believing it to be a church. He discovers a sleeping damsel\(^{21}\) inside and greets her, saying that this is what his mother told him to do. The startled lady’s reaction is fear and self-blame:

\[
\text{La pucele de peor tranble} \\
\text{por le vaslet qui fol li sanble,} \\
\text{si se tient por fole provee} \\
\text{de ce qu’il l’a sole trovee. (685-88)}
\]

The maiden trembled in fear of the boy who appeared mad to her, and blamed her own foolishness for having let him find her alone. (Chrétien de Troyes, “Grail” 389)

She tells him to leave; otherwise her lover might see him. Perceval says that he is determined to kiss her, because that is what his mother told him to do. When she refuses, he simply takes what he wants:

\[
\text{Li vaslez avoit les braz forz,} \\
\text{si l’anbrace mout nicemant,}
\]

\(^{21}\) She is a *pucele* in Chrétien, and her lover is the “Orgueilleus de la Lande,” while in Wolfram she is a *vrouwe*, married to Duke Orilus de Lalander.
car il nel sot fere autremant,  
mist la soz lui tote estandue,  
et cele s’est mont desfandue  
et deganchi quanqu’e ele pot ;  
mes desfansse mestier n’i ot,  
que li vaslez an .i. randon  
la beisa, volsist ele ou non,  
.xx. foiz, si con li contes dit,  
tant c’un anel an son doi vit,  
a une esmeraude mout clere.22 (698-709)

The boy had strong arms and embraced her clumsily because he knew no other way: he stretched her out beneath himself, but she resisted mightily and squirmed away as best she could. Yet her resistance was in vain, for the boy kissed her repeatedly, twenty times as the story says, regardless of whether she liked it or not, until he saw a ring with a shining emerald on her finger. (Chrétien de Troyes, “Grail” 389–90)

Despite Perceval’s disclaimer, kissing the maiden twenty times is quite a bit more than his mother told him to do.23 His attack, clumsy as it may be, bears some similarity to those described in medieval Latin love poetry, such as Peter of Blois’s “Grates ago Veneri:”

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Vim nimis audax infero;} \\
\text{hec ungue sevit aspero,} \\
\text{comas vellit,} \\
\text{vim repellit} \\
\text{strenua,} \\
\text{sese plicat}
\end{align*}
\]

22 There are echoes here of Andreas Capellanus’s description of the four stages of love: “Primus in spei datione consistit, secundus in osculi exhibitione, tertius in amplexus fruitione, quartus in totius personae concessione finitur” (De amore 60-61) “The first stage lies in allowing the suitor hope, the second in granting a kiss, the third in the enjoyment of an embrace, and the fourth is consummated in the yielding of the whole person” (Andreas Capellanus 57). Perceval’s version parodies the neat, ordered System Andreas sets out.

23 Se vos trovez ne pres ne loing/dame qui d’aïe ait besoing./ne pucele desconselliee,/la vostre aïe aparrelliee/lor soit, s’eles vos an requierent./que totes enors i afierent./Qui as dames enor ne porte./la soe enors doît estre morte./Dames et puceles servez./sï seroiiez par tot enorez /et se vos aucune an proiez./gardez que vos ne l’emueiez ;/ne fetes rien qui li despleise./De pucele a mout qui la beise ;/s’ele le beiss vos consant./le soreplus vos an desfant./se lessier le volez por moi./Et s’ele a enel an son doi./ou s’a ceinture ou aumosniere./se par amor ou par proiere/le vos done, bon m’iert et bel/que vos an portoi g son anel./De l’anel prandre vos doin gié./et de l’aumosniere, congiié. (531-54)
et intricat
genua,
ne ianua
pudoris resolvatur. (stanza 4a)

With overboldness I use force. She rampages with her sharp nails, tears my hair, forcefully repels my violence. She coils herself and entwines her knees to prevent the door of her maidenhead from being unbarred. (Walsh 44)

But unlike the determined soldier of Latin love lyric, Perceval’s ultimate goal is a ring, so when he sees that the woman has one, he demands she give it to him. When she refuses, he tears it from her finger.

He then reveals that he is not entirely new to kissing:

et mout meillor beisier vos fet
que chanberiere que il et
an tote la meison ma mere,
que n’avez pas la boiche amere. (723-26)

[...] your kiss is much better than that of any chambermaid in all my mother’s household, since your lips are sweet. (Chrétien de Troyes, “Grail” 390)

Perceval thus betrays that he got more out of this interaction than just the satisfaction of following his mother’s advice: he enjoys kissing, and even has some previous experience with which to compare this new one. We have good cause to wonder how much he is motivated by obedience to his mother, and how much he is following his own whims.

After eating his fill of the available food, Perceval bids the distraught maiden an unexpectedly reassuring, if overly familiar, farewell. His promise to eventually repair the loss of her ring indicates his awareness of the injury he has caused her. He does have

24 Dex vos saut, fet il, bele amie !/Por Deu, ne vos enuit il mie/de vostre anel que je an port./qu’ainçois que/je muire de mort/le vos guerredonera gié./Je m’an vois a vostre congié. (765-70)
a mind of his own, and can see that things were not supposed to turn out like this. The
fact that he even knows that it is proper to ask for leave shows a greater understanding of
courtly conduct than he wants to let on. But he fails in his feeble attempt to repair the
damage, and departs without obtaining the maiden’s leave.\textsuperscript{25}

Wolfram’s version of these events makes significant departures from Chrétien’s
tale. He begins by turning the nameless, faceless maiden into Jeschute, wife of Duke
Orilus de Lalander, sister of Erec, and paradigm of beauty and modesty. Chrétien does
not even offer any of the customary descriptions for his maiden: we have no idea if she is
even attractive. Indeed, the tent in which she is sleeping gets a longer description than she
does. But Wolfram’s Jeschute is stunning, with a full twenty-eight lines devoted to her
description. We see her entirely through Wolfram’s eyes; Parzival disappears during the
effectio of her red mouth, her slightly parted lips, and her snow-white teeth. Wolfram
identifies himself with the members of his audience, and particularly the men, by
expressing his own wishes in such a situation (Green 209): “ich wæn mich iemen küssens
wene/an ein sus wol gelobten munt:/daz ist mir selten worden kunt” (130, 14-16)

“Getting accustomed to kissing such a well-praised mouth: I believe that’s something
I’ve seldom experienced.”

Moving down from her mouth, Wolfram finds Jeschute has yet more charms to
recommend her:

\begin{verbatim}
ir deckelachen zobelin
erwant an ir hüffelin,
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{25} Et cele plore et dit que ja/a Deu ne le comandera./car il li covandra por lui/tant avoir honte et tant
enui/que tant n'an ot nule chestive./ne ja par lui, tant con il vive./n'an avra secors ne aïe./si saiche bien qu'il
l'a traî/e./Ensi remest cele plorant. (771-79)
daz si durch hitze von ir stiez,  
dâ si der wirt al eine liez. (130, 17-20)

Her sable bedcovering, which she had thrown off because of the heat, reached to her hiplet. There her lord had left her, alone.

We find out later that she is wearing a shift, but right now, it sounds as though she may not have any clothing at all. Though for her to appear naked would go against the grain of romance, sleeping naked was entirely in keeping with medieval custom (Piponnier and Mane 99). When one takes into account Wolfram’s penchant for using huf or hüffelin to refer to a woman’s genitals (Schultz, Courtly 41)\(^26\), it is possible that the audience’s gaze is being directed somewhere other than her hips. Even taking hüffelin to mean simply “little hip,” given the heat and her assumption that there is no one around to see her, we have every reason to suspect that she may be naked.

Wolfram has set a detailed scene: an astonishingly beautiful woman lies sleeping, possibly naked, and utterly unprotected. But it is not Jeschute’s nakedly vulnerable beauty that draws Parzival to her; it is her ring. Indeed, it compels him to the bed and to “wrestle” with the duchess: “der knappe ein vingerlîn dâ vant, daz in gein dem bette twanc, da er mit der herzoginne ranc” (130, 26-28) “the boy found a ring there that compelled him toward the bed, where he wrestled with the duchess.” In addition to “to wrestle” or “to struggle,” the verb ringen can also refer to the act of forcing someone to have sex, and in Parzival it is Wolfram’s preferred term for this act (Westphal-Wihl

\(^26\) The first example cited by Schultz is “Titrel, where Herzeloyde is said to have given Gahmuret a shift that not only touched ir blenke ‘her whiteness’ but also etwas brünes an ir huf ‘something brown at her huf’” (81.3-4). The second is Gawen’s encounter with Antikonie, about which Wolfram surmises, “ich wæne, er ruort iz hüffelin ‘I suspect he touched her little huf” (407.3)” (Courtly 44).
The word *twingen* is also used to describe the way that *minne* “drives” a man, as in a sexual assault scene from one of the *Carmina Burana*: “div minne twanch sere den man” (CB 185, stanza 7, line 3) “*minne* drove the man hard.” Wolfram is indulging in a sexually-charged play on words: Parzival is forced by the ring to force himself on the woman wearing it. And the reason he feels thus compelled is, as Wolfram reminds us, because of his mother. Indeed, Wolfram draws a direct line from Herzeloyde to Parzival jumping onto Jeschute’s bed:

```
dô dâhter an die muoter sîn:
diu riet an wîbes vingerlîn.
ouch spranc der knappe wol getân
von dem teppiche an daz bette sân. (130, 29-131, 2)
```

At that point he remembered his mother, who had instructed [him] to [obtain] a woman’s ring. And so the handsome boy leapt immediately from the carpet onto the bed.

Whatever is about to happen, it will be as a result of Herzeloyde’s advice. That is the catalyst for him to leap on to the bed.

D.H. Green contends that Parzival’s obliviousness to Jeschute’s very visible charms is “the reverse side of the coin of purity demanded of the [...] future Grail-king [...] throwing into relief how different Parzival is from others” (193). It is undoubtedly true that Parzival must demonstrate exceptional purity to be a proper successor to Anfortas, but it is not this scene that makes him stand out. No other hero in German

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27 But note that “in many kinds of sources, [men in the Middle Ages] drew very little distinction between rape and heterosexual intercourse generally” (Karras 113). In the second Jeschute episode, Orilus certainly sees little distinction between rape and adultery: “Ich wil iu sagen des einen zorn./daz sin wîp wol geborn/dâ vor was genötzogt./er was iedoch ir rehter vogt./sô daz si schermes wart an in./er wânde, ir wîplîcher sin/wær gein im verkêret,/unt daz si gunêret/het ir kiusche unde ir pris/mit einem andern âmis” (264, 1-10).
romance falls in love with a married woman, so Parzival is not behaving very exceptionally when he does not commit adultery with Jeschute, however beautiful and naked she may be.

At this point, Wolfram switches from emphasizing Jeschute’s beauty to emphasizing her modesty. He seems at pains to show that the audience’s bold enjoyment of her beauty has no bearing on her character. Within the space of a few lines he squeezes in three words reflecting aspects of modesty:

Diu süeze kiusche unsamfte ershrac,  
do der knappe an ir arme lac:  
si muost iedoch erwachen.  
mit schame al sunder lachen  
diu frouwe zuht gelêret  
spach ‘wer hät mich entêret?  
juncheorre, es ist gar ze vil:  
ir möht iu nemen ander zil.’ (131, 3-10, emphasis added)

The sweet, chaste lady was rudely startled when the boy lay in her arms, but she had to wake up. Without even a hint of a smile, the well-brought-up lady said modestly, “Who has violated me? This is inappropriate, squire: you should have directed yourself elsewhere.”

Jeschute finds herself in a situation utterly opposed to her irreproachable behavior. She, unlike Chrétien’s maiden, does not hold herself responsible for this turn of events. She remains utterly blameless. To her, and to Wolfram’s audience, this looks and feels a lot like a sexual assault. So she does exactly what a medieval audience might expect of a woman being attacked: she cries out loudly.  

This is the one action that might later help her prove that this is not consensual, and it gives Wolfram’s audience an irrefutable sign

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28 diu frouwe lûte klagte (131, 11)
of her resistance: according to both biblical and medieval law, a victim must cry out
during a rape for it to be considered rape (Wolfthal 43).29

Parzival, simultaneously naive and rapist-like, pays no attention to her. He presses
his mouth against hers, and then presses her body against his. Though Wolfram does not
say it explicitly, we know that these impulses too come straight from Herzeloyde, whose
final words of advice to him were

sun, là dir bevolhen sîn,
swa du quotes wîbes vingerlîn
mügest erwerben unt ir gruož,
daz nim: ez tuot dir kumbers buoz.
du solt zîr kusse gâhen
und ir lîp vast umbevâhen:
daz ġît gelücke und hôhen muot,
op si kiusche ist unde guot. (127, 29-128, 2)

Son, follow this advice: whenever you can win the ring of a good woman
and her greeting, take it. It will heal your sorrow. You should rush toward
her kiss and tightly embrace her body. That bestows happiness and high
spirits, if she is modest and good.

Parzival is following her advice to the letter, making Herzeloyde directly responsible for
the assault. He finds a good, modest woman with a ring, and wastes no time before
kissing and embracing her. Parzival’s actions match up very closely to Perceval’s, but
their impetus is different. In Chrétien, Perceval’s mother gives far more and far more
detailed advice: she permits her son to accept nothing more from a lady than a kiss and a
ring, and these only if they are granted, and tells him very pointedly not to go any further
than kissing. When Perceval proceeds to disregard his mother’s injunction to honor and

29 Later, in Book X of Parzival (525, 11ff.), Gawan tells Orgeluse about the rape of a virgin ambassador to
Arthur’s court. It is the sound of the victim’s screams that cause Arthur and his knights to spring into action
in her defense. (For an in-depth, enlightening analysis of that episode, including the literary and legal
intricacies of Gawan’s perspective, see Westphal-Wihl.)
serve ladies, and instead physically overpowers the first woman he sees, the responsibility is his.

Parzival, in contrast, remembers the pithy orders his mother gave him, and he follows them as though participating in a scavenger hunt: he needs to find and take a woman’s ring and her greeting, and then obtain her kiss and an embrace of her body. With his list of tasks nearly complete (he is missing only the woman’s greeting), Parzival can focus on other things, like eating. Jeschute, after pointing him in the direction of her food, does her best to figure out what has possessed this strange young man:

\begin{quote}
die frouwen dûhte gar ze lanc
sîns wesens in dem poulûn.
si wânde, er ware ein garzûn
gescheiden von den witzen.
ir scham begunde switzen. (132, 4-8)
\end{quote}

It seemed to the lady that he had been in the tent far too long. She thought he must have been a squire who had taken leave of his senses. Her scham began to sweat.

The most obvious interpretation of the last line is that Jeschute’s genitals are getting sweaty. But Wolfram is playing with scham’s double entendre: since such a vulgar reference is an oxymoronic description of such an irreproachable character, it must instead mean that her modesty is distressed by the situation she finds herself in. Just as Jeschute has impropriety forced upon her, so too is the listener very nearly forced into a

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{131, 17-21}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{94}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{143, 1ff.}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{94}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{143, 1ff.}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{94}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{143, 1ff.}}\]
crude interpretation of Wolfram’s phrase. This rhetorical point underscores the pretext of the entire encounter: the easiest interpretation is not necessarily the correct one. Whatever it looks like, Parzival is not intentionally doing anything wrong, and to attribute to him ill intent would be the same as attributing impropriety to Jeschute. Orilus’s impending wrath is made to look all the more out of place.

Jeschute advises Parzival to return the ring and the brooch and to leave before her husband returns, because his anger will be dangerous. Parzival boasts that he is not at all worried about that, but adds that if staying damages her honor, he will leave. He returns to the bed and, to her dismay, gives her another kiss, apparently his only way of obtaining the final item on his checklist, her greeting. Then he rides off without asking her leave, emphasizing how utterly unaware he is of courtly conventions in comparison to Chrétien’s Perceval. In meeting this exquisitely beautiful and perfectly unattainable object of knightly affection right at the beginning of his journey, Parzival starts out backwards. But it is Jeschute who is to suffer for it.

The Return of the Ring: Parzival, Jeschute, and Orilus

When he returns to their tent after Parzival’s stopover and finds suspicious signs of a male visitor, Orilus is convinced that his wife Jeschute has been unfaithful to him. Ignoring her claims to the contrary and refusing to listen to her version of events, he condemns her to wear nothing but the shift she has on, to be separated from him in bed and at board, and for her horse to go hungry. And so they ride through the forest, Orilus keeping an eye out for the adulterer so that he can avenge himself.
Parzival, in the meantime, receives his knightly education, gets a wife, and misses his first big chance to become Grail King. Now he has just left Sigune, who chastises him for his missed opportunity, and as a result he is in a state of emotional distress. The day is hot so Parzival uncovers himself. Though he only removes his helmet and unties his ventail, this puts him in a state of vulnerability, for a helmetless knight is as good as disarmed (Burns, *Courtly* 136). Alone, apart from his spouse, and outside the safety of the court, he is in a situation similar to the one in which he first found Jeschute.

First, the parallel passage in Chrétien:

 [...] et une pucele ot desus, einz si chestive ne vit nus. Neporquant assez bele fust se assez bien li esteüst ; mes si malemant li estest qu'an la robe que ele vest n'avoit plainne paume de sain, einz li sailloient hors del sain les memeles par les costures. A neuz et a grosses costures de leus an leus ert atachieee, et sa char si fu dehachieee de noif, de gresle et de geleee. Desliee et desafubleee estoit, si li paroit la face ou avoir mainte leide trace, que ses lermes par tot sanz fin i avoient fet le traïn ; que jusqu'au manton li coloient et par desor sa robe aloient jusque sor les genolz colant. Mes mout pooit avoir dolant le cuer qui tant meseise avoit. Si tost com Percevax la voit, si cort vers li grant aleüre, et ele estraint sa vesteüre antor li por le mialz covrir.
Lors comancent pertuis ovrir,
que, quantque ele mialz se cuevre,
.i. pertuis clost et .c. an oevre. (3701-30)

[The palfrey] was being ridden by the most wretched girl you have ever seen. Yet she would have been fair and noble enough had she had better fortune, but she was in such a bad state that there was not a palm’s breadth of good material in the dress she wore, and her breasts fell out through the rips. The dress was held together here and there with knots and crude stitches. Her skin looked lacerated as though it had been torn by lancets, and it was pocked and burned by heat and wind and frost. Her hair was loose and she wore no hood so that her face showed, with many an ugly trace left by tears rolling ceaselessly down her cheeks; they flowed across her breasts and out over her dress down to her knees. Anyone in such affliction might well have a very heavy heart. As soon as Perceval saw her he rode swiftly in her direction, and she gathered her dress around to cover her flesh. But holes appeared everywhere, for as soon as one was covered a hundred others opened. (Chrétien de Troyes, “Grail” 427)

This damsel, far from being beautiful in spite of her poverty, is disfigured by it. Chrétien draws out several key attributes of female beauty—skin, hair, and face—only to describe the wretched condition they are in. We see her breasts, but we wish we did not, for their exposure is embarrassing rather than appealing. The narrator sympathizes with her: she has good reason to cry.

Like Perceval, Parzival does not recognize the maiden, and Wolfram does not give us her name, so we are left to our own devices to figure out who she is. First we are given a thorough description of her horse, her saddle, and the pitiful condition of both.

Finally Wolfram directs us to the lady’s clothing, and with it, her bare skin:

    ouch heten die este und etslich dorn
    ir hemde zerfüeret:
    swa’z mit zerren was gerüeret,
    då saher vil der stricke:
    dar unde liehte blicke,
    ir hût noch wîzer denn ein swan.
sîne fuorte niht wan knoden an:
swâ die wârn des velles dach,
in blanker varwe er daz sach:
daz ander leit von sunnen nôt.
swiez ie kom, ir munt was rôt:
der muose alsölhe varwe tragen,
man hete fiwer wol drûz geslagen. (257, 8-20)

In addition, branches and many thorns had destroyed her shift. Wherever
the tears had touched it he saw lots of tangles, and underneath, bright
glimpses of her skin, even whiter than a swan. She wore nothing but rags.
Wherever those were her skin’s cover, he saw its white color [underneath].
Everywhere else suffered from the sun’s harshness. Nevertheless, her
mouth was red. It had such color that you easily could have struck fire
from it.

As if responding directly to Chrétien, Wolfram shows that poverty is no match for
Jeschute’s beauty. Parzival literally sees beneath the surface and finds that, sunburn or
not, her skin is still beautiful.

Wolfram’s description switches abruptly from dignified description to coarse
joke:

swâ man se wolt an rîten,
daz was zer blôzen sûten:
[nantes iemen vilân,
der het ir unreht getân:]
wan si hete wênc an ir. (257, 21-25)

You could charge at her in any direction and it would be her exposed side.
If anyone had called her a vilan, he would have done her an injustice, for
she had little on her.\(^{31}\)

Such a pun no doubt reflects the perspective of the audience members, who, if they
happened to see such a scene themselves, would probably take the woman for a peasant
(vilan)—though they might wonder where she got her horse—and have no qualms about

\(^{31}\) Cyril Edwards cleverly renders this virtually untranslatable pun thus: “If anyone had called her common, he would have been doing her an injustice, for most of her clothing had come off!” (109)
laughing at her. This is very likely the root of the prejudice against courtly ladies, like Enite and Jeschute, in tattered clothing: whatever the erotic connotations may or may not be, dilapidated clothes are a sign of poverty and a compelling indication that the woman is a peasant. Wolfram has not yet identified who this woman is, so for as much as he is saying, she may indeed be a poor peasant. In a culture where status, class, and nobility are everything, it means something for Wolfram to switch tactics and say

\[
\text{durch iwer zuht geloubet mir,}
\text{si truoc ungedienten haz:}
\text{wîplîcher güete se nie vergaz.}
\text{ich saget in vil armuot:}
\text{war zuo? diz ist als guot.}
\text{doch nême ich sölhen blôzen lîp}
\text{für etslîch wol gekleidet wîp. (257, 26-32)}
\]

By your courtesy, believe me: she bore undeserved enmity. She never forgot womanly goodness. I’ve told you about great poverty. So what? This is a match for wealth. Indeed, I would take a bare body like this over many a well-dressed woman.

Without going so far as to say that Wolfram and Hartmann (in \textit{Erec’s} discussion of Enite\textsuperscript{32}) are trying to erase nobles’ prejudices against their serfs, it seems clear that, in imagining the situation of a courtly, womanly lady reduced to such circumstances, they are reconsidering what partial nakedness means, and imagining the situation of a courtly, womanly lady reduced to such circumstances. Wolfram is using Jeschute to show that she is unassailably, ideally courtly, no matter the condition of her clothes.

Parzival and Jeschute have, in some ways, switched places. While there is still a great deal of difference between Jeschute’s forced degradation and Parzival’s blissful ignorance, it was previously Parzival who looked like a peasant, in his laughable fool’s

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Erec} 624ff.
clothes, and he was the one without a name. Jeschute had a name, but she was partially undressed. Now we know Parzival’s name, and he is the one who, without his helmet and ventail, is partially undressed. Jeschute wears the peasant-like clothing, and is identified not by her name but as “the unclothed duchess” or “the unclothed lady.”

At this point, Parzival greets her, and she recognizes him because of his superlative good looks. She tells him that she wishes him only joy and honor, even though it is on his account that her clothing is in such a wretched state and her honor is in dispute. Parzival, still not realizing who she is, defends himself, saying truthfully that he has never caused disgrace to a woman since becoming a knight. She does not respond except by crying, which invites further opportunity for the narrator to admire her:

```
al weinde diu frouwe reit,
daz si begôz ir brüstefên,
als sie gedræt solden sîn.
diu stuonden blanc hôch sinewel:
jane wart nie dræhsel sô snel
der si gedræt hete baz.
swie minneclîch diu frouwe saz,
si muose in doch erbarmen.
mit henden und mit armen
begunde si sich decken
vor Parzivâl dem recken. (258, 24-259, 4)
```

The lady rode, weeping so that she soaked her breastlets, which were white, high, and round, as if they had been formed [on a lathe]; indeed, there was never a lathe so fast that it could have formed them any better. As lovely as the lady looked, she moved him [Parzival] to pity. With her hands and her arms she began to cover herself in front of Parzival the warrior.

Jeschute’s body is a Galatea-like picture of perfection, her breasts so perfect they seem mechanically produced. Though she, like Pygmalion’s statue, gives the impression that

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33 “diu blôze herzogîn,” 260, 3; “der blôzen frouwen,” 260, 19
she would be even more beautiful naked than with clothes on (Burns, *Bodytalk* 109),

Parzival is moved to help her with the offer of his surcoat. She refuses, believing it would endanger both their lives. She entreats him to leave, but Parzival refuses. Again Wolfram inserts a note about her inadequate clothing:

```plaintext
niht wan knoden und der rige
was an der frouwen hemde ganz.
wîplîcher kiusche lobes kranz
truoc si mit armüete[.] (260, 6-9)
```

Only the collar and tatters remained intact from the lady’s shift. She wore the garland of womanly modesty’s praise along with poverty.

Jeschute may not have much on, but her suffering imparts to her a metaphorical garland.

Parzival, in contrast, re-clothes himself by replacing his ventail and helmet in preparation for battle. As he does so, his horse’s whinnying attracts the attention of Orilus, who rides back towards his wife with his lance positioned for attack. Wolfram describes in detail Orilus’s costly and beautiful armor, contrasting it with his wife’s apparel:

```plaintext
disiu blôziu frouwe
fuort im ungelîchiu kleit,
diu dâ sô trûric nâh im reit:
dane hete sis niht bezzer state. (261, 22-25)
```

This unclothed lady who rode so sadly after him wore clothes unlike his, though she didn’t have a better option.

Wolfram does not let anyone forget for a minute that the lady is nearly naked, even if he does include the disclaimer that she has done nothing to deserve such treatment.

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Just as the joust is getting underway, we finally learn that the woman is Jeschute. When Parzival wins the fight, he forces Orilus on pain of death into a reluctant acceptance of his terms: the couple must reconcile, and Orilus must go to Arthur’s court
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and surrender himself to Cunneware. Orilus grudgingly gives Jeschute a kiss, and
Parzival swears an oath that Jeschute is entirely innocent, and that at the time of their
meeting he was an immature fool.\textsuperscript{34} He returns her ring and apologizes that he no longer
has the brooch.

Orilus, finally satisfied, kisses Jeschute again and gives her his tabard to wear. It
does cover her up ("ouch wart verdact ir blôziu hût," 270, 8), but it is also torn:

\begin{verbatim}
die was von rîchem pfelle, wît,
mit heldes hant zerhouwen.
ich hân doch selten frouwen
wâpenroc an gesehen tragn,
die wære in strîte alsus zerslag[.]
\end{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{(270, 12-16)}

It was made of rich phellel, broad, slashed by a hero’s hand. I’ve seldom
seen a lady wear battle clothing that was so torn in combat.

It will be a little while yet before Jeschute can wear proper clothing. The couple go off to
an undisclosed “place of reconciliation” (\textit{suonstat}, 272, 5) where Orilus orders that baths
be prepared for them. Jeschute is attended by twelve maidens, who, we find out, have
been doing what they could all along to allay her suffering:

\begin{verbatim}
die pflâgen ir, sît si gewan
zorn ân ir schult von liebem man.
si hete ie snahtes deckkleit,
swie blôz si bîme tage reit.
\end{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{(272, 23-26)}

They had cared for her ever since she, through no fault of her own, earned
the wrath of her dear husband. They had always given her a cover at night, however bare she’d had to ride during the day.

Jeschute was undressed solely for the sake of her husband’s unmerited anger. Everyone
around her, from her maidens to Parzival, have done what they could to restore her

\textsuperscript{34} ich was ein tôre und niht ein man./gewahsen niht pî witzen. (269, 24-25)
clothing. Now it is Orilus’s turn. After their baths, they get into bed, where Orilus makes sure that “ir lide gedienden bezzer wât/dan si dâ vor truoc lange” (273, 18-19) “her limbs received better covering than she had worn for a long time.” Finally, it is time for the damsels to clothe their lady, completing her reinstatement.

Much like a beleaguered saint who must prove herself worthy through a series of trials, Jeschute is finally vindicated. Unlike a saint, though, her very courtly restoration to honor is completed by a bath, sex, and clothes. Whereas most other scenes of noble near-nakedness end without fanfare, here the conclusion is highly significant. Jeschute’s partial dress, the sign of her husband’s enmity, is covered up first by his own clothing, then by his body. In a reversal of the Winsbecke trope, the man shields the woman’s body, recovering it from a shame far worse than that of a knight’s disarmament.

We see relatively little of Enite’s, Laudine’s, or Condwiramurs’s features: we know that they are beautiful, but we are left to imagine as we will the details of their teeth, the way their lips part, or the shape of their breasts. We do not even see their faces. But Wolfram reverses all of that in his reinvention of Jeschute. This close look is done purely for the benefit of Wolfram’s audience. In the first Jeschute scene, Parzival notices nothing but the ring, and in the second, he is more worried about her nakedness than observant of her beauty.

And yet, for being the two “raciest” scenes of partial female nudity, they are also the only ones in which the woman is married, and thus the only ones that do not eventually end up with the hero marrying her. This high level of erotic detail is ascribed to the one partially-dressed woman who is sexually unavailable. She is also the only one
to whom Wolfram ascribes the qualities of *scham, kiusche*, and *zuht* in direct relation to her being seen by Parzival. She is the foremost example of this particularly German combination of marital faithfulness and undress.

**A Damsel in Shining Armor: Parzival & Condwiramurs**

In between the two Jeschute episodes, Parzival meets and marries Condwiramurs. As he has already seen Jeschute in her chemise, seeing Condwiramurs in a similar outfit is nothing new. But his reaction to her could not be more different. By the time their late-night rendezvous takes place, Parzival’s transformation from ignorant bumpkin to thoughtful hero is well underway. Earlier, after training Parzival in knightly skills and courtly manners, his mentor Gurnemanz introduces him to his daughter Liaze and commands them to kiss. Despite his best attempts, Gurnemanz cannot convince Parzival to stay and marry Liaze and take Gurnemanz’s lands as his own inheritance. The newly-formed knight is determined to spend some time fighting before settling down into domesticity.\(^{35}\) Knightly fame, he explains to Gurnemanz, is a prerequisite for love. Without making a name for himself, he will not even be interested in a romantic attachment.\(^{36}\) He leaves Gurnemanz’s home and sets off for adventure.

According to the values of chivalry, Parzival has his priorities straight. And this includes the pangs of pining for an unattainable lady: “sît er tumphet âne wart./done wolt in Gahmuretes art/denkens niht erlâzen/nâch der schœnen Lîâzen” (179, 23-26) “now that he was no longer foolish, Gahmuret’s lineage would not spare him thoughts of the

\[^{35}\] bî sîme herzen kumber lac/anders niht wan umbe daz./er wolt ê gestrîten baz./ê daz er dar an wurde warm./daz man dâ heizet frouwen arm. (176, 30-177, 4)

\[^{36}\] dô sprach er ‘hêrre, in bin niht wîs:/bezal abr i’emer ritters prîs,/sô daz ich wol mac minne gern,/ir sult mich Lîâzen wern,/iwerr tohter, der schœnen magt.’ (178, 29-179, 3)
beautiful Liaze.” Having had all the foolishness educated out of him, Parzival’s reclaimed heritage controls his thoughts and he does as a knight ought to do: follow his duty to engage in combat while dreaming of the lady who is attractive to him only because he cannot have her right now.

It is in this state of mind that Parzival comes upon the castle of Pelrapeire and meets its queen, Condwiramurs. They too kiss, in greeting, and, like Liaze’s, her lips are also red. But here end the similarities between Condwiramurs and Liaze, as well as any other courtly lady—Jeschute, Enite, Cunneware de Lalant, Isolde of Ireland, and Isolde White Hands all fall far short of Condwiramurs’s radiance, proclaims Wolfram. Nevertheless, she becomes the Isolde White Hands to Parzival’s Tristan:

\[\text{Lîâze ist dort, Lîâze ist hier.} \\
\text{mir wil got sorge mâzen:} \\
\text{nu sihe ich Lîâzen,} \\
\text{des werden Gurnemanzes kint. (188, 2-5)}^37\]

\[\text{Liaze is there, Liaze is here. God is moderating my sadness: I’m seeing Liaze now, the child of worthy Gurnemanz.}\]

But the resemblance is only in Parzival’s mind, for Liaze’s beauty is nothing compared to Condwiramurs’s.\(^38\)

His lack of romantic interest persists throughout the episode in which Condwiramurs pays a midnight visit to Parzival. Wolfram’s version is notable for the striking ways in which it diverges from the spirit of Chrétien’s while remaining true to the letter. In both versions, the hostess comes to the hero’s room clad in a chemise and a mantle. Resembling a floor-length cloak or shawl, a mantle was a garment defined by its

\(^37\) Compare this to Tristan’s confusion when he encounters Isolde White Hands (Tristan 1899ff.).
\(^38\) Liâzen schœne was ein wint/gein der meide diu hie saz[.]. (188, 6-7)
sumptuary magnificence (Brüggen 81). It was generally made of white silk, with a collar and fur lining, and would have been richly embroidered with needlework and precious stones (Brüggen 81–82). It was the one article of medieval clothing that only nobles were allowed to wear (Wright, “What Was”).

A noblewoman’s shift would likewise have been made of white silk and also might have been embroidered. (Brüggen 71–72). It seems that it was usually cut to cling to the figure, at least for women: whether describing the outer or under layers of clothing, poets are keen to note the contrast between “einem eng am Körper anliegenden, die Taille betonenden Oberteil und einem weiten, faltenreichen Rock” (72). And, like all MHG fashion, it is measured by how well it conforms to French styles. Thus it would be reasonable to assume that shifts generally follow the look described in Renaut de Bâgé’s late twelfth-century *Le Bel Inconnu*, which reveals a portion of its wearer’s legs. While such a garment sounds modest indeed by modern standards, it is nevertheless the medieval equivalent of underwear, which explains why Chrétien’s heroine, clad in her shift and mantle, describes herself as nearly naked (“presque nue” [1984]).

Despite the seeming impropriety, the image of the courtly woman dressed in a chemise-and-mantle ensemble turns out not to be unusual for French romance. Blanches Mains sports the same look during her midnight visit to Guinglain/the Fair Unknown in *Le Bel Inconnu*, and so does Guinevere when she meets with Lancelot in Chrétien’s *Chevalier de la charrete*. Monica L. Wright, in examining these two scenes, finds this particular combination significant for its incongruity: the mantle is public, ceremonial,

39 Les ganbes vit: blances estoient,/qui un petit aparisoient. (*Le Bel Inconnu* 2411-12)
Though we do not see her chemise except for its tight sleeves, this woman’s gown provides a reliable representation of what the undergarment must look like. The tight fit around the torso is not achieved by side lacing or a belt but by custom tailoring, a hallmark of wealth and favored by the nobility. The shift underneath must be equally form-fitting and the neckline cut at least as low as that of the dress.
and exclusively noble, while the chemise is private, quotidian, and worn by nearly everyone (“What Was”). The ensemble is the “twelfth-century equivalent of wearing a mink stole over nothing but lingerie,” combining a symbol of wealth and status with one of sexual availability (“What Was”). Wright observes that it “provides a fascinating insight” into Guinevere’s dual nature as Arthur’s wife and Lancelot’s lover (“What Was”). In the case of Le Bel Inconnu, it is “highly context dependent,” deriving its seductive meaning from being worn in the bedroom (Weaving 52–53). Were Blanches Mains to wear the same thing in public, “she would no doubt look ridiculous and possibly incur some degree of scorn” (Weaving 52).

Le Bel Inconnu emphasizes the spareness of the clothing: “N’avoit vestu fors sa chemisse” (2404) “She wore nothing else [apart from her mantle] but her shift” (143). So does the Charrette:

[...] la reïne est venue
En une mout blanche chemise ;
N’ot sus bliaut ne cote mise,
Mes .i. cort mantel ot desus,
D'escarlate et de cisemus. (4578-82)

[...] the queen approached in a spotless white shift. She had no dress or coat over it, only a short mantle of scarlet and marmot fur. (Chrétien de Troyes, “Cart” 263)

The existence even of the thin material of the shift is downplayed so that it poses virtually no obstacle to the male lover’s visual and tactile enjoyment. The fabric almost disappears in Renaut’s description: “Son pis sor le sien li tenoit/nu a nu, que rien n’i avoit/entre’els non plus que sa cemisse” (2435-37) “She held her breast next to his own, and there was nothing at all between them but her shift” (145).
The sexual nature of these scenes is undeniable. In Renaut’s, Blanches Mains’s entire objective (to tempt the Fair Unknown to marriage) fails, but not before she has given him a very good look at her body and indulged him with caresses and embraces.$^{40}$

In Chrétien’s two tales, the couples end up in bed together, each engaging in more or less ambiguous degrees of sexual intimacy. Before Blancheflor (MHG Condwiramurs) even arrives in Perceval’s room, Chrétien paints a vivid image of her body bathed in perspiration.$^{41}$ She transfers this wetness via her tears onto Perceval’s face, who is awakened by the unexpected dampness—not, apparently, by her tight embrace of his neck. Courteous knight that he is, he immediately returns the embrace and pulls her near. When he asks what is wrong, she begs him to forgive her for coming to him and being nearly naked. She explains the problems the city is facing due to the siege, and how she will kill herself rather than let Clamadeu (MHG Clamide) take her alive. Perceval tries to cheer her up by inviting her into his bed, to which she agrees.

They proceed to spend a comforting night together:

[...] Et cil la beisoit,  
qui an ses braz la tenoit prise.  
Si l’a soz le covertor mise  
tot soavet et tot a eise ;  
et cele suefre qu’il la beise,  
ne ne cuit pas qu’il li enuit.  
Ensi jurent tote la nuit,  
li uns lez l’autre, boche a boche,  
jusqu’au main que li jorz aproche.  
Tant li fist la nuit de solaz  
que boche a boche, braz a braz,  
dormirent tant qu’il ajorna. (2056-67)

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$^{40}$ En lui joir a painne mise;/les son menton li met sa face,/et cil molt doucement l’enbrace. (2438-40)

$^{41}$ Lors s’est de son lit departie/et issue fors de sa chanbre/a tel peor que tuit li manbre/li tranblent et li cors li sue. (1958-61)
And he kissed her and held her tightly in his arms. He placed her gently and comfortably beneath the coverlet, and she let him kiss her, and I do not believe it displeased her. Thus they lay side by side with lips touching all night long, until morning came and day dawned. He brought her so much comfort that night that they slept with lips pressed to lips and arm in arm until day broke. (Chrétien de Troyes, “Grail” 407)

Chrétien invites the audience to read between the lines: the language may be literal, or it may be euphemistic. But judging from Wolfram’s claims about his own narrative, it seems that at least German audiences understood Blancheflor and Perceval to be doing more than innocently cuddling:

[d]az kom als ich iu sagen wil.
ez prach niht wîplîchiu zil:
mit stæte kiusche truoc diu magt,
von der ein teil hie wirt gesagt. (192, 1-2)

I will tell you the way it happened. It did not break with womanly modesty. The maid of whom an account is told here bore chastity along with constancy.

Wolfram knows that his audience is expecting the narrative to take a particular direction, and he does his best to guide them down a different path by fervently testifying to Condwiramurs’s virtue and Parzival’s innocence.

He nevertheless manages to walk the line between loyalty to the original French tradition and allegiance to his own incarnation of Parzival. His scene is set up identically to the similar scenes in Old French romances. Wolfram specifies that Parzival is alone, just like Guinglain and Perceval. And just like Blancheflor, Condwiramurs’s extreme despondency prompts her to go in search of help and trustworthy advice. In addition,

42 The pattern for ladies is different: Guinevere in the Charrette is not alone (Kay is sleeping in her chamber). Similarly, Condwiramurs takes care not to wake the chamberlains and maids as she exits her room. It seems that it is not unusual for ladies to sleep in the company of servants.
Parzival, just like Guinglain, can see everything, thanks to the candles left burning next to his bed. But whereas in Le Bel Inconnu it seems to be a normal part of bedtime preparations and comes with a pragmatic reason (“por veoir li metent devant” [2389] “so that he could see” [Renaut de Bâgé 141]), Wolfram, rather than supplying a rationale, simply says that the candles made Parzival’s sleeping area as bright as day. Candles near the bed may indeed be a routine part of hospitality; nevertheless, the comparison to daylight is significant: as any Minnesinger knows, daytime is antithetical to a secret tryst. Nighttime is indeed the right time for kissing: for example, Lancelot’s rendezvous with Guinevere in the Charrete is notably lightless, without any illumination from the moon or any other source to give Lancelot away as he makes his way to her chamber.

But Wolfram seeks to distance himself from any notion of forbidden love: Condwiramurs’s visit is in no way motivated by a search “[...] nâch sölher minne/diu sölhen namen reizet/der meide wîp heizet” (192, 10-12) “for the sort of love that provokes the sort of thing that calls maidens women.” Again, he anticipates his audience’s expectations and dismantles them, all while he faithfully following the scene’s structure. Condwiramurs’s outfit is identical to that of Blancheflor, Guinevere, and Blanches Mains: a silk chemise and a long, samite mantle. But instead of lingering on the details of how little clothing this is, Wolfram refrares the situation. Condwiramurs is warlike rather than seductive: these are her “werlichiu wât” (192, 14) “fighting clothes.”

43 von kerzen lieht alsam der tac/was vor sîner slâfstat. (192, 28-29)
44 The only difference, apart from details like the material, is that Condwiramurs’s mantle is said to be long while Guinevere’s and Blancheflor’s are short. (There is no indication of how long Blanches Mains’s mantle is.) However, it is not clear exactly how short “cort” is. Perhaps it is only short relative to a mantle with a three-foot train. Certainly the typical style as seen in contemporary artwork features floor-length mantles.
Wolfram asks rhetorically, “waz möhte kampflîcher sîn,/dan gein dem man sus komende ein wip?” (192, 16-17) “What could be more warlike than a woman thus advancing against a man?”\textsuperscript{45} The meaning is double: on the one hand, Condwiramurs is not at all threatening; she is as defenseless as she could possibly be. On the other hand, a woman so scantily clad is tremendously threatening to a man who must resist the temptation of “sölher minne.” Near nakedness, paradoxically, becomes a sort of weapon. Luckily for Parzival, he is not able to be tempted. Like a prelapsarian Adam, he has no knowledge of the thing that is forbidden to him on account of his yet-unknown Grail Kingship.

Condwiramurs enters Parzival’s room and kneels down next to his bed, at which point Wolfram again reminds us that whatever we might expect from this scene, nothing untoward is going to happen: “si heten beidiu kranken sin,/\[e\]r unt diu kiïneginne,/an bî ligender minne” (193, 2-4) “both he and the queen had deficient knowledge of the mechanics of love.” As far as the conventions of his language will allow, Wolfram dispenses with euphemism: Condwiramurs and Parzival literally do not know how to have sex. Rather than being driven by desire, Condwiramurs is driven by modesty: Wolfram uses the typical formulation for \textit{minne} and replaces it with \textit{schem} (“des twanc si schem” [193, 7]).\textsuperscript{46} His is an anti-love scene, one in which all the ingredients are there—

\textsuperscript{45} Furthermore, there is a well-established poetic tradition of comparing love to a military engagement, with the man likened to a besieging army and the woman a defenseless castle. This tradition goes back as far as Augustan love elegy, and for the Middle Ages was best exemplified by Ovid: \textit{Amores} 1.9 is the classic example of an extended comparison between lover and soldier (Walsh 45). Even as Condwiramurs lives this metaphor in a very literal way, she reverses the terms and herself becomes the soldier preparing for an engagement. This upset in the usual roles is a further guarantee that the situation is not going to end as one might expect from its French romance counterparts.

\textsuperscript{46} e.g., “des twanc in weerdîu Minne” (81,1)
peerlessly attractive queen, devastatingly beautiful knight, very little clothing, and total privacy—but the knowledge of how to mix them together is missing.

Wolfram does not allow his audience any imaginative leeway; instead, he goes on asking and answering his own questions, as if filling in for his own cross-examiner, a curious and perhaps skeptical audience. “ober si hin an iht nem?” (193, 8) “Did he take her to him at all?” Wolfram’s answer disappoints hopeful listeners (“leider des enkan er niht” [193, 9] “unfortunately he does not have any knowledge of that”) before teasing them with a riddle (“âne kunst ez doch geschiht” [193, 10] “yet it happens without any knowledge”). He puzzles it out by returning to the war metaphor:

mit eime alsô bewanden vride,
daz si diu stienebären lide
niht zein ander brâhten.
wênc si des gedâhten. (193, 11-14)

[It happens] with a truce designed in such a way that they did not bring their reconciling limbs into contact with each other. That was not in their thoughts.

Wolfram bats his audience’s expectations back and forth, leaving everyone to wonder what he is going to do with the version they already know.

As the scene progresses, the basic outline remains the same: the queen’s great grief, manifested in tears and loud weeping, wakes Parzival. But she is not embracing him, and he does not invite her into his bed. Instead, he sits up and admonishes her for kneeling in front of him when she should only kneel in front of God.47 He then suggests a solution:

“geruochet sitzen zuo mir her”

47 frouwe, bin ich iwer spot?/ihr soldet knien alsus für got. (193, 23-24)
If you’d like, sit here next to me”—that was his request and his desire—
“or lie down here where I was lying. Let me stay wherever I can.”

Parzival, unlike Perceval, does not begin by drawing the grieving lady close. He does not even ask her what is wrong. His reaction to seeing a gorgeous, nearly-naked woman kneeling next to him is religious indignation. He ensures that propriety is observed in the positioning of their bodies relative to one another: he ought not to lie down in front of her, and she ought not to kneel in front of him. Rather than suggesting she climb into bed with him, he offers her a seat next to him, which, Wolfram tells us, is genuinely what he wants. Again, his innocence is foregrounded: Parzival truly wishes for nothing more than to sit and chat politely with the queen; it is not disingenuous restraint. Far from suggesting anything erotic, his visitor’s near-nudity highlights the innocence of both characters.

The queen counters with her own terms, reviving the war imagery: if Parzival can show restraint and not wrestle with her (“mit mir ringet niht” [194, 1]), then she will lie beside him. They genuinely believe that the real impropriety would be *ringen* “wrestling”; they do not understand it in the way it would normally be seen in such a context, which is as a euphemism for sexual activity. Condwiramurs goes on to request that they lie next to each other (*biligen*), another term they misunderstand. She takes it literally because she has no concept of what the term actually signifies: sexual intercourse. They thus invert the usual decorum by taking a literal understanding of the
linguistic labels for their actions. Wolfram has a penchant for taking an innocent-sounding phrase and arranging it to sound more or less off-color. Parzival and Condwriramurs do the opposite: they understand overtly sexual phrases to mean something very innocent.

Parzival agrees to this vride “truce” and Condwriramurs snuggles (smouc) into bed with him. As Parzival is, infamously, not one for asking questions, Condwriramurs is the one to ask modestly (zühteclîche) if he would like to hear about her problems. She proceeds to tell him about the siege and its underlying cause, which is Clamîde’s determination to take her virginity. In the course of conversation, Condwriramurs happens to mention Liaze as being the sister of Schenteflurs, who died in Condwriramurs’s defense. Parzival feels the appropriate pangs of love: “nâch ir vil kumbers was gemant/der dienst gebende Parzivâl” (195, 8-9) “Parzival, her [Liaze’s] servitor, was reminded of his great suffering on her account.” No doubt there is some humor in the contrast between this supposedly great suffering and Parzival lying in bed with another woman, though Parzival does not seem to recognize any conflict between his developing relationship with Condwriramurs and his previous commitment. Indeed, it is his memory of Liaze that prompts him to ask whether there is anything anyone can do to help Condwriramurs. When she explains that defeating Kingrun the seneschal would save her, he offers his help. Unlike Perceval, who offers to fight on the condition that Blancheflor grant him her love, Parzival gives his service freely. Satisfied, Condwriramurs sneaks back to her bedroom.
Neither Condwiramurs nor Parzival is interested in marriage, or a romantic relationship, until after he has proven his mettle as a fighter. The fact that Wolfram couches Parzival’s nighttime encounter with Condwiramurs in terms of warfare puts it in line with just such a goal. Parzival does battle not only with a knight but also with a woman before deciding he is ready for marriage.

By the time Condwiramurs leaves Parzival’s room, Liaze is completely forgotten. She is never again mentioned; even hearing her brother Schenteflurs’s name the next day is not enough to jog Parzival’s memory. That evening Condwiramurs swears she will marry no one but Parzival. At bedtime, “Bî ligens wart gevråget dâ” (201, 19) “Sleeping together was inquired about,” and the couple says yes, they will sleep together. While there is no scene in which Parzival explicitly falls in love with Condwiramurs, “si wâren mit ein ander sô,/daz si durch liebe wâren vrô,/zwên tage unt die dritten naht” (202, 29-203, 1) “they were together like that [in bed], happy in their love, for [the next] two days and the third night.” To the extent that he can be said to fall in love, he does so while they are in bed together, where they are presumably semi- or fully naked. 48

Furnished with the same erotic extramarital opportunity as his French counterparts, it is nothing short of astounding that Parzival is impervious to the allure to which they succumb. In so doing, he accomplishes something none of the French protagonists are able to do. While Perceval, Guinglain, and Lancelot all become enamored of the lady in her shift and mantle, Parzival resists without even knowing he is

48 On balance, Condwiramurs spends most of her time only partially dressed. When the couple is finally reunited in Book XVI, Condwiramurs is once again clad in only a shift: “si blicte ūf und sah ir man./si hete nihht wanz hemde an/UMB sich siz deckelachen swanc./fürz pete üfen teppech spranc/Cundîr âmûrs diu lieht gemâl./ouch umbevienc si Parzivâl:/man sagte mir, si kusten sich” (800, 29 - 801, 5).
doing so. Wolfram keeps the external elements identical to the French version but frames them differently and changes the way his characters respond to them. Condwiramurs wears the same clothing, but it is warlike rather than seductive. She also ends up in bed with Parzival, but unlike Perceval and Blancheflor, the couple’s intentions are entirely innocent. In Wolfram’s hands, a scene that is by all appearances immodest becomes a gateway to greater courtly development.

Conclusion

If *Der Welsche Gast* is any indication, medieval nobles would not have encountered partially-dressed ladies as they went about their day:

Wil sich ein vrowe mit zuht bewarn,
si sol niht âne hülle⁴⁹ varn.
si sol ir hül ze samen hân,
ist si der garnatsch⁵⁰ ân.
lât si am libe iht sehen par,
daz ist wider zuht gar. (451-56)

If a lady wishes to guard herself with modesty, she should not travel without a cape. She should keep her cape closed if she is not wearing a long tunic. If she lets any part of her body be seen uncovered, that is completely contrary to modesty.

Thomasin does not even bother to address chemises or torn clothing, let alone nakedness, because there should be multiple layers between the bare body and the one seeing it. Ideally the lady will have a long tunic *and* a cape, which would make for at least four layers of clothing: the requisite shift and gown, plus tunic and cape. Even with only three out of the four, surely there can be no chance of any part of her body being uncovered.

⁴⁹ A *hülle* is an “Umhang” or “Mantel” (Brüggen 227) but is distinct from the mantle, which was worn by the nobility at ceremonial occasions.

⁵⁰ A *garnatsch* is a sleeveless “Oberkleid, wohl mit Pelz gefüttert” (Brüggen 216).
Yet Thomasin nevertheless feels obligated to insert that warning, showing how very
much partial female nakedness, by its very nature, stands in opposition to modesty as far
as he is concerned.

Nevertheless, we see with some frequency that courtly women in MHG romance
forego all but one layer of their clothing, and yet that their modesty is never questioned.
Sometimes it is even emphasized. Such treatment of partial nakedness would seem at first
to support Norbert Elias’s contention, discussed in the previous chapter, that the Middle
Ages was a time of great “Unbefangenheit” as far as the display of the naked body was
concerned (Über, vol. 1 224). As we have seen in this chapter, partial nakedness does not
usually cause shame.

But if it was part of daily life, why do we not see it even more often? And if it
was so unremarkable, why do the romances dwell so much on the details? Out of the
many characters in the four core German romances, only four ladies are partially
undressed. They are all exceptional because of their status as queens, and, for three of
them, as the hero’s wife. When they show some skin, the authors draw attention to it,
even when their own characters do not notice it.

While an investigation of romance conventions alone cannot offer much insight
into lived daily practice, it can reveal much about the attitudes of its authors, and
presumably, their patrons and audiences. We can deduce from the reactions to Enite and
the second scene with Jeschute that tattered clothing was probably something associated
with peasants. Furthermore, if Wolfram needs to insist so forcefully that there is nothing
at all inappropriate about Condwiramurs coming to Parzival’s bedroom in a chemise and
a fur coat, such an occurrence in real life probably would have been seen as highly inappropriate by his audiences.

Yet we know that these romances were wildly popular. Audiences must not have been scandalized by them—or if they were, they enjoyed being scandalized, and kept on reading and listening. As is already well-established, romance is a world of ideals, not reality: “we must not imagine that this literature presents us with a realistic view of the everyday lives and experiences of the knights and ladies of the feudal court any more than a Hollywood western depicts the daily lives of people in the Old West” (Tobin, Vivian, and Lawson x). Just as real medieval knights did not “spen[d] most of their time off in search of adventure, at tourneys, or pining away for some lady” (x), neither did real medieval ladies seek out male guests clad only in the medieval equivalent of lingerie. Nor did they make unilateral decisions about who to marry based on nothing but affection and physical attraction. There is a basis in reality for the things that happen in romance—a basis on which the audience’s enjoyment of the tales rests—but it does not represent life as it was lived.

While this is true of both German and French romances, the German versions depart even further from actual practice in their treatment of a woman’s exposed body. In Yvain, Laudine’s tearing at her clothes is disruptive, while in the German version, it is a symbol of her fine qualities and irresistibly attractive. In Erec, Chrétien’s Enide is properly covered except for her elbows, but Enite’s dress in Hartmann’s version is quite a bit more threadbare. In Jeschute’s first scene, she goes from wearing regular clothes in Chrétien to only a chemise in Wolfram. In her second scene, her clothes are equally
destroyed in both versions, but while this mars her beauty in the French, it accentuates it in the German. Condwiramurs too wears the same clothes in both the French and the German versions, but her presentation goes from seductive to emphatically innocent.

Partial nakedness in German romance comes to stand as a symbol of positive attributes: womanliness, loyalty, and modesty. It is not that the women are immodest in the French versions, but they are most definitely modest in the German versions. A chemise in French romance is ineluctably sexy, while a tattered dress is a symbol of misfortune: the bigger the holes, the greater the damage to her beauty. But both of these garments represent in German a marker of a lady’s high status, her beauty, and her womanly modesty.
Epilogue: On the Cleavage of Romance and Conduct Literature

Modesty is a lock upon all conduct. I can wish them [women] no greater blessing.

The findings of my dissertation agree with this epigraph: modesty is indeed a lock upon all conduct, and it is particularly important that women possess it. This nugget of Wolframian wisdom appears in the prologue to Parzival on the heels of a sort of apologia for the tale:

ouch erkante ich nie sô wîsen man,
ern möhte gerne künde hân,
welher stiure disiu mære gernt
und waz si guoter lêre wernt. (2, 5-8)

And I’ve never known a man so wise that he wouldn’t gladly learn what tribute these tales demand and what good teaching they contain.

Romance tales have a didactic function, Wolfram claims: they are full of twists and turns that demand a listener’s patience, but the effort will be rewarded with valuable wisdom. Turning specifically to the female portion of his audience, Wolfram notes that their fame and honor depend on their chastity and loyalty. Moderation too is indispensable. But the piece that holds everything together, the one that keeps all the other virtues under control, is modesty. Once a woman has that, she possesses a veritable treasure chest of good conduct, and has reached the pinnacle of courtly behavior.

Yet in other passages Wolfram plays with another meaning of the word scham, “genitalia.” Though this is not his intent in the passage quoted above, it is nevertheless a
fairly common usage of the word. *Parzival’s Jeschute*, as discussed in Chapter Four, is subject to just this sort of wordplay: “ir scham begunde switzen” (132, 8) “her scham began to sweat.” This study has paid attention to the multiple and paradoxical meanings of *scham*: it is at once modesty and unmentionables, virtue and shame, abstraction and embodiment. Linked even at its most virtuous moments with the most hidden aspects of physicality, modesty is itself a discourse about the body, sight, and gender.

As this dissertation has shown, Wolfram’s philosophy, in all its nuances, is emblematic of the core works of German courtly literature. My fundamental question has been, “How are notions of modesty in behavior and appearance represented in romance and conduct literature of German courtly culture in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries?” I began with the premise that, in order to understand how the conduct of romance characters would appear to a medieval audience, we must first understand audience expectations of conduct. Behavioral guides provide the perfect avenue by which to do this. Rather than assume that romance literature is a mirror of ideal behavior, as other critics have, I started with those texts that were written and read with the express purpose of teaching behavior. These became the standard from which romance might or might not deviate, rather than the other way around.

I took as my subjects two examples of conduct literature and the four primary courtly romances, and organized my study according to four principal areas of inquiry. The first was gender differences. As with so many other medieval values, there are different expectations for male and female expressions of modesty. I have been very interested in investigating precisely what those differences are and how they structure
gender roles and courtly identity. These include some very tangible differences in conduct, as Chapter One showed. Men are entitled to look at whomever they please, but women should be careful not to gaze at an unknown man. While a woman should not ride her horse with fewer than four layers of clothing, men are instructed only not to appear bare-legged in front of women (which suggests strongly that such a practice was not uncommon). In Chapter Two, I showed how the practice of modesty is one of many components that leads to a successful life for a knight, while for a lady it structures the way she orders her life. It also makes her a target for the violence of minne, a force understood variously as a threat and a support to the practice of modesty.

My second area of inquiry was the significance of sight and the body, both of which are closely entangled with notions of modesty. In Chapters Three and Four I examined the scenes in which these themes find their richest expression: depictions of naked knights and partially naked ladies. I found that not only are such scenes fairly common, but they follow particular patterns. The hero is often depicted naked, and the hero’s future wife partially clothed. In the scenes of naked knights, scham may be felt by the knight himself, or by the maiden who gazes at him. But while one might expect that there would be something fundamentally improper about a virgin seeing a naked man, this turns out not to be the case. Instead, the sense of scham is inspired by the man’s uncourteous state of nakedness and the knowledge or fear of being seen at all. Similarly, given what we know from Der Welsche Gast, it seems reasonable to expect that a partially-dressed courtly lady would be exhibiting immodest behavior, but I have shown that this too is mistaken. Even when missing some of her clothes, the courtly lady
exhibits modesty and virtuous behavior, and, except in the second Jeschute scene, never even attempts to cover up. Modesty is therefore completely compatible with a partially naked courtly lady. Indeed, her lack of clothing is a marker of her high status: she is invariably queenly and usually the hero’s future wife. Though a naked knight differs in that his status while naked is uncourtly, it is the exposure of his body that initiates his reintegration into the chivalric code.

The translatio of modesty from the French into the German cultural context formed my third area of inquiry. Whatever changes a German author makes are significant per se, and any patterns in those changes are reliable indicators of particularly German cultural values or characteristics. One such example, well-established in the secondary literature, is the German habit of turning unmarried partners into faithful spouses. This might seem to indicate a universally conservative bent on the part of the German authors. But my investigations showed that this affinity for marriage is matched equally by a penchant for naked knights and partially naked ladies. German romances have more of both: they invent nude scenes for knights that do not exist in the French versions, and they take more clothes off the ladies. In addition, the German romances frequently emphasize the woman’s modesty and courtliness while the French versions omit this entirely. This is particularly evident in the second Jeschute scene, in which Chrétien’s dirty and disfigured maiden becomes, without any change in her wardrobe, a radiantly beautiful lady whose courtliness outshines her circumstances.

The fourth area of inquiry was the seeming “cleavage” between romance and conduct literature. By this I mean the ways in which the two genres rely on each other for
definition, as well as the ways in which they are distinct. As I outlined in my introduction, scholars have long recognized a distinction between conduct literature and romance, with conduct literature historically occupying a position of less significance. This distinction, as it turns out, is not merely academic: as Chapter One showed, Thomasin himself is very aware that his project is qualitatively and generically different from that of the romance writers. He very clearly explains that he aspires to truth untainted by fiction.

But more recent scholarship has brought the two genres back together, suggesting that the distinction is far less defined than traditionally thought. In the early stages of my project, I had thought that the genres would turn out to have more similarities than differences, and that they would both focus heavily on didactic aims. Instead, I have found that the relationship is quite a bit more complicated than that. While on some level it may be true that all medieval literature could be considered conduct literature (Rasmussen, “Fathers” 106–07), that assertion must be qualified. Certainly there are moments when the narrators offer unambiguous advice to their audience, such as in the prologues to Parzival and Tristan. But there is a reason why it is objectively more exciting to read Parzival than Der Welsche Gast: as much as romance literature takes seriously the goal of prodesse, its ultimate project is delectare.

In pursuit of this project, romance characters stray, frequently and in particular patterns, from the standards of modest conduct placed upon their audiences. Thomasin makes it clear that a well-bred man does not appear bare-legged in front of ladies; yet we have seen that in romance it is almost a rite of passage for a knight to appear bare-
everything in front of ladies. Conduct literature does not bother to address the impropriety of a woman appearing partially naked in front of men; such an occurrence would be unthinkable given the many layers of clothing she is instructed to wear. Yet in the world of romance, some of the highest-status ladies are the ones with the least clothing on.

But in other ways, the world of romance is even more narrowly defined than the world represented in conduct literature. As Chapter Four showed, German romance is more concerned with marriage than French romance. It is also more concerned with marriage than the conduct literature studied here. Nowhere in the Winsbecke poems or in the first book of Der Welsche Gast do we hear anything about marriage. Quite to the contrary, even the moralizing Thomasin advises discretion in, rather than a moratorium on, adulterous relationships. He accepts them as a matter of fact without warning against them.\textsuperscript{52} The Winsbecke advises similar discretion when he tells his son to keep his minne ring a secret. He operates under the implicit assumption that minne is for lovers, not for marriage, and though he alludes to marriage when he talks about the transfer of a wife’s land, goods, and person to her husband, he does not mention it by name. We see similarly veiled allusions to marriage in Die Winsbeckin. In the discussion of surveillance, the mother indicates that there is a difference between minne, romantic love, and liebe, the type of love forced on a woman by her guardian, probably her husband. This means that there is room for both a husband and a lover, because a different kind of love is extended

\textsuperscript{52} Thomasin only takes issue with a woman’s boasting, not her extramarital affair: “ob si ir manne saget daz./wer umbe sî werb, si swige baz./ir ruom und ir lôsheit/vüegent ir manne grôzez leit/unde ir selben arcwân./wan ir getrouwet wirs ir man./und vüeget ir vriunden grôzen haz./den in ir man treit, wizet daz./si verliuset ouch ze jungest den/der ir gerne dient etwenn” (279-288).
to each one. According to this logic, it is possible for a woman to embody the ideals of modesty and also be an adulterer.

The romances are not nearly so permissive, which we can see from the tests of fidelity regularly administered to their characters. Beset by unwanted suitors along her journey, Enite remains faithful to Erec even when she believes him to be dead. She must resort to clever trickery to avoid further entanglement, but she does not come close to tarnishing her record of fidelity. Iwein finds himself with multiple proposals of marriage as he progresses through his adventures, but he is never tempted to stray, despite being estranged from his wife. In *Tristan*, Gottfried must move rhetorical mountains to position his characters on the same level of fidelity that other romance couples attain through marriage, which shows just how valuable that official seal of approval is. *Parzival* offers numerous examples of marital fidelity (Belacane, Herzeloyde, Parzival) and makes clear the consequences for unfaithfulness (Anfortas). Sigune is the most loyal of all: officially unmarried, she is as faithful to Schionatulander as if they had been husband and wife, and as if he were not dead.

In addition, romance literature puts more emphasis on a woman’s status as a virgin than does the conduct literature I have examined. As Chapter Three showed, writers of romance are very concerned with identifying women as virgins or non-virgins, even when they are nameless, faceless maids appearing in only one scene. We know from Chapter Four that a woman does not have to be a virgin to be considered an eligible bachelorette, but when it is a virgin getting married, there is typically a reference to her wedding night transformation from maiden to woman.
In the *Winsbecke* poems, however, categorization is based on biological sex rather than sexual activity. There is no fear about the daughter “losing her virginity;” all concerns are about the overwhelming force of love and a man’s power to betray and hurt her. Similarly, the father and son attribute powers of happiness and healing to *wîben* in general without ever distinguishing between women’s levels of sexual experience. While Thomasin does make the occasional distinction between *juncvrouwe* and *vrouwe*, it is only in recognition of the fact that a *vrouwe* has a higher status than a *juncvrouwe*. Virginity is not given special prestige—or, more to the point, it is not fetishized. That falls under the purview of romance writers.\(^{53}\)

But while conduct literature and romance clearly do have their differences on themes related to modesty, they are also in dialogue with each other. Romance literature is explicitly part conduct manual, with Gottfried and Wolfram in particular making a point to share advice with their audiences. But aside from the obviously pedagogical passages, *Parzival* in some ways contains a critique of Thomasin and the Winsbecke’s brand of didacticism. Parzival’s original lack of tact and courtesy is the direct result of his mother’s abbreviated version of a conduct manual. Similarly, he takes Gurnemanz’s advice on conduct so literally that he fails when it comes to the most important task of his life: asking Anfortas the question. Wolfram seems to be saying that conduct manuals cannot make up for a lack of common sense. All the rules in the world will not help someone who does not have the wisdom of experience.

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\(^{53}\) And in real life it was probably also a concern of exacting husbands. Judging by the instructions for falsifying virginity found in certain medical texts (Lastique and Lemay 65), the problem faced by Isolde on her wedding night is one that members of Gottfried’s own audiences might themselves have encountered.
Conduct literature also looks to romance for compelling role models to offer its own readers. The Winsbeke poems do so comfortably, with Die Winsbeckin in particular showing its debt to romance idioms. Thomasin has a more tortured relationship with romance and all its lies, but even he cannot resist naming a few of the characters his readers would do well to emulate. Whether explicit or implicit, these references serve as a kind of shorthand: romance characters represent a shared culture and literary language, and to draw on them is both a matter of practicality and efficiency and a way of creating content within an established idiom.

In a way, then, the two genres rely on each other. Conduct manuals, appealing to the same audiences already saturated with romance, allude to that genre either begrudgingly or obligingly. The romances, at least as eager to please, include long conduct passages for the benefit of audiences eager to apply the standards of their heroes to their own lives. Romance literature does not offer a mirror image of its audience’s lived experiences, but it rewards the audience for its intricate understanding of its own rules and regulations. Understanding, and, better yet, living, the actual world of the court is what gives meaning to the romances.

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My project opens up a number of possibilities for future research. The subjects I chose were not only among the most popular texts of their time, they also set the standard for many contemporary and future works. Given this common foundation, the apparatus I have brought to bear on scenes of (partial) nudity in the romances could provide a way to understand similar scenes in other sources. In addition to other works of high courtly
literature such as Willehalm and Das Nibelungenlied, there are also more popular tales, such as Hartmann’s Der arme Heinrich and the Stricker’s stories.

There is one tale in particular from Jans Enikel’s Weltchronik (c. 1272) that offers an excellent example of the productive value of my approach. Jans’s narrative of Friedrich von Antfurt tells of a supremely courageous, courtly, and comely knight who sets his sights on a married countess. Desperate to be rid of his unwanted attentions, she makes a deal with him: if he participates in a tournament wearing nothing but a lady’s dress (“einer frouwen kleit,” 28299) and survives, she will sleep with him. He obliges and is summarily impaled on his opponent’s lance. After one year of presumed death, his injury heals and he returns to the lady to claim his prize, bringing with him the bloody chemise in which he was injured. When she begs him to release her from their agreement, he agrees on the condition that she submit to his own peculiar demand:

ir súlt an sant Steffans tag
nâch míner lêr sag
an iu daz sweizic hemdel tragen.
noch wil ich iu mêr sagen:
ein rísen súlt ir haben guot,
einen mantel ân huot,
zwên schuoch alsô niuwe.
und welt iuwer triuwe
behalten, sô ir ze opfer gêt
unde vor dem alter stêt,
sô lât vallen den mantel guot,
daz ich ez sech, frou wol behuot,
wan ich wil in dem kôr stên,
sô ir súlt ze opfer gên. (28447-60)

54 Jans’s tale is based on an Old French fabliau by Jacques de Baisieux (Dunphy 185 n. 24).
55 This is Stefanstag zu Pfingsten, the Monday after Pentecost, rather than the day after Christmas (Dunphy 186 n. 29). This date is significant as a nod to Arthurian romance’s most important holiday.
On St. Stephen’s Day, as I command it, you will wear this bloody little chemise. I have yet more to say to you: you shall have a good veil, a mantle without a hood, and a pair of brand new shoes. And if you want to maintain your loyalty [to your husband], then when you go to [take] the sacrament and are standing before the altar, you will let the mantle fall so that I see it, well-guarded lady, for I will be standing in the choir when you go to [take] the sacrament.

Each has now required a type of nakedness from the other: she requires him to fight unarmored and in a woman’s dress, making him not only figuratively but literally as naked as a woman. He contrives to do the same to her, accounting for the gender difference by forcing her into nothing but a bloodied shift. The lady agrees, and when the appointed day arrives she does as she has been instructed:

\[dô si daz opfer leit,\]  
\[ein samît lanc unde weît\]  
\[si dâ vallen lie.\]  
\[daz hemdel gie ir ûf diu knie,\]  
\[daz was von bluot alsô rôt.\]  
\[ir frûmkeit dô gebôt,\]  
\[daz si dâ stuont in grôzer scham. (28495-502)\]

When she had taken the sacrament, she allowed her long, broad samite to fall. The short chemise, red with blood, went [only] to her knee. But her virtue commanded that she stand there in great scham.

The woman then picks up her mantle and returns home, where she explains everything to her husband. He reaffirms his great love for her, and Friedrich, fearing for his life, leaves.

This perplexing story draws new meaning in light of the themes of my dissertation. Friedrich sees nothing dishonorable about seeking the affections of a married lady, which aligns him with the values represented in conduct literature, and perhaps therefore real life. But the countess represents the world of romance literature: she will go so far as to appear nearly naked in church if that is what it takes to uphold her marital
vows. The clash of these two systems is worked out on the bodies of both Friedrich and
the countess. He must show his commitment to the pursuit of love service by humiliating
his body to the point of death.

Like Enite, the countess does not reveal to her husband Friedrich’s ill intent; she
takes care of it on her own. Friedrich recognizes that his beloved, like Die Winsbeckin’s
daughter’s ideal, is “wol behuot” “well-guarded” by her own marital loyalty and thus
unwilling to meet his demands. In lieu of satisfaction, he settles for an Iwein-like
invisibility, watching from the choir while the lady disrobes. The costume he chooses for
her is a recognizable parody on the romance trope of the high-born woman wearing
nothing but her chemise and a mantle. While a romance queen like Condwiramurs does
this only of her own volition, this lady is forced into it, which also evokes the image of
Jeschute reduced to tatters.

Friedrich changes the setting from a private bedroom to a public place, which he
seems to think will result in shame and dishonor for the countess. But, like
Condwriramurs, the countess’s nearly naked body ends up becoming her weapon. An
opponent’s lance piercing Friedrich’s cross-dressed body was not enough to put an end to
his advances, but the shockingly disordered image of the countess’s denuded form
paradoxically restores order. It both releases her from harassment and enables her to tell
her husband about what has happened.

Though the woman’s fidelity provides the impetus for the story, her ultimate
virtue is her modesty. Even while she travels to the church in bloody undergarments and
a fur cloak, Jans emphasizes her zuht (28480, 28482). When the time comes for her to
drop her cloak at the altar, she remains standing there in great scham. We can understand
that to mean that her virtue compelled her to stand there in great shame, so that she could
salvage her fidelity, or that her virtue enabled her to exhibit modesty even in her
wretched circumstances.

This study has shown that modesty is as much a personal practice as an external
attribute: modesty is both something to be and to be seen as. As in the case of Jeschute’s
first scene, it can exist even when no one is around who recognizes it. It can also define
the way the world sees a woman, as with Enite’s appearance among the knights. But a
woman who does not practice it herself risks having it forced upon her. Surveillance, as
we have seen in Die Winsbeckin, is a family’s way of imposing societal standards on a
wife or daughter who is not appropriately demure. Most of all, it is a lock upon all
conduct, the quality that ensures the proper practice of all other virtues.
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