Olga V. Trokhimenko

Constructing Virtue and Vice

Femininity and Laughter in Courtly Society (ca. 1150 – 1300)

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With 18 figures

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For Katja

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Frequently Used Abbrevations

ANF	*Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*
BMZ	G. F. Benecke, W. Müller, and F. Zarncke, *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch*
Chastoiement	Robert de Blois, *Chastoiement des Dames*
DWb	Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*
EK	Der Stricker, "Der ernsthafte König"
Eng.	English
FB	Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Frauenbuch*
FD	Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Frauendienst*
Flore	Konrad Fleck, *Flore und Blanschflur*
Fr.	French
Germ.	German
Gregorius	Hartmann von Aue, *Gregorius der gute Sünder*
Hatto, *Parzival*	Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival,* trans. A. T. Hatto
Hatto, *Tristan*	Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan, Translated Entire for the First time with the Surviving Fragments of the* Tristan *of Thomas*, trans. A. T. Hatto
Ital.	Italian
Iwein	Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein*
KLD	*Deutsche Liederdichter des 13. Jahrhunderts,* ed. Carl von Kraus
Lat.	Latin
LCI	Engelbert Kirschbaum, ed., *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*
Lexer, *HW*	Matthias Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch*
Lexer, *TW*	Matthias Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Taschenwörterbuch*
Licht	Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*
Magezoge	"Der Tugendspiegel oder der Meizoge"
ME	Middle English
MF	*Des Minnesangs Frühling*
MHG	Middle High German
NL	*Das Nibelungenlied*
NPNF 1	*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Series 1*

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NPNF 2	*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Series 2*
OF	Old French
Parzival	Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completus, sive biblioteca universalis, integra, uniformis, commoda, oeconomica, omnium SS. Patrum, doctorum, scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum…: [Series Latina]*
Port.	Portuguese
RM	Heinrich der Teichner, "Von roten muenden"
SE	Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*
SI	Samuel Singer, *Thesaurus proverbiorum medii aevi: Lexikon der Sprichwörter des romanisch-germanischen Mittelalters*
SMS	*Die Schweizer Minnesänger*
TPMA	Samuel Singer, *Thesaurus proverbiorum medii aevi: Lexikon der Sprichwörter des romanisch-germanischen Mittelalters* (when not citing specific examples but rather page numbers)
Tristan	Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*
VA	Berthold von Regensburg, *Vollständige Ausgabe seiner Predigten mit Anmerkungen und Wörterbuch*
VL	Wolfgang Stammler, Karl Langosch, and Kurt Ruh, eds., *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*
WA	Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander, *Deutsches Sprichwörter-Lexikon: Ein Hausschatz für das deutsche Volk*
WE	*Winsbecke*
WG	Thomasin von Zerclaere, *Der Welsche Gast*
WI	*Winsbeckin*

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Introduction. Liberated Yet Controlled: The Problem of Women's Laughter

> Hombres necios que acusáis
> a la mujer sin razón
> sin ver que sois la ocasión
> de lo mismo que culpáis.[1]
>
> (Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, 1648 – 1695)

A young woman-rider comes galloping across a stream. She is Isolde of the White Hands, daughter of the local ruler and new wife of Tristan, the famous hero who recently came to these places. Her horse's misstep causes water to splash up the rider's skirt. The lady laughs and cannot prevent herself from making a bitter, derisive remark about her husband, who a year into their marriage continues to fail in his spousal duties. Although clearly a victim of neglect who until now has been consistently portrayed as an innocent and misled virgin, the woman becomes much less likeable from this point on. Once her behavior is explained, even her brother sees her as damaged goods. Her laughter in this episode heralds her textual transformation or, more accurately, her irreparable decline. The next time the reader meets Isolde is in the role of her husband's murderer; she is bitter, resentful, and vilified.[2]

Another snapshot: At the court of King Arthur, the maiden Cunneware, who has been serious for years, suddenly bursts out laughing and is cruelly beaten for it by the royal seneschal in front of everybody. Even though the cruelty of the punishment provokes general indignation, no action is taken until much later when the work's protagonist, Parzival, finally avenges the maiden. After the injustice has been rectified, Cunneware's laughter is never mentioned again, even though now she should have real reason for cheer. In the same work, we also meet the stunning but unruly Orgeluse, desired by every man for her beauty. Unlike Cunneware, she laughs openly and freely, mercilessly humiliating her suitors until this medieval shrew finds a man who can tame her, thus restoring the order. Orgeluse is then miraculously transformed into the obedient and virtuous lady she was supposed to be from the very beginning. The trans-

1 "Foolish men are you who accuse the woman unjustly without realizing that you are the very cause of that for which you blame her." All translations into English are my own unless specifically indicated.

2 For a detailed analysis of the depiction of the female protagonists in the Middle High German Tristan tradition, see Trokhimenko, "And All Her Power Forsook Her."

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formation is finalized once she surrenders her body to her conqueror in a scene that is striking for its suggestive erotic euphemisms.[3]

Finally, there is the beautiful Isolde of Ireland, who receives a wondrous present from her exiled lover Tristan, currently languishing in exile. This magic gift is a little dog that can make anybody laugh. Having experienced the enchantment herself, Isolde breaks the magic bell on the dog's collar and thus deprives herself of the chance to forget her heartbreak. In relishing her sorrow, Isolde does nothing short of publicly displaying her adulterous passion for Tristan. And yet, her insistence on living with this boundless grief deeply touches all sensitive readers, "the noble hearts" for whom this story was intended and who admire Isolde's loyalty and, paradoxically, her virtue.[4]

These female characters and their plights have little in common except for two things: the first is the fact that all of them come from medieval German courtly tradition, and the second is the negative judgment, both explicit and oblique, that their laughter seems to spark. It would be highly simplistic, however, to treat the instances of such textual disapprobation as mere coincidences or twists and turns of plot, be this disapprobation diegetic (expressed by the actual characters in the tale) or non-diegetic (an unspoken prejudice transmitted by the narrator and meant to be deciphered and shared by the reading or listening audience outside the tale), since a similar attitude can be detected in numerous other medieval texts as well. The medieval German poet Hartmann von Aue, for example, wants to be absolutely sure that the audience listening to his courtly romance *Erec* would not misinterpret the heroine's smile—even though she is using that smile purely to save her husband's life.[5] In yet another popular thirteenth-century story, *Die Heidin* (*The Heathen Queen*), the redaction in which the female protagonist laughs also turns out to be the only version in which she appears as daring, powerful, and secure, challenging and even manipulating the Christian man who wants to possess her.[6] And although *die Heidin* ultimately succumbs to male trickery (as do her counterparts in all other redactions of the story), this remains the only version of the work in which the man's victory feels like a *real*, hard-won triumph over the unruly "woman-on-top."

Medieval German vernacular texts appear to be ill at ease with the laughter of

3 I am referring here to a very memorable description of Gawain and Orgeluse's wedding in Wolfram von Eschenbach's courtly romance *Parzival.* The sexual union of the two lovers is described with the help of not-so-veiled metaphors. See vv. 643,27 – 644,1 in Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival.*

4 For a discussion of the Petitcrü-episode in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* see Wright, "Petitcreiu"; and recently, Layher, "*Sô süeze was der schellen klanc.*"

5 See a detailed discussion of this episode in chapter 3.

6 *Die Heidin (IV) Redaktion*; Pfannmüller, *Die vier Redaktionen.*

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women. When it is open or boisterous, it is portrayed as disturbing and may be punished either literally (through physical or social repercussions, as in Cunneware's case) or obliquely (through character transformation, as demonstrated by Isolde of the White Hands and Orgeluse). Its more restrained forms, like smiling, require an explanation as well—a qualifier such as *guotlîch* ("good, kind")—lest they be perceived as seductive. Both in romance and in lyric, laughter often functions as a statement about the woman's virtue, suggesting that the two may have been intricately connected in the medieval imagination. Unsurprisingly, courtly literature proves to be one of many forums for discussing this issue. The connection between laughter and female virtue is echoed throughout a variety of discourses. It is alluded to in religious texts and in the extensive body of contemporaneous didactic literature, including conduct and etiquette manuals. Explicit prohibitions, admonitions, or rules restricting women's gaiety abound there. So do implicit repercussions, both literal and metaphorical, for those who are careless or, on the contrary, too bold to challenge the regulations written by men. Of course, as Lisa Perfetti justly points out, medieval literature is also rich in works depicting their heroines laughing or joking.[7] I would interpret this seeming inconsistency in a twofold way: first, as a sign that medieval society was not homogeneous, but rather a place of an intense debate on the subject of women's laughter; and second, that, conspicuously, the texts Perfetti alludes to are much more representative of the Late Middle Ages and early modernity, which scholarship frequently treats as a period of unbridled laughter.[8] The high-medieval perspective appears to be more uncertain, full of contradictions and tensions. Laughter and smiling do play a prominent role in art, sculpture, and literature of this period; and yet, the French historian Jacques Le Goff accurately describes the prevalent approach to these human expressions as that of "liberation and control."[9] Indeed, as the medieval discourses show us, the element of control is ever present in the treatment of women's behavior. Ultimately, even in the so-called pro-laughter texts courtly ladies are no freer to express themselves at will than their counterparts are in explicitly moralizing and giving stern didactic treatises and exempla.

The treatment of women's laughter in medieval literature raises a number of compelling questions about the social and cultural context out of which it arose, and about the relation between reality and fiction, ideology and misogyny. Was women's laughter viewed differently compared to men's, and why does it so

7 Perfetti, *Women and Laughter*, 1.

8 The first person to suggest this term was the Russian semiologist Mikhail Bakhtin in his seminal study *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable*, translated into English by Helene Iswolsky as *Rabelais and His World.* Also see numerous studies by the French historian Jacques Le Goff, especially "Le rire au Moyen Âge," 12.

9 "Libération et contrôle du rire." Le Goff, "Le rire au Moyen Âge," 12.

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often go hand-in-hand with descriptions or at least allusions to the sexualized female body or female virtue? How can textual references be profitably understood in dialogue with the contemporaneous cultural, philosophical, and physiological discourses of femininity? What does women's laughter say about the complex interaction between clerical and secular spheres of medieval society? How does this interaction shape the ideal of a virtuous, aristocratic woman? Finally, how does the awareness of the work performed by women's laughter deepen our understanding of gender and class in the Middle Ages?

Successful exploration of these issues requires clarity in terminology and methodology. The human interest in laughter—its physiology, purpose, and social value—is as old as mankind itself.[10] The approaches to studying it have varied and still vary greatly, based not only on discipline but also on the object of their investigation: (1) the audience's response, meaning everything that falls under the categories of the risible, comedy, and humor;[11] (2) the psychological causes of laughter and the feelings a laughing person experiences;[12] or (3) laughter as a form of behavior, as a gesture, and its textual representation. The difference between these perspectives can be succinctly summarized with the help of Le Goffe's binary: the "theory and practice of laughter" ("théorie et pratique du rire"). As Le Goff points out, "these are different things, and one of the great problems of this kind of research is already apparent: the problem of the heterogeneity of documents, of the issues, of concepts. One of the greatest

10 See, for example, famous studies such as Baudelaire, "On the Essence of Laughter," 147 – 165; Bergson, "Laughter," 161 – 192; Plessner, *Laughing and Crying*; Freud, *Jokes.* Some important modern studies of laughter include the series Studies in Humor and Gender, published by Gordon and Breach, especially Gail Finney's collection *Look Who's Laughing.* Also see Köhler, *Differentes Lachen.* On medieval and early-medieval humor and gender see Balzaretti, "Liutprand," 114 – 128; Perfetti, "Men's Theories," 207 – 241; Perfetti, *Women and Laughter*; Polachek, "Scatology," 30 – 42; Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative*; Coxon, "Laughter and Process of Civilization"; Coxon and Seeber, *Verlachen.*

11 The seminal essay on jokes and humor from a psychoanalytic perspective is, of course, Sigmund Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious.* Henri Bergson's study has also been groundbreaking in pointing out that laughter and humor are grounded in the perceived contrasts between human intellectual aspirations and the restrictive physical contexts they inhabit. See Bergson, "Laughter." Other important research on laughter, comedy, and humor has been done by Plessner, *Laughing and Crying*; Stern, *Phisolophie du rire*; Propp, *Problemy*; Likhachev, "Smekh," 341 – 403; Faure, *Rires et sourires littéraires.*

12 One of the most comprehensive summaries of theories about laughter can be found in John Morreall's *Taking Laughter Seriously.* In it, Morreall not only discusses the three theories, or reasons, for laughter—superiority, incongruity, and relief—but also offers what he calls a "new theory" of his own based on the idea of a pleasant psychological shift. See Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 4 – 20. Norman N. Holland offers an even more detailed and complicated analysis of the causes and mechanisms of laughter, differentiating, for example, between formal, ethical, and cognitive types of incongruity. See Holland, *Laughing*, 21 – 108. All of these theories are also summarized in a more recent publication by T. G. A. Nelson on comedy. See Nelson, *Comedy.*

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uncertainties is not knowing if there is any unifying subject in all of that."[13] Naturally, the boundaries between the approaches are not impenetrable. It would be unproductive, for example, to discuss the issues of humor or satire in a literary text without mentioning derisive laughter and the notions of superiority, incongruity, and relief—the psychological causes for the audience's enjoyment of the joke or the work. Similarly, studies of humor often find it important to carefully examine actual textual references in order to see when the characters laugh and what is at stake when they do.[14] Finally, a textual analysis of literary characters' behavior often leads to questions about the motivation behind their laughter and its effect on the audience.

In this study, however, I purposely focus on just one aspect of laughter: its depiction and evaluation as a physical behavior, i.e. as a gesture rather than a verbal manifestation of humor or wit in the intra- and extra-textual worlds. I will investigate texts that depict and evaluate laughter (Le Goff's "texts qui jugent le rire") as opposed to those that make people laugh ("textes qui cherchent à faire rire").[15] As with any other emotions, gestures, and their literary representations, laughter and its forms should not be taken at face value or as self-evident, but

13 "Ce sont des choses différentes, et l'un des grands problèmes de cette recherche se manifeste déjà: problème d'hétérogénéité des documents, de la problématique, des concepts, et l'une des grandes incertitudes est de savoir s'il y a un sujet unificateur derrière tout cela." Le Goff, "Le rire au Moyen Âge," 3. The Russian scholar M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij has also noticed two different connotations of laughter that set the direction of the scholarly approach: "directed" and "non-directed" laughter. "Directed laughter," according to Steblin-Kamenskij, is "laughter implying some object laughed at, ridiculed, mocked, derided, satirized, criticized, censured, condemned, exposed and so forth," while "non-directed laughter" is "laughter not implying any such object." Steblin-Kamenskij, "On the History of Laughter," 154.

14 Perfetti and Polachek study medieval women's humor through close textual readings. Gerhild Scholz Williams pursues a similar approach in "Das Fremde erkennen," 82 – 96.

15 Le Goff, "Le rire au Moyen Âge," 3. This is not to say that there have not been any studies of laughter as an emotional gesture before the end of the twentieth century. Until recently, however, such studies, particularly in the area of pre-modern literary studies, produced detailed work on the semantic fields of the word "laughter," or described the different kinds of it found in literary texts (e.g., heroic, derisive, joyous, etc.), which sometimes resulted in compilations of textual examples accompanied by cursory literary analysis. Le Goff has also noted this and criticizes that "practical" type of research for its lack of coherence and depth by pointing out that they treat their subject matter in a limited, perfunctory way ("d'une façon tout à fait limitée, ponctuelle"). Le Goff, "Le rire au Moyen Âge," 3. An example of an older scholarly approach can be found in Karl Richard Kremer's impressive collection of references to laughter that covers the whole medieval period of German literature, both its masterpieces and less-known works. The scope of Kremer's research, understandably, has rendered detailed literary analysis or close reading impossible; it is, however, of substantial value to those searching for references or in need of a quick overview. See Kremer, "Das Lachen." Also see Tatlock, "Mediaeval Laughter," 289 – 294; Adolf, "On Mediaeval Laughter," 251 – 253; White, "Medieval Mirth," 284 – 301; Ménard, *Le rire et le sourire*; Blaicher, "Über das Lachen," 508 – 529; Wehrli, "Christliches Lachen," 17 – 31; and Ekmann, "Das gute und das böse Lachen," 8 – 36.

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must be examined according to the terms of the culture that lived and expressed them.[16] Heinz-Günter Vester justly points out that society and culture constitute the background "from which the forms and the languages evolve that in turn are the material which makes possible the representation, expression, and experience of emotions."[17] Textual representations of human emotions can only be accurately interpreted in their cultural and historical specificity.

In the last two decades, medieval historians and literary critics have disproved the simplistic view, once prevalent thanks to the influential works by Johann Huizinga and Norbert Elias,[18] that the Middle Ages were an emotionally uncomplicated, what-I-show-is-what-I-feel period with "the emotional life of a child: unadulterated, violent, public, unashamed"—a stark contrast to the much more sophisticated period of modernity "with its discipline, control, and suppression."[19] Numerous scholars working on the topic of performance and performativity have shown just how complex medieval culture truly was, given its inherently performative style of communication.[20] As recent studies by Gerd Althoff, Barbara Rosenwein, J. A. Burrow, Kathryn Starkey, Sebastian Coxon, and many others demonstrate, medieval emotions and gestures had a specifically public, social function in addition to a private, personal one and, therefore, were an important factor in shaping the individual's position in society.[21] What Laurie Postlewate calls a "calculation of outward behavior"[22] was practiced in various areas of life, including important public events such as demonstrations or re-

16 It is important to point out that there are scholars who dispute the culture-specific nature of emotions. For more on the debate about universal human emotions, see Perfetti, *The Representation of Women's Emotions*, 1 – 22, esp. 10 and 20 (note 25); Wierzbicka, "Emotion," 133 – 196.

17 Vester, "Emotions in Postemotional Culture," 20.

18 Elias, *Civilizing Process*, esp. 1: 319; Huizinga, *Waning of the Middle Ages*, esp. 9 – 11.

19 See Althoff, "Demonstration"; Althoff, "Gefühle." Also see Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions," par. 17; Dülmen, "Norbert Elias und der Prozeß der Zivilisation," 264 – 274; Heinzle, "Der gerechte Ritter," 266 – 294, esp. 286 – 290. For the most recent engagement with Elias's theory of the civilizing process, see Fulbrook, *Un-Civilizing Processes.*

20 A detailed discussion of the concepts "performance" and "performativity" and their applicability to the study of pre-modern texts can be found in Velten, "Performativität," 217 – 242. Also see Austin, "Lecture I in *How to Do Things with Words*," 93 – 94.

21 Cf.: "Dem mittelalterlichen Menschen stand ein differenziertes System von Zeichen, Symbolen und Verhaltensmustern zur Verfügung, mit dem er nonverbal Stand, Stellung und Rang, sein Verhältnis zum jeweiligen Gegenüber, Freundschaft und Freude, Feindschaft und Unwillen ausdrücken konnte." Althoff, "Demonstration," 232. Also see Starkey, "Brunhild's Smile," 159 – 173; Burrow, *Gestures and Looks*; Verberckmoes, *Laughter, Jestbooks and Society*, 3; Innes, "He Never," 131 – 156; Coxon, "Laughter," 17 – 38; Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative.*

22 Postlewate and Hüsken, *Acts*, 8. Bert O. States calls it "me behaving as if I am somebody else." States, "Performance as Metaphor," 119.

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affirmations of kingly or lordly power, as well as in commonplace dealings and even individual interactions with God.[23]

To acknowledge the emotional complexity of this society and to recognize its performative character means to accept the inherent ambiguity of pre-modern texts, to welcome re-reading and searching for a deeper meaning that may not be immediately apparent to the modern reader. For example, even in courtly literature where laughter is very common, it is seldom used as a true expression of contentment or as a response to situational incongruity and humor. More frequently it serves as a means to appease or humiliate the enemy, as a statement about one's favor, or as an indicator of one's virtue. At all times, however, it is treated as a social action that subjects its actor to audience's evaluation. And it is not just its content that is culturally determined; who laughs, how, and under what circumstances — i. e., laughter as behavior — is socially regulated as well. Laughter functions as a statement about an individual's status, age, gender, and moral character; its presence or absence has a capacity to mark a person as an aristocrat or commoner, monastic or layman, virtuous or corrupt, and in the case of women, even as chaste or sexually available. The debate on laughter thus always involves three levels: socio-political, moral-religious, and gender. An ability to control one's own passions and desires is expected of the nobility and, as Matthew Innes demonstrates in his study of the early-medieval kingship, considered to be essential to one's claim to be able to rule legitimately.[24] The refusal to display overt emotions serves as proof of one's victory over the body and is particularly prominent in religious, especially monastic, discourse. Finally, the rules governing behavior and emotional expression happen to be imposed much more strictly upon female members of the society. As the anthropologist Mahadev Apte points out, in cultures "where ideal sex role-models for women emphasize modesty, passivity, and politeness, it is considered unbecoming for women to laugh in an unrestrained manner, while men are free to express their joy or amusement quite freely."[25] And indeed, medieval literary texts pay attention to women's laughter by regulating it more stringently and, if immoderate, judging it more harshly than men's.

23 "The notion of constant self-representation before the gaze of God and other people." Postlewate and Hüsken, *Acts*, 8. Gerd Althoff has made a similar point. See Althoff, "Demonstration," 251. Also see Althoff, "Gefühle," 82 – 99. For an example of performative communication in the religious sphere, see a recent study by Denery, "The Preacher and His Audience," 17 – 34.

24 Innes, "He Never," 131 – 156.

25 Apte observes that positive or negative attitudes towards laughter and smiling are commonly fused with specific role models for different sex and age groups in a variety of cultures. By and large, he claims, restraints on laughter are imposed more strictly upon young or middle-aged women (the time of life when their sexual behavior needs to be regulated and curtailed). Apte, *Humor*, 259.

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This gendered element can be fully understood only in conjunction with the remaining two aspects, socio-political and moral-religious, which is reflected in the structure of my study. Here theological, didactic, medical, and folkloric discourses provide a larger cultural context for the literary references to women's laughter, thus allowing for a more nuanced understanding of them. Despite tensions and contradictions among and even within these various discourses, all of them seem to agree on one point: because of the corporeal nature of laughter, the debate about laughter is ultimately inseparable from debates about the body, sexuality, and the erotic.

Chapter 1 looks at the connection between laughter and sexuality, but while doing so, heeds James A. Schultz's admonition that medieval people understood their bodies differently than we do. Therefore, one has to be careful "if one wants to study how the body in the past was, and was not, invested with erotic significance."[26] "If we want to find these things out," warns Schultz, "we must try to suspend what we think we know and attend carefully to what the texts actually say."[27] By looking at the significance and symbolism attributed to the female mouth in a variety of discourses, this chapter addresses the assumption—which by now has become a cliché in the field of medieval feminist studies—that the female mouth is a genital symbol. It demonstrates that the sexual imagery attributed to the female mouth was indeed prevalent in pre-modern times. While this symbolism would not surprise anyone living in the post-Freudian era, I draw my conclusion from contemporaneous sources: medieval medicine, natural philosophy, folklore, and literary works. The evidence that this interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approach provides argues for the existence of a pan-European tradition that connects laughter and other activities of the female mouth to the loss of virginity and sexual activity. This chapter has two additional important outcomes. Firstly, it reveals that the role given to women's laughter in the ideal of femininity reflects male desires and fantasies.[28] Secondly, it points out an important strategy for talking about such sensitive issues as human sexuality, namely, indirection (*Verhüllung*). Laughter itself becomes an important euphemism for female sexual availability.

The topic of sexuality is further pursued in chapter 2, which addresses the religious discourse on laughter. Since its influence in the Middle Ages is hard to overestimate, one cannot get a full picture of the socio-cultural context without a good sense of the prevailing clerical debates and how they changed over time.

26 Schultz, *Courtly Love*, 3. I am also deeply thankful to Professor Schultz for his keen insights and especially for generously granting me permission to see an early manuscript of his study.
27 Ibid.
28 Cf. Ruth Mazo Karras's question: "Do these stories tell us anything about women's attitudes to sex, or only about what men thought those attitudes were, or wished they were?" Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 14.

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This chapter provides an overview of the way laughter was perceived by theologians, from the Church Fathers to the late-thirteenth-century preacher Berthold of Regensburg. The evidence suggests that concerns about laughter's value and nature originally arose from the early Church's attempts to strongly differentiate its newly emerging spirituality from the age-old tradition of associating laughter with fertility rites, birth, sexuality, and eroticism. By the Early Middle Ages, orthodox Christianity, preoccupied with the questions of eternal perdition and salvation, perceives the erotic side of laughter as a liability. It thus becomes a subject of eschatology and apocalypticism, and its link to sexuality turns out to be particularly threatening to those who have dedicated themselves in body and soul to God. Textual analysis shows how monastic writings from the fifth to the thirteenth centuries treat laughter as a crack through which earthly matters could reach the human soul, thus leaving the body—whether male or female—open to the world and sin. At the same time, this chapter makes clear that medieval attitudes towards sexuality, salvation, and laughter were conflicted and complicated, and that it would be highly inaccurate to speak of some universal and hegemonic point of view, "imposed by a totalitarian church upon everyone."[29] The debate about the value and propriety of laughter continues in ecclesiastical discourse for centuries without a definitive answer, and the lack of agreement on this issue within such a powerful social institution as the Church could not help but affect other areas of society as well.

The degree of this influence becomes the subject of chapter 3, which analyzes the ways in which the religious discussion of laughter impacts secular discourses, such as didactic and conduct literature. This chapter closely examines the influential role of the courtly cleric, oftentimes the best-educated member at an aristocratic court. Entrusted with instructing and guiding the laity, courtly clerics, I argue, were in a perfect position to transmit religious views of laughter to the secular nobility. The conduct, or courtesy, books they wrote advocate the courtly ideal of restraint and moderation and condemn laughter in a way that is similar to the religious texts of the time. These works also reinforce the idea of women's laughter as a class attribute: medieval conduct literature only regulates the behavior of those who are of high social standing while the lowborn can laugh freely. It thus supports Apte's anthropological finding that laughter is inappropriate for people of high socio-economic status, while lower classes are permitted to exercise much less control over their bodies and behavior.[30] The treatment of laughter in didactic discourse thus provides invaluable insights for understanding contemporary fictional texts and poetry.

Placed on the border between the secular and the religious worlds, written by

29 Karras, *Sexuality*, 26.
30 Apte, *Humor*, 259.

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clerics but for aristocratic audiences, medieval educational treatises illustrate the role of the court as a place of *domestication* and of further codification of laughter. These texts attempt to accommodate hilarity by distinguishing between its acceptable and non-acceptable forms; while a sensual and unrestrained outburst of emotion is condemned, a pleasant and even seductive smile is encouraged. Conduct manuals thus try to reconcile the anti- and pro-laughter traditions and, not surprisingly, adopt a strongly gender-specific approach. At the same time, they also reveal the degree to which these two seemingly incompatible positions are in fact *intertwined* in the medieval courtly imagination; when it comes to women, they ultimately have the same goal. Control over laughter represents male control over female sexuality. Nowhere is this as clearly presented as in Ulrich von Liechtenstein's didactic work *Das Frauenbuch.* This text stands out because of its unique perspective and because its author is not a cleric. Ulrich presents both the clerical and courtly approaches to women's laughter and uncovers an inherent contradiction within medieval society: the paradoxical demand to be virtuous and seductive at the same time. Through a careful textual analysis of this work, chapter 3 demonstrates how smiling and laughing constitute an inseparable part of praiseworthy courtly femininity, while simultaneously being associated with a sexual availability that merits condemnation. Women's laughter thus both masks over and uncovers the power relationships between the genders.

Chapter 4 looks closely at the medieval German tradition of the courtly lyric. Courtly love poetry of the Minnesang offers a unique opportunity to see the effect and meaning of women's laughter at work. As a male-authored and predominantly male-voiced kind of writing, it presents its audience with the fantasy of a desirable woman—be she as remote and perfect as she is in the earlier stages of the lyric's development, more accessible during the post-classical stage, or completely available and sexually insatiable as in some *dörper*-songs (a parodic type of poetry that transplants the style and ideals of the classical lofty love service into the uncourtly village milieu). This chapter relies on the background material provided in the previous chapters because it is only in the context of the larger discourse on laughter that we can fully appreciate the changes that the image of the lofty lady undergoes at different stages of the genre's development, and the role of "erotic smiles" in constructing this image.

Unsurprisingly, the Minnesang does not offer one uniform ideal of femininity. Male-voiced songs of lofty love (Germ. *Hoher Sang*) admire the inaccessibly remote lofty lady, whose relationship to the singer is strongly reminiscent of feudal vassalage. The political model of composed lordliness provides a framework for understanding the classical Minnesang's disinterest in women's smiles. It is not until the male speaker begins to dwell on the worshipped lady's bodily charms and to fantasize about the solace they can provide that laughter

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becomes a truly recurrent motif in medieval German love poetry. "Erotic smiles" completely dominate the post-classical lyric where *lachen* (MHG for "laughter") is mentioned in almost every song. One also notices a fixation on the lady's mouth. Often the expression *rôter munt* ("red mouth") is used as a metonymy for a woman, and the minnesinger's pleas are addressed directly to it. The instances of smiling are regularly accompanied by invocations of the sexualized female body, whether in the form of a dream, a wish, a hint, or a joke revealing the male speaker's true desire to possess the object of his love. I interpret such eroticization and sexualization in the post-classical lyric as a move from the *body politic* towards the *body natural*, from the emphasis on the lofty lady's status as a *lord* towards depicting her more as a *woman*—noble, but desirable and accessible. I also look at several female-voiced songs in which we can detect the echoes of the anti-laughter discourse. There too, laughter goes hand-in-hand with references to female sexuality.

With chapter 5 the circle is complete, taking us back to the religious conception of laughing femininity. In contrast to chapters 2 and 3, which set out to show the impact of the ecclesiastical view of laughter on the secular world, this chapter explores the possibility of a reverse relation. By examining the sculptural representation of the famous biblical parable about five wise and five foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1 – 13), it reaffirms the enduring tension between laughter and female virtue. A comparison of the iconography, facial expressions, and clothing of the ten virgins in Gothic cathedral sculpture reveals the degree of interaction between secular and religious discourses. Having adopted in a positive way the secular imagery that had so frequently been used to criticize the vanity and weaknesses of the courtly world, Magdeburg's *Paradiesportal* depicting the wise and foolish virgins provides an inspiring and innovative model for its successors. Yet even though the Magdeburg approach expresses lofty spiritual ideas, not all of its innovations appear to have been well received. The treatment of the parable by the later sculptors seems to reinforce the tension between the religious and secular perception of laughter, suggesting that its innovative and positive use in the statuary in Magdeburg might simply be the exception that proves the rule—that female virtue is ultimately incompatible with laughter.

Finally, a word should be said about the vocabulary used in this book. Undertaking a historical study of laughter or any other emotion or gesture means struggling with the question of the translatability of emotional life across time, with the uncertainty that comes with the distinct referencing of emotions. The conceptual difference between modern and medieval laughter is reflected at the linguistic level: medieval Latin and vernaculars make no clear distinction between laughter and smiling. The latter, now perceived as an independent, self-standing emotional gesture, is treated rather as a *form* of the former, deviating from it only in intensity. A clear semantic distinction between the two emotional

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expressions does not develop until well into late-medieval and early-modern times.

The most common vocabulary used to refer to laughter and smiling are the Latin *ridere*, Old French *rire*, Middle English *laugh*, and Middle High German *lachen*, while the words *subridere* (Lat. and Ital.) and *sourire* (OF) actually refer to "laughing up one's sleeve," or "secret or malicious laughter."[31] Similarly, Middle High German *lecheln* means "to be disingenuously friendly,"[32] while the modern verb *lächeln*, currently signifying "to smile," does not acquire its present meaning until well into early modernity.[33] *Smielen* and *smieren*, the cognates of the modern English "smile," have a connotation that is completely alien to the modern mind; in heroic epic they provide a stark contrast to the regular *lachen* and are used to refer to a performative type of smiling indicating the balance of power in the scene.[34] In courtly lyric, *smielen* and *smieren* are used by just a few authors (Ulrich von Liechtenstein, for example) to refer to what nowadays can be translated as smiling, but appear to be a dialectal/regional phenomenon.[35] Similarly, the Middle English word *smile*, derived from the Old English *smerian* "to laugh," does not acquire its present meaning and usage before the fourteenth century.

As Le Goff points out, the creation of *subridere* (and its vernacular counterparts) is indicative of medieval attempts at codification. Unlike Hebrew and Greek, both of which had a more diverse vocabulary to refer to positive and negative kinds of laughter, Latin initially had only *risus* at its disposal.[36] While the Latin-speaking Christian thought inherited the conceptual distinction from

31 Le Goff, "Le rire au Moyen Âge," 10. Also see Ménard, *Le rire*, 31, 430 – 431: "Il n'y a pas dans le vocabulaire médiéval d'opposition de sense entre rire et sourire. […] L'aire sémantique du mot *rire* englobe le sourire." On the same distinction in Middle English see Burrow, *Gestures*, 76. For Italian see Galler, *Lachen und Lächeln*, 31 f.

32 "Auf hinterlistige Weise freundlich sein." Lexer, *HW*, 1:1849.

33 Galler, *Lachen und Lächeln*, 38; Kremer, "Das Lachen," 28 – 43. The negative meaning of MHG *lecheln* is apparent in its derivative *lechelaere* (lit. "laughers"; corresponds to modern "hypocrites"), which is used very frequently in courtly and didactic poetry. Lexer, *HW*, 1:1849.

34 Starkey, "Bruhnhild's Smile," 159 – 173.

35 Kremer lists several MHG synonyms of *lachen: grînen* ("to grin, to grimace"), *smutzeln* or *smutzen* ("to move one's mouth in laughter"), *kachhazzen / kachen / kachezen* ("to laugh loudly"), *kutzen* ("to laugh"), *smielen / smollen / smieren / smirwen* ("to smile"). *Lachen* is, however, by far the most common, and *grînen* is used mostly negatively. *Kachhazzen / kachezen* are Germanized derivatives from Latin *cachinnus* ("loud or violent laughter"). Kremer, "Das Lachen," 40 – 42.

36 Le Goff, "Le rire au Moyen Âge," 10; Le Goff, "Laughter in the Middle Ages," 48. In the Old Testament, *sâkhaq* is used to refer to "happy, unbridled laughter" and *lâag* designates "mocking, denigrating laughter." Greek is said to have made a similar distinction juxtaposing *gélân* (natural laughter) and *katagélân* (malicious laughter) (ibid.). For a detailed overview of laughter in Greek culture see Halliwell, "The Uses of Laughter," 279 – 296.

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its two source languages, it struggled to reproduce a similar dichotomy linguistically, which in turn became reflected in medieval vernaculars. Most of the Middle High German texts in this study use the word *lachen,* which I have tried to translate consistently as "laughter" when medieval sensibilities appeared to coincide closely with modern ones. However, I sometimes use the words "laughing" and "smiling" interchangeably when they refer to a restrained and controlled kind of *lachen* that nowadays could mean either a smile or subdued, soft laughter.

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1 "You Are No Longer a Virgin": The Two "Mouths" of a Medieval Woman

"But there is no reason to think the courtly culture of the High Middle Ages shared our attitude. If we are to discover their attitudes, we must respect the silences of medieval texts and resist the temptation to fill those silences with modern meanings."

(James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love and the Love of Courtliness*)

"Female identity resides in one key body part: that stereotypically female orifice, the vagina."

(E. Jane Burns, *The Bodytalk*)

The Importance of the Mouth

"I was asked a strange question: what the greatest treasure among all treasures in the world might be. And I answered: a little red mouth of a gentle, good-natured lady is *the* treasure above all treasures."[1] This peculiar reply opens a poem by a certain Heinrich der Teichner, an enigmatic but prolific author of the late-fourteenth century who left behind some 798 *Reden* (lit. "speeches"), all ending with the same phrase *also sprach der Teichnaer* ("Thus spake Der Teichner"). In his didactic poems—the tone is already discernible in his trademark signature—the poet explores a wide range of moral-ethical and theological topics with a freedom that is unusual for the Middle Ages, criticizing all social groups (clerics, courtiers, judges) and addressing all crucial aspects of human life, such as marriage, love, sickness, and death. The unabashed manner in which Der Teichner treats many of these issues points to his probable financial and social independence as well as his erudition and familiarity with a variety of contemporary discourses.[2]

The one-hundred-line poem "Von roten muenden" ("Of Red Mouths"), from which these unusual introductory lines are taken, is traditional and unorthodox at the same time. Upon first reading, it appears to be just another piece of

1 "Ich ward gefragt vremder wort, / waz auf der werlt der oberist hort / under allen horten mocht gesein. / ich sprach: ein rotez muendlein / zarter vrawn wol gemuet / daz ist ein schatz ueber allez guet" (*RM*, vv. 1 – 6).

2 Cramer notes that the poet, although highly educated, was believed to be neither a cleric nor a member of any specific court, but rather a private person who was affluent enough to support his literary activity. Cramer, *Geschichte*, 104.

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medieval didactic writing meant to instruct the laity in matters of comportment and Christian virtue. And indeed, this text bears a strong resemblance to love treatises known as *Minnereden,* in which the all-knowing male narrator expresses his opinion about how virtuous noblewomen should lead their lives. However, while completely conventional in its choice of tropes and motifs (courtly love, female beauty, and virtue), the poem is unusual in its development of these themes. It pushes the reader to establish an unexpected connection between the references to female virtue and the mouth, achieving this by initially producing not one, but *two* answers to its main question about the greatest treasure in the world and then sophistically conflating them with the help of the concept of treasure (MHG *schatz*).

The poem naturally falls into two parts. The first one includes the perplexing but important opening:

> Ich ward gefragt vremder wort,
> waz auf der werlt der oberist hort
> under allen horten mocht gesein.
> ich sprach: ein rotez muendlein
> zarter vrawn wol gemuet
> daz ist ein schatz ueber allez guet. (*RM*, vv. 1–6)

> I was asked a strange question: what the greatest treasure among all treasures in the world might be. And I answered: a little red mouth of a gentle, good-natured lady is *the* treasure above all treasures.

This opening is then followed by about thirty lines of a panegyric to the charms of the red mouth and physical love between the sexes:

> waz der mensch in hertzen trag,
> ez sey von leit, ez sey von chlag,
> daz muez allez sampt hin dan,
> wa liebs weib pey liebem man
> so gar mynnechleichen leit. (*RM*, vv. 19–23)

> Whatever a man may have in his heart—be it sorrow or grief—all of this must disappear when a lovely woman lies next to a lovely man in such a caring way.

This section of the text claims the greatest treasure in the world to be the woman's red mouth. However, what follows—introduced by the question "How can a woman keep the treasure?" ("wie ein vraw den schatz behuet") in line 37—provides a completely different answer. It features a dialogue between the narrator and a lady about the need to be vigilant against men's attempts at seduction. Like so many didacts before him, Der Teichner lectures his female audience on the importance of good manners (*zucht*), modesty (*scham*), and steadfastness (*staeten muet*) (*RM*, v. 38) and warns them to never let their guard down against those who might wish to ruin their good reputation:

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aver der sey maint zu ruem
und ze vall ir eren bluem,
wer den chant, den solt man fliehen
und allez gruezzen von im ziehen.
sich hat nicht so vil zu hueten
als ein weib mit weibez gueten,
dw natur dez twingt und muezzet
daz sew tugentleichen gruezzet
und nicht mer denn tugent chan
gegen vrawn und gegen man,
und erchennt nicht leicht da pey,
waz ein poez gedanch sey
der zu andern dingen gehoeret. (*RM*, vv. 79 – 91)

But if a lady knows a man believed to praise her only to fell the flower of her virtue, she should flee him and withdraw all her welcome from him. Nobody has to be as careful as a good, womanly woman, compelled by her nature to greet everybody kindly and incapable of acting other than virtuously towards women and men. She thus may not be able to easily detect that wicked thought which belongs to *those other* things.

In this part of the poem, Der Teichner evokes the topos of constantly threatened female virtue. While the noble lady is expected to be approachable in order to maintain her reputation as a "womanly woman," she is also advised to constantly watch for those who would interpret her civility as a sign of sexual looseness: "dannoch spricht ein man betoret, / ir sey anders dings zu muet, / man gewunns mit leichtem guet" ("For a foolish man would claim even in this case that she desires something else, and one can easily get it," *RM*, vv. 92 – 94). The narrator also alerts his female pupil and her whole sex to the ambiguity inherent in courtly love language, to the "double-talk," in which the praise of beauty is used to obscure men's true intentions. Aristocratic women must learn to recognize their persistent sexualization in love discourse, for men's words are not always what they appear to be on the surface. Thus the message in this part of the poem is very clear: the "treasure" to be zealously protected is the woman's chastity and good reputation.

The question in line 37, "How can a woman keep the treasure?" ("wie ein vraw den schatz behuet"), is strategically placed between the lecture on chastity and the introductory monologue about the mouth. With its choice of the definite article "the" (*den*) over the possessive pronoun "her" (*ir*) before the word *schatz*—the lady asks "how a woman can keep *the* treasure" rather than "*her* treasure"—this line seems to respond to the narrator's initial praise of the orifice, since it has been the only *schatz* (*RM*, v. 6) or *hort* (*RM*, v. 2) mentioned until this point. Yet without the second half of the poem, both the question and the reply are meaningless or confusing at best. Why should a woman take care of her mouth? Der Teichner's reply to the woman's inquiry in the following lines,

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however, makes it clear that by "treasure" he actually means female chastity: "zucht, scham, staeten muet / schol ein vraw in hertzen pruten, / wann sew wil den schatz behuten" ("A woman should cultivate in her heart good manners, modesty, and steadfastness if she wants to keep her treasure," *RM*, vv. 38 – 40). The word *schatz* thus connects the mouth and virtue—the two major themes of the work—implying that the attraction or actions of the former can have major repercussions for the latter.

Der Teichner's skillful manipulations of the two seemingly unrelated concepts illustrate very well the ambiguity inherent to the language of courtly love. It is remarkable that while the main goal of this didactic poem is to alert women to the dangers of such ambiguity, it relies on this very strategy itself. The audience was apparently expected to decipher and appreciate Der Teichner's puzzle. Otherwise, the *double entendre* and thus the charm of the poem would have been all for nothing. The question left to be answered then concerns the nature of the convention that, as Der Teichner hopes, would evoke in his listeners' minds the question of female virtue at the first mention of red lips. The popularity of the mouth motif in high- and late-medieval literature suggests that such a convention indeed existed. It can be found in courtly love lyric, romance, Wolfdietrich-tales, and other stories about amorous contests, such as Dietrich von der Glezze's *Der Borte* (*The Girdle*) or the love allegory "About the Most Beautiful Lady Called Red Mouth" ("Von der schonsten frawen genant der rot munt").[3] Since in many of these works it is the smiling or laughing orifice that the male speaker finds so attractive, exploring the medieval fascination with the heroines' mouths deepens our understanding of the textual references to their laughter. The mouth symbolism offers a new dimension for interpreting the connection between laughter and sexual availability; it allows the modern reader to make a mental leap from the former to the latter and discover an additional level of meaning in these old poems, which might otherwise remain unrecognized.

3 See Meyer, *Der Borte.* On the love allegory about the red mouth see Schmid, *Codex Karlsruhe 408*, 503 – 512; also published as *Die altdeutsche Erzählung vom rothen Munde:* see Keller, *Die altdeutsche Erzählung vom rothen Munde.* On the role of color symbolism and hyperbole in this *Minnerede*, see Lieb, "Wiederholung als Leistung," 147 – 165; Köbele, "Die Kunst der Übertreibung," 19 – 44; and Waltenberger, "*Diß ist ein red als hundert*," 248 – 274. Specifically on the mouth symbolism in this text, see Trokhimenko, "The Treasure above All Treasures."

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Mouths That Matter: Isn't It Obvious?

It is not hard to imagine that some readers may consider this chapter unnecessary. The association between the mouth and the female genitals seems to be firmly engrained in our post-Freudian minds. The mouth is perceived to be an extremely sensual part of a woman's body, a fact continuously exploited in contemporary culture, as evidenced by the current craze for lip enhancement; modern advertisements that zoom straight in on the model's sensual lips, often accentuated with bright lipstick; or Victoria's Secret lingerie featuring prints of sensuous red kisses generously scattered all over underwear briefs. And in contrast, the recent craze for the so-called "nude" make-up in cosmetics advertisement features an extremely pale, flesh-colored lipstick, shifting the viewer's attention from the model's mouth to her frequently over-accentuated eyes. This often produces an androgynous, almost alien effect, in which the young woman's femininity is extinguished. The connection between the two body parts is also reflected in modern language, with its numerous obscenities applying mouth imagery to genitals and sex acts and its very analogy—on both visual and linguistic levels—between the lips and labia.[4] Finally, one can easily find an explanation for the equivalence between the two organs in popular psychology books, as in Arial Arango's *Dirty Words: Psychoanalytic Insights.*[5] Inspired by Freudian psychoanalysis, it proclaims the existence of a metaphoric connection between the female mouth and genitals, a supposedly well-established "psychic identity between the vulva and the face." Arango notes, "Even the cold anatomists, when describing the vulva, have discovered in it *labia majora* and *labia minora.* The writer, Henry Miller, says that 'there are cunts which laugh and cunts which speak.'"[6] Such "insights" rely heavily on assumed cultural beliefs, in this case the audience's readiness to accept other connections between the two female orifices, based on their perceived visual similarity.[7]

4 See Borneman, *Sex im Volksmund.* Borneman lists 35 entries in the word family of "Mund," such as, for example, "mit offenem Mund dastehen: auf Oralverkehr warten," "Mundfunk: Kuß," "Mundharmonika: Geschlechtsteil," "Mündungsklappe: Regelbinde, Regeltampon," etc. Most of the obscenities refer to oral intercourse. (No pagination in the source.)

5 Arango, *Dirty Words.*

6 Ibid., 137.

7 In Freud's writings, the mouth is qualified as a genital symbol. He talks about the transposition of genitals to upper parts of the body in dream symbolism and treats the face of the Greek monster Medusa with its snake-like hair and gaping mouth as a representation of female genitals. See Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, esp. 387; Freud, "Medusa's Head," 273–274; at 273. However, it is Freud's theories of castration and sublimation that are also used to account for the recurrence of the motif in literature and art, particularly in "Medusa's Head," "Civilization and Its Discontents," "Three Essays on the History of Sexuality," and "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood." See Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents," 57–146; Freud, "Leonardo," 59–138; and Freud, "Three Essays," 123–246. Mitigating the horror

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Our postmodern mind thus may be inclined to draw similar conclusions about what seems to be a persistent and recurrent obsession with the female mouth and its activities in medieval discourses. To paraphrase James A. Schultz, one hundred years after Freud we *know* what things mean.[8] Yet, as Der Teichner's poem suggests, and the material discussed later in this chapter will further illustrate, a different mechanism appears to be at work in premodern texts. What modern psychoanalytic interpretations would examine through the lens of the unconscious seems to be a rather conscious choice for medieval theologians, natural historians, and poets. As Toril Moi points out, "To say that some or all of th[e] reasons are unconscious is to say that the speaker or writer in question does not know […] what they are," which does not appear to be the case in medieval texts playing with the red mouth motif.[9] These works are not only aware of the connection between the female mouth and the pudenda, they count on their audience's recognition of it, just not exactly for the same reasons that are likely to come to the modern, post-Freudian mind.

While conscious of Cynthia Marshall's and Nancy Partner's point that historicist and psychological interpretations can enrich textual analysis with their distinct insights, I agree with Ruth Mazo Karras, Lee Patterson, and James A. Schultz, who argue for the primacy of contemporaneous evidence.[10] As Karras warns, "We are reading the texts in a different world, a world that has learned from Freud and from various literary schools of interpretation to see sex lurking everywhere as an underlying motive or theme. Medieval people may not have seen things this way."[11] Approaching the red mouth motif as a manifestation of castration fear and sublimation can provide an explanation that is understandable to post-modern minds and reflects post-Freudian concerns. Although the mouth and genitals are frequently confounded in pre-modern discourses, such parallels are not reduced solely to visual similarity, as they would be in psychoanalytic interpretations. For example, it is rather the cause-and-effect or

of castration, sublimation enables an artist to give expression to his desires through the creative process. Freud, "Leonardo," 107. It signifies a shift of interest away from the genitals, since Freud sees discomfort with the genitals and sexual functions (genitals as "pudenda," as "objects of shame") as a corollary of the civilizing process. Freud, "Three Essays," 156 – 157; Freud, "Leonardo," 96. To use Arango's somewhat simplistic summary, men who do not have access to the woman's sexual organs often displace their longings to the areas allowed by conscience, particularly to her face, thus "transforming their desire to copulate into contemplative pleasures." Arango, *Dirty Words*, 138.

8 Schultz, *Courtly Love*, 1 – 8.

9 Moi, "From Femininity to Finitude," 866.

10 Cf. Karras, *Sexuality*, 15; Patterson, "Chaucer's Pardoner," 638 – 680; Schultz, *Courtly Love*. For objections to the historicist perspective see Scala, "Historicists and Their Discontents," 108 – 131; Marshall, "Psychoanalyzing the Prepsychoanalytic Subject," 1207 – 1216. A more recent addition to this discussion is Partner, "The Hidden Self," 42 – 64, in which she defends the usefulness of psychoanalysis for pre-modern historiography.

11 Karras, *Sexuality*, 15.

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functional connection that is more prominent in medical writings, medieval folklore, and comic tales such as Old French fabliaux, Chaucer's Miller's Tale, or the early-modern German *Fastnachtspiele.*[12] The bawdy and oftentimes misogynist style of many of these stories allows for the most direct and unabashed treatment of this theme, confounding all female orifices into one big genital or virtually placing a woman's mouth between her legs as a symbol of utmost immoderation—be it in speech, food, drink, or sexual activity. In contrast, medieval courtly literature is more likely to hide behind euphemisms and make use of the convention known as the *quinque lineae amoris* ("five stages of love"). Even though these aristocratic texts are strikingly different in their style and language from the explicit and often crass fabliaux, the ultimate outcome of their strategy is the same—the activity of one orifice inevitably leads to or symbolizes the fall of the other. The author's hints or contextual clues make it clear that the audience's appreciation of the work's cheeky humor depends on its ability and willingness to make this connection.

To return to pre-modern evidence does not mean to fall into the trap of what Nancy Partner calls "ascribing the mental life of early infancy to the Middle Ages."[13] Neither is it intended as an acceptance of an unsurpassable abyss between the past and the present, a categorical rejection of any similarities in the emotional and rational structure between medieval and modern people. The goal of seeking answers in medieval discourses is first and foremost to examine these old texts on their own terms, to hear what they say before interpreting what they might mean to *us.* As it is in ours today, sex was intricately woven into the fabric of the medieval universe. For this reason, it is important to understand the sexual symbolism of the female mouth in its own historical context and not as a product of the modern yearning to see "how a medieval text could satisfy modern […] preoccupations [with sexuality]."[14]

12 See Bishop, "'Of Goddes pryvetee," 231–246; Müller, *Schwert und Scheide.*

13 Partner, "Hidden Self," 43.

14 Patterson, "Chaucer's Pardoner," 657. Manfred Lurker's *Wörterbuch der Symbolik* supports my argument that the association between the mouth and the genitals is very old. In the article entry for "Mund" ("mouth"), Lurker mentions, for example, an ancient Hindu myth where mouth appears to function as a reproductive organ. He also points out the world-wide popularity of this metonymic imagery: "Eine sexuelle Symbolbedeutung (M[und]=Vagina) findet sich bei zahlreichen Völkern wie z. B. bei den Chinesen." See Lurker, *Wörterbuch der Symbolik*, 495.

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Mouths That Matter: Medieval Literary Constructions of Gender

As James A. Schultz's recent study demonstrates, medieval German texts seem to treat human beauty in a rather peculiar way. Of course, both ladies and knights are at all times strikingly radiant; yet, as Schultz points out, there seems to be an unexpected and puzzling similarity between the physical descriptions of male and female characters.[15] In fact, the evidence provided by the major Arthurian romances, heroic epic, and courtly love poetry uncovers bodies that "turn out to be virtually the same" and "not marked morphologically as male or female."[16] Men and women in these works appear to find one another attractive and be accepted by the audience as such not because of the impressive size of their perfectly shaped breasts or pectoral muscles, but rather thanks to the class that the physical body reveals, to its manifest nobility:

> Bodies differ in visible ways because they are noble or because they are beautiful (for which their nobility is a prerequisite). The nobility and the beauty of the desirable body are culturally visible in the morphology of the body itself. The sex of the desirable body is not. […] While the sex of the desirable body is not culturally visible, the gender of the desirable body is.[17]

As a result of what appears to be a purposeful move away from body difference in Old French texts to body sameness in the MHG tradition,[18] gender is constructed through the rhetorical elaboration of beauty or with the help of clothes. If the garments "disclose the body," inviting the spectator's gaze to linger over its hips and sides, then the body is recognizable as a woman's; but if the clothing accentuates the person's shapely calves, it is guaranteed to be worn by a man.[19]

The primary (genitals) and secondary (breasts, beards, muscles) sexual characteristics are not the only things that seem to be of little interest to MHG writers; the very standard of beauty used by the characters of both genders is said to be uniform. Exactly the same features mark both courtly heroes and heroines as attractive; they are all distinguished by a rosy complexion, red lips, and "display an identical radiance or identical virtues."[20] "Men's and women's lips," says Schultz, "are equal in color, shape, and the flames to which they are

15 Schultz addresses this topic in the article "Bodies That Don't Matter," 91 – 110; and most recently in *Courtly Love*, esp. 17 – 47.

16 Schultz, *Courtly Love*, 22. Also see Schultz, "Bodies That Don't Matter," 95.

17 Schultz, "Bodies That Don't Matter," 96.

18 Schultz, *Courtly Love*, 46. Also see pp. 22, 45, 79 – 98. Schultz even coins a specific term—"aristophilia"—to describe the medieval admiration of nobility.

19 Schultz, "Bodies That Don't Matter," 98 – 99; Schultz, *Courtly Love*, 40 – 42. Cf. also: "The aphrodisiac body, which is static […] can be inflected for gender but is basically the same for men and women." Schultz, *Courtly Love*, 91.

20 Ibid., 91.

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likened, and the torment they bring members of the other sex."[21] These conclusions appear to be supported by medieval manuscript illuminations commonly depicting men and women in a very similar manner as well. As in literary works, the two can be distinguished only by their hairstyles, the clothing they wear, or the activities they perform. Neither their bodies nor their faces reveal any characteristics we would expect to find in each sex. In addition, men and women alike display equally tiny, equally red, and equally tightly shut mouths. And yet, while such traits as a perfectly shaped nose, bright eyes, or a radiant complexion are indeed a must for either a male or female body to be considered beautiful, certain elements, such as the red mouth, prove to be much more ubiquitous in descriptions of women. Schultz sees this merely as a greater rhetorical elaboration of female beauty, as a "difference of degree," not of "kind."[22] To me, however, the striking majority of red-mouthed heroines, the erotic context that frequently accompanies the red-mouth motif, and the parallels and insinuations like Der Teichner's all suggest that the medieval audience indeed made a distinction between male and female mouths, which has several important repercussions for understanding the literary use of this motif. Firstly, this distinction can account for the attention given to the mouth in works that feature only women, as is the case with courtly love poetry. Male-voiced songs are unidirectional in their perspective, featuring only female bodies and thus providing no opportunity for comparison. Secondly, if the attractive mouth is indeed perceived to be more of a feminine attribute than a masculine one, we might ask what is at stake when the audience's attention is drawn to it.

A purely statistical analysis of how frequently the red mouth indicates the presence of a beautiful female body compared to a male one produces a rough proportion of 2:1. For example, in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival,* ten female characters offer a stark contrast to only five men.[23] This pattern repeats in his *Willehalm,* where the image is used once for a male hero (Vivianz, v. 49,15), but twice in reference to women (Alize, v. 180,9 and Gyburg, v. 229,22).[24] Hartmann von Aue's Gregorius is said in his infancy to have a sweet (rather than red) mouth that turns "pale and cold" after long year of self-inflicted penance;[25] however, here again it is balanced out with an example of its female counter-

21 Ibid., 36.

22 Ibid., 36–37.

23 Male characters include Parzival, Gahmuret, Gawan, Feirefiz, and a young page, a relative of Gawan's. The women whose mouths are emphasized in *Parzival* are essentially all principal female characters: Herzeloyde, Sigune, Condwiramurs, Cunneware, Liaze, Jeschute, Orgeluse, Antikonie, Itonje, and as a contrast to them, Cundrie. All MHG quotes of *Parzival* come from Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival.*

24 Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Willehalm. Titurel.*

25 *Gregorius*, vv. 1038–1039 and 3437–3438 respectively.

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part—that of Gregorius's mother and wife.[26] Conspicuously, only the ladies' lips are mentioned in Hartmann's courtly romance *Iwein*—in the case of the damsel seeking justice from her sister at Arthur's court[27] and that of Iwein's wife Laudine.[28] And it is impossible to forget the description of Enite's beauty in Hartmann's *Erec*. Her mouth stands out like a red rose against the background of her rosy-white complexion:

> der wunsch was an ir garwe.
> als der rôsen varwe
> under wîze liljen güzze,
> und daz zesamene vlüzze,
> und daz der munt begarwe
> waere von rôsen varwen,
> dem gelîchete sich ir lîp. (*Erec*, vv. 1700 – 1706)

> She was all that one could desire. If the color of roses were poured among white lilies and mixed together in such a way that the mouth was entirely the color of roses—that's what her body looked like.

Add to this pantheon of heroes and heroines Gottfried von Strassburg's Tristan, who is indeed said to have a red mouth ("sîn munt was rehte rôsenrôt," *Tristan*, v. 3334).[29] However, women's mouths are featured more often again, this time in the descriptions of the protagonist's mother, Blanscheflur, and his lover, Isolde of Ireland. In Blanscheflur's case, the very image is evoked twice: when the audience hears a detailed description of her beauty as seen through her courtly lover Riwalin's eyes (*Tristan*, vv. 925 – 928) and in the important scene of the two lovers' physical reunion, discussed in detail later in this chapter. For her part, the beautiful Isolde is said to have a "sweet mouth" (*süezer munt*) (*Tristan*, v. 11975) that "swells up" (MHG *ûf swellen*), which signals her falling in love with the protagonist. The beauty of the orifice is emphasized again in the most voyeuristic description of the heroine in the Love Grotto episode (Book XXVII). When her jealous husband King Marke discovers the two lovers sleeping in the forest, it is only the woman's beauty that Gottfried cares to mention, paying particular attention to her red lips—glowing like fire and accentuated by a stray ray of sun playing on her face.[30]

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26 Ibid., v. 371.

27 "diu suoze gemuote, / diu niuwan süezes kunde, / mit rôtsüezem munde / lachte sî die swester an" ("The sweet-natured one, who knew nothing but what was good, smiled at her sister with her sweet red mouth," *Iwein*, vv. 7300 – 7304). Quoted according to Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein*.

28 Cf. Lunete's reference to Laudine's "sweet mouth" (*Iwein*, vv. 7895 – 7900).

29 All MHG quotations come from Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*.

30 "ir munt der viurete und bran / rehte alse ein glüjender kol" ("Her mouth flashed and burned like glowing coals," *Tristan*, vv. 17568 – 17569); "ein cleinez straemelîn […] / daz gleste ir ûf

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The mouth functions as an inherent attribute of an attractive female body, while it is seldom emphasized in this capacity and to such a degree for men. When one examines the references to men in medieval courtly epic, two scenarios stand out: descriptions of male characters who are explicitly marked as young, or when they are observed and admired by women.[31] Besides Gahmuret, Parzival, Gawan, Feierfiz, and a minor secondary character, no other brave and masculine knights in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*—even those who are described quite elaborately—can boast a vivid description of an attractive red mouth. This is true for Ither, Count Orilus, or Arthur himself (to say nothing about dozens of other random and glamorous male characters). A very telling example is Ither, the famous Red Knight, so shamefully slain by the fool Parzival. Wolfram pays a great deal of attention to his appearance, depicting him as truly imposing and at the peak of his manly beauty. However, it is not his mouth's redness that captivates the onlookers, but rather that of Ither's armor and hair, offering a stark contrast to his white skin. The narrator paints a vivid picture of a magnificent warrior, both in life and in death,[32] but he never mentions his mouth:

> ez was Ithêr von Gaheviez:
> den rôten ritter man in hiez.
> Sîn harnasch was gar sô rôt
> daz ez den ougen roete bôt:
> sîn ors was rôt unde snel,
> al rôt was sîn gügerel,
> rôt samît was sîn covertiur,
> sîn schilt noch roeter danne ein viur,
> al rôt was sîn kursît
> und wol an in gesniten wît,
> rôt was sîn schaft, rôt was sîn sper,
> al rôt nach des heldes ger
> was im sîn swert geroetet,
> nâch der scherpfe iedoch geloetet.
> der künec von Kukûmerlant,
> al rôt von golde ûf sîner hant
> stuont ein kopf vil wol ergraben,

ir hiufelîn, / ûf ir kinne und ûf ir munt" ("A little ray […] shined on her cheek, on her chin and on her mouth," *Tristan*, vv. 17577–17579). A red mouth is also present in Heinrich von Veldeke's description of Lavinia in *Eneasroman*, vv. 56, 21–25.

31 The only exceptions to this rule that I found are the references to Feirefiz' mouth in *Parzival* (v. 758, 19) and Gregorius' pale mouth (*Gregorius*, vv. 3437–3438).

32 "Der was doch tôt sô minneclîch" 'Ither looked so handsome for all that he was dead' (v. 159, 7). Henceforth, English translations for *Parzival* are cited according to A. T. Hatto's translation of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (see "Frequently Used Abbreviations"). Here see Hatto, *Parzival*, 90.

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ob tavelrunder ûf erhaben.
Blanc was sîn vel, rôt was sîn hâr. (*Parzival*, vv. 145,15 – 146,3)

His gear was so red that it infected the eye with its redness! His charger was a swift sorrel, its crinière red all over, its trappers were of red samite, his shield redder than fire. His surcoat, well and amply cut to his figure, was all red. Lance-head and shaft were both of them red. The warrior's sword was all red as he had wished it, but well hardened at its edges. And the finely chased goblet which this King of Cucumerlant had standing in his hand, having seized it from the Table Round, was entirely of red gold. His skin was white, his hair red.[33]

Ither's beauty is important, but its role is to emphasize his splendor as a warrior and the overall redness of his attire, which captivates the young and foolish protagonist Parzival to such an extent that he is willing to kill his own kin—albeit unknowingly—for it.

Similarly, a red mouth is never a component of beauty in the case of yet another mature and glorious courtier, Count Orilus. Instead, he is presented as "der vürste wert unt erkant" ("the noble and illustrious prince").[34] The only time his red lips are mentioned at all is in battle, when Parzival's strike causes his nose to bleed, thus coloring his mouth:

swie daz bluot von der nasen
den munt im hete gemachet rôt,
si [Jeschute] kuste in dô er kus gebôt. (*Parzival*, vv. 268,19 – 24)

Although the blood from his nose had dyed his mouth red, Jeschute kissed him as he offered her a kiss.[35]

The redness of Orilus's mouth has nothing to do with beauty. In fact, here it is precisely the opposite—a site that is supposed to provoke revulsion rather than admiration, expressed with the help of *swie* ("although, even though"). His faithful wife Jeschute overcomes this revulsion by returning her husband's kiss despite the blood on his face. It is in this blood that the narrator and the audience are truly interested, which together with grime bespeaks his manliness and his toughness as a warrior. Even though Orilus loses, the acquired redness of his lips proves him to be a worthy opponent for the epic's protagonist Parzival.

The male characters who *are* described as having red mouths—the irresistible Gahmuret, his even more irresistible son Parzival, or the paragon of male beauty, Tristan—display their prominent attribute in two peculiar situations. First, in all three cases, the narrator emphasizes their youth. All of them are

33 Ibid., 84.
34 *Parzival*, v. 133,3; Hatto, *Parzival*, 141. Cf. also: "der stolze Orilus" ("proud/ noble Orilus," *Parzival*, v. 133,5).
35 Hatto, *Parzival*, 142.

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portrayed as beardless and extremely young, particularly Parzival. The two descriptions of his red mouth—while in Gurnemanz's care (*Parzival*, v. 168,20) and in the Grail Castle (*Parzival*, v. 244,8)—are accompanied by references to his tender age. On the former occasion, the knight is presented as "der *junge* werde süeze man" 'the charming young noble man'[36] (*Parzival*, vv. 166,28 – 29), and on the latter, the mouth is mentioned amidst praises of his beardless child-like beauty: "Ouch vuogten in gedanke nôt, / daz im sîn munt was sô rôt / unt *daz vor jugende niemen dran / kôs gein einer halben gran*" ("Moreover thoughts of his red mouth and of his being so young that not even half a bristle could be detected in his face, caused them [the ladies] many a pang," *Parzival*, vv. 244,7 – 1).[37] In Gottfried's text, Tristan's mouth, *rehte rôsenrôt* ("as red as rose," *Tristan*, v. 3334),[38] is similarly admired when accompanied by the references to his tender age, such as *junger* (*Tristan*, v. 2238), *jungelinc* (*Tristan*, v. 2240), and *kint*.[39] In the episode when Tristan is kidnapped by treacherous merchants, the heroes and his foster-brothers are explicitly called "children" (*kint*):

> biz zwei des marschalkes kint
> (wan kint der dinge vlîzec sint)
> under in zwein wurden in ein,
> daz sî Tristanden zuo z'in zwein
> ir wânbrouder, nâmen… (*Tristan*, vv. 2169 – 2173)

> At last two of the Marshal's children [for children are much given to such things] decided to take Tristan, their supposed brother, with them as a third…[40]

Finally, yet another possessor of an attractive mouth, Flore in Konrad Fleck's *Flore und Blanscheflur*, is the epitome of youth. The story of his life and his love for Blanscheflur encompasses the span of only fifteen years, from the moment the children fall in love in their cribs until they are finally reunited and married at the end of the tale. Throughout the tale, Flore is repeatedly marked as a child (*daz kint*), on a few occasions as *junkherre* and *jungelinc*, and most interestingly, as *der kindesche man*, an almost oxymoronic expression meaning "man-

36 Hatto, *Parzival*, 94.

37 My emphasis. Hatto, *Parzival*, 129. In addition, the red mouth seems to be a genetic marker of Gahmuret's line in this romance: both of his sons inherit it, even the black-and-white Moor Feierfiz (v. 758,19). Conspicuously, the description of the little page, an obscure secondary character and a distant relative of Gawan, does *not* include a reference to the color of his mouth, only to its handsome appearance: "Lyâze was des kindes base. / sîn munt, sîn ougen unt sîn nase / was reht der minne kerne" ("Liaze was the child's aunt. His mouth, eyes, and nose were Love's true kernel"). *Parzival*, vv. 429,23 – 25; Hatto, *Parzival*, 220.

38 As translated by A. H. Hatto in Hatto, *Tristan*, 85 (see "Frequently Used Abbreviations").

39 Cf. *Tristan*, vv. 2282 – 2283, 2238, 2689, 2753, 3145, 3273.

40 My translation. In order to avoid repetition, Hatto translates the first reference to *kint* as "sons" and the second as "boys." Hatto, *Tristan*, 72.

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child."[41] In fact, such repeated references to his youth really irritate Flore, making him protest on one occasion, "doch dunket ir mich ein kint" ("You still think of me as a child," *Flore*, v. 4064). It is not until the last quarter of the work that Flore is finally accepted as a man, and only after passing the test of true maturity when he rejects Blanscheflur's offer to die instead of him.

The second context in which the description of a male character's mouth is frequently found is when he is said to be watched and desired by women.[42] As Gahmuret proudly parades on horseback in Wolfram von Eschenbach's epic, the crowd admires his ruby-red mouth and other beautiful body parts.[43] This leads to a peculiar battle in which two powerful queens—Queen Herzeloyde and the Queen of France (*Parzival*, vv. 63,16–18)—fight over his love in a clear and unusual reversal of traditional gender roles. Both references to Parzival's lips occur in a similar situation when the hero is closely observed or gazed at, first by the female members of Gurnemanz's household and later by the ladies in the Grail castle. Sandra Summers's analysis of the bathtub episode demonstrates that Parzival is feminized "or, at least ambiguously gendered" by his naked body and his red lips.[44] Finally, in Gawan's case the image is used again when he is described as seen through the maidens' eyes (*Parzival*, v. 575, 21). Even if the male bodies are not entirely feminized in these episodes, their tender age or their depiction as passive objects of a gaze place them in a position typically occupied by women: on display, their every limb and movement carefully watched and evaluated. The relatively small number of such male characters also suggests that the red mouth is a gendered characteristic that is more likely to be a part of the feminine beauty ideal.

In contrast, female beauty is inseparable from the image of the red mouth. Konrad Fleck's Flore is conspicuously mistaken for a girl when discovered in bed by a servant, the confusion resulting from the boy's feminine beauty, which is emphasized throughout the work.[45] Among women, Parzival's cousin Sigune is presented as "she of the red lips."[46] Her mouth plays a crucial role in her depiction as a worldly, courtly, beautiful, and sexually attractive young woman. It is what men notice first when they gaze at her countenance. When she willingly

41 Cf. *daz kint: Flore*, vv. 1390, 1940–1941, 3224, 3895, 4064, 4966–4967, 5457; *junkherre: Flore*, vv. 3024, 3065, 5100; *jungelinc: Flore*, vv. 3059, 3064, 5254, 5530, 6543, 6666; *der kindesche man: Flore*, vv. 2552–2556, 5013–5017. For a detailed study of Fleck's work see Altpeter-Jones, "Trafficking in Goods and Women."

42 For a recent study of the role and power of women's gaze in Middle High German literature see Summers, "*Frouwen schouwen.*"

43 *Parzival*, v. 75,30; Hatto, *Parzival*, 43.

44 Summers, "*Frouwen schouwen*," 165. Schultz also admits that male beauty is mentioned when women gaze at it. Schultz, *Courtly Love*, 35.

45 Cf. *Flore*, vv. 1834–1847 and 6819–6864.

46 Hatto, *Parzival*, 81. Cf. "ir rôter munt sprach sunder twâl," *Parzival*, v. 140,15.

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separates herself from the world and dedicates her body and soul to God—thus becoming sexually unavailable and physically wasted—this very important attribute finally loses its charm: "ir dicker munt heiz rôt gevar / was dô erblichen unde bleich" ("Her full, hot, red lips were withered and blenched now that joy of this world had deserted her," *Parzival*, vv. 435, 26–27).[47] Parzival is so shocked by Sigune's transformation that he even exclaims in grief, specifically focusing on the paleness of her mouth rather than on her overall haggard appearance: "Oh woe, where are your red lips?" ("Ôwê war kom dîn rôter munt?" *Parzival*, v. 252, 27).

The role of the mouth in medieval perceptions of feminine beauty becomes even clearer in the depictions of the attractive Duchess Jeschute and the hideous Sorceress Cundrie. When Duchess Jeschute lies semi-naked in the forest, it is not her voluptuous body to which the audience's mental eye is drawn first, but to "Love's blazon—a mouth of translucent red, torment to the hearts of amorous knights"[48] ("der minne wâfen, / [ein] munt durchliuhtic rôt, / und gerndes ritters herzen nôt," *Parzival*, vv. 130,4–6). Wolfram does not stop here, however, but continues:

> innen des diu vrouwe slief,
> der munt ir von einandes lief;
> der truoc der minne hitze viur.
> sus lac des wunsches âventiur.
> von snêwîzem beine
> nâhe bî ein ander cleine,
> sus stunden ir die liehten zene.
> ich waen mich iemen küssens wene
> an ein sus wol gelobten munt:
> daz ist mir selten worden kunt. (*Parzival*, vv. 130,7–16)

> She slept with parted lips that wore the flames of Love's hot fire. Thus lay the loveliest challenge to adventure imaginable! Her gleaming close-set teeth lay in neat rows of snow-white ivory. [I fancy none will accustom me to kissing so well praised a mouth! Such things never come my way.][49]

Wolfram emphasizes Jeschute's irresistible sex appeal by calling her *des wunsches âventiur.* Spiewock's German translation of the phrase as "ein wahres Wunder an Vollkommenheit" ("true wonder of perfection") deprives the metaphor of its *double entendre*, a technique that Wolfram uses so skillfully throughout the work. A.T. Hatto's English translation, however, reproduces this play on words much more accurately. While the MHG word *âventiure* can mean

47 Hatto, *Parzival*, 223.
48 Ibid., 76.
49 Ibid.

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"wonder" (Germ. *Wunder*),[50] its other, more primary meanings include "adventure" (Germ. *Abenteuer*) and "challenge" (Germ. *Wagnis*, *Herausforderung*).[51] Jeschute thus represents not merely a wonder of perfection, but a perfect adventure or a perfect challenge. It is quite obvious what kind of adventure would be on a man's mind if he stumbled upon a semi-naked, red-mouthed sleeping beauty lying alone in the woods. The medieval public both outside and within the universe of the text clearly knows this too. The former perceives Parzival's attack as humorous because its expectations are subverted; the latter, represented by Jeschute's husband Orilus, condemns the heroine to long days of punishment for a suspected transgression. The assumption in this episode is that the woman's charming mouth would cause a man to lose his head.

Consequently, when Jeschute's enraged husband Orilus suspects infidelity and threatens his wife with the harshest treatment possible, he promises that the first thing she will lose will be the color of her mouth, the symbol of her erotic power: "I will make your red lips fade and teach their color to your eyes" ("ich sol velwen iuweren rôten munt, / [und] iuwern ougen machen roete kunt," *Parzival*, vv. 135,5 – 6).[52] It is important, however, that even Orilus's harsh treatment fails to extinguish Jeschute's sex appeal, for unlike those of the recluse Sigune, this innocent woman's charms do not diminish despite the physical deprivation she has to endure. When Parzival meets the couple in the forest,[53] Jeschute's mouth strikes him as being as red as ever—the primary proof of her beauty—in stark contrast to her tattered and torn appearance, her undignified saddle, and her half-dead horse: "Wherever she had it from, her lips were red, their colour was such that you could have struck fire from them" ("swie ez ie kom, ir munt was rôt: / der muose alsölhe varwe tragen, / man hete viur wol drûz geslagen," *Parzival*, vv. 257,18 – 20).[54]

All sexually attractive women in Wolfram's *Parzival* are described as having red lips. Cunneware, Liaze, and Itonje are said to have sweet lips or lips as red as fire;[55] so does Condwiramurs as she kisses Parzival in her castle of Belrepeire;[56] and so do the maidens in the Grail castle, Orgeluse, and the daughters of the pilgrim whom Parzival meets on his way to Trevrizent.[57] And of course, one cannot forget Antikonie, whose behavior differs substantially from the way it is

50 Lexer, *HW* 3:997.
51 Hennig, *Kleines Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, 16; Lexer, *HW* 1:105.
52 Hatto, *Parzival*, 79.
53 Cf. Wolfram's extremely sensual description of Jeschute's body gleaming through the holes in her rags. *Parzival*, vv. 257,10 ff.
54 Hatto, *Parzival*, 136.
55 *Parzival*, vv. 151,19 (*minneclîcher munt*); also vv. 176,9 and 631,12.
56 Ibid., v. 187,3 and also later in v. 807,5.
57 Ibid., vv. 233,4; 729,1; and 449,28.

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described in Chrétien de Troyes' version of the story. Wolfram untiringly emphasizes Antikonie's virtue and thus presents his heroine in a more favorable light compared to her Old French counterpart. By doing so, he plays with the audience's anticipation that a description of the woman's indiscretion must inevitably follow; for anybody hearing the triple reference to Antikonie's seductive red mouth[58] would understand why Gawan's hand could so boldly stray under her skirt and stroke her thigh.[59] The beauty of all these physically perfect and sexually attractive characters contrasts with the monstrous body of Cundrie the sorceress, the paragon of ugliness, who curses Parzival at King Arthur's court. Befitting her overall appearance, her mouth is said to be as "bluish [as] a violet" ("ir munt gap schîn / als ein vîol weitîn," *Parzival*, vv. 780, 21–22). In all of these cases, the references to the orifice occur in the midst of detailed head-to-toe descriptions, when the lady functions as the object of the male gaze. The red mouth is thus a crucial element in constructing the ideal of noble and desirable femininity.[60]

Like other texts, Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst* (abbreviated as *FD*) abounds with descriptions of beautiful women endowed with beautiful and sensual mouths.[61] Disguised as Lady Venus in his travels, Ulrich meets many noble ladies, and all are described as having red lips. This image, however, is never evoked to describe the knights against whom he fights, nor is it mentioned as part of Ulrich's own appearance:

indes chom der potestat
hin zuo den vrowen als man bat,
da gruozt in sa an der stunt
vil manic rosenvarber munt. […]
mit manger schoenen vrowen segen

58 Ibid., vv. 405,16–21; 409,25; and 426,9–427,1; Hatto, *Parzival*, 208, 210, 218.

59 Hatto, *Parzival*, 208–209.

60 Interestingly, the most common description of Orgeluse—the most powerful female character in this work—is "sweet lips" (*Parzival*, vv. 509,12; 515,12; 622, 28; Hatto, *Parzival*, 259, 262, 312). The first two references, however, serve less to depict Orgeluse's loveliness than to provide the contrast between her angelic face and the viciousness of the words issuing from her mouth. The third reference deals more with her appearance, describing her fair skin and her sweet lips. There is only one reference to Orgeluse's red mouth ("ir süezer munt rôt gevar," *Parzival*, v. 729,18) when she has to bestow a kiss of forgiveness and peace on her persistent wooer Gramoflanz at the end of the epic, thus coinciding with the beginning of her transformation into a more traditional courtly lady.

61 For example, the maiden welcoming Ulrich: "Do mich diu reine guote sach, / diu schoene uz rotem munde sprach…" ("As the pure and good [maiden] saw me, the beautiful one spoke with her red mouth," *FD*, vv. 565,1–2). (My translation.) All MHG quotations come from Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Frauendienst*. For a thorough analysis of laughter in *Frauendienst*, see Perfetti, *Women and Laughter*, 126–167.

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wurd wir gesegent an der stunt,
daz tet manch rosen roter munt. (*FD*, vv. 501,5 – 8; 516,6 – 8)

The magistrate arrived meanwhile
among the ladies. With a smile
each warmly welcomed him and said
a greeting with her lips so red. […]
The pretty ladies who were near
said prayers that there would be no slips.
These came from many rose-red lips.[62]

Frauendienst proves to be the work where Schultz's theory of identical, non-gendered beauty (at least facial beauty) fails. In order to conceal his manliness and his own mouth during his travels as Lady Venus, Ulrich has to wear a veil over his face at all times. Tellingly, his farce falls through precisely when he is compelled to lift his veil for a kiss of peace after the Mass:

Daz pece ab einem buoch ich nam
verbunden gar, daz doch niht zam;
der grevinne bot ich ez da.
diu hoch geborn diu sprach sa:
"ir sult die risen fürder nemen,
so mac daz pece mir gezemen."
zehant do si daz wort gesprach,
die risen ich von dem munde prach.
Diu schoene lachen des began,
si sprach: "wie nu, ir sit ein man?
daz han ich kürzlich wol gesehen;
was danne? der kus sol doch geschehen…" (*FD*, vv. 537,1 – 538,4)

I got the peace kiss from a book
but through my veil, which didn't look
quite right. I wished to pass the kiss
on to the countess; she said this:
"You'll have to move the veil aside
for such a kiss I can't abide."
When she spoke thus I did not quail
but from my lips drew back the veil.
The charming lady then began
to laugh and said, "Why you're a man!
I caught a glimpse of you just now.
What then? I'll kiss you anyhow…"[63]

62 As translated in Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Service of Ladies*, 105.
63 Ulrich von Liechtentein, *Service of Ladies*, 110.

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There is little doubt that despite his feminine attire, Ulrich's maleness is widely suspected even before this discovery. Although the knight is proud of his efforts to appear womanly and well-behaved (*blide*) in church, the laughter of those present at the Mass proves that despite his efforts, they are able to tell a man in woman's clothes:

> min opfer ich so blide an vie,
> do ich her von dem opfer gie,
> daz man daz pece sa dar truoc,
> gelachet wart des da genuoc. (*FD*, vv. 536,5 – 8)
>
> I tripped along so feminine
> they laughed—the women and the men.
> The kiss of peace was started then.[64]

Even so, everybody in this work honors the convention and treats the figure in a female dress like a woman. The people whom Ulrich meets enjoy and encourage his game of pretense. The knight's gender becomes problematic only when his masculinity is confirmed visually. He is betrayed not by his body or his mannerisms, but rather by his face and, more precisely, his lips, no longer hidden by a veil.

Sarah Westphal's study of a similar description in Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneasroman* is helpful in understanding the function of the veil. Camilla, the leader of maiden-warriors or Amazons, is described as wearing a *sydine riese* ("a silk veil") in addition to her helmet.[65] Westphal provides an insightful analysis of the word *riese* (or *rîse*) and determines that Camilla's veil must have covered the bottom half of her face:

> *Rîse* […] designates "[ein] herabfallendes Kopftuch," wide enough to be pulled over the face to cover cheeks, mouth, and chin. […] But there is little doubt that the function of this veil is to conceal what is normally exposed under Norman helmets *and* in descriptions of courtly women: the face, or parts of the face such as the lips, chin, or cheeks.[66]

Camilla is an example of how the bottom half of the woman's face stimulates male libido: "Her nose, mouth, and chin were so lovely that no man, however mighty, could see her and not wish she were lying in his arms."[67] These features attract the onlookers' attention to the body as a female body. The covering is necessary for Camilla to be recognized as a warrior and to leave behind all the

64 Ibid. Cf. "Der männliche Protagonist [übernimmt] mit den weiblichen Kleidern zugleich die Bewegungsnorm und die Einschränkung des weiblichen Körpers." Bennewitz, "Der Körper der Dame," 232.
65 Westphal, "Camilla," 240.
66 Ibid., 240 – 241.
67 As quoted in Ibid., 241.

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baggage of courtly femininity: "The veil covers the face, itself constructed to make tolerable what the viewer cannot bear to see," says Westphal.[68] At the same time, the paradox of the *rîse* is that it is precisely the veil—a traditional female garment—that identifies Camilla and her maiden-warriors as women on the battlefield.[69] The effect of the veil in Camilla's case is thus twofold: it simultaneously conceals and draws attention to her female body.

In Ulrich's case, the *rîse* is serving a similar purpose of covering and disclosing his lower face, especially his mouth, thus both reaffirming his status as a woman and making him unrecognizable as a man (even if the courtiers around him only pretend that it is working).[70] The magic of disguise is, however, broken when Ulrich has to free his lips to offer the countess the requested kiss. She immediately recognizes him as a male, implying that his mouth is not feminine enough to deceive her.[71] The countess's laughter in this episode is understandable and provoked by the incongruity of the masculine mouth combined with the feminine attire and seemingly feminine comportment. The bodies in *Frauendienst* are far from being non-sexed. Ulrich's lips make visible what was intended to be concealed by his gendered clothes and gender-appropriate behavior, and what those participating in the joke feigned not to recognize—the real sex of Lady Venus's body.

Both traditional courtly romance and *Frauendienst*, the parodic work exploiting the well-known romance conventions, seem to suggest (albeit each in its own way) that the mouth is perceived as an important attribute of feminine beauty. No doubt, men have mouths, but they are emphasized when the characters find themselves in a unique position either due to their age or as objects of the female gaze. Women's mouths are mentioned much more often and constitute, as Sigune, Jeschute, Camilla, Isolde, and a legion of unnamed ladies in courtly love lyric prove, a standard component of beautiful femininity. In Ulrich

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 The idea of disguise is represented by the word *verbunden* (*FD*, v. 537,2), which means "hidden, disguised, masked, hidden under the visor of a helmet" Lexer, *TW*, 268. Also cf. entry for *verbinden* in Lexer, *HW* 3:76: "bindend verdecken, verhüllen, sich das haupt verhüllen, sich vermummen, maskieren."

71 I have not found any indication that Ulrich had a beard or a moustache. In fact, the medieval illustrations seldom depict young men with beards (for example, in the Codex Manesse); and James A. Schulz points out the same in his study of bodies in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan:* "There are historical reasons for this. While older men like Rual might have beards, the ideal of youthful male beauty in Middle High German (MHG) courtly texts requires young men to be beardless." Schultz, "Bodies," 93. In his study of medieval childhood, Schultz emphasizes the artificial treatment of beards in MHG courtly literature and provides an extensive list of examples of beardless men in note 81. See Schultz, *Knowledge of Childhood*, 120 – 121. Joachim Bumke also mentions that close shaving was a common custom in Germany during the High Middle Ages. See Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 149.

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von Liechtenstein's case, the protagonist's true gender identity gets reaffirmed despite the fact that his feminine dress conceals both his most obvious anatomical signs of sex difference and body parts such as legs, which are commonly used to construct gender difference in medieval romance. The man's mouth is *the* body part that betrays him, parodying the topos of the qualitative difference between male and female mouths in medieval courtly literature.

The Two Mouths: Medieval Medical Perspective

The recognition of similarities between the mouth and female sexual organs has a long tradition in medieval medicine and natural philosophy. The fundamental difficulty of these texts lies in their lack of a consistent and uniform vocabulary to refer to various parts of the female reproductive system. In his enlightening, albeit controversial work *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greek to Freud*, Thomas Laqueur points out that the very terminology, so ubiquitous today, is, in fact, a post-Enlightenment invention: "Until the late seventeenth century, it is often impossible to determine, in medical texts, to which part of the female reproductive anatomy a particular term applies."[72] This opinion is supported by Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, who observe that the failure to use uniform language to describe female sexual organs can be traced back to the greater interest in the mechanism of reproduction rather than in the precise appearance of the body parts, which had in fact remained a puzzle for a long time.[73]

Revealing its close proximity to religious thought, medieval medical discourse commonly refers to the sexual organs as *pudenda*, Latin for "shameful parts."[74] As far as female anatomy is concerned, the uterus is undoubtedly treated as the most important part due to its role in the reproductive process,

72 Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 96. As Johannes Müller points out, this lack of precision surprisingly survives even into the mid-twentieth century. See Müller, *Schwert und Scheide*, 35.

73 Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality*, 25. Laqueur and Jacquart and Thomasset provide a fascinating overview of pre-modern medical knowledge of the female reproductive anatomy and of religious treatises on the origin of mankind. Laqueur's study also contains numerous useful and rare illustrations. For additional comprehensive overviews of classical and medieval medical and gynecological literature see Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*; Green, "Female Sexuality," 127–158; Green, *Women's Healthcare*.

74 Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality*, 13. Monica Green has examined the changes in how medieval medical discourse references the female sexual organs. Through a careful study of primary texts, Green points out that a shift occurs around the thirteenth century, where the female organs and sexual diseases are seen as "secret parts" and "secrets of women." See Green, "From Diseases," 6. Green interprets this development as a strategy of concealment and indicative of a change in the intended audience for medical texts from female to male (12ff).

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while the external genitalia receive much less attention overall.[75] It is telling that though the uterus is most frequently referred to as a "womb" or "matrix," it could also be called "vulva"—a term that appears to have been used rather broadly to refer to both the uterus and the external sexual organs.[76] The writings that address the appearance and function of the female genitalia, however, demonstrate that medieval physicians realized their semblance to the mouth, even though their view went beyond the modern labia-lips equivalence. The example that comes closest to the modern analogy can be found in the texts of the tenth-century Arabic writer al-Kunna al-Maliki, who observes that the vagina possesses the "prolongations of skin called the lips" and "has as its function protection of the matrix against the cold air."[77] The juxtaposition of the two female "mouths" is also present in Western medicine. Kathleen Coyne Kelly points out that the correspondence between the orifices can be traced back to Greek antiquity. The woman's body in Greek medical texts is described "as always potentially open at both ends, with two sets of lips at rest against each other."[78] However, Kelly emphasizes that the modern *labia majora* and *minora* are not the "lips" that ancient physicians had in mind. "Rather," she continues, "the mouth that they imagined is found further in, at the entrance to the uterus, that is, what Galen calls the 'neck.'"[79] Pre-modern medicine is clearly aware of the visual similarity between the mouth and the genitals, yet it uses different criteria than its modern counterpart to separate the interior and exterior anatomy. Even though the two sets of "lips" exist, which body part is introduced by one of them is not uniformly defined.

To make things more complex, the relationship between the two organs in medieval medical texts is also seen as functional. Like the genitals, the mouth leads inside the body, opens it, and introduces interior organs. In the fourth century C. E., Oribasius, the compiler of Hippocratic works, observes that "the

75 The very word *labia* is not part of the medieval medical vocabulary, since it does not appear until 1634, and the terms *labia majora* and *labia minora* were only coined in 1838. *Merriam-Webster*, 649.

76 The word *vulva* "tended, depending on the authors, to designate either the woman's external genital apparatus taken as a whole, or […] the womb." Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality*, 24–25.

77 As quoted in Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality*, 34. Laqueur points out that the translation of the word "lips" may be problematic, but emphasizes that Jacquart and Thomasset do give *lèvres* (lips) as an alternative translation. Having studied the French edition of their book, Laqueur concludes that this translation is indeed justified, since the context makes clear that the *labia minora* are the organs referred to in this passage. See footnote 64 in Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 270.

78 Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, 22.

79 Ibid.

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genitals lead to the uterus, just like a mouth,"[80] while Aristotle's *Historia Animalium* and the anonymous treatise *On Generation* describe the uterus as closing like a mouth.[81] In the Middle Ages, Isidore of Seville chooses a linguistic method to explain the function of these two orifices. He traces the etymology of the word "vulva" to Latin *valva*, meaning "the door or gateway to the belly"—the function that is also characteristic of the mouth.[82]

Since both the mouth and the genitals are orifices, the former serves as a point of comparison and even a source of vocabulary to refer to the latter. The mouth provides medieval teachers and students with a way to talk about the reproductive organs, to explain and comprehend their physiology and purpose. For example, Jacquard and Thomasset point out that the secretions of the female sexual organs are likened to saliva.[83] Even today one of the connotations of the word "mouth" is "orifice," particularly the orifices of internal organs, such as the stomach or uterus.[84] The Grimms' dictionary, for example, specifies: "Mouth, of human interior organs; orifice, a mouth of the stomach. Also: a mouth of the uterus [womb], cf. cardia; esp. orifice of the uterus."[85] This meaning was popular in medieval tradition as well.[86]

The degree to which the two orifices are fused in the medieval imagination and the usefulness of the mouth metaphors for understanding the female reproductive system become clear in the writings of the early-fourteenth-century physician Henry of Mondeville. In his treatise *Chirurgia* (1306), Henry provides the following description of the pudenda: "[Vagina] is made in such a way that it can open and close at any time; it is called vulva or cunt (*vulva vel cunnus*). […]

80 The Hippocratic work *Diseases of Women* also calls the entrance to the uterus "the mouth of the uterus." Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 "Vulva vocata quasi valva, id est ianua ventris…" Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarvm*, 137. Although it is indisputable that in this particular case, Isidore means female womb when he uses the word *ventris* (Genitive case of *venter*, "belly," "womb"), it is interesting to point out the following meanings of the English word "belly." According to *Merriam-Webster*, "belly" stands for both "stomach" and "womb/uterus" (see meanings b and d), which demonstrates that both the vulva and the mouth can be used to signify the entrance to the belly. *Merriam-Webster*, 105.

83 Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality*, 37.

84 "Mund, öffnung einer höhle." *DWb* 12:2683. Also see *Duden Deutsches Universalwörterbuch*, 1047; Wahrig, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 2580. For English definitions, see *Merriam-Webster:* "something that resembles a mouth, esp. in affording entrance or exit; as: b: the surface opening of an underground cavity." *Merriam-Webster*, 761.

85 "Mund, an menschlichen inneren organen; *orificium*, dez magen munt. Also: mund der gebärmutter, vgl. magenmund; sp. muttermund." *DWb* 12:2683. Both Wahrig and *Duden* differentiate between the external and internal *Muttermund*, i.e., the orifice of the uterus and the opening of the vagina respectively. The polysemy is strikingly reminiscent of the ambiguous medieval medical terminology.

86 See BMZ 2.1:235.

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When the woman is sitting with her thighs parted, it affects the air entering the womb, as the uvula does for air entering the mouth."[87] The functional connection between the two orifices in Henry's work goes even further than the "mouth of the womb"; the physiology of the two organs must be similar as well. Even more striking is the view of a cause-and-effect connection between the two "mouths." Several of Laqueur's examples suggest that some medieval natural philosophers viewed the link between these orifices as having causal consequences in the body, as being real. This causality is recognizable in the medieval belief that if a woman was vomiting blood she would stop if she started to menstruate,[88] or that female singers who did not menstruate must be infertile.[89] Laqueur concludes that these examples illustrate an association "between the throat or neck through which air flows and the neck of the womb through which the menses passes."

> [A]ctivity in one detracts from activity in the other. (In fact, metaphorical connections between the throat and the cervix/vagina or buccal cavity and pudenda are legion in antiquity and still into the nineteenth century.) […] Put differently, a claim that is made in one case as metaphor—the emissions that both a man and a woman deposit in front of the neck of the womb are drawn up "with the aid of breath, as with the mouth or nostrils"—has literal implications in another: singers are less likely to menstruate.[90]

A similarity in function and mutual dependency between the two organs can have serious implications for female members of the patriarchal society. The woman's physical characteristics or the activity of her mouth can be interpreted as indicators of her sexual behavior and morality. As Ann Hanson and David Armstrong's analysis of Aeschylus illustrates, such assumptions were already common in antiquity. The ancient texts establish a firm connection between an enlarged neck and the loss of virginity. The female neck in Greek literary works is seen as homologous to the neck of the uterus: "First intercourse deepens a woman's voice and enlarges her neck, which corresponds in sympathy to the stretching of her lower neck."[91] Lisa Perfetti has shown that this belief is not limited to the antique world or European Middle Ages, but can also be found in medieval Arab texts, warning that a woman with a large mouth also has a large vagina and should therefore be avoided.[92]

Finally, it is important to point out that medieval sexual vocabulary was not

87 The insertion in square parentheses belongs to the authors. See Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality*, 45.
88 Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 37.
89 Ibid., 36.
90 Ibid., 36.
91 Hanson and Armstrong, "The Virgin's Voice," 99. For additional analysis, see Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, 161.
92 Perfetti, *Women and Laughter*, 9.

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static, but rather changed over time. Monica Green points out a crucial shift in the medieval medical perception of the female reproductive anatomy and diseases; this occurs around the thirteenth century and leads to the strategy of concealment in the matters of female sexuality. The relative comfort with which earlier physicians had treated women and their ailments gave way to what Green sees as their subsequent "enveloping […] in a shroud of secrecy" and to the appearance of the "secret places" of the female body.[93] Green traces this shift to the changes in the intended audience of medieval medical literature—from the predominantly female (midwives) to the male (physicians)—and concludes that it is *men's* perspective on women's bodies that rendered the topic secret.[94] Remarkably, the idea of hiddenness linked to female shame is said to have emerged in the early-twelfth century, when the ideology of courtliness was on the rise. Medical discourse thus cannot be read outside of the larger intellectual culture of high- and later-medieval Europe: "Both clerical and secular intellectuals, working both in Latin and the vernaculars, readily adopted these new models of conceptualizing the female body."[95] Green's study of medical texts and the analysis of contemporaneous literary fiction prove that concealment does not at all "enshroud women's bodies with a protective barrier to the male gaze."[96] On the contrary, it provides medieval writers with the means to talk about female sexuality and the license to scrutinize female bodies without appearing indecorous. The link between the two orifices of the woman's body continues to be exploited in literary discourse, creating sexual innuendo and producing additional subtexts in these seemingly innocent poetic works.

The Two Mouths: From Kissing to Sex

Not unexpectedly, the connection between the two orifices in medieval literary tradition is affected by the Christian attitudes that define sexual intercourse as sinful and the genitals as shameful. The Early Church Fathers associate women with "open mouths" (i.e., talkative women) with lust, as these words by Tertullian illustrate: "Their God […] is their belly, and so too what is neighbor to the belly."[97] Clearly, excessive openness of the mouth is seen as a convincing indicator of sexual openness, and the sin of one orifice implies the potential

93 Gradually, the term "secrets of women" becomes normative in academic Latin and provides in certain vernacular traditions the standard terminology for referring to the genitals and their diseases until the end of the Middle Ages. Green, "Diseases," 6.

94 Ibid., 12.

95 Ibid., 6.

96 Ibid., 7.

97 Tertullian, "To His Wife," 43.

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transgression of the other. It is not surprising that almost any activity of the woman's mouth can be interpreted as threatening to her chastity, or already indicative of its loss.

In this context, kissing seems to be particularly dangerous. The medieval topos of "five stages of love" (*quinque lineae amoris*), according to Rüdiger Schnell, defines kissing as the penultimate step on the path to genital contact.[98] So it is no wonder that medieval proverbial lore would be replete with opinions like the one in Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval:* "Fame qui sa boche abandone / Le soreplus de legier done" ("A woman who lets herself be kissed easily gives up the rest").[99] Samuel Singer's multi-volume collection *Thesaurus proverbiorum medii aevi* (*TPMA*) (1995 ff)[100] contains proof of the motif's popularity in the Middle Ages. The belief that the woman's mouth, if used to misbehave, will inevitably lead to a transgression of her lower body appears to have been pan-European, since similar sayings are found in most languages. They vary from rather discreet versions, such as Old Norse "Þvíat koss lokkar konu til hjúskapar" ("With a kiss one entices a woman into a marriage") to much more blunt Italian "Donna basciata, e mezzo guadagnata" ("A kissed woman is half-won"); Old French "Car, quant la bouche est assaillie, du demourant on doit doubter" ("Because when the mouth is under attack, one has to be also afraid for the rest [of the body]"); Portuguese "La muller e a truyta, por la boca se prenden" ("One catches a woman and a trout by their mouth"); Spanish "No me hagas besar, no me harás pecar" ("Don't make me kiss [you] [and] you will not make me sin"); Latin and Middle High German "Os rubeum quantum tantum quoque sordidat antrum.— Ye röter mund, ye beschisser ars" ("The redder the mouth, the dirtier the arse").[101] Lest one think that such proverbial wisdom is merely the earthy bluntness of the uncouth, I hasten to point out that among these proverbs some were coined by courtly authors, such as Chrétien de Troyes and Chevalier de La Tour Landry; yet even these examples do not conceal the negative view of female sexuality. Both the Old French and the Middle English versions of La Tour Landry's work openly state, "La baisier est germain du villain fait" ("A kiss is related to a bad deed") and "The kyssynge is nyghe parente and Cosyn vnto the

98 Schnell, *Causa amoris*, 26.

99 As translated in Chrétien de Troyes, *The Story of the Grail*, 428.

100 The other primary paremiological reference is Wander, *Deutsches Sprichwörter-Lexikon*. To cite individual examples from these collections throughout my study, I use the following system: "WA, II, 1842, Leben 166," where "WA" or "SI" refers to a particular *proverb collection* (Wander or Singer, respectively), the roman refers to the *volume*, the following Arabic numeral stands for the *column* (for Wander) or *page* (for Singer), followed by the *keyword* and, finally, by the *number* assigned to a particular proverb.

101 My translations. Respectively SI, VII, 234, Kuss 5 – 6; SI, VII, 282, Mund 319 and 323; SI, VII, 234, Kuss 8; SI, VII, 282, Mund 326. Here the two orifices are conflated, which is not uncommon in medieval literature. See for example Bishop, "Of Goddes pryvetee."

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fowle faytte or dede" ("Kissing is a close relative and a cousin of a foul deed"), respectively.[102] The meaning of the euphemism "fowle faytte" is obvious: the worst "deed" for a young woman is to become sexually active, and foreplay in the form of kissing is certainly the wrong path to take.

In MHG courtly texts, the connection between the sinful activities of the twin orifices can be found in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, Neidhart von Reuenthal's "Summer Song 15," and Claus von Wizze's and Phillip Collin's *Nüwe Parzifal* (also known as the *Rappolsteiner Parzival*), to name just a few. Parzival's attack on Jeschute has been read as a parody of a love meeting or a rape.[103] The possibility of Jeschute's sexual surrender is clear to society both inside and outside the world of the epic; but while the latter has the privilege to appreciate and enjoy the humor resulting from its unfulfilled expectations about this scene, the former has to condemn the woman for her assumed infidelity. The victim's husband Orilus expresses his indignation when his faithful wife confesses that she was kissed against her will and robbed of her ring by an unknown wild man. The reason for Orilus's rage is not hatred for the intruder or pity for the loss of the precious jewel, but the kiss that leads him to believe his Jeschute has surrendered her whole self to her attacker: "Hey, sîn lîp iu wol gevellet. ir habt iuch ze im gesellet" ("Aha, you like him [or his body]! You have become his lover," *Parzival*, vv. 133,21 – 22[104]). The Old French version of the story allows the modern reader to fill in the gaps in Orilus's logic with the help of the notorious proverb, "A woman who lets herself be kissed easily gives up the rest."

Neidhart von Reuenthal's "Summer Song 15" presents a similar assumption that if a woman receives a kiss, it implies her sexual surrender. Like Neidhart's other "Summer Songs," this one features a conversation between a young girl and her mother, in which they discuss the daughter's dangerous infatuation with a certain knight Riuwenthal. The girl feels sad and preoccupied, because she is under what she calls the man's *zouber* ("magic, spell, witchcraft"):

> Diu muoter sprach zer tohter: "kumt ez dir von mannes schulden?
> "jâ, muoter, ich muoz von der manne schulden zouber dulden:

102 SI, VII, 234, Kuss 13 and 17.

103 Cf. Jaeger, *Origins of Courtliness*, 252; Scaglione, *Knights at Court*, 159.

104 My word choice in this verse differs from A. H. Hatto's commonly accepted translation of *Parzival* and comes closer to Wolfgang Spiewok's German Reclam edition. Hatto translates the word *gesellen* in the above-mentioned passage as, "You made a pair with him," which, in my mind, is not as strong as the German "sich hingeben" ("to give oneself to somebody") used by Spiewok. According to Lexer, *gesellen* as a reflexive verb can mean "in Liebesverhältnis treten (auch in obsc. [=obscönem] Sinne)" ("to enter in a love relationship, also in the obscene sense of the word"). Lexer, *HW* 1:909.

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mich het ein ritter nâhen zim gevangen."
"Nu sage mir, liebiu tohter mîn: ist ander iht ergangen?" (SL 15.VI,1–4)[105]

The mother spoke to her daughter: "Is it [the daughter's sadness] because of a man?" —"Yes, mother, because of the man I am bewitched. A knight dragged me close to him." —"My dear daughter, tell me now, has anything else happened?"

In retelling the intimate details of her encounter with the knight, the daughter exhibits surprising naiveté and ignorance, unlike many of her equivalents in Neidhart's other songs. Since she seems to have not the slightest understanding of what has transpired between her and the man, already obvious in her choice of the word *zouber* ("magic," "spell") to describe the event, her mother has to interpret the situation by drawing on her own experience:

"…Er kuste mich; dô het er eine wurzen in dem munde:
dâ von verlôs ich alle mîne sinne."
diu alte sprach: "*dû bist niht magt; dich rüerent mannes minne.*" (SL 15.VII,2–4)

"He kissed me; he had some kind of root (or a plant) in his mouth: I lost all my senses because of it." The old woman said, "*You are no longer a virgin; man's love has touched you.*"[106]

The MHG word *wurze* ("plant," "herb," "flower," "root") is often used to refer to a plant that has medicinal or magical qualities.[107] The daughter's inexperience makes her choose an ambiguous image to describe her condition. On the one hand, the plant metaphor refers to the man's tongue, while on the other it is intended to account for her stupor ("I lost all my senses because of it"). What she achieves, however, is quite unexpected. The older woman's decisive verdict demonstrates that her understanding goes beyond the mere kissing she heard about. She draws a parallel between the activity of the girl's mouth and the loss of her virginity. And although the daughter vehemently protests against her mother's insinuations about the so-called "love-touching" ("mir ist niht kunt um mannes-minne-rüeren," "I do not know of any man's love touching," SL 15.VIII.3), the old woman cuts her short—"You are not going to distract me with your tales" ("dû darft mich niht mit spellen umbe vüeren," SL 15.VIII.4)—thus insisting that her life-long experience and folk wisdom provide her everything she needs to know to interpret the outcome of her daughter's love adventure.

105 Quoted according to Neidhart von Reuental, *Die Lieder Neidharts*, 22–24. The abbreviation SL represents "Sommerlied" ("Summer Song"), as opposed to WL ("Winterlied"), the two cycles of Neidhart's poetry.

106 My emphasis. For a detailed analysis of the mother-daughter dynamics in Neidhart von Reuenthal's poetry see Rasmussen, "I Inherited It from You," 163–188.

107 "Arznei- und zauberwurzel." *DWb* 14:2328. The motif of a magic plant is very common in medieval literature. In courtly romances magic herbs often cure the heroes' wounds (Tristan, Lancelot, Gawan, etc.). See also BMZ 3:830–831.

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The mother's suspicion about the daughter's loss of chastity is well-grounded. How can a girl lose her maidenhood just from a passionate kiss? The fact that she is so naive as to be unable to recognize a man's tongue suggests that she also might not have understood and protested the man's more ominous advances, particularly if she was "under his spell," as she herself describes it. The mother's categorical statement, "You are no longer a virgin; man's love has touched you," thus reaffirms that kissing is just a step away from sexual intercourse. Even though the young woman may not be aware of the ambiguity in her description of the events, the older one notices the sexual symbolism in her daughter's description of the kiss. One way to read the statement "dô het er eine wurzen in dem munde: dâ von verlôs ich alle mîne sinne" is as a description of sexual intercourse, where the words *wurz* ("root") and *munt* ("mouth") stand for the male and female sexual organs. This use of plant metaphors is by no means unique to Neidhart, who uses it to be suggestive. Even in Wolfram von Eschenbach's courtly romance *Parzival,* plant symbolism is used for a similar purpose—to conceal and simultaneously refer to sexual intercourse between the two characters, the wounded knight Gawan and his lady love Orgeluse:

> ich wil iu daz maere machen kurz.
> er vant die rehten hirzwurz,
> diu im half daz er genas
> sô daz im arges niht enwas.
> Diu wurz was bî dem blanken brûn. (*Parzival*, vv. 643,27 – 644,1)

> I will make it short. He found the authentic hart's eye which helped to make him well again so that all that was baneful left him—a herb showing brown against white.[108]

The MHG word *minne* in the mother's "diagnosis" is yet another indicator of her conviction that sex has actually taken place, since one of the connotations of *minne* is "sexual, carnal love (often [used] exactly for sexual intercourse)."[109] In this respect, Neidhart's "Summer Song 15" supports the coarse folk wisdom,

108 As translated in Hatto, *Parzival*, 322. For a discussion of Wolfram's erotic symbolism and bawdy humor, see the essays by Blake Lee Spahr and James W. Marchand: Spahr, "Gahmuret's Erection," 403 – 413; Marchand, "Wolfram's Bawdy," 131 – 149. As Marchand points out in his study, "Wolfram knows well that a reference to the pudenda, no matter how oblique (as long as it is understood), will always wring a titter from a crowd." The name of the plant *hirzwurz* refers to the *barba Jovis*, a plant thought to have the power to cure wounds, draw out arrows, and remove spear points, but it also was used to refer to the female genitals because of its appearance. The reference to the female genitals is made even stronger by the vivid description "brown against white." See Marchand, "Wolfram's Bawdy," 137. Another common phallic plant metaphor is a thorn (*dorn*). One sees references to it in *Carmina Burana* and Neidhart von Reuenthal's poetry. A common vaginal symbol is a rose. For a detailed analysis of the sexual symbolism of plants in late medieval folklore, literature, and art see Jones, *Secret Middle Ages*, 248 – 273.

109 "Die geschlechtliche, sinnliche liebe (oft geradezu für beischlaf)." Lexer, *HB* 1:2146.

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“She who gives the man access to her mouth, might as well serve him with her body” (“Die einem den Mund erlaubt, die darf einem wohl mit dem Leib dienen”).[110]

A telling illustration of the *quinque lineae amoris* is found in Gottfried von Strassburg’s famous epic *Tristan.* The description in this text is more veiled compared to the two texts discussed above. Unlike Neidhart’s mother or Wolfram’s Orilus, Gottfried’s narrator does not use the love-making episode to make a negative statement about female sexuality, intactness, or virtue. Culminating in sexual intercourse that leads to the conception of the work’s protagonist Tristan, the encounter between the beautiful Blanscheflur and her dying lover is one of the most touching and lyrical passages of Gottfried’s masterpiece. As Riwalin lies almost mortally wounded after one of his exploits, Blanscheflur breaks all norms of propriety by visiting him disguised as a beggar-woman. As the princess sees her beloved on his deathbed, her grief and love cause her to faint. Upon regaining her senses, she begins to kiss the dying man. Her kissing awakens in him a life-force and desire that give him enough strength to make passionate love and conceive their future son Tristan.

While avoiding the crassness of the insinuations of Orilus or the mother in Wolfram’s and Neidhart’s texts, this episode still employs the motif of the *quinque lineae amoris* in a strikingly similar way that is both direct and elliptical at the same time. The body part mentioned the most is Blanscheflur’s mouth; its color, actions, and effect on the dying man are described numerous times. As a beautiful, strong, and passionate young woman, Blanscheflur is endowed with stereotypically attractive red lips, which, as she faints, turn pale (“ir rôsevarwer munt wart bleich,” *Tristan*, v. 1299). As she lies unconscious and lifeless (“âne sinne lange […] gelîche als ob si waere tôt,” *Tristan*, vv. 1305 – 1307), her mouth is lifeless and unattractive as well, expressed with the MHG word, *bleich.* However, it begins playing its life-giving role as soon as Blanscheflur wakes up:

Nu daz sî dô von dirre nôt
ein lützel wider ze crefte kam,
ir trût si an ir arm dô nam
und leite ir *munt* an sînen *munt*
und kuste in hundert tûsent stunt
in einer cleinen stunde,
unz ime ir *munt* enzunde
sinne unde craft zer minne,
wan minne was dar inne:
ir *munt* der tete in vröudenhaft,
ir *munt* der brâhte im eine craft,

110 WA III, 668, Mund 69.

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daz er daz keiserlîche wîp
an sînen halptôten lîp
vil nâhe und inneclîche twanc.
dar nâch sô was vil harte unlanc,
unz daz ir beider wille ergienc
und daz vil süeze wîp enpfienc
ein kint von sînem lîbe. (*Tristan*, vv. 1308 – 1325)[111]

As soon as she had somewhat regained her strength after her fit of feebleness, she took her beloved into her arms and pressed her *mouth* against his, and kissed him a thousand times in one brief hour, until her *mouth* awoke his senses and his desire [literally: his strength to love]. For love was in her *mouth:* her *mouth* made him joyous; her *mouth* gave him such strength that he pressed the splendid woman closely and intimately to his half-dead body. After that it did not take long before they satisfied their desire and the sweet woman conceived his child.

Gottfried's poetic techniques allow the audience to create in its imagination vivid erotic pictures of intense love-making, yet he achieves this by focusing exclusively on Blanscheflur's mouth. The repetition of the word five times, the emphasis on the mouth's agency, and the anaphoric description of its effect on Riwalin truly make the orifice what modern film terminology would call "the dominant" in this scene. The mouth is important for yet another reason: it initiates Blanscheflur into the ritual of physical love and symbolizes her becoming a sexually active woman. Like Wolfram's and Neidhart's works, but without the moralizing inherent in both of them, Gottfried's text presents its audience with only the beginning and the end of the sexual encounter, with its cause and its consequences (kissing, loss of virginity or chastity, and pregnancy), making a leap from the actions of one female orifice to those of the other.

Besides kissing, smiling and laughing are also frequently seen as potential precursors to a woman losing her chastity. Matthew of Vendôme (ca. 1170), the author of a long and scandalous poem, *Milo*, gives the following description of the five stages of love in his *Ars Versificatoria:* "Risus amor, coitus, ventris conceptio, triplex / Indicium laesae virginitatis habent…" ("Love welcomed with laughter, followed by intercourse, and then by the womb's conceiving, constitute a threefold sign that virginity has been lost").[112] The loss of the woman's most precious possession, virginity, is the result of a triple sin: the first one coming from the woman's mouth in the form of laughter (either seductive or foolish); the second is related to her sexual organs, the so-called "mouth of the womb," here even openly referred to as coitus; and finally, the third sin is that of the womb itself, conception and pregnancy.

111 My emphasis.
112 As quoted and translated in Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality*, 109.

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This is exactly what happens in Claus von Wizze and Phillip Collin's fourteenth-century work known as the *Rappolsteiner* or *Nüwer Parzival* (*Rappolsteiner* or *New Parzival*),[113] a 37,000-verse-long expansion of the Gawan adventure, supplementing Books XIV and XV of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival.* At the very beginning of this text, Gawan, known for his great popularity with ladies, expresses a keen interest in the host's daughter. For those familiar with his reputation and the rules of courtly love, it is not hard to predict how the relationship will progress. One can expect a daring and passionate love adventure, similar to those found in the epic's prequels by Wolfram and Chrétien. And indeed, the plot develops as expected in a familiarly elliptical way:

mit küssende so erwarp er vil
gezögenliche der minnen spil.
sü rettent zuo enander gnuog
unde lachetent früntlich mit gefuog.
ir megede nam verlor sü sam… (*Nüwe Parzival*, fol. 24[b], vv. 25 – 29)

With kisses he [Gawan] artfully achieved much in the game of love. They talked to each other enough and laughed/smiled in a friendly and decorous way. And she lost the name of maiden…

Like Vendôme, Wizze and Colin add a new element to the equation, "activity of the mouth equals activity of the sexual organs." Both texts suggest that laughter (or smiling) is the very first of the five stages of love, and they insinuate that it too can have the same dire consequences for the woman's reputation.

The Two Mouths: Extreme Cases and Confusion of Orifices

The connection between the mouth and sexual organs is exploited most successfully in the topos of the confused orifices, described by E. Jane Burns in her analysis of the Old French fabliaux. These bawdy comic tales in verse achieve their effect not simply by alluding to the motif of the two "mouths," but rather by confusing them. Such intentional confounding is based on the same premise as the courtly texts: the activities of the two "mouths" are intricately connected and almost reciprocal. Fabliaux are known for their crude use of mouth imagery to refer to the genitals and for their unabashed and obscene play on words that exploits the visual similarities between the two organs. Despite their lack of inhibition, these bawdy stories are by no means a medieval version of pornography. OF fabliaux and MHG *Mären* were written for an audience of higher social status, the aristocracy, the very same public that was fascinated by much

113 Wisse and Colin, *Parzifal*; henceforth abbreviated in the text as *Nüwe Parzival.*

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more "refined" courtly romances. These stories were read and openly enjoyed by men and women, including clergy.[114]

The two "mouths" emerge in these bawdy tales as truly equivalent and interchangeable body parts.[115] The fabliaux authors' keen interest in these orifices is attributed to their traditional depiction in medieval misogynist discourse as causing trouble for men; and indeed, all the fabliaux heroines are lascivious, demanding, and verbose.[116] The image of the vaginalized mouth appears to have been very successful and popular, since it appears in a number of texts as one of the primary devices used to solicit the audience's laughter. As Burns shows, in the tale "Du Chevalier qui fist les cons parler" ("About the Knight Who Made the Genitals Talk"), the sexual organ is even called a "*goule*, or gaping mouth."[117] Another story presents a monk who dreams of purchasing the ideal "cunt" from a salesman and rejects a specimen because it is not "sufficiently mouth-like to satisfy his desire."[118] The genitals are judged by the same standards of beauty as the real mouth: "Both its lips were thin and blacker than iron" ("Il avoir les levres ansdeus / Maigres et plus noires que fer").[119] In "Le Dit des cons," a mouth-like vagina (Old French *cons*) eats, sucks, swallows, opens, and closes like the upper-body orifice.[120] All these tales savor the sexual symbolism and openly liken the wives' voracious vaginas to their gluttonous mouths, reducing them by association to a wholly sexual organ. The women of the fabliaux narrative lose their heads metaphorically to the extent that their mouths are shown to function as vaginas. Burns observes that instead of bearing two distinctly different mouths—one facial and one vaginal, with independent functions—the sexualized female is shown to have only one kind of orifice. Whether it appears on her face or between her legs, the female mouth is erotic and wholly corporeal.[121]

A similar play on words is found in a German proverb in Johannes Agricola's collection. Agricola's advice about how one should treat verbosity in women clearly relies on this motif, while strangely reversing the expected order:

darumb meynen ettliche
dieweil sie das schwert inndem maul furen
musse man die weiber auff die scheiden
das ist
aufs maul klopfen.

114 Karras, *Sexuality*, 2, 15.
115 Burns, *Bodytalk*, 31–70.
116 Ibid., 31.
117 As quoted in Ibid., 54.
118 Ibid., 54.
119 Ibid., 54.
120 As quoted in Ibid., 54.
121 Ibid., 53.

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> That's why some think that since women carry a sword in their mouths [meaning "have a sharp tongue"], they should be hit on their sheaths, that is, on their mouths.[122]

The witticism definitely makes use of the audience's knowledge that the word *scheide* is a standard reference to the female genitals, following the pattern of the Latin word *vagina*, which literally means "sheath."[123] Agricola's proverb is thus a double pun, playing with the public's anticipation of a dirty joke that despite its misogyny turns out to be quite innocent thanks to his final clarification: the *scheide* he means is nothing but a "slit," a "hole," and a sheath for the weapon-like tongue; in other words, it is just a mouth.

The Dangers of Openness

When the fourteenth-century poet Der Teichner composed his poem, he did not merely recycle a cliché in order to evoke a traditional image of beautiful and noble femininity. Instead, Der Teichner structured his poem to reflect the cultural belief associating a woman's mouth with sexual availability—a tradition that he inherited from the centuries of authors who preceded him. Even though the authors of the great high-medieval epics never explicitly articulate this link, it is clear that the red mouth presents the noble female body as irresistibly attractive to male admirers. Over one hundred years later, Der Teichner employs this image and explains the secret of its charm. His poem is a warning to women, an invitation to read deeper into men's words, to anticipate the possibility of "double-talk," figurative speech, and euphemisms that conceal the true intentions behind the seemingly innocent and glorifying language.

As this chapter has shown, the link between a woman's mouth and her virtue precedes Der Teichner. The preoccupation with female sexuality is palpable in many writings of the European Middle Ages.[124] The contemporaneous conduct manuals I will discuss in chapter 3 illustrate that in aristocratic, courtly discourse control over sexuality could be achieved by limiting women's bodies spatially and physically.[125] It is thus not surprising to discover physically unrestrained, unruly, and immoderate women presented as sexually active and aggressive. As Joyce E. Salisbury points out, "The metaphor of sexual women being 'open' was pervasive, and this openness was also extended to include such things

122 Müller, *Schwert und Scheide*, 66.

123 Lexer, *HW* 2:683. Also see *DWb* 14:2396–2398.

124 It is particularly strong in the clerical tradition. See Blamires, Pratt, and Marx, *Woman Defamed*. The lay works like Old French fabliaux or German *Mären* do not seem to fear female sexuality, but still attempt to contain it by presenting it in laughable terms.

125 See chapter 3.

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as garrulousness—that is, women with open mouths."[126] As the Old French fabliaux show, the metaphor extends beyond chattiness to include eating, drinking, kissing, and laughing. The female body is not imagined as a sealed vessel, but rather as constantly at risk of becoming open through different means, particularly love and sexuality. Since the biological and social repercussions of sexual activity are much graver for women than for men, any interest in or appeal attributed to their mouths has to be interpreted differently as well.

Medieval medical theories, popular wisdom, and literary texts accept and perpetuate the link between the two openings of the female body. The function of both the mouth and the genitals as orifices lies at the core of medieval medical lore. Furthermore, limited knowledge of female anatomy and the consequent lack of precise and uniform terminology encourage the frequent use of mouth-related vocabulary to describe the sexual organs. Finally, the parallels between the appearance and anatomy of the two orifices foster conclusions about the cause-and-effect relationship of the two body parts.

Medieval folklore and literature assume the audience's awareness of the topos of the two "mouths." Proverbs, dirty jokes of the French fabliaux, and more refined and euphemistic descriptions found in courtly poetry expect their audience to appreciate their *double entendre*, to interpret the seemingly legitimate activities of the female mouth as references to sexuality or sexual organs. However, while the tellers of bawdy tales do not shy away from explicitly acknowledging all the parallels, courtly texts are much more veiled. They rely on the convention of the five stages of love, focusing only on the initial and final stages, and eliding everything in between. The examples of Gottfried's Blanscheflur, Neidhart's unruly daughter, or the seduced and dishonored maiden in *Nüwe Parzival* demonstrate that the medieval audience was sensitive to the erotic connotations of the mouth imagery and interpreted the opening of the upper orifice as the opening of the lower one.

This connection between the two body parts affects the perception of women's laughter as well. Depending on whether they represent a conservative clerical or more liberal courtly position, the educational manuals for medieval nobility discussed in chapter 3 either forbid women's laughing altogether, or only allow forms of it that can make the lady even more attractive in men's eyes. The parallels between laughter and virtue are frequently exploited but never explained directly. The confounding of the two female orifices thus opens up new possibilities for interpreting these courtly texts, restricted by the rules of propriety, etiquette, and refinement.

126 Salisbury, "Gendered Sexuality," 87.

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2 A Deeply Serious Matter: Laughter in Medieval Ecclesiastical Discourse

"For Christians, laughing was a deeply serious matter."

(Ingvild Sælid Gilhus)

"'John Chrysostom said that Christ never laughed.' —'Nothing in his human nature forbade it,' William remarked, 'because laughter, as the theologians teach, is proper to man.' —'The son of man could laugh, but it is not written that he did so,' Jorge said sharply, quoting Petrus Cantor."[1]

(Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*)

Medieval Theologies of Laughter

There can be no doubt as to the disputatious and heterogeneous nature of medieval culture, in which lay and clerical spheres, far from being separate, often created competing views of the body, sexuality, and femininity. It is precisely because vernacular courtly tradition did not exist in a vacuum, however, that one cannot fairly address the topic of laughter in the Middle Ages without first getting a sense of the prevailing clerical debates.[2] The issues raised by ecclesiastical thinkers, the uncertainties and concerns they express regarding the place of laughter in the life of a virtuous Christian have an indisputable impact on the secular perception of this emotional gesture as well. Importantly, religious discourse on laughter itself was polyphonic and did not remain static; rather, it changed over time, reflecting and adapting to contemporaneous sensibilities.

Writers, especially academics, often beg indulgence from the reader when they venture outside their domains of competence. Let me make a gesture in this direction as well. I am a philologist and a literary critic by training, thus this chapter takes me beyond my areas of formal expertise. The following overview of religious discourse does not claim to be exhaustive; a great deal more has been written on laughter in the history of religion than I can address here, and much remains to be explored still. Yet even a brief survey of this literature better equips us to comprehend the scope of the bias against women's laughter that I discuss

1 Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, 95–96.

2 "Es handelt sich […] nicht um eine Literatur, die in einem von der Kirche getrennten, höfischen Raum existiert hätte; viel mehr beteiligte sich die geistliche wie die weltliche Führungsschicht an der Diskussion." Haug, *Die höfische Liebe*, 34.

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more fully in the subsequent chapters. It allows us to situate the manifestations of this prejudice within a larger cultural discourse on the body, gender, sexuality, and emotions, and to detect in them a reflection of the overall ambivalence that marked medieval society's relationship to joy and hilarity.

This uncertainty was partially inherited from a variety of pre-Christian traditions and then further complicated by Christianity's own views on the body, virtue, and the afterlife. The study of religious thought has to be diachronic, since high- and late-medieval writings on laughter are heavily indebted to earlier debates and cannot be rightfully understood separately from them. Medieval thinkers struggled with the same questions that baffled their predecessors, such as the mechanisms and taxonomy of laughter, its eruptive nature, the difficulty of controlling it, and thus, ultimately, its connection to the body, fertility, and sexual activity. Needless to say, no consensus was reached on most of them during the period covered in this book.

The periodization suggested by the French historian Jacques Le Goff distinguishes three stages of the evolution of medieval laughter. The early Christian and early medieval times (particularly the fourth to ninth centuries C. E.) are dominated by what is frequently called a monastic model. During this time, the Christian Church did not yet know how to approach the phenomenon that it perceived to be dangerous; therefore, the predominant response to laughter was suppression.[3] The High Middle Ages was a period marked by an extraordinary growth of lay culture and the blossoming of secular literatures and art. It had inherited an apprehension of laughter from the preceding epoch, yet continued to debate its value and nature. Instead of simply banishing both laughter and smiling, high-medieval thought sought to define them at the very time when they began appearing in much of religious art, particularly in sculpture, as a means of separating the sinful from the virtuous, an example of which I discuss in chapter 5. Le Goff calls this second stage the period of "liberation and control."[4] Lastly, the Late Middle Ages and early modernity are often characterized as the era of "unbridled laughter" due to its carnivalesque subversion and *Lachkulturen*, the study of which began with the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin and remains popular until now.[5]

Despite this seemingly clear timeline, it is important to remember that the descriptions of these periods reflect only the dominant discourse, and that *both*

3 Le Goff, "Le rire au Moyen Âge," 5.
4 Ibid.
5 In recent years a number of scholarly studies have explored Bakhtin's theory of carnival, especially by Werner Röcke and his research group within the *Sonderforschungsbereich* "Kulturen des Performativen" at the Free University of Berlin, Germany. See Röcke and Neumann, *Komische Gegewelten*; Bachorski, "Performativität und Lachkultur," 157 – 190; Röcke, "Ostergelächter," 335 – 350.

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pro- and anti-laughter positions are continuously present at any point during the medieval era. Gerhard Schmitz's study of early monasticism, for example, powerfully complicates the view of the Early Middle Ages as a laughless time.[6] The early tension that he uncovers between pro- and anti-laughter forces resurfaces in high-medieval attempts to codify laughter, which are apparent in this era's scholastic debates, in the proliferation of smiling in art and vernacular literatures, and in the solemn warnings against joy, excess, and entertainment. Finally, late-medieval carnival processions continuously fueled debates about their propriety, techniques, and purpose. This suggests that the anti-laughter discourse had not been forgotten, even at this time. Der Teichner's late-fourteenth-century writings demonstrate that it was indeed so, for several of them familiarly treat laughter as a threat to individual salvation—the issue that was so prominent in early-medieval ecclesiastical discourse.[7] In short, while Le Goff outlines general trends in the medieval way of thinking about laughter and joy, the true medieval attitude is best expressed by his own admission that there is no such thing as "the heresy of laughter."[8]

Fighting the Body: Laughter in the Early Church and Early Medieval Monasticism

In his essay on the role of gestures and ceremonial during the medieval period, Klaus Schreiner points out a dualism that is characteristic of medieval anthropology, i.e. the relationship between body and soul, between *actus animi* and *actus corporis*, between *homo interior* and *homo exterior:*

> The union of soul and body allows medieval theologians and writers to recognize in the movements of the body (*motus corporis*) the movements of the soul (*motus animae*), to turn the face (*facies*) into a reflection of the heart (*speculum coralis*), and treat the posture of the body (*gestus corporis*) as an indicator of the state of mind (*signum mentis*).[9]

As a bodily expression, as *actus corporis*, laughter is always interpreted in religious discourse as a manifestation of the person's moral virtue or corruptibility. It becomes part of the debate on the corporal and the spiritual, and, consequently, sin and virtue as well as eternal damnation and salvation. The early

6 Schmitz, "*quod rident homines*," 3–15.

7 See e.g., #80 ("Von der werelt," 'Of the World'); #164 ("Von unrechten vraüden," 'Of Unjust Pleasures'); and Teichner, *Gedichte*, 91–92, 185 (respectively).

8 "Je n'ais pas rencontré d'hérésie du rire." Le Goff, "Le rire au Moyen Âge," 5.

9 My translation. Schreiner, "'Er küsse mich," 89.

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Church establishes these theoretical paradigms and sets the tone for later discussions about the place of laughter in the life of a Christian.

The early texts' position on laughter is far from favorable. Both the Old and the New Testament provide arguments to convince believers that earthly joy is incompatible with the Christian ethos. Indeed, how could a sensitive and sensible person experience anything but awe and sadness when made aware of the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice, the transience of human existence, and the impending Apocalypse? John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople (347 – 407 C.E.), presents laughter as callous when seen within the context of the tragedy of the Crucifixion: "Christ was crucified for your ills, and dost thou laugh? He was buffeted, and endured so great sufferings because of thy calamity, and the tempest that had overtaken thee; and dost thou play the reveler?"[10] In the early Christian worldview, rejoicing is shortsighted; the only true happiness is the one that will be available to the chosen in the afterlife, while the sinners should be constantly fearful of Judgment Day. Laughter thus becomes an important element of eschatology and apocalypticism. Its foolishness is condemned in four verses of Ecclesiastes (Eccl. 2:2, 3:4, 7:4, and 7:6)[11] that serve as the foundation for what may well be considered the most important Christian statement on the subject—a passage from the Sermon of the Plain in the Gospel of Luke: "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. […] Woe to you who are laughing, for you will mourn and weep" (Luke 6:21 and 6:25 respectively). Luke's message is also restated at the end of the Epistle of James, who speaks of abandoning mirth as a sign of humility before God: "Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you" (James 4:9 – 10). For these reasons, the writings of Augustine, Jerome, Gregory the Great, and Isidor of Seville treat laughter as a spiritual matter. Gregory I (d. 604 C. E.) and Augustine agree that one could not rejoice with the World in this life and be at the Lord's side in the afterlife,[12] while the late-eighth-century theologian St. Benedict of Aniane (745/750 – 821 C. E.) excludes laughter in a much more radical manner from both this

10 "Homily XVII on Ephesians" in *NPNF* 1.13:130. Laughter is further addressed in his other works, such as "Homily V on First Thessalonians," "Homily XII on Colossians" (*NPNF* 1.13:314 – 321), "Homily XIV on Phillipians" (*NPNF* 1.13:246 – 249), and "Homily XV on Hebrews" (*NPNF* 1.14:438 – 442).

11 "I said of laughter, 'It is mad,' and of pleasure, 'What use is it?'" (Eccles. 2:2); "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: […] a time to weep, and a time to laugh" (Eccles. 3:4); "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth" (Eccles. 7:4); and "For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of fools; this also is vanity" (Eccles. 7:6).

12 "Man kann sich nämlich nicht hier mit der Welt freuen, und dort mit dem Herrn herrschen" as translated by Schmitz ("Nemo etenim potest et hic gaudere cum saeculo, et illic regnare cum Domino"). Schmitz, "*quod rident homines*," 13.

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world *and* the afterlife. In his *Interrogatio* LIII of the *Codex Regularum,* with the very telling title *Si ex toto ridere non licet?* ("If laughter is altogether permitted?"), Benedict observes, "Since the Lord condemns those who laugh now, it is clear that there is never a time for laughter for a faithful soul."[13]

While laughter is to be avoided, its antithesis, crying, is encouraged as a way of expressing repentance for one's sins and grief for the sad affairs of the world. To quote Jerome, "As long as we are in the Valley of Tears, we must not laugh, but cry. On this account says the Lord: 'Blessed be the weeping ones, for they shall laugh.' We are in the Valley of Tears, and this world is of tears, not of joy."[14] A similar sentiment can be found in St. Augustine's commentary on Psalm CXXVI: "Although we sow in tears, yet shall we reap in joy. For in that resurrection of the dead, each man shall receive his own sheaves, that is, the produce of his seed, the crown of joys and of delight. Then will there be a joyous triumph, when we shall laugh at death, wherein we groaned before."[15] Monastic discourse of late antiquity and the Early Middle Ages develops what has been called a "theology of tears" (*eine Theologie der Tränen*), in which crying and sorrow are highly valued and even treated as a duty for a monk or an ascetic.[16] The superiority of grief over laughter is emphasized in *Apophthegmata patrum* (*Maxims of the Fathers*), a collection of sayings attributed to the Desert Fathers, i. e., the monks and hermits who dwelt in the Egyptian desert in the fourth century C. E. Originally written in Greek and translated into Latin in the sixth century, this collection remained well known and influential throughout the medieval period. One story praises the wisdom of a certain Father Arsenius, whose motto is said to have been *flere sempre debemus* ("We should keep crying"),[17] while in another, Abba John (nicknamed Kolobus or "the Dwarf") reproaches a brother for his unguarded behavior during a meal: "What kind of heart does he have," he observes, "that he laughs when he should weep?"[18] Texts such as these form the foundation for the Christian anti-laughter discourse. They contrast short and long-term gains—fleeting pleasures of this world and spiritual salvation in the

13 "Cum Dominus eos qui nunc rident condemnet [Luc. VI], manifestum est quia nunquam tempus est risus fideli animae." Saint Benedict of Aniane, "Interrogatio LIII," *Codex Regularum*, XI, in *PL* 103:515.

14 "Quamdiu ergo sumus in valle lacrimarum, non debemus ridere, sed flere. Propterea dicit et Dominus: 'Beati flentes, quia ipsi ridebunt.' Interdum ergo sumus in valle lacrimarum, et saeculum hoc lacrimarum est, non gaudii." The Latin text as quoted in Schmitz, "*quod rident homines*," 13.

15 Augustine, *Expositions*, in *NPNF* 1.8:605.

16 Schmitz, "*quod rident homines*," 5. Similarly to Le Goff, Schmitz does not detect anything even close to a "theology of laughter" (*Theologie des Lachens*), which is indicative of the lack of agreement on the subject among medieval thinkers. One finds much on the value of tears in Chrysostom's writings, especially in "Homily XII on Colossians." *NPNF* 1.13:314 – 321.

17 As quoted in Schmitz, "*quod rident homines*," 5.

18 Ibid.

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next—and promise consolation in the eternal life as a reward for the willing acceptance of hardship and self-sacrifice.

In addition to eschatological concerns, the early Christian suspicion of laughter is shaped by the monastic view of the body: infinitely inferior to the soul, the body is perceived as transient, corrupt, potentially unchaste, and therefore in constant need of control. Ascetic rejection of laughter is first and foremost a rejection of physicality, an effort to conquer one's humanity. One of the important debates lasting throughout the Middle Ages concerns Christ's laughter, mentioned for the first time by Chrysostom.[19] At the core of the dispute lie Aristotle's maxim that laughter is proper to humans and the applicability of this statement to Jesus.[20] Patristic discourse sees this idea of the inherent humanity of laughter as problematic. Even though Clement of Alexandria (d. 215 C. E.) seemingly agrees with Aristotle in Chapter V, Book II of his *Paedagogus*, he is cautious to point out the need to subdue the instinct:

> Even laughter must be kept in check. […] For man is not to laugh on all occasions because he is a laughing animal, any more than the horse neighs on all occasions because he is a neighing animal. But as rational beings, we are to regulate ourselves suitably, harmoniously relaxing the austerity and over-tension of our serious pursuits, not inharmoniously breaking them up altogether.[21]

A similar attitude is found in the writings of St. Augustine (d. 430), who is also familiar with the Aristotelian view that laughter separates humans from animals, but considers this difference to be *infimum* ("the lowest, of the lowest kind")[22] and worldly joy (*laetitia saeculi*) nothing but a sign of vanity.[23] As the Son of Man, Jesus was supposed to have been able to laugh—in accordance with the Philosopher's thesis—yet, as Chrysostom points out, none of the Scriptures

19 "If thou also weep thus, thou art become a follower of thy Lord. Yea, for He also wept, both over Lazarus, and over the city; and touching Judas He was greatly troubled. And this indeed one may often see Him do, but nowhere laugh, nay, nor smile but a little; no one at least of the evangelists hath mentioned this. Therefore also with regard to Paul, that he wept, that he did so three years night and day, both he hath said of himself, and others say this of him: but that he laughed, neither hath he said himself anywhere, neither hath so much as one other of the saints, either concerning him, or any other like him; but this is said of Sarah only, when she is blamed, and of the son of Noe, when for a freeman he became a slave." John Chrysostom, "Homily IV on St. Matthew," *NPNF* 1.10:41.

20 Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals I–IV*, 69. Also see Le Goff, "Le rire au Moyen Âge" 5; Le Goff, "Il riso nelle regole monastiche," 161.

21 Book 2, Chapter 5 in Clement of Alexandria, "Paedagogus," *ANF* 2:250. Smiling must be regulated ("be made the subject of discipline") as well, for "a clever man smiles almost imperceptibly" (Ibid.). Clement's objection to laughter reveals that the strong influence of the Stoic philosophy is grounded in the potential of laughter to disrupt speech and violate reasonable discourse. Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 61–62.

22 Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, I:8, 18, 63 as quoted in Schmitz, "*quod rident homines*," 13.

23 Schmitz, "*quod rident homines*," 13.

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record his doing so.[24] Christ exemplifies a victory over his humanity; thus those who wish to emulate him must equally conquer their own human weaknesses, must gain control over their physical bodies.

It is thus not surprising that the repudiation of laughter would be reflected in many early-medieval monastic rules. Benedict of Aniane's stern conclusion is taken very seriously by those who choose to dedicate their lives and bodies to God: ascetics, monks, and virgins. Ammonius, the disciple of St. Anthony, is said to have emphasized that monks should abstain from laughing lest it undermine the foundations of the ascetic life and its complete sexual renunciation.[25] When not controlled, laughter was thought to function as a "crack through which earthly matters could touch the human soul," leaving the body open to the world and sin.[26] In order to prevent this, St. Bernard was known to chastise his flesh in an effort to avoid prohibited laughter, or as an English legend says:

> He his herte neuer cast
> inwardly to lauhwe so fast,
> that he nas bisy hit to restreyne
> with al his mihtes and to refrayne.[27]

The three demands—to emulate Christ, to gain control over one's inherently corrupt (because sexual) body, and to be preoccupied with the salvation of one's soul—provide the basis for the early-medieval monastic rules. The monk whose duty it is to be constantly aware of the danger of death can never freely surrender himself to cheer and merriment, for "he will enjoy laughter only in the future when he has finally escaped the snares of the devil and entered into the heavenly Jerusalem."[28]

Fear of the open body results in prohibition against most activities of the human mouth. The oldest monastic rule, that of Pachom of Egypt (ca. fourth century C. E.), explicitly forbids joking and laughter,[29] while the seventh-century Irish *Regula Coenobialis* emphasizes the need to conquer laughter in order to obtain complete control over the body.[30] Particularly telling is the sixth-century Italian *Rule of the Master* (*Regula magistri)*, known to have served as the basis for the famous Rule of St. Benedict. It does not simply mark laughter as a vice,

24 Gilhus points out that although Jesus' laughter is never mentioned in the New Testament, it is sometimes found in apocryphal texts, such as the Gospel of Pseudo-Thomas, which mentions the laughter of Jesus as a child. Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 145.
25 Ibid., 64.
26 Ibid., 67.
27 Blaicher, "Über das Lachen," 518.
28 Resnick, "'Risus monasticus," 99.
29 Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 63.
30 For a detailed discussion of different monastic rules see Schmitz, "*quod rident homines*," 10 ff.

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but uses vivid body metaphors to depict it as a powerful force that is imperative—but difficult—to contain:

> The *Rule of the Master* speaks of "the bolt of the mouth," "the barrier of the teeth," etc. When laughter is ready to burst forth, it should be absolutely prevented from getting out. One can see how of all internal forms of evil, laughter is the worst one: the worst stain [sin] of the mouth.[31]

By the ninth century, the Rule of St. Benedict becomes the dominant and most influential monastic rule in the West, translated into numerous vernacular languages, including Old High German. It is particularly famous for its regulations of the mouth. Of the twelve degrees of humility a monastic must display according to Chapter 7, the ninth is achieved by respecting the importance of silence. A monk should restrain his tongue and keep silent, "not speaking until he is questioned. For the Scripture shows that 'in much speaking there is no escape from sin' and that 'the talkative man is not stable on the earth.'"[32] This idea is further developed in Chapter 42, which culminates in the most famous regulation, the notorious Rule of Silence: "Monks should be zealous for silence at all times, but especially during the hours of the night."[33] In addition to emphasizing humility, and similar to earlier monastic regulations, the Benedictine Rule admonishes its followers to maintain the integrity of their body by keeping their mouths closed most of the time.

The issue of laughter is explicitly addressed in the descriptions of the tenth and eleventh degrees of humility. The former is manifested through the reluctance to laugh because of the association of laughter with foolishness: "The tenth degree of humility is that he be not ready and quick to laugh, for it is written, 'The fool lifts up his voice in laughter.'"[34] The topos will continue to figure prominently, not only in religious literature but also in conduct texts and

31 Le Goff, "Le rire au Moyen Âge," 8. Also see Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 63.

32 As translated in Geary, *Readings in Medieval History*, 176. For Latin and OHG see "Benediktinerregel," 216. Lat. "Si linguam ad loquendum prohibeat | monachus! et taciturnitatem habens usque ad inerrogationem! non | loquatur; Dicente scriptura! quia | in multiloquio non effugitur peccatum! | Et quia uir linguosus non diregitur super terram"; OHG: "ibu zungun ze sprehhanne piuuerie | … suuigali | habenti unzi zanfrahidu ni | sprehhe qhuedenteru kescrifti danta | in filusprahhi nist erflohan sunta | … danta comman zunkaler nist kerihtit | uber erda." The ellipses are reproduced according to the Old High German original.

33 Lat. "Omni tempore silentium debent studire monachi maxime nocturnis horis"; OHG: "eocouueliheru citi stilli sculun | cilen … allero meist naht." Geary, *Readings in Medieval History*, 186 – 187; "Benediktinerregel," 248 – 249.

34 Lat. "Decimus humilitatis gradus est! | Si non sit facilis hac prumptus | in risu! Quia scriptum est; Stultus | in risu exaltat uovcem suam"; OHG: "zehanto … | ibu nisi samfte enti funser | in lahtere danta kescriban ist unfruater | in lahtere heuit stimma sina." Geary, *Readings in Medieval History*, 176; "Benediktinerregel," 216.

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courtly poetry of the high-medieval era.[35] The latter reminds the monastic yet again that when he must speak, he should do so "gently and *without laughter, humbly and seriously*" (my emphasis).[36] Both of these ordinances emphasize that control of one's mouth (be it speech or laughter) is a crucial sign of humility and victory over one's pride and physical body.

Rejecting Eroticism: Controlling Female Bodies

It is possible to see the early Christian rejection of laughter as an attempt to separate the newly emerging spirituality from earlier and contemporaneous pagan traditions, in which laughter was associated with the body, sexuality, eroticism, and fertility. It was viewed as a cosmic force and linked to eroticism in ancient Near Eastern and classical Greek cultures.[37] Similarly, in ancient Egypt, ritual laughter is known to have symbolized opening up and rejuvenation of a divine body and functioned on the level of a sexual response during the ritual. As Ingvild Sælid Gilhus points out, certain traditions drew parallels between laughter and other "products" of the body such as birth, spitting, sneezing, or tears.[38] In the Hellenistic cultures it was treated as a symbol of regeneration and renewal. In Greece, laughter (*geloion*) is said to have functioned as a primary medium for religious expression and as a part of cultic life,[39] and erotic laughter accompanied festivals dedicated to the goddesses Demeter and Aphrodite. Hilarity and laughter were firmly established as part of Aphrodite's cult as the goddess of love and sexuality, and their link to sexuality was exploited even linguistically, in the play on words transforming one of her nicknames "genial" or "laughter-loving" (*philommedes*) into an adjective *philomeides*, meaning "genital-loving."[40]

In Demeter's cult, laughter appears in the context of rejuvenation and rebirth, signaling a temporary end to her sorrow over Persephone's kidnapping and the return of spring and summer to mortal earth. Provoked by antics of an Olympian servant-girl, Demeter's laughter releases her generative powers as the goddess of motherhood, childbirth, and nature, opening her body up sexually and emotionally. The erotic face of laughter in this myth is further represented by the character who so successfully restores harmony to the world. In the *Homeric*

35 For a detailed discussion of this motif in the secular texts, see chapter 3.
36 Lat. "et sine risu humiliter; cum grauitate"; OHG: "ano hlahtar theomuatliho mit fruati." Geary, *Readings in Medieval History*, 176; "Benediktinerregel," 216.
37 Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 9.
38 Ibid., 19.
39 Ibid., 28.
40 Ibid., 28. Also see Brown, "Ares, Aphrodite," 283–293.

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Hymn to Demeter, the young goddess Iambe entertains the Olympians with her obscene jokes, while in other versions it is Baubo who makes the grieving goddess laugh by revealing her private parts in public.[41] Both versions of the myth emphasize the analogy between the mouth and the female sexual organs, the two orifices that open up the female body. Baubo's very name literally means "vagina," and her statues are known to have had a face placed directly over her private parts and legs, a strong hint at the parallel between a laughing face and the female genitals.[42] Even though Iambe does not expose herself, she is often addressed as *athyroisin*, or "doorless." Her nickname has a dual meaning: it alludes to her function and ability to "open up that which is closed" (i.e., Demeter's body) as well as to her own bodily openness, suggested by all the obscene jokes that stream from her mouth.[43]

Such a connection to reproduction and eroticism was perceived as an abomination in the ancient Israelite religion. The Old Testament perspective is crucial to understanding medieval attitudes; by accepting the Hebrew Bible as one of its fundamental texts, Christianity inherits a long tradition, part of which is the rejection of laughter's erotic side. Ancient Judaic theologians condemn the link between laughter and the sexual practices of the Canaanites, and thus banish fertility and erotic rituals together with female laughter, as they shut women out of the cult of Yahweh.[44] Instead, they celebrate the divine derisive laughter of male power.[45] The tension between the two becomes apparent in the story of Isaac's birth (Gen. 18:11–15, 21:1–7). Ninety-year-old Sarah bursts into laughter upon hearing from Yahweh himself that she will soon conceive. Later, however, well aware of her misconduct, she denies ever having done so. Once the child is born, Sarah makes an enigmatic comment: "God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me" (Gen. 21:7). She also gives the boy the name Isaac, which itself is conspicuously connected to the Hebrew word for "laughter." While on the surface Sarah's statement seems to give voice to the mother's joy at Isaac's extraordinary conception and birth, it also reveals the

41 Cf. Clements of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 2, 21. Quoted by Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 34.

42 Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 34.

43 Ibid., 35. For Baubo's story also see Treusch-Dieter, "Das Gelächter der Frauen," 115–143. For additional illustration of erotic laughter in Greek culture see Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 28–42, 46–48. Laughter thrived and had traditionally been a symbol of regeneration and renewal in the late Roman culture as well. According to Gilhus, the feast of Saturnalia and the Plautian comedies were contexts for erotic laughter. Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 46. For more on laughter and humor in antique cultures see Huizinga, *Homo ludens*.

44 Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 23. Also cf.: "Because of Yahweh's prophets' and theologians' attempts to destroy the fertility cults, erotic laughter was overruled." Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 26.

45 Ibid., 23.

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tension between three different kinds of laughter in this story—derisive (both human and divine), joyful, and erotic—and establishes the supremacy of divine power. It is Yahweh who has the proverbial last laugh. He punishes Sarah's rebellious incredulity, her doubt and mockery, by making her conceive despite her advanced age. Sarah's statement alludes not only to her happiness, but also to her humiliation. One may wonder if people who hear about Isaac's birth will laugh *with* her or *at* her.[46] As Gilhus points out, the tale is ultimately a veiled attack against the erotic, cultic laughter of other cultures:

> The Old Testament God manipulated the power of reproduction when he caused a woman of 90 to become pregnant. In some passages the name Isaac is connected with a word for laughter […] which sometimes has the meaning 'have sexual fun' (Genesis 21:9 – 10, 26:8). […] With the birth of Isaac and the pun probably intended in the saying 'God has made laughter for me' (Genesis 21:7), it seems that Jahweh has made a sexual joke directed against the old fertility cults with their potent women and erotic laughter.[47]

In addition to Yahweh's joke, the biblical text has clear gendered undertones and transmits a message of disapproval of women's laughter. The qualitative difference between Abraham's and Sarah's transgressions (cf. Gen. 17:17: "Abraham fell upon his face and laughed") continuously posed difficulties to medieval interpreters of this passage, who justified Sarah's selective punishment by familiarly claiming her behavior to be less noble and spiritual in its motivation.[48] With the Bible remaining "The Book" until the fourteenth century, and a starting point for "all theoretical reflection and practical rules,"[49] the rejection of the erotic side of women's laughter was firmly established as an important part of the Christian discourse.

If laughter could threaten the virtue of monks, it held even more peril for nuns since female nature was viewed as weaker and more susceptible to sin and excesses. These beliefs persisted into early-medieval times, finding further

46 Ibid., 25. For a feminist interpretation of Sarah's story, see Ostriker, *Feminist Revision and the Bible*, 38 – 43.

47 Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 25. Gilhus's idea of Yahweh's laughter as a counter-measure against women's laughter and power is also visible in the gendered way laughter is treated in this story. Abraham, who laughs as well (Gen. 17:17: "Abraham fell upon his face and laughed"), is not reprimanded. It is only Sarah's laughter that is portrayed as transgressive. Later commentators attempt to explain this gendered approach by searching for differences between Abraham's and Sarah's motivation. Matthew Innes, for example, mentions how the medievals struggled with this qualitative difference between Sarah's and Abraham's laughter: "Abraham's had reverently expressed his pious joy at God's goodness, but Sarah's had been fuelled by doubt at the possibility that God had granted her a son." Innes, "He Never," 142.

48 Innes, "He Never," 142.

49 "La réflexion théorique et les règles pratiques fonctionnent à partir de la Bible." Le Goff, "Le rire au Moyen Âge," 9.

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support in natural philosophy. As R. Howard Bloch points out, "In the misogynist thinking of the Middle Ages, there can, in fact, be no distinction between the theological and the gynaecological."[50] While Isidor of Seville (c. 570–636) proves woman's inferiority through linguistic means, with the help of etymology,[51] others, like Pseudo-Albertus Magnus in his *De secretis mulierum* (*On the Secrets of Women*), seek to provide an anatomical-physiological justification, incorporating the knowledge of their famous predecessors Aristotle (384–322 B. C. E.) and Galen (131–201 C. E.).[52]

In a world that emphasizes sexual chastity as an "angelic" way of life,[53] the exalted state of femininity has successfully conquered the temptations of the flesh and shut itself off from the world and men. The early-medieval theologians advocate virginity as the ideal for a Christian woman. Naturally, the Virgin Mary is the exemplar here, but her immaculate conception renders her unique. More attainable models of female behavior were provided by the so-called Iron Virgins, i.e. female martyrs such as St. Catherine of Alexandria who were seen as having transcended their sex, and the Demure Virgins "exemplifying the norms of womanhood."[54] The virgin body, imagined as a sealed vessel, a *hortus seclusus*, was naturally seen as far superior to the regular, sexually active female body.[55] Both Chrysostom and Ambrose present virginity as a state for the chosen, which "cannot be commanded, but must be wished for."[56] Neither of them actually condemns the institution of marriage as unequivocally sinful nor presents virginity as the sole, exclusive condition for women: "The one sins not if she marries, the other, if she marries not, it is for eternity. In the former is the remedy for weakness, in the latter the glory of chastity. The former is not reproved, the

50 As quoted in Blamires, Pratt, and Marx, *Woman Defamed*, 3.

51 "(XI.ii.17) Man [*vir*] is so named, because there is greater force [*vis*] in him than in women [*feminis*]—hence also the word 'strength' [*virtus*]—or, he is so named because he controls woman [*feminam*] forcefully [*vi*]. (18) Woman [*mulier*] gets her name from 'softness' [*mollitie*], or as it were 'softer', *mollier*, with a letter taken away or changed. (19) For the two sexes are differentiated in the strength [*fortitudine*] and weakness [*imbecillitate*] of their bodies. Thus there is the greatest strength [*virtus*] in man [*viri*], and less in woman [*mulieris*] so that she might be forbearing to man; otherwise, if women were to repel them, sexual desire might compel men to desire something else or rush off to another sex." As quoted in Blamires, Pratt, and Marx, *Woman Defamed*, 43.

52 Lemay, *Women's Secrets*.

53 John Chrysostom, *On Virginity*, xiv.

54 Blamires, Pratt, and Marx, *Woman Defamed*, 13.

55 For example, Chrysostom insists that genuine Christian virgins must be completely unconcerned with the matters of the world (*On Virginity*, LXXVII). Much later, in her *Holistic Healing* (*Causae et curae*), Hildegard of Bingen expresses the same view of a maiden's body as "still closed up" and the importance of chastity as "the protection of her undamaged condition." Hildegard of Bingen, *Holistic Healing*, 91.

56 Chapter V.23 in Ambrose, *Concerning Virgins*, in *NPNF* 2.10:367.

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latter is praised."[57] Yet the difference between not reproving and extolling is too drastic not to be noticed:

> Why speak of the troubles of nursing, training, and marrying? These are the miseries of those who are fortunate. A mother has heirs, but it increases her sorrows. For we must not speak of adversity, lest the minds of the holiest parents tremble. Consider, my sister, how hard it must be to bear what one must not speak of. And this is in this present age. But the days shall come when they shall say: "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare [sic]." For the daughters of this age are conceived, and conceive; but the daughter of the kingdom refrains from wedded pleasure, and the pleasure of the flesh, that she may be holy in body and in spirit.[58]

The blessed nature of the virginal state comes with higher demands for caution and chastity. Decorum, devotion, and perfect conduct are all essential;[59] therefore, laughter comes to be associated with a lack of modesty. Chrysostom compares a virgin to a charioteer who keeps the "horses" of her senses and her body under control:

> The virgin, applying the golden reins of good behavior to everything, keeps each of the horses in perfect rhythm. She forbids her tongue to utter anything discordant or unsuitable, her glance to stray impudently or suspiciously, her ears to hear any improper song. She cares too that her feet not walk in a provocative or pampered fashion. […] She cuts away the decoration from her clothes and continually exhorts her countenance not to dissolve into laughter, not to even smile quietly, but always to exhibit a serious and austere visage, one prepared always for tears, never for laughter.[60]

Similarly, Ambrose's *Concerning Virgins*[61] focuses on the fragile nature of the virginal condition. Book III contains the strictest admonitions against laughter, with its Chapter III emphasizing the need to isolate virginal bodies from all possible contact with the secular world, by eluding human communication as well as by constraining the female body in terms of speech, gestures, and emotions. For example, visits are overall strongly discouraged with the exception of parental ones, since social interaction is seen as detrimental to the virgin's virtue: "Modesty is worn away by intercourse, and boldness breaks forth, laughter creeps in, and bashfulness is lessened, whilst politeness is studied" (Ch. III.9). Laughter is seen as an integral part and an inevitable outcome of any communication (Ambrose's "intercourse"), particularly between the sexes. It is tied to "politeness," or secular etiquette, thus anticipating the high-medieval vernacular tradition in which laughter and smiles would play an important part

57 Chapter VI.24 in *NPNF* 2.10:367. Also see Chapters XVI and XVII in Chrysostom, *On Virginity*, 23–27.
58 Book I, Chapter VI.26 in *NPNF* 2.10:367.
59 See LXXX,2 in Chrysostom, *On Virginity*, 121–122.
60 LXIII,2 in Chrysostom, *On Virginity*, 100.
61 Ambrose, *Concerning Virgins*, in *NPNF* 2.10:381–385.

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in courtly ritual and interaction between men and women. Since the virginal body is valued only as long as it preserves its metaphorical and physical intactness of a sealed vessel, it is constantly in danger of being opened through sexual intercourse as well as by the activities of the mouth. Even religious fervor has to be restrained in order for the body to be subdued. The female body has to disappear, rendering the virgin unnoticeable to the world:

> And do you, holy virgin, abstain from groans, cries, coughing, and laughter at the Mystery. […] [L]et virginity be first marked by the voice, let modesty close the mouth, let religion remove weakness, and habit instruct nature. […] That virgin is not sufficiently worthy of approval who has to be enquired about when she is seen. (Ch. III.13).

Paradoxically, Ambrose's repudiation of laughter reaffirms to some degree Aristotle's maxim that it is inherently human. In the Christian theologian's case, laughter is feared precisely because it is part of uncontrollable human—especially female—nature, which leads him to demand that virgins conquer this part of their humanity at all costs. Other Church Fathers share his prepossession. Clement of Alexandria points out that "to children and women especially laughter is the cause of slipping into scandal,"[62] while Chrysostom and Jerome (in his *Letters*, 22 and 24,1) also see the laughter of virgins as a threat to modesty. In fact, Chrysostom is wary even of smiling.[63] Reflecting this spirit, Rudolf of Fulda, Carolingian monk writing in the early ninth century *Vita Leobae* (*The Life of St. Leoba*), praises Leoba's self-control and emphasizes that despite her calm and cheerful demeanor, the Abbess of Bischofsheim never allowed herself to burst into laughter.[64] Patristic theologians and their medieval successors see laughter as a symptom of immoderation, a sign of lax bodily control, and a threat to modesty that endangers the soul's salvation. They thus establish a topos linking it to carnal desire and the consequent lack of chastity, the most treasured possession for a woman.

Tensions within the Early Christian View of Laughter

Although ecclesiastics like Isidor of Seville promote the ideal of *humilitas mentis cum lacrymis* ("humility of the mind with tears"), the early monastic treatment of laughter is actually riddled with tensions. The very same theologians who express strong views against laughter are well aware of the impossibility of eliminating it, even within monastic communities. It is more accurate to speak of its control rather than absolute rejection, even when the anti-laughter discourse

62 Clement of Alexandria, "Paedagogus," 250.
63 Chrysostom, *On Virginity*, 100. Also see Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 6.
64 From Rudolf of Fulda, "Life of Leoba," in Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization*, 318.

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dominates. The very same St. Basil (d. 379 C. E.) who strictly admonishes against uncontrollable and excessive laughter leaves a place for a gentle sign of joy: "It is not totally inappropriate to express the joy of the soul in a soft cheerful smile. The Scripture speaks of that when it says: 'A happy heart brightens up the face.'"[65] Like its predecessors and contemporaries, the commentary on St. Benedict's Rule composed by Smaragdus, the abbot of Saint-Mihiel, shortly after the Aachen Council of 816–817 C. E. acknowledges crying to be much more appropriate for the monk than laughing and rejects loud and unrestrained displays of emotion as dangerous and foolish. At the same time, Smaragdus also recognizes that only seldom do even monks succeed in conquering their humanity. Therefore, he leaves a place for a restrained, careful, and "honorable" kind of laughter even in monastic culture, for "the man cannot leave behind to what he is compelled by nature."[66]

Another contentious topic within the monastic discourse during this time is the laughter of martyrdom. While derision is frequently interpreted as a sign of pride, Christian martyrs are said to have resorted to derisive laughter in order to defy their tormentors. On the one hand, mockery is admired for its spiritual character, stemming from its connection to the soul rather than the body: the martyr's indifference to physical pain and suffering becomes a symbol of victory over carnality.[67] On the other hand, as Catherine Conybeare demonstrates in the case of St. Lawrence, the laughter of martyrdom was not at all unproblematic.[68] Various versions of this legend reveal that the saint's behavior was perceived as unsettling even by the authors of his *vita*. During his painful and slow torture on the grill, St. Lawrence's derisive laughter is unquestionably subversive; it challenges the authority represented by the Roman prefect. Yet Conybeare shows that the saint's laughter also presents him in a dubious light, placing him in a position similar to the one women normally occupy, thus casting a shadow over the grandeur of his masculine heroism.[69]

Early Christian thought bequeaths to posterity a rather complicated view of laughter. The strong anti-laughter perspective will continue to resonate in all

65 "Dagegen ist es nicht ungeziemend, durch sanftes heiteres Lächeln die Fröhlichkeit der Seele anzuzeigen. Davon allein spricht die Schrift, wenn sie sagt: 'Ein fröhliches Herz erheitert das Angesicht.'" As quoted by Schmitz, "*quod rident homines*," 6.

66 Schmitz, "*quod rident homines*," 9.

67 A similar emphasis on the spiritual nature of permissible laughter is present in Pope Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job*, in which he comments that the laughter of the elect in heaven will assume special status, radiating from the heart and not from the body. Sanders, *Sudden Glory*, 130.

68 Cf. Conybeare, "Ambiguous Laughter," 175–202.

69 Ibid., 190–191, 193–194. Conybeare also refers to Judith Butler's observation that in the dominant masculine culture, the derisive, subversive type of laughter is far more typical of women.

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spheres of life, not only in religious discourse, but also in folklore, didactic works, and even fictional secular texts. Yet parallel to it, other voices treat laughter as part of human nature and acknowledge the fact that, as such, it is difficult if not impossible to eliminate. In an effort to establish limits for hilarity and control it, early-medieval culture openly condemns laughter that erupts loudly and affects rational discourse and bodily composure.[70] In addition, while the *homo ridens* is tolerated, the *homo ludens* (with his laugh of derision, the exact opposite of *caritas*) is denounced. As subsequent chapters will illustrate, the attempts to codify and control laughter reappear in high- and late-medieval discourses, and with them, the renewed interest in issues of chastity and virtue.[71]

Debate Continues: High-Medieval Theology of Laughter

The tensions already apparent in the early monastic view of laughter are only heightened during the High Middle Ages (11th–13th c.), a time of important cultural development both in the ecclesiastic and secular parts of society. The three issues that affect the treatment of laughter in this period are changes in the perception of the body, the unprecedented rise of vernacular lay cultures and literatures, and the return of the debate on chastity. The high-medieval era reveals an intense preoccupation with the physical body and its corruptibility and changeability, most apparent in the treatment of the Eucharist and the increasing interest in relics:

> It [is] seen, for instance, in how the body of Christ was shown as bleeding and suffering and in the veneration of the fragments of the bodies of the saints, but also in the practice of judicial torture on living bodies and in how dead bodies were partitioned for religious and medical purposes. It is as if the corruptibility which is inherent in bodies was fully revealed; they were opened up…[72]

70 "Il riso accompagnato da sghignazzi e sussulti [*subsannatio*, *risus cum cachinnis*], il riso eccessivo, il riso intempestivo che rompe il silenzio, il riso grossolano" ("Laughter accompanied by mockery or shaking [*subsannatio, risus cum cachinnis*], excessive laughter, untimely laughter that disrupts silence, ungraceful laughter"). Le Goff, "Il riso," 172. Also see Innes, "He Never," 143.

71 As Kathleen Coyne Kelly indicates in her study of medieval views on virginity, the discussion gets picked up in the central Middle Ages. From the twelfth century on, medieval society experienced a renascence of interest in the issues of virginity and chastity. Kelly supports her statement with numerous high- and late-medieval vernacular examples. See Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, 7. Another important and fascinating side of early-medieval laughter is the laughter of Gnostics, or to use Gilhus' term, *les enfants terribles* of early Christianity. The constraints of this chapter do not allow a detailed analysis of this phenomenon, but a good overview can be found in Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 73–76. Also see Bröker, "Lachen als religiöses Motiv in gnostischen Texten," 111–125.

72 Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 98.

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Moreover, this era witnesses a renewal of the debates about chastity and virtue, owing to the Gregorian Reform. During the eleventh century, the Church attempted to set higher standards of moral behavior for priests, including the prohibition of marriage. Consequently, a new literature developed, criticizing marriage and emphasizing the importance of chastity. Although intended initially for priests, these developments had widespread repercussions for the laity as well,[73] becoming a leading topic of debate in both ecclesiastical and secular discourses.[74] Finally, the increased influence of courtly society that made joy and affability crucial parts of its ethos and etiquette naturally impacted the discussion about the value and place of laughter in a virtuous person's life. It is one thing to demand obedience and sacrifice from those who have consciously chosen the life of austerity and self-renunciation, but how to control the emotional life of those who are not bound by such vows? These issues are reflected in the writings of high-medieval religious authors, demonstrating their keen awareness of the changing world around them.

At first glance, the high-medieval position on laughter appears to be more accepting than the views of the earlier epochs. Laughter and smiling are featured frequently in sculpture and art, joy is treated as a virtue and an indicator of harmony in aristocratic vernacular texts, and "laughter" becomes one of the most frequently used words in courtly literature. Yet a closer look at written and artistic sources of this time reveals that despite this seeming approval, all the manifestations of high-medieval laughter point toward the continuous codification of its practice, an effort to further determine who is allowed to laugh, when, and how. In this regard, the High Middle Ages inhabit the same tradition as the previous epochs, going back to the Early Church Fathers. The struggle is palpable in scholastic debates and responses to carnivalesque processions, in Berthold of Regensburg's sermons, and in Hildegard of Bingen's medical writings. It is also apparent in the contrast between the gaping mouths of gargoyles, sinners, and fools and the barely perceptible, Mona-Lisa-like smiles of the Amiens angels. The high-medieval approach is thus best described by Le Goff's term "liberation and control of laughter,"[75] which despite the seeming contradiction accurately represents the lack of consensus, the constant tension between

73 Karras, *Sexuality*, 43.

74 Ibid., 37. Aaron Gurevich also points out the ever-presence of religious doctrine in this historical period: "Everybody who lived in medieval Christian society belonged to different levels of culture. Everybody was Christian and therefore had something in common with the culture and religiosity of the learned people. Of course the monks, the Church prelates, the educated people and theologians had much more information and knowledge about the Christian truth than simple folk. [...] But even the most uneducated people possessed some information concerning Christian ideas and Christian beliefs." Gurevich, "Bakhtin and His Theory of Carnival," 59.

75 Le Goff, "Le rire au Moyen Âge," 12.

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two diametrically opposed positions: one that attempts to make a place for laughter and recognizes it as necessary or at least unavoidable, and one that is fixed on limiting it.

Works dealing with laughter in this period commonly follow three trajectories; they reiterate authoritative opinions, engage and debate with them, or subvert the established ideologies. Whichever approach an individual author chooses, it is still deeply rooted in tradition and the continuing influence of the past, "a repository of normative guidelines for Christian belief and action."[76] Here the authority of the Church Fathers remains unquestionable, even when it is being debated against (Aquinas) or merely expanded on (Hildegard), the later thinkers are always careful to maintain, to use Clare Lees' expression, an "impression of continuity" with their predecessors.[77]

Patristic opinions retain their popularity during the High Middle Ages. Jerome, Ambrose, Tertullian, and Chrysostom are all cited repeatedly, giving the new generation of thinkers legitimacy and textual authority. Here one finds both apocalyptic motifs and the familiar argument about Christ's humanity. For example, in the writings of Bernard de Clairvaux (1090 – 1153), laughter is said to constitute a crucial distinction between Christians and heathens because only the former are aware of why it should be avoided—an obvious allusion to the Last Judgment.[78] The question of Christ's laughter returns in the writings of John of Salisbury (ca. 1115 – 1180), who points out in his *Policraticus* (1154) that "no man has seen him [Christ] laugh, but he has frequently wept in the presence of men."[79] This argument remains popular well into the fourteenth century, as evidenced, for example, by the poem *Cursor mundi* (*The Runner of the World*) (ca. 1300) and the writings of John Wycliff.[80]

In the German-speaking lands, the anti-laughter discourse is as enduring as it is in the rest of Europe. The monastic rules, even those written in the vernacular, reflect the influence of the earlier models. Even though separated from St. Benedict's Rule by three centuries, the twelfth-century fragment known as *Die Nonnenregel* ("The Rule for the Nuns")[81] advises its audience on the dangers of the mouth and tirelessly warns of the importance of silence and the discipline of

76 Lees, *Tradition*, 21.
77 Ibid., 28.
78 Moulinier, "Quand le malin," 469.
79 Sanders, *Sudden Glory*, 136.
80 "Of Cristis laughing we reden never in Holy Writt, but of His myche penaunse, teris, and shedynge of blod"; "That thrice he wept we find i-nogh / Bot we find never quar he logh." As quoted in Sanders, *Sudden Glory*, 136.
81 Ms. C 76/290 is said to come from the cloister Adelhausen in Breisgau and is now located in the Stadtbibliothek in Zurich, Switzerland. The name of the text is based on the inscription found on the first two blank pages: "diss büch Ist des Closters (ze) adelnhusen." For an edition of the work, see "Nonnenregel," 22 – 24.

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speech: "von rede er [mund] gerne swigen sol"; "so soltu dich ze allir zit vor lúten worten huete dich. mit dunkeler stimme sprich" ("It [the mouth] should willingly abstain from speech"; "So should you guard yourself against loud words. Speak in a low voice," *Die Nonnenregel*, vv. 15 – 16; 20 – 23). Just like the original Rule, it also contains explicit warnings about the dangers of the outside world and, unsurprisingly, of laughter: "dv welt ist das helle tor. div hoere von dem mvnde din. der sol vil wol bewart sin meistlich lachen han" ("The world is the gates of hell. Shut it in front of your mouth. It should be very well guarded against laughter," *Die Nonnenregel*, vv. 10 – 13). Similarly, *Ecclesiastien homilae* by Hugh of Saint Victor (ca. 1096 – 1141), a Saxon canon regular, a mystic, and allegedly the first theologian to synthesize the dogmatic treasures of the patristic age and form them into a coherent and complete body of doctrine, reveals a strong hostility toward laughter, branding it as an outright evil: "To be noted [that] whereas joy is only proven to be wrong, laughter is indeed altogether disapproved of, because laughter is evil in every respect."[82]

The patristic views spread beyond the ecclesiastical community thanks to the efforts of religious clerics writing in the vernacular.[83] They were transmitted to the laity in the form of homiletic literature, didactic and religious tales, *exempla*, and parables. In his poem *Von des todes gehugde* (*On the Remembrance of Death*) Heinrich von Melk (writing ca. 1160 – 1180) condemns those whose overly cheerful, insincere demeanor proves that they do not have a "true love in their hearts" ("di waren minne in dem hercen"): "They may well know how to ridicule and grin" ("wol chvnnen si spotent vnt greinen," *Von des todes gehugde*, vv. 201 – 202).[84] He also reiterates the view that true joy can be found only in Paradise:

Da ist elliv chlage fremde
vnder dem himelischem sende,
da sint die gedanch alle vrei,
dane waeiz niemen, waz angest sei;
mer vrevden mvgen si da lehen,
denn iemen habe gehoert oder gesehen
oder iemen gedenchen chvnne
ir vrevde ist immer ane cil. (*Von des todes gehugde*, vv. 985 – 997)

82 "Notandum quod gaudium tantum arguitur, risus vero omnino reporbatur, quia risus omnimodo malus est; gaudium non semper malum est, nisi quando de malo est." As quoted in Sanders, *Sudden Glory*, 128 f. Translation mine. Sanders' own translation appears to be only fragmentary, "Joy may be good or evil, depending on its source, but laughter is in every respect evil".

83 See for example Anton Schönbach's three-volume collection of German sermons of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. Schönbach, *Altdeutsche Predigten*. In volume 1 there are several familiar motifs such as Jesus's laughter (Sermon 1; 8,11), as well as allusions to Luke 6:21 – 25 (Sermon 6; 39,5) and Ecclesiastes 7:5 (Sermon 191; 299,29).

84 Cited according to Heinrich von Melk, *Von des todes gehugde*.

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> No lament will be known to the righteous ones in heaven. There all thoughts will be free, for nobody shall know what fear is. More joys will be given them there than one has ever seen, heard or thought of. Their joy will last forever without end.

Heinrich's message is echoed by a thirteenth-century German sermon that brings together various themes, including the question of Christ's laughter and the apocalyptic promise of terrible punishment after death for idle laughter in this life found in Luke 6:25:

> du ensolt uoch nicht itelichen lachen, uffe daz die nicht gesche als den von den got spricht in dem ewangelio: ve vobis qui nunc ridetis etc. we iuch die ir nu lachet, wanne ir wert her nach weinent vuorege trehen. unser herre Jesus Christ der weinnete ober Lazzarum und Jerusalem die stat, von sinen lachen les wir niht. dar umme so si wir in der jamercheit und sulen billicher weinnen danne lachen. (Sermon 1; 8,11 – 19)[85]

> You should not laugh vainly, so that you would not fare as those of whom God speaks in His Gospel: *ve vobis qui nunc ridetis*, etc. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall afterwards weep fiery tears. Our Lord Jesus Christ wept over Lazarus and the city of Jerusalem; yet of his laughter we read nothing. Therefore, let us remain in sorrow; weeping befits us better than laughter.

All these themes are brought together in a parable by the thirteenth-century author Der Stricker, which remained extremely popular all over Europe well into the fifteenth century. The short didactic poem, "The Earnest King" (Germ.: "Der ernsthafte König"; MHG: "Ditz ist von einem kunege der wolde nie niht gelachen"),[86] tells about a virtuous king questioned by his brother about the cause of his perpetually serious demeanor. In response, the ruler summons an assembly, orders his brother to undress, and surrounds him with four spears pointing directly at his bare flesh. Having noticed that the naked man's careless manner has quickly given way to great anxiety, the king inquires why he no longer feels like laughing, to which the brother replies that if he were to do so, all the four spears would immediately pierce his body. The king then explains to all present that what they have witnessed is an allegorical representation of what he endures daily: "Four spears aim at my heart" ("Vier sper sten an dem herzen min," *EK*, v. 105). The message of the story is familiar and typically patristic: no good Christian should be capable of laughter as long as he is aware of Christ's suffering on the cross, of his own mortality, and of the uncertainty he will face even after his death: "Ein sper daz vaste dar in get: daz ist die marter die Krist leit" ("One spear that pierces [my heart] is the torture that Christ suffered," *EK*, vv. 116 – 117); "daz wendet mich des lachen wol / daz ich die zit niht wizzen sol / wen mich der tot ersliche / und mich scheide von minem riche" ("It truly turns

85 Schönbach, *Altdeutsche Predigten* 1:8.
86 Cited according to the following edition: "Der ernsthafte König," 63 – 68.

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away my laughter that I cannot know when death will slay me and thus part me from my kingdom and wealth," *EK*, vv. 143 – 146); "daz ist die engestliche not / welich vart mir schaffe min tot" ("My great anxiety is [that I do not know] with what kind of way my death will provide me," *EK*, vv. 157 – 158).[87] The popularity of the story across time and the fact that it was incorporated into numerous collections prove that the enduring apprehension of laughter and its potential threat to individual salvation continued to preoccupy not only the medieval ecclesiastical elite but secular society as well.

During the High Middle Ages patristic views on laughter also provide material for further inquiry and even for intellectual debate about their accuracy. One finds this approach in the works of two prominent figures of the period, Hildegard of Bingen (1098 – 1179) and Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274). While in her liturgical drama *Ordo virtutum*, Hildegard continues the early-medieval paradigm of denouncing laughter as proper to the devil,[88] she offers quite a different perspective in her contribution to medieval health science, *Causae et curae*, completed between 1151 and 1158.[89] Belonging to both monastic and popular medicinal traditions, *Causae et curae* is a handbook of advice in matters of sickness and health, which despite its singular scientific approach remains deeply rooted in the canonical Christian texts.[90] The intertwining of natural philosophy and theology characterizes Hildegard's treatment of laughter as well; the two approaches serve to reinforce one another. For example, in the chapter "Adam's Knowledge,"[91] the visionary accounts for the sinfulness of laughter with the help of its physiology, which she considers to be a direct result of the Fall:

> *Adam's Knowledge.* Before his fall, Adam knew the angels' song and every form of music and had a voice like the peal of the bell. However, as a result of his fall, through envy, the serpent infested his marrow and his abdomen with a kind of wind, and it is

87 Sieglinde Hartmann analyses other texts by Stricker, including his humorous stories, known as *Schwänke*, and illustrates the extent to which Stricker's writings are influenced by the early Christian debates on laughter. Hartmann, "Ein empirischer Beitrag," 107 – 129.

88 Moulinier, "Quand," 469.

89 Translated into English as *Holistic Healing*. The manuscript copy of it, known as *Liber compositae medicinae* (*Book of Holistic Medicine*), Codex 90b is currently located in Copenhagen.

90 See Palmquist and Kulas's introduction in Hildegard of Bingen, *Holistic Healing*, xiii.

91 The chapter headings themselves are not authentic Hildegard's inventions. They are said to have been created by a thirteenth-century scribe who took it upon himself to divide Hildergard's manuscript into five sections and separate chapters, assigning each chapter its individual title. Said scribe is believed to have shorted the original title of the work as well, since Matthew of Westminster cites this work in 1292 with its full Latin title: *Liber compositae medicinae de aegritudinum causis, signis atque curis.* Hildegard of Bingen, *Holistic Healing*, xii–xiii.

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still present in every man. Through this wind a person's spleen becomes fat, and thereby inappropriate intemperance, hilarity, and echoing laughter are set loose.[92]

Hildegard does not address the social and individual psychological aspects of laughter that make it so disturbing to Christian thinkers. She attributes its origins to an external corruptive force—the devil—thus revealing her familiarity with the topos of diabolical laughter. Yet she treats its causes not as merely "spiritual" (envy and desire for superiority), but also as physiological: the Evil one literally interferes with the functioning of Adam's (human) body. Laughter is therefore similar to (and is a product of) a disease. It is linked to moral qualities such as immoderation and impropriety ("immoderate intemperance"), but is also set loose by the evil wind festering in the fatty human spleen. Its origin is thus wholly corporeal, making it inherently impure. Before the Fall, there was no need for laughter, since there were no corrupt bodies. This idea gets further developed in the next passage called "Echoing Laughter and Hilarity":

Echoing Laughter and Hilarity. Just as at Adam's fall the pure, holy form of begetting offspring was transformed into carnal desire, so also the voice full of heavenly joy that Adam possessed changed into the opposite sound of hilarity and resounding laughter. Inappropriate rowdiness and laughter have a certain commonality with carnal desire, and the same wind that sets loose laughter, emerges from a person's marrow and disturbs his abdomen and his bowels. Once in a while as a result of excessive disturbance, laughter drives as much tear water out of the eyes from the blood in the vessels as foam of the man's seed is driven out from the blood in the vessels by the heat of his passionate desire.[93]

Here again, one notices Hildegard's attempt to juggle her own innovative natural-philosophical perspective with the traditional moral or social view of laughter prevalent in the ecclesiastical tradition. The passage acknowledges the disturbing, inappropriate, aesthetic side of the emotional gesture and its metaphorical association with carnality. Yet it also establishes physiological affinity between laughter and human sexuality. Sexual activity is the post-Fall transformation of what was originally intended to be pure and sinless procreation.[94] For this reason, earthly laughter is a sullied form of what could have been eternal unpolluted heavenly joy. Its "commonality with carnal desire" is explained with the help of the theory of winds and humors, widespread at Hildegard's time; she claims it to be released by "the same wind" that disturbs the person's abdomen and bowels and sets in motion the procreation process, i. e. ejaculation. Since laughter is seen as a physiological process, as a bodily disturbance akin to a

92 Ibid., 132. Italics as used in the text.
93 Ibid.
94 Cf. Chrysostom's position on sexuality as the result of the Fall in *On Virginity*, XIV.5 – 6 and XV.2. See John Chrysostom, *On Virginity*, 21 – 23.

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disease, it can and should be treated. In the chapter "For Immoderate Laughing," Hildegard offers some creative recipes on how to manage laughing fits and explains their damaging effects on the body and the curative magic of her medicine.[95] However unusual it may look, her approach to the emotion as a treatable physical malady has a very familiar outcome. It effectively reinforces the well-established view of it as utterly corporeal in nature. The "empirical" methods thus strengthen the existing theological opinions of laughter as bodily, sinful, and thus in need of constant control.

That said, Hildegard's writings on laughter are by no means consistent; just like the larger medieval discourse, her pioneering text contains tensions and contradictions. The view of laughter's diabolical and sinful origins coexists with more hopeful and positive opinions, such as the ones found in the chapter "Joy and Laughter." Both the former and the latter can be positive as long as they occur when a person "is not aware of anything sad, unpleasant, or bad in himself."[96] Remarkably, contrary to the widespread admonitions based on Luke 6:21–25, Hildegard seems to prefer joy to sadness. She compares the heart of a joyous person to a blossoming flower: "When a person's consciousness is not aware of anything sad, unpleasant, or bad in himself, this person's heart also opens itself to joy, just as blossoms open themselves to the sun's warmth."[97] Joy thus offers a positive alternative for laughter's origins. And yet even in this very chapter, the vocabulary used to refer to laughter in general is frequently derogatory, emphasizing its inferior nature. Its sound is likened to the "sound of an animal" and to a horse's neighing.[98] These animalistic comparisons go against Aristotle's thesis about laughter as inherently human, subordinate it to intelligible speech, and brand it as aesthetically unpleasant. Even in this seemingly positive chapter, the prejudice against laughter is far too strong, as revealed in repeated warnings about excess and its danger to human health. Immoderate hilarity is ranked together with such negative emotions as sadness and anger that "make a person thin and weak," they "weaken the stomach and cause the humors to circulate incorrectly."[99]

A discussion of high-medieval religious writings would be incomplete

95 "*For Immoderate Laughing.* A person who is seized and shaken by excessive laughter should grind up some muscat nut, add half as much sugar, shake this in some heated wine, and drink it both on an empty stomach and after having eaten something. For immoderate laughter dries out the lungs and shakes up the liver, and the heat of the sugar that has become liquid restores the lungs. If these two agents are regulated with the heightened heat of the wine and then consumed, they restore the good humors to their proper order which, through immoderate laughing, have become unbalanced." Hildegard of Bingen, *Holistic Healing*, 176.
96 Ibid., 132.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.

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without mentioning Scholasticism, given that, as John W. Baldwin points out, scholastics had an expressed interest in mastering authoritative texts while debating "thorny questions and smoothing out conflicts."[100] They develop what Le Goff calls a "casuistry of laughter" (*une casuistique du rire*), in an effort to define who is authorized to laugh and when it is legitimate to do so. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* provides the most prominent example of this approach. In four articles of Question 168, "Of Modesty as Consisting in the Outward Movements of the Body," Aquinas explores the alleged sinfulness of laughter by engaging with the almost proverbial patristic opinions, with the help of formal thesis-antithesis postulates: "(1) Whether there can be virtue and vice in the outward movements of the body that are done seriously? (2) Whether there can be a virtue about playful actions? (3) Of the sin consisting in excess of play; (4) Of the sin consisting in lack of play."[101] The way in which the questions are formulated suggests that this theologian's approach to mirth, laughter, and the body might be less restrictive than that of his predecessors. And indeed, his response to Ambrose's interpretation of Luke 6:21 ("Woe to you who laugh, for you shall weep") disagrees with the Church Father's conclusion that "all, and not only excessive games should be avoided" and that "therefore there cannot be a virtue about games." Aquinas defends joy, pleasure, and laughter because of their therapeutic effect on the human soul.[102]

However, as in Hildegard's case, Aquinas's less rigid views regarding joy and laughter should not be taken as an unconditional acceptance of them. To use C. S. Lewis's description of Aquinas's rhetorical strategy, "He seems always to take away with one hand what he holds out to us with the other."[103] *Summa* reveals a delicate balance between the inherited tradition of Christian theology and his own views on the matter, inspired by the Aristotelian philosophy and other works of classical antiquity, to which he continuously refers. While proclaiming mirth and joy beneficial for one's health (Article 2) and for greater social harmony (Article 4), Aquinas is also careful to agree with some of his austere

100 Baldwin, *The Scholastic Culture of the Middle Ages*, 85.

101 Quoted according to Aquinas, *Summa*, 1870.

102 "Just as man needs bodily rest for the body's refreshment, because he cannot always be at work, since his power is finite and equal to a certain fixed amount of labor, so too is it with his soul whose power is also finite and equal to a fixed amount of work. […] Now just as weariness of the body is dispelled by resting the body, so weariness of the soul must needs [*sic*] be remedied by resting the soul: and *the soul's rest is pleasure…*" Question 168, Article 2 in Aquinas, *Summa*, 1872.

103 Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, 16. Aquinas utilizes the method commonly used in medieval disputation and presents two sides of the argument side by side; however, more than Aquinas's method, Lewis addresses his ambiguous philosophical position.

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predecessors that "excessive play pertains to senseless mirth, called by Gregory (Moral. xxi, 17) a daughter of gluttony"[104]:

> *I answer that,* In human affairs whatever is against reason is a sin. Now it is against reason for a man to be burdensome to others, by offering no pleasure to others, and by hindering their enjoyment. Wherefore Seneca […] says (De Quat. Virt., cap. De Continentia): "Let your conduct be guided by wisdom so that no one will think you rude, or despise you as a cad." Now a man who is without mirth, not only is lacking in playful speech, but is also burdensome to others, since he is deaf to the moderate mirth of others. Consequently they are vicious, and are said to be boorish or rude, as the Philosopher states (Ethic. iv, 8). Since, however, mirth is useful for the sake of the rest and pleasures it affords; and since, in human life, pleasure and rest are not in quest for their own sake, but for the sake of operation, as stated in Ethic. x, 6, it follows that "lack of mirth is less sinful than excess thereof." Hence the Philosopher says (Ethic. ix, 10): "We should make few friends for the sake of pleasure, since but little sweetness suffices to season life, just as little salt suffices for our meat."
> *Reply to Objection 1:* Mirth is forbidden the penitent because he is called upon to mourn for his sins. Nor does this imply a vice in default, because this very diminishment of mirth in them is in accordance with reason.
> *Reply to Objection 2:* Jeremias speaks there in accordance with the times, the state of which required that man should mourn; wherefore he adds: "I sat alone, because Thou hast filled me with threats." The words of Tobias 3 refer to excessive mirth; and this is evident from his adding: "Neither have I made myself partaker with them that walk in lightness."
> *Reply to Objection 3:* Austerity, as a virtue, does not exclude all pleasures, but only such as are excessive and inordinate; wherefore it would seem to pertain to affability, which the Philosopher (Ethic. iv, 6) calls "friendliness," or, otherwise wittiness. Nevertheless he names and defines it thus in respect of its agreement with temperance, to which it belongs to restrain pleasure.[105]

Aquinas places a particular emphasis on affability, the quality of being pleasant to others, a motif prominent in the contemporary vernacular literature and conduct texts. Unlike Ambrose's treatise on virginity, in which social intercourse is presented as a dangerous aspect of the secular world that threatens virtuous ascetic bodies, Thomas treats it as an important component of human life. Laughter is disapproved of not because it stems from affability, but because if it is excessive, it can disrupt social relations. In this respect, the High Middle Ages exhibit a preoccupation not only with the salvation of the human soul, but also with much more immediate concerns, such as social interaction and acceptance, for which the body is recognized as an important means of communication. Aquinas objects to the position of the Apostle Andronicus who "counts austerity to be one of the virtues" and "describes it as a habit whereby a man neither gives

104 Question 168, Article 3, Reply to Objection 2 in Aquinas, *Summa*, 1874.
105 Question 168, Article 4 in Aquinas, *Summa*, 1874 – 1875.

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nor receives the pleasures of conversation."[106] By responding that even austerity itself "does not exclude all pleasures, but only such as are excessive and inordinate," he reveals his understanding of mankind's social nature, and that it is impossible to abolish mirth and laughter just as it would be impossible to eliminate all social interaction. Aquinas offers a middle ground and emphasizes the importance of self-restraint and bodily control, the ideal of *moderatio* in all things as one of the most important characteristics of a "good man" (*vir bonus*). Thus he reconciles the two positions and illustrates the Legoffian *contrôle de rire* at work.

All the aspects of high-medieval laughter are represented in the German sermons of the Franciscan friar Berthold of Regensburg (1210 – 1272). A charismatic preacher and a prolific writer, Berthold left numerous Latin sermons transmitted in more than 300 manuscripts and 211 sermons written in the vernacular.[107] Whether the so-called "German sermons" were truly his or only attributed to him, it is obvious that in either case his name provided the weight of legitimacy and authority. Unlike those of Hildegard and Aquinas, Berthold's view of laughter is uniformly derogatory. His writings demonstrate an awareness of both the canonical works and contemporary debates and reveal a preoccupation with the state of morality among the laity. Like his early monastic predecessors, Berthold interprets laughter in eschatological terms: as a symptom of shortsightedness and insufficient concern with eternal salvation. In the sermon with the telling title "Von fünf schedelîchen sünden" ("Of Five Harmful Sins"), the preacher admonishes:

> Fliehet die sünde diu dâ heizet unkiusche. Wellet ir des niht tuon, vil wunderlîchen balde von der gesuntheit des lîbes unde von lanclebenne iuwers lîbes unde von der gnâde gotes in den lôn nâch den sünden zuo dem êwigen tôde, nû des êrsten an der sêle und an dem jungesten tage an lîbe und an sêle! Jâ ist ez iu niht wan ein gespöte und ein gelachter. Jâ kumt noch der tac, daz der schimpf gar ze einem ernste wirt, des niemer mêr zerrinnet. (XXVII, 10 – 17)[108]

> Flee the sin called unchastity. If you do not wish to do so, then you shall marvel at [what will happen to] the health and longevity of your body and to God's mercy. As a reward for your sins [you shall be condemned] to eternal death, first in soul, and on the Judgment Day in body and soul! Truly, to you it is all nothing but a joke and a laugh. Verily, the day shall come when your jesting turns into gravity to which there shall be no end.

106 Question 168, Article 4, Objection 3 in Aquinas, *Summa*, 1874.

107 *VL* 1:819. The question of authenticity in the case of Berthold's "German sermons" continues to be debated. Frank Banta argues that the German sermons are not authentic and have only been transmitted under Berthold's name, while Joachim Bumke asserts with certainty that there is no reason to question their authenticity. Cf. *VL* 1:819; Bumke, *Geschichte*, 425.

108 *VA* 1:435.

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In contrast to Aquinas, who treats laughter as a universal human ability, for Berthold it is a particular secular, or courtly, vice that deserves condemnation as an idle pastime together with other forms of amusement, such as jesting, dancing, or playing games:

> Der sechst sunde stam is vrazhait, des est sint ê zeit ezzen, edeleu ezzen, chostleicheu ezzen machen, ze vil ezzen, […] und gelustleicheu löterrede und loterfur nach wirtscheften, ungefuogeu gemeleich oder schimpf, unmäzzich gelechter, vergezzerung gotes und des todes, spil mitwürfel, pretspil, schachzagel und sölheu spil…[109] (Appendix A, vv. 30ff)

> The origin of the sixth sin is gluttony. To that belong eating all the time, fine eating, preparing expensive meals, eating too much, […] joyful but useless speech and good-for-nothing lifestyle, impolite jollity or joking, immoderate laughter, forgetting God and death, playing games, board games, chess, and other such pastimes…

Women are particularly singled out and advised against all immoderation in enjoying life, which includes dancing and joking: "ir frouwen, schônet ouch iuwer selbe gar flîziclîche vor springen unde vor schimpfe unde vor tanzen" ("You women, protect yourself diligently from jumping, jesting, and dancing," XLII, 6–7).[110] Berthold explicitly ties laughter to the lack of chastity (*unkiusche*), for which humanity was punished with the biblical Flood, and condemns it in all possible forms, including ridicule (*smehen*, *gespoett,* and *gespoettlachen*) and loud, bodily, immoderate outbursts (*chahitzen*).[111] Laughter is also conspicuously included in the long list of the sins of the mouth, such as gluttony ("unmâze des mundes an ezzen und trinken"), excessive talkativeness, vicious speech, and slander. While warnings against these transgressions are present in most of Berthold's speeches, Sermon I of Appendix A substantially expands this catalogue to more than fourteen lines of text, adding several categories that clearly aim their criticism at the secular ideal of courtly love service and the literature that perpetuated it: "weib erwerben" ("wooing women"), "singen wertleicheu lieder" ("singing of secular songs"), "lesen tauetsche puech die valsch sint und unnütz" ("reading of books in the vernacular, i. e. German, which are false and useless"), "die stimm trilberen, so man singen sol gotes lob" ("trilling one's voice the way one should sing God's praises").[112] For Berthold,

109 *VA* 2:670–671.

110 *VA* 1:57.

111 For references to the Flood, see sermon "Von ruofenden sünden" ("Of Calling Sins," VI), *VA* 1:81–83. Also see vv. 25ff in *VA* 1:87. For ridicule see Sermons I, VII, and XXVII. For *chahitzen*, cf. v. 23 in *VA* 2:672. *Chahitzen* is a rare Germanized version of the Latin onomatopoeic *cachinnus,* referring to loud or violent laughter (etymologically related to the actual sounds of laughter **ha ha*). Kremer, "Das Lachen," 43.

112 Vv. 15–25 in *VA* 2:672.

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courtly ideology is firmly connected to shortsightedness, the want of morality, and laughter.

It is hard to do justice to the complexity of medieval theological discourse on laughter in just one chapter. Much more can be said about the forms of religious expression that do not suppress but rather utilize and favor human laughter, particularly in the later Middle Ages. However, since most of the literary texts analyzed in this study belong to the high-medieval period, such manifestations of laughter as the Passion plays (*Corpus Christi*) and the *risus paschalis* have to be excluded from the present discussion.[113]

A brief word needs to be said about the phenomenon of carnival, this ultimate form of subversive laughter, which exploits its connection to human sexuality. Much has been written on the carnival tradition thanks to the discussion initiated by the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin in his seminal study *Rabelais and His World*. Bakhtin famously presented the late-medieval carnival as an alternative to the hegemonic power of the Church, as a cathartic, salvific expression of popular rebellion against the restrictive and oppressive religious ideology.[114] Even though commonly thought to be a late-medieval phenomenon, the carnival tradition began much earlier. The oldest mention of the Feast of Fools (*festum stultorum*) comes from the end of the eleventh century and is attributed to the Rector of Theology in Paris, Joannes Belethus. It is also known that in 1199 the Bishop of Paris, Eudes de Sylly, wrote a decree against this feast in Notre Dame.[115] The tradition of carnival processions must have been established firmly enough by the end of the twelfth century for it to disturb the ecclesiastical authorities and to warrant condemnation. The Feasts of Fools (*festum fatuorum, festum follorum*, or *festum stultorum*), the Feasts of the

113 Their meaning and effect continue to be debated. Particularly popular in England during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, the Passion plays were originally a byproduct of the medieval feast *Corpus Christi*, "the feast in which the symbolic Eucharistic world of the Medieval period culminated." Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 88. As far as the *risus paschalis* is concerned, Werner Röcke's recent study illustrates that there are still many misconceptions to be resolved, including the very definition of this phenomenon (preachers driving their parishioners into fits of laughter during the Easter service). See Bachorski et al., "Performativität," 335–336. On Passion plays and *Corpus Christi* see Choi, "Corpus Christi Cycle," 131–151; Fichte, "Die Darstellung"; Bergmann, *Studien zu Entstehung*; Bumke, *Geschichte*, 404–407.

114 Some aspects of Bakhtin's argument, such as a rather black-and-white contrast between the "laugh-less" Middle Ages and the unbridled and free laughter of the Renaissance, are no longer accepted as unquestionable. See, for example, Le Goff, "Le rire au Moyen Âge," 13; Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 103–107. In fact, Gilhus describes the time following the Renaissance and Reformation as no less hostile towards laughter than the medieval period. Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 100.

115 Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 147. Gurevich, however, disagrees and cautions that the carnival proper is a late-medieval and Renaissance phenomenon. Gurevich, "Bakhtin," 56.

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Subdeacons (*festum subdiaconorum*), the Feast of the Ass (*festum asini*), and the Feast of the Rod (*festum baculi*) appropriate and subvert the religious ritual while representing and celebrating the opening up of the body to the sensory world, the age-old connection between laughter and sexuality. The participating priests are said to have dressed up in female garments, clothes with clear sexual connotations, for the female gender represented disorder and corporeality. One of the important characteristics of the carnival is its interest in the material, unruly body and its functions, including sexuality; Bakhtin refers to this aspect as *snizhenie*, a Russian term commonly rendered into English as "pointing downward": from high to low, from spirit to body, from head and face to buttocks and genitals.[116] Carnival participants thus exploited the very aspect that the doctrinal tradition before them had attempted to subdue. The subversive nature of the carnival and the negative responses to it, however, illustrate that the ambivalence toward laughter that plagued earlier epochs was very much present in the High Middle Ages.

This uncertainty is manifested in continuous attempts to create a taxonomy of laughter and to define its permissible and unacceptable forms. The attempts at codification illustrate the medieval awareness that Aristotle's view of laughter as inherently human was ultimately true. At the same time, its numerous aspects are perceived as disturbing. They correspond to, as Gilhus points out, two phenomenological fields of laughter in religion: the connection between the physical body, creation and birth, sexuality and eroticism, food and intoxicating drinks, feasts and comedies, madness and wisdom, and the destructive and antisocial powers, seen in destruction and death, derision and shame, ridicule and blasphemy, and ultimately tragedy.[117] As the new Christian religion tries to differentiate itself from the surrounding and former religious pagan practices, laughter inevitably becomes involved in the debate on the body, propriety, salvation, and virtue. As the issues of corporeality, chastity, and virtue are particularly important in monastic communities, laughter is frequently interpreted as a sign of immoderation, foolishness, and, in women's case, as signaling a possible lack of sexual virtue, while its rejection demonstrates one's internal goodness. In order to obtain salvation after death, an early-medieval Christian had to perform virtue at all times, whether in front of a human or divine audience. As Althoff points out, performance was practiced not only in secular interactions, but also in communicating with God and the saints.[118] The truth of this observation is illustrated by the thirteenth-century cleric Thomasin von Zerclaere, who warns that those who laugh in church act unwisely because the

116 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 11.
117 Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 4.
118 Althoff, "Demonstration und Inszenierung," 250.

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saints can witness their transgression.[119] Early Christianity and medieval monasticism bequeath to posterity what in German is called *der Unwert des Lachens* (the depreciation of laughter).[120]

By the High Middle Ages, patristic texts are seen as authoritative opinions, which—even when questioned—continue to influence ecclesiastical and secular discourses. "I thought of laughter as folly," proclaims the Vulgate Bible.[121] Even as the high-medieval society develops a seemingly more accepting view of joy—curiously coinciding with the rise of courtly culture, the increased importance of laity, and the development of vernacular literatures[122]—the interest in controlling it indicates the persistence of the same concerns that plagued their predecessors and endured well into the future. In the fourteenth century, the female mystic Margaret Ebner interprets her own laughter as a sign of suffering to come,[123] and the fourteenth-century author Der Teichner continues to transmit the belief to his audience that hilarity is incompatible with virtue, and particularly with holiness.[124] The following chapters will show that the secular treatment of laughter in many ways reflects the uncertainty we find in the religious discourse, but that medieval aristocratic culture also played an important role in "domesticating" laughter.[125] Some of its forms become an integral part of courtly protocol. Yet even within courtly culture, the question of laughter's propriety continues to be debated, especially for women who are expected to perform virtue at any cost.

119 "Swer da ist mit ubermuot / und chlaffet unde lachet / wizzet, daz der selbe mahet / die heiligen ze geziuge siner missetat" (*WG*, vv. 10878 – 10881). For further discussion of medieval clerical works, see chapter 3.

120 "Dem Mönche, und man kann ruhig hinzufügen, auch dem Menschen, ziemt das Lachen nicht." Schmitz, "*quod rident homines*," 11.

121 "Risum reputavi errorem" (Vulg. Eccl. 2,2).

122 Le Goff, "Le rire au Moyen Âge," 12.

123 Ebner, *Major Works*, 120.

124 "Daz tunt uns dw puech nicht schein / daz chain heylig yndert sey / der mit lachen sorgen frey / chomen sey ans himel schar" ("The books do not let us know of any saints who would have ever joined heaven carefree and laughing," *Von unrechten vraüden* [#164], vv. 22 – 27). Teichner, *Gedichte*, 185.

125 "Et au niveau du mœurs, on retrouve l'importance de la cour comme milieu de domestication du rire." Le Goff, "Le rire au Moyen Âge," 12.

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3 “Men Are Not of One Mind”: Medieval Conduct Literature for Women

“Wie stet der pfaffen sin?
sie lêrent wol gebaren,
kunst, wîsheit, aller tugende kraft,
vrîde, scham und dar zuo vorhte.”

(Frauenlob)[1]

“Wie sol ich sælig wîp
den liuten nû gebâren,
daz ich müg ir nâchrede wol gestillen,
sît daz in sin noch lîp
niht kan gelîche varen?
daz ir doch viere hæten einen willen!
nieman siht gelîches iht…”

(Burkart von Hohenvels, *KLD* XIII.1,1 – 7)[2]

The Laughter of Courtly Women: Complexities and Concerns

Let’s imagine a situation: a beautiful young woman and her husband are travelling alone, far from their court, when she unwillingly attracts the attention of a boisterous and vain nobleman and is about to be snatched away from her husband by brutal force. Despite her pleas and appeals to the villain’s reason, the situation is becoming desperate: unless she yields and agrees to become his mistress, her husband will be killed and she herself will face rape and abuse. Luckily, the woman reveals a remarkable presence of mind and turns the situation to her advantage by distracting the attacker and giving her companion time to save both of them. The evil is defeated, and the couple is free to continue their travels and face new adventures.

A student of medieval literature will easily recognize in this description an important episode from the famous tale of the love and trials of a married couple—the Arthurian knight Erec and his ever-patient wife Enite. In both

1 “And what is the inclination of clerics? They teach good manners, art, wisdom, all kinds of virtue, peace, modesty and, in addition, awe.”

2 “How should I, a chaste woman, behave nowadays towards people so that I might silence their slander since, according to them, minds and bodies do not desire the same thing? If only four of them were of one mind about it! Nobody sees things the same way…”

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versions of the story—Chrétien de Troyes' Old French romance and its German counterpart by Hartmann von Aue—Enite averts danger from herself and her husband by choosing to deceive the treacherous count whom the couple meets in their wanderings. However, the two works differ significantly in the means that the clever heroine deploys to achieve her goal. Having initially rejected the count's advances, Chrétien's Enide suddenly changes her attitude. In order to persuade the count to spare Erec's life, she summons all her sophistry and rhetorical skills. She resorts to an endless monologue, intersperses it with complicated arguments, and manipulates social conventions to her advantage—further and further convincing the traitor of her willingness to become his lover:

> "Sir, there is a preferable alternative to what you're saying," said Enide: "it would be an act of gross disloyalty and treachery if you killed him [Erec] right here. But, good sir, calm yourself, for I shall do as you desire. […] I should not at any price wish you to commit such an act of treason. My lord is not on his guard: if you killed him in such a way you would be committing too great an offence, and I would in turn be blamed for it. Throughout the land everyone would say that it had been done on my advice. Hold back until morning, when my lord will wish to rise; then you will be better able to harm him without incurring blame or reproach." But the thoughts of her heart are not the words on her lips. […] The count replied: "Splendid, my lady! Surely you were born under a lucky star; you will be kept with great honour."
> "My lord," said she, "I do believe it, but I wish to have your pledge that you will dearly cherish me; I shall not believe you otherwise."
> The rapturously happy count replied: "Here: I pledge you my faith, my lady, loyally as a count, that I will do all you wish…" Then she accepted his pledge, but it was of negligible worth to her and she scarcely valued it except as a means of saving her lord. She knew well how to intoxicate a rogue with words when she put her mind to it; it was far better that she lie to him than for her lord to be cut to pieces.[3]

In Hartmann's story the same scene is depicted differently. Gone are the verbal nets of complicated reasoning woven by the Old French Enide for her potential rapist. The Middle High German heroine's first strategic success is achieved not through her words, but through her body language:

> als si sînen ernest sach
> und daz erz von herzen sprach,
> vil güetlichen sach si in an,
> den vil ungetriuwen man,
> und lachete durch schœnen list.
> si sprach: "ich wæne iu ernest ist.
> […] sô bin ich iuwer bete bereit." (*Erec*, vv. 3838 – 3843; 3895)[4]

3 As translated by William Kibler in Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide,* 79. Corresponds to vv. 3355 – 3361, 3368 – 3380, 3398 – 3417 of the Old French original in Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, 168.

4 Hartmann von Aue, *Erec.*

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> As she saw that he [the Count] was serious and meant it, she looked at the false man in a friendly way and smiled cleverly. She said, "I see that you are in earnest. […] So I am ready to do your bidding."

What Chrétien's character achieves with persuasion, Hartmann's Enite accomplishes with a smile. No doubt, this smile has the same degree of premeditation and deceit as her Old French counterpart's words, a fact made clear by the author's reference to *list*, meaning "cleverness," "wit," or "cunning." However, while the non-verbal aspects of this scene are left to the discretion of the individual performer of Chrétien's text, the German work is very precise in its description of the heroine's actions. And although the message that Enite's body language sends is then reinforced by a tall tale about her alleged misery with Erec, it is clear that her smile plays the crucial role in turning this dire situation to her advantage. The count, who a moment ago was ready to lose control over his passion and ravish the poor woman, stops and listens. He is persuaded by her sudden change of mood and takes it at face value. Enite thus appears to use some well-established convention in regard to women's smiling, which her wooer recognizes. It is the count's uncritical acceptance of this convention that ultimately leads him to his perdition.

Smiling is by no means an unusual gesture in medieval courtly literature. As Kathryn Starkey observes,

> In most courtly epics the joy of the court is expressed visually in the smiling countenances of young men and ladies, particularly at ceremonial events such as arrivals and feasts. At these public events smiling is not just an affective response to a joyous event but […] is part of a conventional visual display of courtly *freude* [joy].[5]

Few would believe that Enite's facial expression has anything to do with an affective response to a happy event. Although it resembles the restoration of peace and a reaffirmation of the power of the lord of the house, it is hard to find courtly joy in this situation of threat, danger, and rape. The heroine's smile is thus nothing but a performance.[6] In the fictional world of Hartmann's romance, Enite's smile produces an *impression* of restoring *freude*, with its important component of harmonious interaction between the sexes. It reinstates traditional gender roles by presenting the woman as attractive and sexually inviting, as an object of desire, rather than as a rebellious and inaccessible *übelez wîp* ("evil woman").

The connection between women's laughter and sexual availability, discussed in previous chapters, serves Hartmann well; yet it also causes the German poet to

5 Starkey, "Bruhnhild's Smile," 164.

6 On the definition of performance and performatives see Starkey, "Bruhnhild's Smile," 163–164.

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view Enite's smile as problematic. He reveals his uneasiness by adding a clarifying description, *durch schœnen list*, purposely translated earlier simply as "cleverly." Of course Enite laughs *cleverly* in the given situation (MHG *durch list*)! But the question that arises is why this *list* should be described as *schœn*; or, even better, why couldn't Hartmann simply omit the reference to *list* and describe the scene as, "she looked at the false man in a friendly way and smiled" or "smiled sweetly" ("und *lachete*" or "…*lachete schœne*")? Could it be more than a flowery idiom or a mnemonic aid for the performer of the story?[7] Can Hartmann's careful word choice add to the modern understanding of how his contemporaries might have perceived the laughter of courtly women and uncover this perception's complexities and contradictions?

First of all, let us examine what would happen if the word *schœne* were taken out of the phrase. Even though Hartmann is much less direct than Chrétien, never stating that his Enite is openly lying, the phrase *durch list* would alert the listening audience to the fact that the heroine's behavior was a charade and that this smile must be followed by a lie. The Middle High German word *list* is used much more often to refer to cunning than to wisdom, and the expressions *âne list, mit listen*, *arger list*, *boeser* or *übeler list* all refer to treacherous, dishonest, or deceitful behavior.[8] Surely, the audience is likely to be on the woman's side as she tries to free herself from this precarious situation, but such a strategic use of smiling in order to deceive and mislead can nevertheless be seen as transgressive. The image of Enite in this case—so cold-blooded in her smiling and plotting—would be at odds with the way she is depicted throughout the rest of the work—as warm, womanly, and honest. By adding *schœne* to his description, Hartmann takes away the negative connotation of *list* and softens the effect of the heroine's treacherous smile and her subsequent lie.

Had the author described Enite as simply smiling or smiling decorously (*schœne*), her behavior would have looked very strange indeed. Now *schœne* would come to describe not her cunning, but her smile. With no other explanation provided for Enite's sudden change of mood, the audience could come to question her character, since her body language—the stereotypical *vil güet-*

7 For a brilliant discussion of the formulaic constitution of thought in oral noetic (i.e., relying on memory) cultures to which the Middle Ages belong, see Chapters 2 and 3 in Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 16–76.

8 Lexer's definitions of *list* include "weisheit" (wisdom) but also "klugheit, schlauheit" (cleverness, slyness); but the negative connotation seems to predominate, e.g. *mit listen* means "auf schlaue weise" (slyly, cunningly); *âne list* means "aufrichtig, wahrhaftig" (honest, true; literally: "without cunning"); and *argerlist* means "arglist, unaufrichtigkeit" (dishonesty, conceit). Lexer, *HW* 1:1936. This use of *list* is characteristic of Stricker's Arthurian romance *Daniel von dem blühenden Tal* (*Daniel of the Blossoming Valley*). Scholars speculate that the protagonist's use of *list* rather than knightly prowess may have contributed to the negative reception of Stricker's epic. Cf. Gibbs and Johnson, *Medieval German Literature*, 363.

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lichen ansehen and (*schœne*) *lachen*—would have indicated she welcomed the man's sexual advances. Without the reference to *list*, German Enite's smile would thus take on the meaning of the *unkiusche* (the notorious lack of chastity), which Hartmann needs to avoid in order for Enite to maintain the image of a virtuous victim.[9] In fact, this is precisely what Chrétien fears too. His version supplies triple justification for Enide's lying, and all three times he is emphatic that Enide's dubious words are not indicative of her conjugal infidelity: "The thoughts of her heart are not the words on her lips"; "then she accepted his pledge, but it was of *negligible worth to her* and she *scarcely valued it except as a means of saving her lord*"; "it was *far better to lie* […] *than for her lord to be cut to pieces*" (my emphasis). The last quote unhesitatingly presents lying and giving the impression of consenting to adultery as correct ethical choices.

Despite the fact that Enite's chastity and her loyalty to Erec are unquestioned, Hartmann's innovation—the heroine's smile—is both brilliant and problematic. Poetically, Hartmann dramatizes the episode and achieves through the description of a single gesture what Chrétien tries to do in several paragraphs and three clarifications. On the level of symbolism, however, the MHG writer has difficulty reconciling Enite's virtue and her treacherous seductiveness, inherent in her smile and necessary for the plot. His addition *durch schœnen list* clearly illustrates the need to emphasize the woman's goodness and to justify her smiling lest it be perceived as transgressive.[10]

A clue to understanding Hartmann's concern that Enite's behavior might be misconstrued can be discovered in a completely different kind of text, known as conduct literature, written to educate young aristocrats about proper behavior in this world and attaining salvation after death. Intended for a lay audience but written mostly by clerics, these works are conspicuously situated between the two worlds—the religious and the secular. The nature of their authors' education presupposes knowledge of the Church's teachings; and it is thus not surprising to discover that these texts often echo and promote contemporary religious concerns about laughter and virtue.[11] They, however, coexist with the writings

9 My interpretation is further supported by Joachim Bumke, who points out that medieval rules for women frequently emphasize that in order to reject a man a woman must do so with entire seriousness and without laughing. Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 343.

10 In MHG *schoen* can also mean "careful, complete, impressive." In this case, *schoen* can be seen as a compliment to Enite's presence of mind. Yet, it still performs the same function—it neutralizes the treachery of Enite's smile and of her consequent lie.

11 Of course, conduct literature is by no means the only way that religious views of laughter reached the secular public. Sermons by mendicant preachers like Berthold of Regensburg are just one example. Another venue for the interaction between the ecclesiastical and secular spheres may be found in the didactic tradition of the Middle Ages, such as *Maeren*. For example, see Sieglinde Hartmann's study on the way laughter is represented in Der Stricker's

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that appreciate laughter (including that of women), define its acceptable forms, and fix its place within the secular courtly ideal of humanity. At the same time, medieval conduct texts do more than simply mirror the debate between anti- and pro-laughter discourses. The two kinds of conduct works demonstrate that medieval lay society lived with two diametrically opposed views of laughing femininity, both relying on the topos "laughing woman = sexually available woman," but utilizing this equation in its own way. While one position presents laughter as a threat to female virtue, the other exploits its erotic potential. Conduct discourse reveals the degree to which these two seemingly incompatible views are in fact *intertwined* in the medieval courtly imagination, pointing to the ultimate reason behind this symbiotic existence: control of laughter in the case of women represents male control over female sexuality. It exposes an inherent contradiction within medieval courtly society that imposes on women the unsatisfiable requirement to be virtuous and desirable at the same time.

Before moving on to a textual analysis of conduct literature, I must clarify some terminology. The texts I will discuss belong to the genre known as conduct or courtesy literature. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, the distinction between "conduct" and "courtesy" is important. The latter refers to the texts dealing specifically with court etiquette, while the former is used as a broader and more inclusive term. A further distinction can be made within the concept of "courtesy," between "courtesy books proper" that deal with moral qualities and "etiquette manuals" that focus on behavior.[12] However, too strict an emphasis on the moral versus behavioral, internal versus external is neither helpful nor necessary in the study of medieval conduct, where external qualities, such as behavior or beauty, commonly reflect internal qualities (i. e., virtue or its lack). As Dronzek observes:

> People would no doubt consider a person's behavior toward others as an indicator of that person's morality or goodness, thus erasing the modern distinction between courtesy and etiquette. Therefore, although a number of these texts do label themselves "courtesy books," the term conduct literature is more encompassing and neutral.[13]

In this study, the terms "conduct" and "courtesy" are used interchangeably to refer to instructional treatises like Thomasin of Zerclaere's *Der Welsche Gast* or

works. Hartmann makes a strong argument for the influence of medieval theology, particularly of the Early Church Fathers. Hartmann, "Empirischer Beitrag," 107–129.

12 Dronzek, "Gendered Theories," 137.

13 Ibid., 137. For a detailed discussion of the term "courtesy" with a survey of medieval texts see Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy.* Recent research on pan-European conduct literature is wonderfully represented in the essay collection Ashley and Clark, *Medieval Conduct.* A comprehensive overview of medieval and early modern German conduct texts for women is provided by Susanne Barth in Barth, *Jungfrauenzucht*, 75–83. On women in specific MHG texts see the bibliography, particularly the studies by Bennewitz, Ehlert, Rasmussen, and Dallapiazza.

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Hugo of Trimberg's *Renner*. However, I also apply the term "conduct literature" to a broader spectrum of texts that includes *Sprüche*, or short didactic poems by secular authors, as well as proverbial wisdom from collections such as Freidank's *Bescheidenheit.* Although these works formally belong to the genre of didactic literature (*Lehrdichtung*) rather than to educational literature (*Erziehungsliteratur*) proper, their relevance to the present discussion is obvious in their frequent engagement with the issue of laughter and their broader interest in the subject of proper conduct, represented by the iconic question, *Wie man zer werlte solte leben?* ("How one should live in this world?").

Belonging to Two Worlds: Meet the Courtly Cleric

Until the rise of courtly culture in the twelfth century, all literary activity was concentrated in the hands of clerics and intended, for the most part, for religious instruction, whether in Latin or in the vernacular (what Bumke calls "practical religious literature").[14] However, the work of scholars such as Jaeger, Colish, and Schulman has shown that true interaction between the secular and ecclesiastical worlds extended beyond patronage and religious instruction. Even such striking developments in secular society as the unprecedented growth of vernacular literatures and the spread of the chivalric code of manners during the High Middle Ages are now themselves seen as products of clerical activity.[15]

Although the term "cleric," from the Latin *clericus,* includes all clergy living outside monastic life—such as students, teachers, bishops, archbishops, and clergy of parish and cathedral churches—it also applies to court clerics, that is, the educated members of aristocratic courts who performed a number of important duties as advisors, tutors, diplomats, architects, and chaplains.[16] As the best-educated members of the court, privileged to have access to their secular lords, courtly clerics played an important role in shaping the affairs of medieval aristocracy, which becomes clear thanks to the numerous works they wrote with the purpose of improving and guiding the noble laity.[17]

14 Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 425.

15 Jaeger's seminal work, *The Origins of Courtliness—Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals—939 – 1210,* reveals the scope of clerical influence in formulating and promoting the ideal of courtliness that found its expression in medieval lyric, narrative, and numerous writings of didactic nature. Also see Colish, *Medieval Foundations*, 175 – 183; Oostrom, *Court and Culture*; Schulman, *Where Troubadours Were Bishops.*

16 Jaeger, *Courtliness*, 15.

17 Cf. "As tutors at court the clerics unquestionably exerted a significant influence on the social ideas of the secular nobility." Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 324. Both Jaeger and Bumke concur that instruction of laity in courtesy lay by and large in the province of clerics, especially in Germany, where the level of literacy among the aristocracy was substantially lower compared

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The functions of the court chaplain often included those of a priest, thus providing an opportunity to transmit ecclesiastical ideals to the laity. Because of the discrepancy between courtly ideals and reality, it is not surprising that the secular way of life is continuously scrutinized in the clerical writings of the time, which reveal that worldly clerics were strongly aware of the scope and limits of their influence. For example, the fourteenth-century Dutch cleric Dirk of Delft advises against attacking laymen's vices and suggests more diplomatic strategies that his colleagues might use in order to fulfill their duty of *correctio* (correction): "Let them approach their masters and convey to them the error of their ways by parables, with gentle speech rather than harsh words, for these will not be heard and so they do more harm than good."[18] The works of many high- and late-medieval clerics anticipate Dirk's insight, correcting the deficiencies of the laity not through direct condemnation, but rather with the help of persuasion, *exempla*, and appeals to their patron's secular values, such as honor, prestige, well-being, and prosperity. Clerical writings, particularly conduct texts, point to their authors' position at the nexus of the two worlds and their understanding of the lay society within which they moved—its mechanisms, intricacies, necessities, and sensibilities.

It would be inaccurate to imagine all clerics as highly pious churchmen pursuing the goal of promoting the Christian doctrine at court.[19] However, their proximity to and integration into courtly society cannot obscure the fact that they received an ecclesiastical education, by means of which they were initiated into the pan-European culture with long-rooted traditions and patriarchal ideology.[20] Besides ideals of courtly humanism, this learned culture promoted misogynist discourse inherited from classical and early ecclesiastical texts. Andreas Capellanus's *De Amore*, particularly its notorious and rampantly misogynist Book III, demonstrates how the patristic, no less than the classical, tradition could be harnessed for the agenda of high-medieval authors; while Alcuin Blamires' anthology *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended* provides another stark illustration of the negative pre-modern discussion on femininity and sexuality.[21] In the later Middle Ages, the misogynist discourse continues to

to that of France or England. "Here, [in the German lands]," Bumke says, "the princes were generally illiterates and had no personal access to the tradition of Latin learning" Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 75. Bumke also mentions that at first, in order to be educated as clerics, Germans frequently went to France or Italy where learning and clerical culture flourished. However, later "higher studies did gradually gain ground in Germany" Ibid., 72.

18 Oostrom, *Court and Culture*, 185.

19 Jaeger, *Courtliness*, 22 ff.

20 "The worldly clergy formed a class whose values were not limited by national boundaries." Jaeger, *Courtliness*, 27 – 28. Jaeger also provocatively asks, "Where should they have gotten an education if not in the church as clerics?" Ibid., 15.

21 Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love.* Also see Blamires, Pratt, and Marx, *Woman Defamed.* Van Oostrom's and Karras's studies show how all clerical learning inevitably led to

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be closely associated with a university education, forming the core of clerical masculine identity, different from that of secular knighthood.[22]

Misogyny was thus transmitted to the laity, even by liberal worldly clerics, and provided a rationale for gendered education.[23] The medieval theological and natural-philosophical belief that woman is more carnal than man is the key reason for this gendered approach. Even though both men and women are held to the standards of moderation (*mâze*) and advised against improper behavior, awareness of the body and the ways to control it are emphasized to a greater extent in the texts intended for the female audience. While the list of a man's virtues and responsibilities encompasses a broad scope of activities, the most important and defining values for a woman are thought to be her physical beauty and attractiveness, thus anchoring her in her corporeality. Gendered education results in a gendered approach to laughter. Similar to the contemporaneous religious discourse, conduct literature recognizes the connection between laughter and affability (or social intercourse), so prominent in the writings of Ambrose and Aquinas. The authors of conduct treatises are conscious of the fact that affability is more than just an indicator of a person's refinement as a courtier; it also plays a crucial role in facilitating the interaction between the sexes. While some authors may be more explicit than others in their apprehension of the erotic side of laughter, the majority express reservations regarding women's laughter, reaffirming Ambrose's view that "when laughter creeps in, […] bashfulness is lessened and modesty is worn away."

Despite the parallels between conduct literature's negative perception of laughter and that of the contemporaneous religious discourse, conduct manuals

theology. See Oostrom, *Court and Culture*, 172; Karras, *Sexuality*, 13. The presence of a powerful misogynist rhetoric may at least partially explain Jaeger's finding of the total absence in real court life of anything similar to the worship of women often found in courtly literature: "But I do find it surprising that in the many texts giving us vivid glimpses into the life of the medieval court in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, there is no trace of the exaltation of women, so prominent a feature of courtly literature," Jaeger, *Courtliness*, 268.

22 Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 68.

23 For example, in the Old French conduct treatise *Contenance des fames*, the author paints a familiar image of woman as volatile, erratic, and forever oscillating between dangerous extremes of behavior: "Or est sauvage, or est privee" ("Now she's wild, now she's demure," v. 51); "Feme a un cuer par heritage / Qui ne puet estre en unestage" ("A woman's heart is just not able / To chart a course that's firm and stable," vv. 27–28). Even as the mother, she is unstable: "Or est douce, or est amere…" ("Now she's gentle, now she's tart," v. 45). As translated in Fiero, Pfeffer and Allain, *Three Medieval Views of Women*, 57. That said, one must admit that the view of femininity in courtly discourse—intended for the culture of procreation and sexuality—is far from unambiguous. Strong derogatory remarks about women or less explicit, but no less effective, rules on how to control or restrict the unruly female nature are known to coexist with the praise of ladies (*Frauenlob*) in both fictional texts and conduct literature of this time. However, scholars frequently interpret even the glorification of women in courtly love tradition as a form of misogyny. Cf. Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*; Burns, *Bodytalk*, esp. 154.

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clarify why Le Goff calls the medieval court the place where "domestication" of laughter must have occurred.[24] The authors of courtesy books try to accommodate, even "tame," laughter by defining its forms and the specific spheres where it might be permissible. It continues to be viewed with suspicion, but the task of medieval courtly didacts is to control rather than utterly eliminate it.

Non-Gendered Laughter in Conduct Texts: Saving Souls and Reputations

In their overall treatment of laughter, conduct texts reflect the contemporary preoccupation with the impending death and looming Apocalypse, as expressed in Luke 6:21 – 25, James 4:9 – 10, and Ecclesiastes 7:4.[25] The writings of clerical authors Thomasin of Zerclaere and Hugo of Trimberg, for example, contain such familiar motifs as the performance of virtue, the diabolical nature of laughter, and the foolish shortsightedness of those who indulge in it. According to Hugo of Trimberg, the devil is said to drag his victims to hell laughing; and Thomasin calls those who make others laugh the "devil's illusionists."[26] The need to appear virtuous and ever mindful of God and His saints causes Zerclaere to warn his audience against laughing in church, since it indicates one's lack of repentance and points to the deadly sin of arrogance: "Be it known to you the saints witness misdeeds of those who chatter and laugh in arrogance [in church]" ("swer da ist mit ubermuot / und chlaffet unde lachet / wizzet, daz der selbe mahet / die heiligen ze geziuge siner missetat" (*WG*, vv.10878 – 10881).

At the same time, the writers of conduct manuals are keenly interested in the here and now, in the social perception of laughter. The preoccupation with societal approval is apparent in *Facetus Deutsch*, a German translation of the famous twelfth-century Latin collection of aphorisms, proverbial expressions, and maxims: "Du salt nicht lachen zcuvil, Und das selbige sal gescheen senfftiglich; Wen wer stetis lachen wil, Den saltu han vor eyenen narren gewißlich" ("You should not laugh too much, and if you do laugh, you should do so quietly,

24 Le Goff, "Le rire au Moyen Âge," 12.

25 Also the Vulgate Bible: "Risum reputavi errorem" ("I considered laughter derangement," Vulg. Eccl. 2,2). SI, VII, 248, Lachen, 102.

26 "Swenne der tiufel, / dîn geselle, / mit dir vert lachende in der helle …" ("When your friend, the devil, laughingly rides with you in hell…"; *Renner*, vv. 6395 – 6387). All citations come from Hugo von Trimberg, *Der Renner.* Also Zerclaere: "er ist des tivels goukelere / wan er machet mit sinem mere, / daz ein tore den vient uber siht, / wan er ist sin gevær niht" (*WG*, vv. 11067 – 11070). Also see *WG*, vv. 1149 – 1163 condemning the shortsightedness of those who choose worldly laughter. The laughing devil is a common image in the fourteenth-century poems by Der Teichner, as well as, for example, in #34 "Von der chonschaft," v. 23. In Heinrich der Teichner, *Gedichte*, 40 – 41.

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because he who always wants to laugh, should be truly considered a fool").[27] This sober admonition seemingly echoes the proclamation in Ecclesiastes 7:4 that "the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth"; yet it is no longer just the response of the heavenly audience that preoccupies the author, but rather that of his peers, their sensibilities and acceptance. Aristotelian physiognomy, popular in the Middle Ages, included treating facial expressions and bodily gestures as a reflection of one's character and morality. Therefore, as Verberckmoes points out, "from someone's laughter could be deduced what kind of individual he was."[28] Depictions of laughing fools abound in medieval art. The fool's open mouth draws attention to itself and disturbs the viewer. The grotesqueness of laughter combined with its eruptive nature are incompatible with the ideals of moderation and refinement cultivated in courtly fiction and advocated in contemporaneous courtesy manuals. This leads medieval didacts to demand that the education of aristocratic children of both genders include instruction on how to control their natural, potentially excessive jollity:

> Ein ander lêre suln diu kint
> behalten, die dâ edel sint:
> si suln lachen niht ze vil,
> wan lachen ist der tôren spil.
> bi ir rede ist niht grôzer sin,
> swâ zwêne lachent under in.
> dâ von mac ein ieglîch man,
> der sich wol verstên kan,
> lâzen ân nît, hœrt er niht,
> des ein man lachende giht. (*WG*, vv. 527 – 536)

> Noble children should follow yet another rule: they should not laugh too much, because laughter is a fool's business. Whenever two people laugh, there is not much sense in their speech. That is why a wise person must not get angry if he does not hear what somebody says while laughing.

A keen awareness of the performative aspects of laughter and of the difference between affect and gesture, especially in a society where high-mindedness and joy (*freude*) are standards, is another recurrent theme in medieval didactic

27 SI, VII, 249, Lachen 121. This advice appears also in medieval proverbial lore, for example, in Freidank's *Bescheidenheit:* "und lachent si nâch tôren site" ("and they laugh as is common with fools," v. 86,4), Dietrich Engelhus's *Laienregel*, Der Teichner's poetry (#391, vv. 1 – 5), and much later, even in Sebastian Brandt's *Narrenschiff* (v. 54,26). For more examples, see the rubric "Lachen" in *TPMA* 7: 240 – 253, esp. SI, VII, 249 – 250, Lachen 119 – 137. All quotes from come from Freidank, *Bescheidenheit.*

28 Verberckmoes, *Laughter*, 41.

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literature. Medieval authors express concern with the manipulative use of laughter and smiling, with false friendliness intended to deceive and mislead:

Vil maniger mich an lachet,
ichn weiz, ob er mich meine
mit triuwen als ich in.
Sîn triuwe diu wirt geswachet,
sîn muot der ist niht reine,
ob er treit valschen sin.
[…]
Sô phî dir, valschez lachen,
swem du wonst in den ougen;
vil manigen hâst [du] verwunt.
Du kanst wol sünde machen… ("Aber driu," vv. 1 – 6, 10 – 13).[29]

Many a man smiles at me, but I do not know whether his intentions toward me are as honest as mine toward him. If he is false, he is not trustworthy and his mind cannot be pure. […] So fie, you false laughter, in whosever eyes you live; [you] have hurt very many. You can truly cause sin.

What has worked so well for Hartmann's Enite clearly has its downside. It is crucial for young courtiers to be able to discern the true motivation behind the external affability: "Disloyalty is visible in him who grins in laughter," states Freidank[30]; "I have to be wary of those who smile at me sweetly," observes Der Teichner[31]; hypocrites' "cloudless laughter/smile" brings along "sharp hail" and their sweet tongues are just a distraction from their hearts of gall in Walther von der Vogelweide's opinion.[32] For this reason, the Latin *Facetus* warns that laughter must be used very sparingly; and if it is used, it should be honest and kind.[33]

While differing in their perception about the potential of laughter, all conduct texts share the same premise, i.e. that it must be approached with caution.

29 De Boor, *Die deutsche Literatur* 1.1: 870.

30 "untriuwe in deme schînet, / swer lachende grînet" (*Bescheidenheit*, vv. 43,24 – 25). Similarly, in Hugo of Trimberg's *Renner:* "lecheler mit valschem mund / hânt lützel triuwe in herzen grunde" ("laughing hypocrites with false tongues [lit. "mouths"] have little loyalty deep in their hearts," *Renner*, vv. 3587 – 3588).

31 "der mich liebleich lachet an, vor dem muez ich mich besorgen" ("Von der werelt," vv. 11,8 – 9) in Heinrich der Teichner, *Gedichte*, 91 – 92.

32 "[ir] wolkenlôsez lachen bringet scharpfen hagel" (L 29,4; Schweikle 12,10); "Mir griulet sô mich lachent an die lechelære, den diu zunge honeget und daz herze gallen hât" (L 30,9; Schweikle 13,8). Walther von der Vogelweide's verses are quoted according the standard practice of following Karl Lachmann's classification (marked as L). For the sake of convenience, I also quote the page numbers from the most recent standard edition of Walther's poetry by Günther Schweikle. See Walther von der Vogelweide, *Werke.*

33 "Risus in ore tuo pius et rarus videatur; per crebros risus levitas in corde notatur" ("Laughter on your face should be honest and kind and must appear rarely, for frequent laughter indicates inconstancy of heart," SI, VII, 248, Lachen, 110).

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Whether their authors talk about an immoderate eruption that turns the person into a shortsighted fool in the eyes of his or her peers and the all-knowing heavenly judges, or a gentle, disarming, and welcoming smile that conceals one's evil intentions, the primary reason for their concerns is its relation to virtue. Laughter, especially when it is excessive, is seen as a statement about one's character. At the same time, when used wisely, laughter can function as a social lubricant. The authors of conduct books are keenly aware of the fact that in their society no words or actions can or should be understood literally. Thus the frequent laughter of the so-called *lechelære* may be a successful tool of their intrigues, but it also signals and proves their treachery.

Bodily Virtue or Social Prestige: Gendered Education and Laughter

This treatment of laughter in conduct texts acquires additional complexity when examined within the context of the gendered nature of medieval education. A comparison between conduct manuals that address men exclusively and those written just for women uncovers an unequal treatment of laughter. This results from distinct social expectations and relies on a different understanding of male and female honor in courtly society. The texts written for a male audience, such as *Winsbecke*, *Der Jünglinc*, *Magezoge*, or relevant passages in *Der Welsche Gast* and *Der Renner*, discuss the practical deeds and actions that reflect a dominant masculine role. At the same time, works intended for a female audience explore a much narrower sphere of activities centered around love and marriage. The two thirteenth-century poems *Winsbecke* and *Winsbeckin* lend themselves particularly well to comparison. The male-voiced text (*Winsbecke*) and its female-voiced counterpart (*Winsbeckin*) are complementary in a number of ways, so much so that it is believed that the former could have served as a model for the latter in both form and content.[34] The similarities between the two texts are indeed striking, particularly in their language, metaphors, and overall didactic tone; yet the differences are no less surprising. While the young aristocrat in *Winsbecke* is instructed in various subjects, such as knighthood (*Ritterlehre*), weaponry (*Waffenlehre*), courtly behavior (*Hoflehre*), household management (*husêre*), and, very briefly and only to general principles, love (*Minnelehre*), the education of the young woman in *Winsbeckin* chiefly explores an inner, emotional world—the prerogative of women—and is reduced exclusively to *Min-*

34 Rasmussen, "If Men Desire You," 138. Also see the introduction in the recent edition and translation of the three *Winsbecke*-texts in Rasmussen and Trokhimenko, "The *Winsbecke* Father-Son and Mother-Daughter Poems," 61–69.

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nelehre.[35] Texts like *Winsbecke* prepare young men for their role as rulers, warriors, courtiers, Christians, and even household managers; they focus on various aspects of the feudal life and represent diverse civic, masculine roles. In contrast, the conduct books intended for girls limit women's field of activity to love and marriage and emphasize that a woman need only be "courteous and decent" (*hüfisch und gevuoc*).[36]

Such a disparity in social expectations is grounded in a gendered understanding of honor. Conduct manuals are deeply influenced by the view that female sexuality requires stronger control than its male counterpart. Therefore, they emphasize the physical component of women's *êre* and examine any female behavior through the prism of sexual modesty. A woman's reputation is treated as a consequence of her bodily virtue, and even when a particular transgression is nonsexual (such as excessive chattiness, for example), "damage takes place only through the catalyst of inappropriate sexual behavior," thus resulting, to use Anna Dronzek's term, in the "physicalization of women's honor."[37]

In order to restrain their inherent sexuality, women's bodies are subjected to numerous restrictions. Ingrid Bennewitz has pointed out three primary ways, in which courtly manuals successfully obliterate the female body in order to make it less visible and therefore less disturbing: through concealing it with clothes[38];

35 As Trude Ehlert observes, only nine stanzas in *Winsbecke* deal with *minne* (love), comprising merely 16 percent of the poem, while in *Winsbeckin* thirty-three out of a total of forty-five stanzas (ca. 73 percent of the total text) are dedicated to love. Ehlert, "Die Frau als Arznei," 55.

36 Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 345. This aspect of conduct literature for women did not go unnoticed by older scholarship and can be blamed for the long-term lack of interest in these works among scholars. For example, while Helmut De Boor praises *Winsbecke* for addressing such profound issues as the problems of its time and the conflict between the world and God ("[die] Problematik der Zeit, [der] Zwiespalt von Welt und Gott"), *Winsbeckin* is described as "more superficial and flat, and focused more on formal education than character building" ("äußerlicher, flacher, mehr auf formale Erziehung als auf Charakterbildung gerichtet"). De Boor and Newald, *Geschichte*, 409.

37 Dronzek, "Gendered Theories," 149.

38 Although written with a different goal in mind, James A. Schultz's essay about the relationship between clothes and gender in Gottfried's *Tristan* offers some additional insights into the relationship between the body and clothing. Schultz, "Bodies," 91 – 110. Schultz claims that clothes often function to reveal the gender of the person wearing them, since Gottfried's bodies are not sexed (due to their lack of "the most obvious anatomical signs of sex difference," which reflects more general trends of medieval construction of the body). "While the sex of the desirable body is not culturally visible, the gender of the desirable body is," says Schultz. "When clothing signifies gender it does something that bodies cannot do, since Gottfried's desirable bodies do not distinguish themselves morphologically as men or women. Clothing, which relates differently to men's and to women's bodies, thereby establishes a difference between men and women. […] It creates the gendered body" Ibid., 97. On the other hand, Schultz's essay offers a different perspective on how clothes can *call attention* to the body instead of *masking* it: clothes and the body work together. Contrary to Ben-

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limiting it spatially (including prohibitions against touching, running, and sudden movements); and by restricting its senses (including rules controlling speaking, gazing, etc.).[39] The most memorable illustration of this literal and metaphorical concealment is found in Thomasin von Zerclaere's *Der Welsche Gast,* with its meticulous lists of activities deemed inappropriate for a courtly lady. The degree of self-control expected of a virtuous woman may shock the modern reader. She is not allowed any swift or sudden movements, including walking fast or even looking up; she may not gaze around or behind herself, talk loudly, or speak if she is not addressed directly. When riding a horse, she must hold her head completely stiff and keep her hands and her body hidden under her cloak.[40]

In contrast, the importance of the body in texts for men is far less prominent. Young noblemen are not simply permitted, but rather encouraged to look directly at both men and women: "A noble youth should *gladly* observe both knights and ladies in a polite manner" ("ein edel juncherre sol / bêde rîter unde vrouwen / gezogenlîche *gerne* schouwen," *WG*, vv. 416–418) (my emphasis). Even when such "bodily" issues as table manners or personal care are discussed, the texts never reduce male aristocrats to their bodies. Depending on the intended audience's gender, the very word *zuht* ("breeding, upbringing, education, good manners") comes to signify different concepts. Whereas in the case of women, it represents "sexual modesty," the same word in reference to men acquires the meaning of "self-control." In contrast to female honor "located in the physical arena," its male counterpart is linked to social prestige.[41] Undoubtedly, both men and women will damage their honor or reputation if they neglect their manners, but for a man such damage would mean a drop in his social standing, a loss of respect in the eyes of his male superiors.[42] In order to

newitz, he sees the woman's body "*exposed* by its clothing and offered to public view. Isold is turned into the object of voyeuristic fantasy" Ibid., 98. Analyzing the way the heroine's clothes are described, Schultz observes that Isold's robe clothes and discloses her body at the same time: "If you see through the clothes, then it must be a woman's body" Ibid. The relationship between the body in medieval literature and its clothing is indeed a complex one.

39 Also see Bennewitz and Weichselbaumer, "Erziehung," 48.

40 *WG*, vv. 405 ff.

41 In her study of the fifteenth-century English conduct books, Anna Dronzek has shown the extent to which the instructions for boys and girls differ in their pedagogical methods and strategies thanks to the belief in men's greater intellectual capacities, thus reflecting the dichotomy "reason versus body." While not all of Dronzek's conclusions apply with equal ease to medieval German texts, some of them nevertheless prove useful for studying conduct literature in general. For the gendered use of metaphors and imagery in Middle High German conduct texts, see Trokhimenko, "*Gedanken sint vrî*," 327–350.

42 Dronzek, "Gendered Theories," 150. Also Bennewitz and Weichselbaumer, "Erziehung," 48: "Männer müssen durch ihr kontrolliertes Verhalten in allen Situationen beweisen, dass sie ihren Platz in der Gesellschaft kennen…"

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alert boys to this potential consequence, conduct literature encourages them to strive to match "the worthy men" in excellence. The father in *Winsbecke* constantly reminds his son of *die werden*, "Self-control and virtue will make you worthy of the worthiest company" ("[zuht und tugent] machent dich den werden wert," *WE*, v. 6), while his equivalent in *Der Magezoge* speaks of the elders (*die alten*) and advises his son to be "brave and noble, so that people would speak of this" ("wis biderbe, daz man sin jehe," *Magezoge*, v. 94).[43] In Thomasin's *Der Welsche Gast*, young men are told to imagine being observed at all times by an older "virtuous man" (*frum man*):

> In sinem mut man still sol
> ain frum man erweln wol,
> und sol sich rihten gar nach im,
> daz ist tugent, und sin.
> er sol di naht und den tach
> an in gedenchen ob er mach.
> […]
> da volge mit dem biderm manne.
> im mach niht misslingen danne. (*WG*, vv. 627 – 632, 635 – 636)

> Secretly in one's mind, [a youth] should choose a noble and virtuous man and be completely guided by him. This is virtuous and reasonable. He should think of [the chosen man] day and night, if he can. […] Let him follow the exemplary man: then he shall not fail.[44]

All of these principles apply to both joking and laughter as an emotional gesture. As sinful behavior and a symptom of hubris, ridicule would, understandably, be inappropriate for any well-mannered courtier. However, as far as jesting is concerned, the prohibitions are clearly gendered. Men are advised against ridicule and excessive jesting,[45] but women are told to forgo jesting completely. "A lady should not jest insolently," points out Thomasin of Zerclaere, and explains, "Such is the womanly way" ("ein vrouwe sol niht vrevelîch schimpfen, daz stât vröuwelîch" *WG*, vv. 411 – 412), especially since joking is connected to garrulousness (itself strictly disapproved of) and eventually to the topos of the "open woman."[46] Jesting is also discouraged for its subversive potential;[47] neither wit

43 *Der Magezoge* is quoted according to the "Der Tugendspiegel oder der Meizoge."
44 Also see Starkey, "Thomasins Spiegelphase," 230 – 248, esp. 232; and Starkey, *A Courtier's Mirror.*
45 Cf. *WG*, vv. 831 – 836, 1271 ff; on mean-spirited joking see *WG*, vv. 1270 – 1282. Also *Magezoge*, v. 297; *WE*, vv. 27,1 – 10.
46 On women's jesting in medieval literature see Perfetti, *Women and Laughter.*
47 The subversive potential of laughter and humor has been widely discussed in scholarship. See Bergson, "Laughter," 161 – 192; Morreall, *Taking Laughter*, 2 – 3; Holland, *Laughing*, 101 ff.

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nor authority are deemed to be desirable qualities for a courtly lady, as the following passage from Thomasin's treatise illustrates:

> ob si dan hât sinnes mere,
> sô hab die zuht und die lêre,
> erzeig niht waz si sinnes hât:
> man engert ir niht ze potestât. (*WG*, vv. 837 – 840)

> If she has some common sense, then let her show good upbringing and wisdom and not display how much intelligence she has, for she is not wanted as an authority figure.

As a physical response, men's laughter is mentioned seldom; and when it is addressed, the male audience is usually advised to follow the idea of *mâze* (moderation) in this, as in everything else: "One should be moderate in speech and in laughter, in sleeping and in waking" ("man an rede, an lachen, an slaffen und an wachen sol haben mazze," *WG*, v. 484). A man should avoid laughter entirely in the presence of his superiors:

> er kenne die zuht ze behalten,wiz ernsthaft mit den alten,
> mit den chinden so lache,
> gezogen zu wirtschaft und vro in ungemache (*Magezoge*, vv. 377 – 380)

> Know how to behave gracefully, laugh with children, be serious in the presence of the elders, polite to the host, and joyful in sorrow.

Good manners and self-control (*zuht*) prove a courtier's nobility, understood as both his internal virtue and his social status. "Do not laugh loudly and calm down your anger," admonishes *Der Magezoge*, "this is how your noble virtue is revealed" ("niht lûte soltû lachen / dînen zorn sanfte machen: / da erkennet man edele tugent an," vv. 107 – 109). As Konrad of Haslau, the author of the late-thirteenth-century treatise *Der Jüngling*, points out, a young aristocrat should be particularly cautious in the presence of his lord (*Jüngling* v. 135), for "a noble man has always been recognized by his good-breeding" ("bi zuht die edeln man ie kande," *Jüngling*, v. 5).[48] Otherwise, his manners would place him on the same the level with peasants, buffoons, and animals:

> ein villan, der der nikht eren gert,
> der ste und kere sich war er welle
> zu dem selben toren ich geselle
> affen, narren und einen bock. […]
> manger von dem tisch stat,
> der anders nicht ze schaffen hat
> denn stozen, dringen, spotten, lachen.
> daz solten gumpelleute machen. (*Jüngling*, vv. 116 – 119, 139 – 142)

48 Cited according to Konrad von Haslau, *Der Jüngling*.

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> An uncourtly creature who does not strive for honor and good reputation, who stands or goes as he pleases—I would rank such a fool together with a monkey, a halfwit, and a billy goat. […] Many a man now stands in front of the table who can do nothing else but push and shove, mock and laugh. Only clowns should behave this way.

When addressing the appropriateness of male laughter, conduct texts place great emphasis on the young man's ability to discern; they appeal to his reason, his piety as a Christian, his feelings of inner virtue and worth, and they present the undesirable behavior as a sign of feeble-mindedness. They are not at all interested in his sexual modesty or physical beauty, both of which are extremely prominent in the works intended for a female audience, be they disparaging or accepting in their treatment of laughter. The very existence of the two positions in the women's case, but not in men's, is in itself telling. It is more than a mere reflection of discursive heterogeneity in the Middle Ages; rather, it implies that the validity of women's laughter must have been harder to determine.[49] Ironically, despite their seemingly different perspectives and approaches, the two positions are grounded in very similar principles. Both anti- and pro-laughter works treat a woman's role as ornamental and her beauty and virtue not as values in themselves, but only as a means to please and encourage men.[50] While the former texts condemn or punish laughing women, the latter present them as perfect sexual objects whose education should emphasize the importance of their physical attractiveness. Furthermore, conduct texts in both groups are keenly aware of the effect women's behavior has on men. Female members of the courtly society are expected to bear responsibility not only for their own emotions and actions, but also for those of their male counterparts; they must exist not for their own sake but as a mirror to reflect men's aspirations and desires and to contribute to men's self-improvement. Marquard vom Stein's and Ulrich von Liechtenstein's works illustrate how women's unrestrained emotions can endanger the delicate social order. Finally, both conservative and more liberal conduct texts reinforce traditional gender roles and prepare young women for their instrumental function vis-à-vis men. Through controlling or manipulating laughter, these male-authored works control and manipulate female sexuality. Whether laughter is strongly admonished, or whether ladies are encouraged to smile gently and seductively, both types of texts imply that men desire only virtuous women and that a woman's ultimate purpose is to be de-

49 It is important to remember that these manuals were written for aristocratic women only, for as far as the peasants are concerned, as Alice A. Hentsch pointed out, they are allowed almost anything: "Elles peuvent rire, chanter, pleurer et jouer librement" ("They are free to laugh, sing, cry and play.") See Hentsch, *De la littérature didactique*, 107.

50 Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 337.

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sirable. They thus reinforce the view that "the fundamental purpose of female virtue is to make women sexually available to men."[51]

Restraining Bodies: Voices against Women's Laughter

Unsurprisingly, the connection between women's laughter and the lack of virtue is strongly emphasized in the works inspired by ecclesiastical, particularly patristic, writings. By quoting the Church Fathers, medieval authors align themselves with a preexisting and well-known tradition, while also actively reshaping it. To borrow Clare Lees' expression, they "selectively reproduce the past."[52] With their help, patristic thought remains relevant and influential. The early texts provide the later writers with legitimacy and authority, yet they themselves are adapted to reflect new needs and bolster new ideas.[53] Originally intended for a very specific social group of female monastics and religious virgins, their arguments are taken beyond the ecclesiastical sphere and applied to a broader audience, such as the medieval laity.

One such work is Vincent de Beauvais's thirteenth-century Latin treatise *De eruditione filiorum nobilium* (*On Education of Noble Children*). Its last ten chapters, dedicated to the education of girls, reveal the influences of St. Jerome's and Augustine's writings on virginity. Quoting Augustine, Vincent advocates for the strongest bodily restraint possible, warning against a willful demeanor, roaming eyes, unbridled tongues, wanton laughter, jeering or buffoon-like jesting, and an indecent disposition.[54] The passage culminates in Ambrose's famous verdict that when one strives for politeness (i.e., social interaction), laughter creeps in and modesty is lessened.[55] Such references to the patristic authors are found in the familiar context of gendered social expectations. Men's brains should be trained for their various careers in the future, while women are depicted as creatures of flesh rather than reason, whose primary social value is

51 Rasmussen, "If Men Desire You," 150.

52 Lees, *Tradition*, 19–45.

53 Lees' observation about the time gap between her tenth- and eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon homilies and their sources is true for other texts as well: "These texts," she says, "are not simply the reworking of the Latin Church Fathers, even when (or perhaps especially when) their content appears to point in this direction, for the simple reason that the historical and cultural conditions of the Benedictine reform are not synonymous with those of the earlier Carolingian reforms." Lees, *Tradition*, 27.

54 "Non sit […] uobis improbus uultus, non oculi uagi, non infrenis lingua, non petulans risus, non scurrilis iocus, non indecens habitus…" Chapter XLVI in Vincent of Beauvais, *De eruditione*, 192.

55 "'Teritur,' inquit, 'officiis pudor, audacia emicat, risus subrepit, modestia soluitur dum urbanitas affectatur." Vincent of Beauvais, *De eruditione*, 194.

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their marriageability and whose unruly bodies must be kept in check: "If sons are given to you, educate them. […] If daughters are given to you, guard their body and do not reveal your joyous face to them. Guard their bodies in the age of maidenhood, which is prone to licentiousness."[56]

Vincent's preoccupation with laughter as a symptom of unchastity is echoed by later works as well. Conduct authors agree that the biggest threat laughter poses to women lies in its potential to reveal their immoderate, sexual bodies, thus threatening their reputations. In the *Quarta Distinctio* of his *Der Renner*, conspicuously entitled "Von der unkiusche" ("About the Lack of Chastity"), Hugo von Trimberg names laughter together with dancing, jumping, joking, singing, embracing, and kissing as regrettable but, unfortunately, all too common indicators of declining morality among his contemporaries.[57] Almost two centuries after Vincent penned his guide, Marquard vom Stein's translation of the French didactic treatise for girls *Le livre du chevalier de La Tour Landry pour l'enseignement de ses filles*, familiarly reinforces the stereotype of a laughing woman as a fallen woman. The purpose of *Der Ritter vom Turn*, as this collection is known in German, is to teach the narrator's young daughters good manners and to keep them "in constant good practice and proper behavior" ("jn steter guoter übung vnd zymlichem wesen hyeltenn").[58] Although Marquard vom Stein does not explicitly address the issue of laughter, his mistrust of it is palpable. When this bodily expression is mentioned in the case of women, it is combined with other familiar transgressions, such as talkativeness, gluttony, or immodesty. Several *exempla* depict laughing female protagonists as immoral and unruly. Among them is a story about a willful, deceitful, gluttonous, and unchaste young woman who is given in marriage to a respectable and pious knight. One night her husband catches her "sitting with two male servants, eating, and laughing" ("by zweyen knechten sitzen essen und gelechter triben").[59] The young wife's frivolous laughter, whether light-minded or playfully seductive, her male company, and the time she chose for stealing away from her husband's side clearly bespeak her lack of modesty. The place of laughter according to the *quinque lineae amoris* and the reference to eating as an allusion to indulgences of

56 "Filij tibi sunt, erudi illos. […] Filie tibi sunt, serua corpus illarum et non ostendas hilarem faciem tuam ad illas. Serua […] corpus illarum in etate puellari que prona est lasciuie." Vincent of Beauvais, *De eruditione*, 172.

57 *Renner*, vv. 11729 – 11738. Quoted according to Hugo von Trimberg, *Der Renner.*

58 "My greatest desire," says Marquard, "is that […] they would be taught to be courtly and seemly through good *exempla*" ("Da aber min groeste begerung / […] ouch das sy wol hofflichen / vnnd zymlichen mit guoten byspeln vnnd exempeln / dar zuo zuo wysen vnd vnderrichten weren"). Marquard vom Stein, *Ritter vom Turn*, 87 – 88.

59 Ibid., 94. It is unclear which transgression is emphasized more here: a transgression of class or of sexual immodesty. *Knecht* can mean both "a young man" and "a male servant."

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the flesh, including gluttony (yet another transgression of the mouth),[60] leave no doubt as to what would have happened if the husband had come in later. The situation is strongly reminiscent of German *Mären* and *Schwänke*, late-medieval stories of hard-to-control and often overtly sexualized women defying their husbands' authority.[61] The challenge to the man's dominance in this tale comes from the wife's unrestrained conduct, represented by her inappropriate laughter and complete disregard for her responsibilities as a virtuous and chaste married noblewoman.

The punishment for such misbehavior is almost providential and emphasizes its sexual nature; it effectively guarantees that the woman will never be perceived as sexually attractive again. Conspicuously, it affects her most precious possession and the body part that participated in her misdeed: her face and, consequently, her beauty. As the husband strikes one of his wife's admirers with a club, it splits from the powerful blow, sending one of its splinters directly into the woman's eye and permanently disfiguring her face: "And her face became so disfigured because of it that the knight began to hate her and turned his heart toward a new love" ("vnd ir das antlit dar von so gar vngestalt ward / das sy der ritter zuo hassen begunde vnd syn [her husband's] hertz vff andre liebe thet keren").[62] The wicked wife loses her principal value as an ornament and an object of desire both for her husband and for anybody else, and with it, her whole livelihood: "And because of it, her whole being, her house, and her honor were destroyed and came to an end" ("Dar durch jr wesen / huß / vnd ere / vernichtet / vnd zuo abgang kam").[63]

The need to control women's bodies and laughter in public in order to protect their reputations is advocated even by more liberal courtly clerics, such as the anonymous writer of *Winsbeckin* (early-thirteenth century).[64] Similar to other conduct works, *Winsbeckin* cautions against laughter in public, but quite unexpectedly, the warning does not come from a figure of authority, such as the

60 Both Freidank and Thomasin connect various mouth transgressions (gluttony, drunkenness, ridicule, and lying) with sexuality and lust. Freidank speaks of *trunkenheit* (drunkenness), *vrâz* (gluttony), and *huor* (lechery), which correspond to Latin *ebrietas, gula*, and *luxuria*. See Freidank's *Bescheidenheit*, v. 94,7 ff; Eifler, *Ethische Anschauungen*, 316 – 340. Also see Zerclaere: "Swer dem geluoste volgen wil, / der hat vrowen harte vil. / Tracheit unde Lekkerheit, / Huorgelust unde Truonchenheit, / die habent ueber in gewalt" ("Whoever desires to follow his lust, he will have lots of women. Laziness and Lewdness, Lechery and Drunkenness. They will all have power over him," *WG*, vv. 4919 – 4923).

61 On the issue of authority and violence in MHG short comic tales, see Altpeter-Jones, "Inscribing Gender" and Altpeter-Jones, "Adam Schubart's Early Modern Tyrant." On laughter in MHG comic tales, see Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative*.

62 Marquard vom Stein, *Ritter vom Turn*, 94.

63 Ibid.

64 Cited according to *Winsbeckin*, 46 – 66.

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poet himself or an older person in the text. Rather, it is an inexperienced young woman who voices the traditional view.

The poem itself is an exchange between a mother and a daughter, in which the older woman tries to teach the younger one about sexuality, love, and honor. Although occasional disagreements do arise, the daughter accepts her mother's advice, for the most part respectfully and compliantly. She is taught the familiar rules for remaining modest and guarding her virtue by controlling her body. In stanza 7, for example, the mother warns her against the danger and impropriety of immoderate staring (*wilde blicke*, lit. "wild glances"). The daughter agrees with this advice and expresses a strong apprehension of women who cannot control their roaming eyes:

> Vür wâr dir, muoter, sî gesaget,
> swie kleine ich habe der jâre zal,
> daz mir diu vuore niht behaget,
> swelch wîp diu ougen ûf, ze tal,
> und über treit als einen bal… (*WI*, vv. 8,1 – 5)

> Truly, mother, let it be said to you, that while I may be young in years, such behaviour does not please me when a woman moves her eyes up and down, and rolls them around like a ball…[65]

As the stanza continues, frivolous looking turns out not to be the only thing that the daughter considers to be inappropriate for a decent young woman:

> …dar under ouch gelachet vil:
> diu prîset niht der zühte ir sal.
> ich wæne ouch, daz juncvrouwen muot,
> diu âne vorhte wirt erzogen,
> nâch ir gebærden dicke tuot. (*WI*, vv. 8,6 – 10)

> [Such behaviour does not please me when a woman moves her eyes up and down, and rolls them around like a ball] and laughs a lot while doing it. Modesty does not grace her chamber.[66] It seems to me that the spirit of a maiden who has been raised without fear is apparent in her behaviour.[67]

The daughter familiarly places laughter into the same context of sexuality, immodesty, and unrestrained female body as the notorious *wilde blicke.* The fact that the author of *Winsbeckin* delivers this condemnation through the younger woman's statement is ingenious; it allows him to reaffirm the norm twice, first

65 All translations of *Winsbeckin* come from Rasmussen and Trokhimenko, "The *Winsbecke* Father-Son and Mother-Daughter Poems," 105 – 122, here 109.

66 The idiom means, "She is no ideal of modesty." See note 2 in Rasmussen and Trokhimenko, "The *Winsbecke* Father-Son and Mother-Daughter Poems," 121.

67 As translated in Rasmussen and Trokhimenko, "The *Winsbecke* Father-Son and Mother-Daughter Poems," 109.

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by the daughter and then by the mother. The daughter is consistently portrayed throughout the work as too inexperienced and, for that reason, uncritically relying on the learned wisdom of others rather than on her own personal knowledge. Her categorical and instant rejection does not simply reveal her naïve rigidity, but rather points to the prevalent general prejudice against women's laughter.[68] In her turn, the mother chooses to reply to the girl's "bookish" knowledge not with praise for a lesson well learned, but with a warning not to be rash, delivered in the form of an allegorical comparison to a bird that is too wise before its time:

> Sint wîsiu wort den werken bî,
> sô ensint die sinne niht betrogen:
> sint aber si guoter werke vrî,
> sô sint diu wîsen wort gelogen.
> von neste ein vogel ze vruo gevlogen
> der wirt den kinden lîhte ein spil:
> die vedern werdent im enzogen.
> daz mac dir, liebez kint, geschehen,
> hâstû in jugent gar wîsiu wort
> und lâst dich tump an werken sehen. (*WI*, vv. 9,5 – 7)

> When wise deeds accompany one's words, then one's wisdom is not a pretence. But if what you say lacks good sense, then the wise deeds are a lie. A bird that has flown from the nest too early easily becomes the plaything of children, who pluck its feathers. That is what can happen to you, dear child, if in your youth you are very clever with words but show yourself to be unwise by your actions.[69]

The mother clearly cannot deny that the daughter's words are true in theory, but she has life experience telling her that it is much harder to control one's behavior in practice. By challenging the young woman's naïve "wisdom" and her zealous righteousness, and by asking her to prove with her deeds what she asserts with her words, the mother effectively reinforces the lesson about proper courtly behavior and the need to control the female body.

68 And indeed, the roughly contemporary text *Quatre tens d'aage d'ome* by Philippe de Novaire contains a similar warning against excessive gaiety for young women. Cf. Hentsch's summary: "Il faut défendre aux jeunes filles de se montrer trop gaies, causantes ou gourmandes lorsque'elles vont à des fêtes, etc." Hentsch, *De la littérature didactique*, 84.

69 As translated in Rasmussen and Trokhimenko, "The *Winsbecke* Father-Son and Mother-Daughter Poems," 109.

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Complicating Matters: Attractive Laughter

In her study with the telling title of "'If Men Desire You, Then You Are Worthy': The Didactive Mother-Daughter Poem *Die Winsbeckin*," Ann Marie Rasmussen points out a paradox plaguing the courtly view of femininity in the fictional world of the *Winsbeckin* poem. It appears that despite the heavy emphasis on restraint and woman's virtue in courtly discourse, the primary duty of an aristocratic woman is to be desirable. "To be lusted after *does* increase a woman's honor," says Rasmussen,[70] or to quote *Winsbeckin:*

> mahtû die tugend ûf gewegen,
> dir wirt von manegen werden man
> mit wûnschen nâhe bî gelegen.
> […]
> so man gedenket oft an dich
> und wünschet dîn, sô bistû wert. (*WI*, vv. 13,5 – 7; 15,9 – 10)

> If you can rise in virtue, then many a worthy man will lie with you in his dreams. […] If someone thinks of you often and desires you, then you are valuable.[71]

Rasmussen's findings apply to the greater conduct discourse as well. Women are taught to know "how to make others desire [them],"[72] for those who fail will pay by being forgotten:

> Ein vrouwe sol sich sehen lân,
> kumt zir ein vrömeder man,
> swelhiu sich niht sehen lât,
> diu sol ûz ir kemenât
> sîn allenthalben unerkant; büeze also, sî ungenant. (*WG*, vv. 405 – 409)

> A lady should let herself be looked upon, if a noble man approaches her. She who would not let herself be seen, will remain unknown outside of her bower. May this be her punishment, may she remain unknown!

It is not surprising then that in this worldview laughter would also be harnessed to enhance a woman's value as an attractive love object. Indeed, the demands to avoid laughter coexist with the attempts to define acceptable forms of it that would satisfy society's need for eroticism and seductiveness, as well as guarantee smooth interactions between the sexes. The Old French translation of Ovid's *Ars Amandi*, known as *La clef d'amors* (ca. 1280), does not reject laughter at all, but

70 Rasmussen, "If Men Desire You," 143.

71 As translated in Rasmussen and Trokhimenko, "The *Winsbecke* Father-Son and Mother-Daughter Poems," 111, 112, respectively. A more poignant, because more gendered, translation is found in Rasmussen, "If Men Desire You," 142: "If men often think of you and desire you, then you are worthy."

72 "Une femme doit savoir se faire désirer." Hentsch, *De la littérature didactique*, 47.

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rather attempts to define an "ideal laughter" ("le rire idéal"): "A little laugh, sweet and brief, with the mouth semi-open between two little charming dimples" ("un petit rire doux et court, à bouche entr'ouverte avec deux jolies petites fossettes").[73] While the texts like *La clef* or Robert de Blois's *Chastoiement des Dames* discourage excessive or loud laughter,[74] they appear to be less interested in the question of its propriety and more in its aesthetic value. A woman is advised to avoid laughter only if it sounds unpleasant:

> Et devant totes genz de pris
> se vos avez maul plaisant ris,
> sanz blasme vostre main poez
> metre devant quant vos riez. (*Chastoiement*, vv.369 – 372)

> And if you have an unpleasant laugh, you may do well by covering your mouth with your hand when you laugh in front of people.[75]

It is telling that Robert does not say that a woman with a less-than-attractive laugh should not laugh at all. Rather, he simply suggests that she should cover her mouth with her hand in order to reduce the unpleasant impression. Apparently, the mere act of laughing does not always automatically imply a lack of *courtoisie*; one must be cautious about *when* and particularly *how* one laughs.

A more accepting approach to laughter is detectable in a number of medieval texts, spread over a substantial period of time. It is shared by Garin lo Brun's twelfth-century Occitan work *Ensenhamen* (ca. 1175) and is later reiterated by Francesco da Barberino (1264 – 1348) in his *Del reggimento e costumi di donna* and in the fifteenth-century Middle English poem, "How the good wiif taughte hir doughtir."[76] However, this group's texts still share with their more conservative counterparts the ideology of courtly love as a man's game of domination and subordination. Be it restrained and modest or pleasantly joyful and enticing, female behavior is acceptable as long as it arouses men's desire and does not endanger the harmony at court. Smiling or gentle laughter can be encouraged in women as a part of their ornamental function, as long as they do not interfere with their most treasured possession—beauty (viewed as a sign of both her virtue and attractiveness)—or disrupt the interaction between the sexes.

The contradictory demands of virtue and beauty—the traditional prohibitions of, yet need for, female laughter and sexuality—do not go unnoticed by medieval writers. Robert de Blois empathizes with the women of his time, say-

73 Hentsch, *De la littérature didactique*, 89.
74 "Ne pas rire haut et longuement." Hentsch, *De la littérature didactique*, 89.
75 Cf. "Si on a un vilain rire s'efforcer de ne pas rire." Hentsch, *De la littérature didactique*, 89.
76 Hentsch, *De la littérature didactique*, 104ff, esp. 105 f and 139. For a substantial analysis of Barberino's didactic work, see Burghartz, "Ehebruch," 123 – 140.

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ing, "because of that [mixed message] a woman does not know what to do" ("por ce ne set dame que faire," *Chastoiement*, v. 27).[77] He is echoed by the female speaker in a poem by Burkhart von Hohenvels, quoted in the epigraph to this chapter:

> Wie sol ich sælig wîp
> den liuten nû gebâren,
> daz ich müg ir nâchrede wol gestillen,
> sît daz in sin noch lîp
> niht kan gelîche varen?
> daz ir doch viere hæten einen willen!
> nieman siht gelîches iht… (*KLD* XIII.1,1 – 7)

> How should I, a chaste woman, behave nowadays toward people so that I might silence their slander since, according to them, minds and bodies do not desire the same thing? If only four of them were of one mind about it! Nobody sees things the same way …

The issue of contradictory expectations is addressed particularly clearly in Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Das Frauenbuch.* Thanks to his layman insights, Ulrich is able to show the clash between the clerical and courtly views of femininity, using the laughter of women as one device that reveals the degree to which these two, seemingly incompatible, positions are in fact intertwined in the medieval courtly imagination.

"Nobody Sees Things the Same Way": Femininity and Laughter in *Das Frauenbuch*[78]

Composed in the mid-thirteenth century (ca. 1257[79]), Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Das Frauenbuch* is a curious text representative of two popular genres. Its formal poetic characteristics place it firmly within the tradition of *Minnereden*, or allegories of love—texts that theorize and didacticize the debate on the qualities

77 Cf. the editor's summary of vv. 27 – 66 of Fox's introduction to de Blois' works: "Difficulté qu'éprouve la dame à régler sa conduite dans la société, car si elle se montre courtoise, les homme disent que c'est par amour et n'hésitent pas à en abuser. D'autre part, si elle manque à la courtoisie en refusant d'accueillir les gens, on l'accuse d'orgueil." Fox, *Robert de Blois*, 24.

78 A version of this section has appeared as a self-standing and expanded essay. Trokhimenko, "Women's Laughter," 243 – 264.

79 Cited from Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Frauenbuch.* Christopher Young's more recent edition of the text includes several valuable resources, such as a modern German translation, a commentary, and literary-historical information on the work, its genre, and its period. See Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Das Frauenbuch. Das Frauenbuch* has been transmitted in a single extant manuscript, the famous *Ambraser Heldenbuch*, Codex Ser. nova 2664 (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek zu Wien). Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Das Frauenbuch*, 37.

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and value of courtly love.[80] Like many works of this kind, *Das Frauenbuch* is structured in the form of a dispute overheard and resolved by the all-knowing male narrator (self-identified as Ulrich). It presents a discussion between a lady and a knight about the decline of courtesy in their world. Opening with a negative *Minnelehre* that reveals a complete failure of the fictional society to live up to the standards of courtliness, the poem concludes with Ulrich's effort to restore courtly love to its proper place and to convince the audience within and beyond the world of his text of the importance of such values as moderation, decorum, high-mindedness, joy, respect, and love service to help their society function smoothly.[81]

At the same time, it is easy to notice, however, that the discussion of love in *Das Frauenbuch* has heavy didactic overtones. The speeches delivered by the two male characters in particular (the knight and the narrator) place the work within the genre of prescriptive conduct discourse. The didactic nature of Ulrich's text is immediately apparent in its title. *Das Frauenbuch* is both "a book *about* ladies" and "a book *for* ladies," written at the request of the author's supposed patroness or beloved (*FB*, vv. 5 – 16, 2053 – 2060), not so much to praise or entertain as to instruct courtly women on the subject of proper behavior. It is telling that while Ulrich the narrator formally takes the female protagonist's side in the dispute, his criticism at the end of the work is directed at both of the men, who have failed to live up to the standards of courtliness, and the women, whom he reminds of their duty to be obedient to their male partners. Though written by an aristocratic layman rather than a religiously educated cleric, *Das Frauenbuch* combines the rhetorical elevation of women (*Frauenehre*) that is characteristic of lofty love song, with the simultaneous subordination of them that usually marks moral-didactic literature. Ulrich's text thus can be seen as a junction of both secular and clerical debates on conduct, virtue, and gender, particularly in regard to the place of laughter within the ideal of virtuous womanhood.

Women's laughter proves to be the truly central issue in *Das Frauenbuch*. Structurally, it bookends the work; the subject of joy and of its visual manifestation introduces and concludes the discussion of harmonious courtly existence. Conceptually, it is portrayed as both the principal cause of the moral decay in the fictional world of the text (the male perspective) and its symptom (the female position). The knight's accusations against the courtly women and the lady's defense of their behavior reveal contradictory models of femininity coexisting side by side and reflect two opposing medieval views of female

80 Bumke, *Geschichte* 338 – 341; Cramer, *Geschichte* 43 – 55. The most detailed study of *Minnereden* remains Ingeborg Glier, *Artes*. Also see Lieb, "Eine Poetik der Wiederholung," 506 – 528; and Christopher Young's succinct introduction on *Minnereden* as a genre in Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Das Frauenbuch*, 11 – 20.

81 See Glier, *Artes*, 41.

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laughter: one that encourages, or at least permits it, and one that condemns it. Ulrich's work demonstrates that what ultimately underlies both anti- and pro-laughter discourses is the patriarchal control of female sexuality. Even though one side uses it to present laughter as a threat to female virtue and the other exploits its erotic potential, both equate the gesture with sexual availability.

The ideal to which the court in *Das Frauenbuch* strives is no different in other medieval works; its positive state is supposed to be expressed visually in the smiling countenances of its knights and ladies. What the reader finds here, however, are men's cheerless faces and dejected mood—all clear signals that the fictional courtly world of the poem has lost its harmony. As the work unfolds, it becomes apparent that the ideal of joy (*freude*) is not only reflected in, but also maintained by outward expressions of happiness.[82] This is precisely why the knight places responsibility for the decline of courtliness on the lady's shoulders. Women, he asserts, no longer fulfill their duty to maintain *freude* because they refuse to welcome men with laughter:

> die wile ir gen uns in hazze lebt
> und uns antwurt ouch nicht gebt,
> noch grüezet wol, noch lachet an,
> von wiu solten wir dann freude han? (*FB*, vv. 145 – 148)
>
> Since you live feuding with us and do not respond to us, nor greet us, nor smile to us, in what should we find joy?

Markedly, women in *Das Frauenbuch* bear responsibility not only for their own emotions but also for those of men.[83] In order for society to function smoothly, the man says, "a maiden should be glad, maintain an elated state of mind, and do it cheerfully *at all times*" ("ein maget diu sol wesen fro / und ir gemüete tragen ho / und *zuo alle ziten* wol gemuot," *FB*, vv. 995 – 997, my italics). The discussion between the lady and the knight makes it clear that the affective side of *freude* is not the only necessary component of courtly harmony, but that internal joy has to be revealed externally in the courtiers' smiling countenances.[84] Women's refusal to display contentment, whether sincerely felt or merely performed, proves to be destructive; it is interpreted as a sign of animosity, discontent, and social discord, impacting the men's own state of high-mindedness and sending the world into a downward spiral. While this passage appears to refer to both affective and performative sides of *freude*, the true relevance of affect in this case is called into question by the emphasis on its continuous display: "zuo alle

82 For a detailed philological analysis of the medieval concept of joy, see Christoph, "The Language and Culture of Joy," 319 – 333.

83 Gabriele Müller-Oberhäuser makes a similar point in her recent study of Middle English courtesy books. See Müller-Oberhäuser, "Gender," 27, 47.

84 This is how the lady senses the man's discontent as well. See *FB*, vv. 54 – 55.

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ziten"("at all times," *FB*, v. 997). As the reader finds out later, no matter what problems a woman faces—a drunk or absent husband, loneliness, or vicious gossip—she still has to smile, i.e., to perform courtly joy:

> doch sol si darumb verzagen nicht.
> […]
> si sol mit andern sachen
> ir herze froelich machen,
> ir freude nicht verliesen. (*FB*, vv. 957, 959–961)
>
> She must not despair because of that. […] She must make her heart glad with other things, she must not lose courtly joy.

In difficult life situations, women are encouraged to seek consolation elsewhere lest they sink into low spirits. And yet it is ultimately the appearance of elatedness and contentment that proves to be crucial for their male partners' mood. The demands of etiquette in *Das Frauenbuch* can be satisfied with performance alone; as long as ladies fulfill their ornamental function at court, they ensure its smooth functioning.

The text makes clear why women's smiling and joyful faces are so important. In this respect, *Das Frauenbuch* is no different from other conduct and literary texts of this period. Gentle laughter makes a woman attractive and appealing in men's eyes. In a world that favors and is based on procreation and sexuality, female smiles and physical beauty facilitate heterosocial ties. Clearly, a joyous, good-looking, and well-dressed woman is much more likely to attract male attention: "die wile ein wip wil haben man, / so sol si iren lip schone han" ("As long as a woman wants to find a man, she should remain beautiful," *FB*, vv. 369–370). This is precisely where Ulrich's courtly ladies are said to have failed. They purportedly cause their society to crumble because men no longer perceive them as alluring. E. Jane Burns' conclusion that in medieval French literature "a female identity […] exists as corporeality alone"[85] is equally true for *Das Frauenbuch*, for it is always the female body that the male speaker is dissatisfied with in one way or another. He complains about the women's physical appearance, body language, and even clothes, all of which no longer invite the men's eyes to linger on their charms, thus stimulating male desire: "Ir lat an iuch nicht anders sehen / mit willen wann der ougen prehen…" ("You do not let [us] see anything else of you other than the gleam of your eyes," *FB*, vv. 237–238). The knight criticizes women for refusing to laugh, for controlling their movements and emotions, and for concealing their bodies with modest clothing and their faces with veils—i.e., for what Ingrid Bennewitz sees as too closely conforming to the precepts for

85 Burns, *Bodytalk*, 3.

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modest behavior advocated in contemporaneous clerical writings.[86] What this reading does not take into account, however, is the tension between the two views of femininity that the text presents, which becomes obvious only when one looks at it through the prism of laughter.

Aristocratic women in *Das Frauenbuch* are confronted by a dilemma. Despite the expressed need for joy and smiles, they have to be wary of the effect their laughter has on men. As Bennewitz rightly observes, and as the female protagonist herself points out, the courtly world in Ulrich's work is not governed by secular ideals alone. The very behavior being urged upon women is at the same time to be avoided, for the courtly men have also internalized the contemporary *clerical* views of laughter, femininity, and virtue.[87] The lady in *Das Frauenbuch* is very much aware of the clerical equation that laughing woman equals sexually open woman, and she shows that men in her society are familiar with it as well. She complains about constantly running the risk that her every look and gesture might be misconstrued as a sign of sexual interest or conjugal infidelity:

> welh frawe iuch nu güetlich an sicht,
> ir jehet, si hab ez durch daz getan,
> si welle iuch minnen für iren man.
> davon si wir in huote
> mit lib und ouch mit muote
> gen iuch als uns des twinget not
> wir wæren anders an eren tot. (*FB*, vv. 310–316)

> Now, if a lady looks at you kindly, you say that she has done so because she wishes to love you instead of her husband. For that reason we are on our guard against you, guarding both our bodies and our minds, as we are forced to do. Otherwise, our honor would be dead.

Similarly, a woman's well-intentioned laughter can also be used to reduce her to her rampant libido. The lady warns, "Welchez wip gern ere welle han, / diu sol

86 "Die Aussage, dass die weiblichen Körper zu genau jene Vorschriften internalisiert haben, die in der moralisch-didaktischen Literatur eingefordert werden: das Senken des Kopfes, das Niederschlagen der Augen, das Verstummen beim Anblick und in Gegenwart eines Mannes." Bennewitz, "Körper," 231.

87 The restrictions placed on female bodies are at their most extreme in the case of the aristocracy, for the behavior of women of lower birth is not as strictly regulated. Francesco Barberino, for example, points out consistently that noble women are held to a higher standard than other social groups. See Krueger, "Introduction," xviii. Also Hentsch, *De la littérature*, 107. Medieval conduct texts thus support and anticipate the anthropologist Mahadev Apte's conclusion about the correlation between corporeal and emotional control and socio-economic status: "Where ideal sex-role models for women emphasize modesty, passivity, and politeness, it is considered unbecoming for women to laugh in an unrestrained manner." Apte, *Humor*, 259.

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iuch nicht lachen an" ("The woman who would wish to keep her honor, should not laugh/smile at you," *FB*, vv. 205 – 206), and explains why:

> ob iuch ein frawe gruozte,
> den gruoz mit lachen suozte,
> ir daecht also: 'si ist mit holt, […]
> si mag wol sin ein gaehez wip. […]
> Si hat gegen mir licht minne gir.' (*FB,* vv. 185 – 187, 191, 194)
> […]
> ist aber daz ein schoeniu maget,
> der lip von rechte wol behaget,
> tanzet unde lachet
> und sich icht schoene an machet,
> so gicht man des, si si ze palt,
> si werde in eren nimmer alt. (*FB,* vv. 821 – 826)

> Should a woman greet you and sweeten her greeting with laughter, you would think: "She is well-disposed toward me. […] She may well be a hasty woman. […] She must desire my love. […] When it so happens that a beautiful maiden, whose body is truly pleasing, dances and laughs/smiles, and adorns herself a little bit, it is said at once that she is too daring and that her honor will not grow old.

The last quote is just one of many examples of how Ulrich's *Das Frauenbuch* anticipates the twentieth-century feminist position that women's bodies are commonly perceived as "speaking" a language of provocation: "When female bodies do not efface their femaleness, they may be seen as inviting, 'flaunting.'"[88] For a woman, failing to use utmost caution in her interaction with the other gender and to control her body results in immediate sexualization, in a projection onto her of the male onlookers' own urges and fantasies. To make matters worse, nobody is safe from gossip in this society, regardless of age or status; married or single, maidens, wives, or widows, all are vulnerable:

> dise not nu lident alliu wip.
> wie solte ein wip da bi iren lip
> behüeten vor dem spot also,
> daz si dannoch da bi waer fro? (*FB*, vv. 845 – 848)

> This is the trouble that all women suffer. How should a woman protect herself from ridicule and still remain joyful at the same time?

Women in *Das Frauenbuch* are clearly placed in an impossible situation. When in their attempt to earn respect and appreciation they choose to follow clerical advice and perform virtue by forfeiting laughter, they are accused of destroying the harmony of the secular world. However, when they try to maintain this world

88 Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 6.

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with their friendly courtliness, the misogynist clerical rhetoric marks them as unchaste.

Unsurprisingly, men represented by the knight deny the contradiction between the clerical and courtly views of women's laughter and sexuality. The lady's opponent does not see it as inherent to his society, but rather attributes all the injustices to several bad apples. At the end of the book, however, his own words betray that he himself is not immune to clerical influence. When the narrator reminds the knight of his duty as a courtier to obey and respect ladies, the latter accuses the mediator of bias in women's favor and resorts to the old misogynist cliché that women are fickle and must be kept under control:

> Da sprach der ritter al zehant:
> 'herr, mir waz daz e bekant,
> daz ir den frawen zuo gestat.
> ja waz ez ie iuwer rat,
> daz den frawen alle man
> mit dienste waeren undertan
> und tuon recht waz si wolten.
> ob wir man alle sollten
> tuon daz frawen diuchte guot,
> so gewunnen si grozen übermuot.
> des mugen wir iuch gevolgen nicht.' (*FB*, vv. 1949 – 1959)

> Then the knight spoke at once: "My lord, it has been known to me for a long time that you stand by women. It has always been your advice that all men should be subject to ladies in service and do whatever they wish. If all of us men were to do whatever seems good to women, they would become too arrogant. For that reason, we must not follow your [Ulrich's] advice."

He is not willing to recognize men's share of responsibility for the decline of chivalry. It is his female opponent who has to his call attention to the discrepancy between reality and the standards of courtliness. From the modern point of view, her mode of analysis is much more sophisticated and more abstract; while the knight personalizes the problem, the lady sees it as a structural issue. She objects to the demand to perform joy at all costs and points out that men are far from fulfilling their side of the bargain. Since laughter makes women more beautiful, approachable, and desirable, then in an ideal society, it must function as a reward, as an expression of welcome and appreciation of men's sacrifices. Through the use of the common trope *laudatio temporis acti* (praise of olden times), the lady shows how men have ignored crucial aspects of the courtly ideology, such as service (*Frauendienst*) and respect (*Frauenehre*):

> warumbe sol
> ein frawe, die man nu grüezzen, wol
> mit spilnden ougen lachen an?

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mit welhen dingen (dienent) man,
daz si die frawen grüezen,
den gruoz mit lachen süezen?
mir ist gesaget, daz e die man
die frawen güetlichen lachten an,
daz si wurden als hochgemuot,
daz si den lip und ouch daz guot
zerten durch uns williklich
und von uns wurden muotes rîch
und waren der tat unverzaget… (*FB*, vv. 151 – 163)

Why should a woman, greeted by a man, smile at him with frolicking eyes? How exactly do men serve that ladies should greet them and sweeten their greeting with laughter/smile? I was told that in the past, men, at whom the ladies smiled kindly, used to become so high-minded that they would willingly risk their lives and their possessions because of us, and were ennobled by us, and did not fear deeds…[89]

In the idealized past, when all components of the courtly way of life were in place, women are said to have been able to smile out of joy or gratitude, for men knew that they had earned this smile as a reward and as a promise of an even better recompense later. In a perfect world, the woman suggests, in which there is trust and good-will on both sides, clerical rhetoric about female fallibility would have no place, for there would be no need to spy on women and misinterpret their signs of affection.

Although *Das Frauenbuch* so powerfully highlights the tension between the clerical and courtly views of women's laughter and sexuality, it resolves this contradiction in a rather conservative way.[90] In order to steer the characters within the fictional universe of his text, and his contemporaries outside it, back toward the ideals of love service (*Minnedienst*), the narrator takes the lady's side, bestows lavish praise on all women, and reaffirms their inherent goodness; and yet the only true solution that his work is able to offer is to establish that women must adhere to their traditional gender roles. Ulrich's explicit verdict proclaims that in order for society to function harmoniously, women must live up to men's expectations and recognize their authority:

Ich sprach: 'fraw, ich muoz des jehen,
was ich ie frawen han gesehen,
dar zuo aller hande wip,

89 Ulrich is definitely not the only author addressing the subject of love service versus its rewards, and of appearance versus virtue. A very poignant critique is found in the manuscript version J of *Winsbeckin* (mgf 474; ca. 1300). See Trokhimenko, "On the Dignity of Women," 490 – 505.

90 Albeit without explanation or textual evidence, Ulrich Müller and Franz Viktor Spechtler express a similar opinion in Müller and Spechtler, "Ulrich von Liechtenstein," 239.

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der guot, der leben und ouch ir lip
muoz sin den mannen undertan.
da von muoz ich iuch zuo gestan.
diu wip müezen beide tuon und lan
an allen dingen waz wir man
wellen und uns dunket guot.
welhez wip des nicht güetlichen tuot,
diu muoz ez tuon, daz ist also. (*FB*, vv. 1930 – 1941)

I said, "My lady, I have to tell you this: whatever I have seen of ladies and of all kinds of women, their possessions, their livelihood, and also their bodies must be subject to men. For this reason I must entreat you: women must do and allow everything that we, men, desire and that seems good to us. The woman who would not do so willingly, has to do so nevertheless. That is how things are.

The poet conveys a similar message rhetorically, through his carefully and strategically constructed argument. Having initially impressed the audience with her power and readiness to voice her concerns, the lady slowly transforms herself into the man's pupil, asking him to teach her how to discern good men from evil ones and how to lead a virtuous life. In addition, the man's yielding in their dispute represents, as Helen Solterer has pointed out, the Ovidian model of symbolic domination and is a common, pan-European device to achieve a true victory. The man's seeming submission, ironically, symbolizes the woman's defeat: "The man's obeisance correlates with the ultimate aim of the woman yielding. Representing the man as temporarily submissive is meant to signify his ultimate dominance. The master-narrator's contention is this: to defer from a position of power can offer, paradoxically, a means of exerting it."[91] Both the knight and Ulrich the narrator achieve this symbolic dominance through acknowledging the authority of women. The man does so by agreeing to respect ladies while receiving in return a promise of their obedience. Ulrich presents himself as a humble servitor, a vassal to his lady love to whom he has always been *ze dienst vil berait* ("ever ready to serve," *FB*, v. 13)[92]; and yet his humility does not prevent him from composing a *püechelin* (both "a little book" and a didactic work written in a form of a debate or disputation), aptly named *Der frawen puech* and intended not so much to entertain as to educate the female audience about the correct way to interact with men.[93] While Ulrich's support for women

91 Solterer, *Master and Minerva*, 38.
92 Also "ich bin ir staete dienestman / mit triuwen als ich beste kan" ("I am her loyal vassal / as loyal as I can [be]," *FB*, vv. 15 – 16).
93 See *FB*, vv. 2125 – 2134. On the genre of *buechlein*, see Bumke, *Geschichte*, 148; Gibbs and Johnson, *Medieval German Literature*, 154; cf. also Gewehr, "'Klage-," 1 – 16; Hufeland, "Zweite Büchlein," 71 – 94; Schulze, "Büchlein," 836 – 837; and Schreinert, "Büchlein," 197 – 198.

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can be seen as an acknowledgement of their predicament, the ultimate purpose of his text is to teach women "how to inhabit the socio-sexual function that is expected of them, […] a notion of female identity that depends on the female's becoming an attractive and compliant object of male desire."[94] Thus the female audiences in Ulrich von Liechtenstein's text and beyond are left to be ever mindful that their laughter and sexual virtue are closely connected and that societal harmony heavily depends on the perfect and willing control of female bodies.

Social Constructs of Femininity: Some Conclusions

"Wer lacht, bekommt ein grosses Maul" ("He who laughs ends up with a huge mouth") warns the folk wisdom.[95] The secondary, metaphoric meaning of this saying, which has survived to this day, is understandable only when one is aware of the perpetual concern with the aesthetic side of laughter, perceived as disturbing in both modern and medieval polite circles.[96] Conduct books show medieval society as plagued by uncertainty in regards to laughter, recognizing the futility of any attempts to eliminate it, and, therefore, desperately trying to solve the questions of its legitimacy, role, and acceptable forms. In these texts, laughter must be restrained and controlled, but only by means that are understandable and acceptable to the secular nobility whom these clerical authors serve. Thus the composers of conduct manuals do not only appeal to their audience's fear of the Last Judgment; they also address their readers' more immediate, courtly sensibilities such as virtue and reputation, and even their concern with outward appearances, especially women's. Courtly clerical instruction about laughter, however, takes a clearly gendered approach. For men it emphasizes a multitude of roles, the importance of social standing, and the esteem of superiors, while for women it focuses on their decorative role, presenting laughter as dangerous to their reputations and always interpreted in terms of sexual modesty.

It is in their view of femininity that the authors' clerical education manifests itself. Presenting each gender not only with its own image, but also with what is expected of the opposite side, conduct books send the message that aristocratic women's role vis-à-vis men is ornamental and instrumental, that their fields of activity include only love and marriage, and that femininity is inseparable from

94 Rasmussen, "If Men Desire You," 158.
95 WA, II, 1746, Lachen 87.
96 Cf. Old French proverb: "On ne peut rire et faire belle bouche" ("One cannot laugh and have a pretty mouth"). SI, VII, 252, Lachen 174.

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sexuality, thus warranting more stringent bodily control.[97] The treatment that laughter receives in conduct texts for women is part of this ideological work. The female readers are reminded again and again to mind their public persona, to carry themselves with dignity, and yet not to forget that, to use a modern expression, their strength lies in their weakness. In other words, they are wanted not in a position of authority, but rather as desirable and virtuous objects who adhere to a courtly ideology defined from a male perspective.

In her introduction to a recent collection on medieval and early-modern didactic literature, Juanita Feros Ruys raises the issue of the correlation between textual advice and actual behavior, between the standard these works advocated and the reality they strove to influence.[98] Her concern is echoed by Roberta Krueger, who warns against reading conduct texts "as snapshots of medieval life."[99] Indeed, it would be naïve to argue that the behavior conduct literature prescribed was diligently followed; that the power structures these texts advocated were unquestioningly embraced and implemented; and that there was no resistance or objection to the misogyny, inconsistencies, and contradictions that mark much of this discourse.[100] It would be equally unreasonable to deny the existence of strong female personages, both historical and fictional, whose behavior, intelligence, or authority did not exactly match the image of the perfect but passive and submissive femininity often inscribed in prescriptive manuals. It may be more productive then, as Krueger suggests, to approach conduct liter-

97 The clerical view of female nature as something to be restrained can be detected even in the most worldly literary works, such as Arthurian romances. This is not at all surprising, considering the fact that the court's administrative center (the office of the chancellor), equipped with lettered clerks, allowed for the production not only of functional but also literary texts, and that most authors of secular epics were educated as clerics. Also see Oostrom, who notes, "This fact explains why medieval court literature so often emerged in the shadow of a chancellor." Oostrom, *Court and Culture*, 9. Bumke points out that "contrary to the widespread notion that with the beginning of courtly literature clerics were replaced as authors by writers from the laity, we must emphasize that the epic poets usually had the kind of learned education that could only be acquired at the ecclesiastical schools. The discussion of this issue has often overlooked the fact that the Latin word *clericus* at this time did not describe primarily an ordained priest or the holder of an ecclesiastical office, but a man with a *clerical education*." Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 492. In addition, scholars believe that even the German Minnesingers also included members of the clergy, although a thorough examination of this question still remains to be done. Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 499. See also Schulman for discussion of the connection between the clergy and Occitan troubadours in Schulman, *Where Troubadours*, 38 ff. Stripping away the sophisticated disguise of the *Frauenehre* in literary works often reveals the limits—physical, spatial, and emotional—imposed on female bodies; and women's emotions, including laughter, often only make these limits more evident.

98 Ruys, *What Nature Does Not Teach*, 18.

99 Krueger, "Introduction," xxviii.

100 See, for example, Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. Clark's introduction to Ashley and Clark, *Medieval Conduct*, esp. x, xii–xvii.

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ature as a reflection of an ideal, an example of what its authors "wished the life to be like."[101] And yet, the treatment of laughter in Ulrich's *Das Frauenbuch* and in the greater didactic discourse reveals that even this ideal was far from uncomplicated, since it arose out of a disputatious and complex medieval culture in which lay and clerical discourses were far from separate, but rather debated and shaped each other; in which the necessity for laughter, eroticism, and procreation clashed with the suspicious view of women and the veneration of restraint and chastity; and in which competing norms and notions of femininity and masculinity coexisted and changed over time.

Written by a nobleman and a famous courtly poet rather than by a church-educated cleric, *Das Frauenbuch*, on the one hand, offers a defense of women and provides a powerful model for female behavior. It features a strong and vocal protagonist who is not afraid to express her opinions and is capable of reasoning logically for and mounting a strong defense of what she considers just and right. Yet, on the other hand, it is precisely the guise of the courtly exaltation of women that allows Ulrich von Liechtenstein to gradually and skillfully take control of this vociferous female dissident; revert to the model of femininity as silenced, accepting, and compliant; and thus send a starkly familiar message.[102] His text is wonderfully duplicitous. It is a work that seems to chastise men, while actually educating women; a work in which women are given the voice, will, and courage to object to men, while ultimately being silenced by the reinstated gender order; a work that with the help of its rhetoric seems to elevate women and yet in the end locks them up within the confines of the traditional patriarchal system.[103] Although unique in its encapsulation of both sides of the debate on laughter and femininity, *Das Frauenbuch* shares with other conduct and didactic texts the ideal according to which women are respected, as long as they themselves are respectfully silent, and obeyed, as long as they themselves are obedient.

101 Krueger, "Introduction," xxviii.

102 The view of courtly love and the praise-of-women topos as forms of misogyny is not new, of course. As Blamires points out, "many of the defense arguments could be interpreted as misogyny in disguise" and "'honouring ladies' came to be a proverbial definition of *male* honor." Blamires, *Case*, 237 and 10, respectively.

103 "Even in the most nearly feminist medieval writings, those most affirmative of female autonomy, there will lurk a shadow of patriarchy." Blamires, *Case*, 5.

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4 "The Pleasure Never Told": Men's Fantasies and Women's Laughter in Love Lyric

"The most delightful and choicest pleasure is
that which is hinted at, but never told."

(Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot or The Knight with the Cart*)

"There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip…"

(Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, 4.5.55)

Courtly Lyric, Laughter, and Familiar Paradigms

The debate in Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Das Frauenbuch* has touched upon the poetic tradition of honoring and venerating women (*Frauenehre*), but what can better represent this discourse than courtly love poetry? In fact, one may wonder if a different treatment of laughter and femininity might be found in the texts that openly promote the ideals of love, service, respect, and humility; that put the woman on a pedestal and impose the duties of sacrifice and self-improvement on the man. Is the lofty lady of the courtly love song, so consistently presented as the epitome of virtue that her purity cannot be doubted even in a moment of anger, safe from the overt sexualization and stereotypes that accompany laughter?

The answers to these questions are not as obvious as one may initially think. The German manifestation of the worldwide phenomenon of medieval love lyric, commonly known under its German term *Minnesang*, is a highly sophisticated art that portrays a fictitious relationship between a knight and his highborn lady. Despite this seemingly rigid and limiting configuration, the Minnesang displays, as Gibbs and Johnson point out, a great variety of expression and diversity of form and content.[1] One would expect the textual treatment of laughter to vary or change within the corpus that developed over the course of two centuries (from its earliest mid-twelfth-century native poems through the late-thirteenth-century, post-*Blütezeit* songs) and shows both liberal borrowings from other vernacular traditions and remarkable individuality. And yet, a diachronic look at the Minnesang reveals that even though laughter and smiling indeed appear to be accepted in medieval courtly lyric, this genre relies on familiar paradigms and symbolism that characterize other discourses already examined in this book.

1 Gibbs and Johnson, *Medieval*, 224.

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The use of the motif at different stages of the Minnesang's development unveils the same careful balancing between the need for eroticism and the limitations of propriety and virtue that mark conduct literature and the romance epic.

Nevertheless, courtly love lyric is also distinctly different from other discourses due to its unique erotic structure. It is the only kind of writing that elevates women to the position of authority and assigns men an inferior role of servitude, thus inverting the traditional power configuration. The woman is often infinitely removed from her male admirer, which results in a peculiar one-sided perspective where everything (including the lofty lady herself) is seen through the eyes of the male narrator (at least in the male-voiced songs).[2] Love lyric is thus the only genre that does not conceal but rather reflects on its own constructedness, openly presenting its audience with a *fantasy* of femininity, with a product of the male poet's imagination.[3] For this reason, the Minnesang can further elucidate the role of laughter in constructing the eroticized female body and highlight the contradictions within the courtly ideal of femininity.

2 This chapter focuses mostly on the male-voiced canzone, the predominant subgenre of the Minnesang. However, it has been argued that the songs written in a female voice ultimately present an essentially male idea of femininity. See the discussion later in this chapter, as well as Klinck and Rasmussen, *Medieval Woman's Song.* For more on gender in *Frauenlieder* and *Frauenstrophen* see Kasten, "The Conception of Female Roles," 152 – 167; Kasten, *Frauendienst*; Rasmussen, "Representing Woman's Desire," 69 – 85; and Jackson, "Reinmar der Alte," 73 – 101.

3 Of course, other discourses essentially present male fantasies of desirable femininity as well, yet unlike courtly lyric, they never acknowledge it. While many courtesy texts feature a sole authoritative male voice evaluating the comportment of female bodies, they (with the exception of Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Das Frauenbuch*) seldom reflect on the relationship between reality and the views of masculinity and femininity they set out to promote. Such self-reflection is absent in courtly epic as well, albeit for different reasons. Romance never deals with exclusively female bodies, but always represents two genders, creating an illusion of objectivity. In addition, the epic is clearly a fictional narrative; even though the audience's and the narrator's attention is deeply absorbed by all the twists and turns of the romance plot and its characters, everybody remains keenly aware of the line between the secondary and primary worlds. The listeners of the tales are invited to deduce lessons from these fictional works and in this way establish a connection between fiction and reality, to emulate the positive models and shun the negative ones. In this respect *Das Frauenbuch* is different again, combining the didacticism and "realism" of courtesy writings with the fictionality of the courtly narrative. Because it is a didactic work, the audience hearing Ulrich's story-within-a-story is always supposed to be aware of two discursive plains: their own world and the universe of the poem, and within the poem itself between the "reality" of courtly life represented by the lady and the courtly ideal to which the man aspires.

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"Laugh, My Dear Lady": When Courtly Women Smile

The anonymous German love song "Der walt in grüener varwe stât" (*MF* I.XIV[4]) features a touching conversation between the poet and the woman he adores. As expected, the man serves her unconditionally, fulfilling all her wishes; this behavior is quite typical for courtly love poetry. She, in her turn, inspires him and fills his soul with gratitude and joy. Two aspects of their relationship, however, make this early love song stand out in comparison to later poems, particularly to the so-called songs of lofty love (known in German as *Hoher Sang*). First, the love relationship between the woman and her servitor is reciprocal. Even though the meeting between the two lovers is clandestine (the male speaker's first impulse at seeing his lady is to check their surroundings), there is no attempt to conceal the intimacy between the two lovers from the audience. The "I" of the poem acknowledges quite openly that the lady provides him with true comfort ("diu mich troestet sunder spot," *MF* I.XIV.1,5), which could be interpreted as a purely emotional consolation if the statement were not echoed by the lady herself. In the third stanza, the lady proclaims that even though their secret meeting may cost her bitter tears, she is nevertheless ready to reward the man's service and grant him her greatest favor—her body:

> 'Ich wil weinen von dir hân,'
> sprach daz aller beste wîp,
> 'schiere soltu mich enpfân
> unde trôsten mînen lîp.' (*MF* I.XIV.3,1 – 2)
>
> "I will cry because of you," said the worthiest of women. "You should receive me swiftly and comfort me/my body."

The skillful play on words in the last line of the strophe allows the poet to hint at the lovers' impending physical union. The MHG expression *mîn lîp* can refer to either the lady's whole person (equivalent to the English pronoun "me") or more specifically to her body, thus turning the expression *lîp trôsten* into a clever euphemism for sexual intercourse. Like other early poets, this author does not separate the spiritual and sexual sides of love, and he glorifies a mutual relationship that inflicts joy and sorrow on *both* parties. Although this love is not at all immune to pain resulting from the limitations imposed on it by society (the famous watchers/overseers known as *merker*, or the male surveillance of women

4 All the quotations in this chapter come from *MF*, *KLD*, *SMS* (see the list of abbreviations), and Walther von der Vogelweide, *Werke*. For practical reasons, individual poems from *MF*, *KLD*, and *SMS* have been referenced as follows: the first number (either a Roman or an Arabic numeral) refers to the number assigned to the author in the collection; the second numeral designates the poem; the last two Roman numbers refer to the stanza and line(s), respectively.

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called *huote*), it nevertheless always strives for its fulfillment—the union of the two lovers.

The second aspect that separates this early Minnesang from many later poems is laughter. The woman is asked to smile and, presumably, would not refrain from doing so in order to please her lover: "Swie du wilt, sô wil ich sîn, / lache, liebez vrowelîn" ("Whichever way you wish, so I want to be. / Laugh, my dear lady," *MF* I.XIV.3,5 – 6). Although it might be easy to see this request as a simple invitation to be joyous and not to think of the gloomy consequences of their little rendezvous, the poem's overall erotic mood also allows for a different reading. The man's request suggests that laughter makes her more attractive, enticing, and inviting. If one looks at this poem as an allusion to the *quinque lineae amoris*, it is possible to interpret the lady's gesture as a sign of encouragement and welcoming of the male speaker, signaling the beginning of their love game.

While this little poem is representative of the work performed by women's laughter in love lyric, and the context of eroticism in which it is usually evoked, the popularity of the motif differs greatly depending on the subgenre, that is, on the poem's perspective and degree of sensuality. The majority of references occur in the male-voiced canzone inspired by the Romance models of Occitan troubadours and Northern French *trouvères*. In this unidirectional type of poetry, the male lyrical "I" describes his desires and projects them on the woman of his dreams. In contrast, laughter is conspicuously scarce in the songs that do not feature this contemplative-meditative state, as, for example, in most poems structured as a dialogue (*Wechsel*) or that emphasize things other than the startling beauty and intimidating glory of the lofty lady. Thus it is rare in most of the poems by Wolfram von Eschenbach, Neidhart von Reuenthal, or even the early native German minnesingers, which favor action over the exploration of the male speaker's inner feelings.[5] Their lofty lady is not stared at or fantasized about as she is in the canzone; instead, she acts, talks, complains, or commands. Songs of this kind lack an important aspect of the Romance-inspired lyric—the notorious male gaze. Scrutinizing, appropriating, and eroticizing, the gaze proves to be the most necessary feature of the courtly love poetry that mentions women's laughter.

Within the songs of lofty love (MHG *hôhiu minne*, mod. German *Hoher Sang*) themselves, one can distinguish patterns as well. The image becomes important only after a certain point in the Minnesang's development. Despite the fact that the lady of the pre-classical canzone is not yet completely transformed into what Marion Gibbs calls "the obdurate creature who comes to characterize so much of

5 Neidhart von Reuenthal's works are represented by two editions: Neidhart von Reuental, *Lieder*; and Bennewitz-Behr, *Die Berliner Neidhart*. Neidhart mentions women's laughter six times in all of his 131 poems (the total for both Wießner's and Bennewitz-Behr's editions).

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the later lyrics,"[6] no laughter is mentioned in the songs of such poets as Meinloh von Sevelingen, Der Burggraf von Rietenburg, and Kaiser Heinrich. During the classical stage of the courtly lyric, it appears only in the works of Heinrich von Morungen, Walther von der Vogelweide, and Wolfram von Eschenbach—the three authors famous for their generous use of erotic elements in their poetry. The scarcity of laughter in the texts of the classical Minnesang stands in stark contrast to its sudden "splash" in post-classical lyric, where the word *lachen* as a reference to "erotic smiles" is used in almost every poem.[7] The lady's smiles are desperately sought and appear to be the only thing mattering to her male admirer. Unsurprisingly, these references occur conspicuously, often when the poems mention the lady's red mouth, whose symbolism enables the poets to communicate indirectly. This allows them to convey a hidden message that they cannot state explicitly due to the restrictions of the genre to which they emphatically proclaim their allegiance. The fixation on laughter in the Minnesang goes beyond a mere expression of joy and contentment; it can be interpreted as a "metaphorical strategy in the taboo area of sex-organ nomenclature"[8] and as a new way to sexualize the lofty lady, thus playing a crucial role in the construction of a sophisticated discourse on love, gender, and power.

"I Love a Woman Who Is Good and Beautiful": The Courtly Lady's Two Bodies

What makes a woman irresistible to the man singing in her honor? The first and most obvious answer to this question would be her physical beauty, for the convention dictates that she be beautiful. The modern reader, however, is usually

6 Gibbs and Johnson, *Medieval*, 244. Gibbs and Johnson point out the active part the lofty lady plays in these poets' works, particularly in those by Meinloh von Sevelingen: "She, too, is committed to this love and, stronger party that she is, she will defend it in spite of the opposition of rivals and spies. It looks, then, like a new view of the old relationship, but the tone is more one of confidence and even happiness" (ibid.).

7 In *MF lachen* occurs a total of 23 times in only 18 poems. In contrast to *MF*, *KLD* contains a total of 165 examples of women's laughter (160 instances of the word *lachen* and 5 of its synonyms *smielen* or *smieren*) and 41 examples in 32 poems in *SMS*. Walther von der Vogelweide's collected poems include 9 songs and 2 *Sprüche* (in Schweikle's edition). His use of laughter is very abundant and varied, including non-gendered laughter (L 39,11 and 51,13), men's laughter (L 47,26; 65,17; 74,20; 128,18 and 184,1), and women's laughter (L 27,17; 27,27; 66,21; 110,13; 115,6; 120,25 and 184,1). In the conventional Minnesang, Walther's use of women's laughter is very similar to Morungen's. As far as the stages of the Minnesang are concerned, I follow the chronology suggested by Gibbs and Johnson, which overall coincides with Schweikle's somewhat more detailed periodization. See Gibbs and Johnson, *Medieval German Literature*, 238 – 303; Schweikle, *Minnesang*, 84 – 102.

8 Jones, *Secret Middle Ages*, 259.

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struck by how general and vague the descriptions of the lady's appearance are in the Minnesang, particularly at its earlier stages. She, of whom the male speaker dreams, is attractive, but it is not easy to find any descriptor more concrete than *schoen* (beautiful), *minneclîch* (lovely), or *best* (the best).[9] In her splendor, she is said to surpass all others but remains hard to imagine for the lack of any detail. While top-to-toe descriptions of female beauty, known as *laudes membrorum*, are ubiquitous in medieval romance,[10] they are scarce in German courtly lyric, which is true for both the early native poetry and that inspired by Romance models.[11] Friedrich von Hausen, for example, is said to be the first poet to praise the lady's seductive red mouth, yet among his eighteen surviving poems only one mentions it (*MF* X.X). Similarly, only two songs (*MF* XI.I and *MF* XI.XXXVII) by Heinrich von Veldeke make any references to specific body parts such as eyes, chin, mouth, and arms.[12] Mostly, the praise of the lofty lady's beauty seems to be nothing more than a poetic cliché.

As James A. Schultz has recently pointed out, courtiers in medieval texts are attracted to one another not merely by beauty but rather by their inherent nobility: "Courtly lovers are aristophiliacs: they fall in love with nobility and courtliness."[13] Nowhere is aristophilia more palpable than in the lofty song. The woman appears to be desired not so much for her physical charms as for the nobility and virtue of her body. Her very beauty functions as an indicator or proof of her aristocratic status, worthiness, and power over the male speaker. The duality of the courtly lady's depiction (her physical body and her lofty status) resembles the famous distinction between the *body politic* and *body natural* in Ernst Kantorowicz's seminal study of medieval kingship.[14] The king is said to be a "twinned person," of whose two faces, "one descend[ed] from nature, the other from grace […]; the one through which, by the condition of nature, he conformed with other men; another through which by the eminence of [his] deification and by the power of sacrament, he excelled all others."[15] The body natural thus represents the king's biological body, while the body politic is seen

9 Rudolf von Fenis notices his lady's *schoener lîp* ("beautiful body," *MF* XIII.III.5,1); Pseudo-Veldeke mentions her *minneclîcher lîp* ("lovely body," *MF* XI.XXXIV.1,7).

10 Cf. Westphal-Wihl, "Power and Fantasy," 39. One only needs to remember Wolfram's description of the sleeping Jeschute in *Parzival*, vv. 129,27 ff.

11 Kasten points out the absence of the actual female body in the classical Minnesang, despite its praise for the woman's beauty: "Da die Minnesänger dabei vor allem die sittliche Vollkommenheit der Frau, *kaum aber ihre äußeren Reize* preisen, verliert die Frau ihre Konturen als konkrete Gestalt und erscheint als Inbegriff der Tugend selbst." (My emphasis.) Kasten, "Minnesang," 174.

12 Conspicuously, one of them happens to be a *Frauenlied* (a song written in a female voice).

13 Schultz, *Courtly Love*, 4.

14 Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*, 7. For a discussion of how Kantorowicz's social model can be applied to medieval German literature, see Wenzel, "Die schuldlose Schöne," 89 – 107.

15 Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*, 43, 42, 500.

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as the body of royal power and honor. Renate Kroll has borrowed Kantorowicz's terminology to talk about female corporeality in medieval French literature, adopting the term "body natural" to designate the woman's "naked body in all its seductive femininity" and "erotic radiance," while the "body politic" represents the lady's public persona endowed with decorum, dignity, and her authority as a ruler.[16] Scholars interested in political theory may perhaps question to what extent Kantorowicz and Kroll describe the same phenomena, yet the separation of the two bodies offers a useful model for thinking about medieval gender. For the purposes of this chapter, I would like to adopt a similar binary to describe a clear and pervasive distinction between the manifestations of the lofty lady in the Minnesang. Since direct references to the naked female body are far less common in the German tradition than in the French, the concept of the body natural has to be further modified to suit the German-speaking lyric. From this point on, I will use the term "body natural" as a general reference to the *desirable* female body.[17]

In the male-voiced songs of the *Hoher Sang*, the lady's body politic—i. e. her status and virtue—is no less important than her physical beauty. By using the word "status," I do not imply the true social standing of either the poet or the lady, but rather the power relationship between the woman and the male speaker in the fictional world of the poem.[18] The body politic in courtly lyric is constructed in two ways: through direct references to the woman's nobility and with the help of the concept of love service (German *Frauendienst*), which borrows its imagery and vocabulary from the language of feudal vassalage. Already at the early stage of courtly lyric, the lofty lady is commonly called *werdez wîp* ("a worthy, noble woman," *MF* III.I.3,7) or *ein edeliu vrowe* ("a noble lady," *MF* III.I.5,3).[19] Bernger von Hornheim chooses a different word (*rîch*), but imbues it

16 "Ein nackter Körper im Sinne verführerischer Weiblichkeit," "weibliche Blöße," and "Ausstrahlung"; "politischer Körper im Sinne eines [männlichen] Herrschaftsstatus," "Anstand" and "Würde." Kroll, "Verführerin," 79, 93, respectively.

17 Walther's famous poem "Si wunder wol gemachet wîp…" (L 53,25; Schweikle 144) describes the man's voyeuristic pleasure at the sight of the nude lady leaving her bath, but is considered to be unique in its bold content. As Schultz points out, it is not at all representative of the Minnesang. Schultz, *Courtly Love*, 26.

18 The claims of the lady's social superiority—the misconception that presents her as a woman of high nobility and her servitor as a man of lower (if not humble) origins—have long been rejected because of the purely fictional, literary nature of courtly love poetry, and because of the variety of backgrounds found among minnesingers. Some include the high or the highest nobility, such as Kaiser Heinrich, Burggraf von Rietenburg, or Burggraf von Regensburg. Schweikle points out that even though the romanticized constellation "noble lady—socially inferior poet" could definitely have been accurate in certain cases, overall it should be seen as an "ephemeral accident rather than a rule": "Dies war dann aber bestenfalls ephemeres Akzidenz, nicht Prinzip." See Schweikle, *Minnesang*, 187–188.

19 Both expressions belong to Meinloh von Sevelingen. Also on four other occasions: "vil

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with the same meaning: "mîn vrowe ist so rîche unde guot" ("my lady is so noble and good," *MF* XVI.II.3,3).[20] Such references are frequently found in the context of love service modeled after the political relationship between a lord and a vassal. Even though the concept of service can be found in the native German tradition (for example, in the writings of Meinloh von Sevelingen or Burggraf von Rietenburg), it is, as Schweikle points out, not yet tied to the man's request for and the woman's denial of a reward, but rather functions as a metaphor for special devotion leading to sexual fulfillment and is not gender-specific.[21]

With the increased influence of Romance models, the woman gradually becomes transformed into a powerful, lordly figure before whom the male lover bows in respect and service, homage and worship. C. S. Lewis noticed the striking similarities between love service and vassalage as early as 1936. In his famous *Allegory of Love*, Lewis writes, "There is a service of love closely modelled on the service which a feudal vassal owes to his lord. The lover is the lady's 'man.' He addresses her as *midons*, which etymologically represents not 'my lady' but 'my lord.' The whole attitude has been rightly described as 'a feudalization of love.'"[22] Unlike the French and Occitan traditions, in which the service of ladies purportedly corresponded to and was inspired by the actual political structures of lordship and inheritance, the German-speaking lyric inherited this concept as a result of a purely literary transmission.[23] For this reason, the feudal terminology in the Minnesang is less developed than in the troubadour and *trouvères* poetry, including the gendered vocabulary to reflect the lofty lady's special lordly status.[24] Even so, the male "I" frequently refers to himself as his

schoene unde biderbe, dar zuo edel unde guot / so weiz ich eine vrowen" (*MF* III.III,1–2); "si ist edel und ist schoene" (*MF* III.III,6); "swer biderben dienet wîben…" (*MF* III.I.3,5); "ez tuo ein edeliu vrowe…" (*MF* III.I.5,3). Dietmar von Eist and Heinrich von Veldeke also emphasize the lady's nobility in similar terms: "daz mich ein edeliu vrowe hât genomen in ir getwanc" (*MF* VIII.XII.1,2); "Si ist edel unde vruot" (*MF* XI.VI.2,5) (respectively).

20 See Lexer's definition of *rîch:* "von hoher abkunft, edel, mächtig, gewaltig" ("of lofty origin, powerful, mighty"). Lexer, *HW* 2:416.

21 Schweikle, *Minnesang*, 174. See, e.g., Burggraf von Regensburg's female-voiced song "ich bin mit rehter stæte einem guoten rîter undertân" (*MF* IV.I.1,1).

22 Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, 2.

23 "Dabei war der Frauendienst im Wirkungsbereich der Trobadors nicht nur ein literarisches Modell, sondern auch eine Form realen gesellschaftlichen Handelns, da adlige Frauen auf Grund des Erbrechts häufig selbst Herrschaft ausgeübt haben. […] Da den deutschen Dichtern die Vorstellung, daß Frauen tatsächlich Herrschaft ausüben und Männer ihnen dienen könnten, eher fremd war, ist das Modell für ihre Dame nicht der Typus der Lehnsherrin, sondern eine Frau der höfischen Gesellschaft, und entsprechend schwach ist bei ihnen die Lehnsterminologie ausgebildet." Kasten, "Minnesang," 168–169. For more on the lordly status of the minnelady and its correspondence to reality, also see Kasten, "Frauendienst und Verfassung," 64–76; Sayce, *Medieval German Lyric*, 41.

24 Kasten, "Minnesang," esp. 174; Sayce, *Medieval German Lyric*, 30–31. The language of vassalage is particularly favored by the poets of the Rhineland region, of the so-called "Hausen-School."

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lady's *eigen* (vassal) and *undertan* (subject), while she is said to exercise *gewalt* (authority and power) over him. Ulrich von Gutenburg, for example, proclaims: "swie mîn vrowe wil, sô sol ez mir ergân, / der ich bin ze allen zîten undertân" ("As my lady wishes, so it shall be with me; I am forever her subject," *MF* XII.Lied.1,5–6); and admits with resignation: "Diu mac sîn gewaltic mîn. dêst reht, ich bin ir eigen / nu vil lange" ("She may well show her power over me. It is her right, for I have been her vassal for a long time now," *MF* XII.Leich.IV,9–10).[25] Typically, it is the male speaker who presents himself as the woman's vassal; however, in one of Heinrich von Rugge's female-voiced stanzas, it is the lady who uses this term:

> welle er ze vriundinne mich gewinnen,
> sô tuo mit allen sînen sinnen
> daz beste und hüete sich dâ bî,
> daz mir iht komme ze maere, wie rehte unstaete er sî:
> waer er mîn eigen denne, ich liez in vrî. (*MF* XV.XI.5,5–9)

> If he wishes to have me as his beloved, let him strive as hard as he can to do his best and beware lest I hear any report of his disloyalty: for in this case if he were my vassal, I would release him.

A quintessential example of how the language of vassalage can be harnessed to refer to courtly love can be found in Albrecht von Johansdorf's song, "Mîn êrste liebe, der ich ie began…" (*MF* XIV.I), which generously uses feudal terminology to describe the relationship between the male speaker and his Lady Love.

> Ich wil ir râten bî der sêle mîn,
> durch deheine liebe niht wan durch daz reht.
> was moht ir an ir tugenden bezzer sîn,
> danne obe si ir umberede lieze sleht.
> Taet an mir einvalteclîche,
> als ich ir einvaltic bin!
> an vröiden werde ich niemer rîche,
> ez enwaere ir der beste sin.

25 Cf. Rudolf von Fenis and Pseudo-Veldeke: "I gave her my body and my mind as a freehold in hope of favor; this lies in her power" ("Lîp und sinne die gap ich vür eigen / ir ûf gnâde, der hât si gewalt," *MF* XIII.V.2,1–2); "I am her serving subject" ("ich bin ir dienest immer undertân," *MF* XI.XXXIV.1,4). Also see Engelhart von Adelnburg (*MF* XX.I.3,2), Reinmar der Alte (*MF* XXI.XXXII.2,2), and Hartmann von Aue (*MF* XXII.XII.3,8 and 4,1–2). One can draw a parallel to the contemporaneous MHG epic texts, such as *The Nibelungenlied*, that use similar rhetoric when they refer to real political authority. For example, when Rüediger promises Kriemhild vast power in exchange for her marrying Etzel, he says: "Ir sult ouch werden *frouwe* über manegen *werden* man, / die mîner frouwen Helchen wâren *undertân*" ("You will also become a lady/ruler over many a worthy/noble man who used to be subject to my [late] Lady Helche," *Nibelungenlied*, vv. 1236–1237) (my emphasis). Cited according to *Das Nibelungenlied*.

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Ich wande, daz mîn kûme waere erbiten;
dar ûf hât ich gedingen menege zît.
nu hât mich gar ir vriundes gruoz vermiten.
mîn bester trôst der waene dâ nider gelît.
Ich muoz alse wîlen vlêhen
und noch harte, hulf ez iht.
herre, wan ist daz mîn lêhen,
daz mir niemer leit geschiht? (*MF* XIV.I.2,1 – 3,8)

By the salvation of my soul, I wish to advise her, but only out of duty, not out of affection. What could be better for her virtue than if she were to set the rumors straight? If only she were as honest with me as I am with her! I shall never be full of joy unless it would be also in *her* best interest. It seemed to me that I had been scarcely expected: I had hoped for it for a long time, and now I am denied her friendly greeting. My best consolation, methinks, is now completely gone. Just as in former times, I have to entreat [her] and try hard, so that it would be of any avail. Lord, when will it be my reward [my fief] that no sorrow shall ever come my way?

In this poem, the legal rhetoric is intertwined with the language of love. In the first strophe the man speaks of advising (*râten*) his liege-lady and of his own sense of duty or law (*durch daz reht*). He indicates that the woman's well-being is above all else, even his own happiness. However, he also hints at the lady-lord's own responsibility to her vassal, i. e., her duty of reciprocity. In exchange for his trustworthiness, openness, and honesty, he would like to receive hers ("taet an mir einvalteclîche als ich ir einvaltic bin," *MF* XIV.I.2,5 – 6). He therefore inquires at the end of the second strophe about his *lêhen*—a feudal fief or tenure that in this context can be read as "reward."[26] Albrecht's poem contains striking parallels to the medieval rules for lords and vassals, such as the ones mentioned in the letter of Bishop Fulbert of Chartres to Duke William V of Aquitaine (ca. 1020). A vassal's oath of fealty is said to include a promise to abide by six principles, namely, to remain "harmless, safe, honorable, useful, easy, [and] possible":

Harmless, that is, he must not harm his lord in his body. Safe, he must not harm him in his secrets or in the fortifications by which he is able to be safe. Honorable, so that he must not harm him in his justice or in other affairs which are seen to pertain to his honor. Useful, that he might not be harmful to him in his possessions. Easy or possible, so that he not make difficult any good which his lord could easily do nor make anything impossible that is difficult. […] Therefore it remains that he should give his lord counsel and aid in these same six above mentioned things if he wishes to be seen worthy of his benefice and to be safe in the fealty he has sworn. The lord should act toward his

26 Similar vocabulary appears in Ulrich von Gutenburg's songs as well, e. g., in his Leich (*MF* XII. Leich).

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vassal reciprocally in all these things. If he does not do so, he deserves to be considered of bad faith…[27]

It is clearly the failure to abide by the last requirement—the lord's reciprocity toward the vassal—that bothers the speaker in Albrecht's song and causes him to voice his discontent in the second stanza. The lady has withheld her favor—her greeting—from him despite his loyal and lengthy devotion. The refusal to reward the singer is equated with the breach of feudal troth and is strongly condemned in courtly love lyric. It drives some particularly dissatisfied minnesingers to abandon love service altogether:

Ich was ungetriuwen ie gehaz:
nu wolte ich ungetriuwe sîn.
mir taete untriuwe verre baz,
dann daz mich diu triuwe mîn
von ihr niht scheiden liez,
diu mich ir dienen hiez.
nu tuot mir wê,
si wil mir ungelônet lân. (*MF* XXII.III.2,1 – 8)[28]

I have always hated the disloyal ones, but now I wish I had been disloyal. My infidelity would have been far better than my loyalty that did not let me leave her who had called me into her service. Now it pains me that she wishes to leave me unrewarded.

The classical lofty lady is not a concrete and living woman, but rather a "shadowy figure, the passive recipient of [the minnesinger's] devotion,"[29] whose body politic supersedes the body natural. Her nobility is inseparable from and reinforced by her dignity and moral perfection; her virtue supersedes even her beauty.[30] The abstract vocabulary used to describe the woman's moral qualities—*güete* (goodness), *kiusche* (chastity), *sælde* (blessedness, perfection), *zuht* (good breeding), or *werdekeit* (worthiness, nobility)—only enhances the sense

27 Geary, *Readings*, 386.
28 "Ich sprach, ich wolte ir iemer leben…" (Hartmann von Aue, *MF* XXII.III).
29 Gibbs and Johnson, *Medieval German Literature*, 247.
30 Kasten, "Minnesang," 165. The lady's moral superiority is much stronger in the Minnesang than in troubadour and *trouvère* poetry. Kasten interprets this as the need to legitimize the expectation of male servitude and submission, since it did not have as much real-life basis in Germany as it had in France. The connection between virtue and physical beauty is apparent in the common phrase "ir tugende und ir schoene" ("her virtues and her beauty," *MF* XIX.IX.1,7). Heinrich von Rugge, for example, warns that one should not value female beauty too much (*MF* XV.IX.1,1 – 8), and Walther von der Vogelweide uses his own experience to warn against choosing external beauty over internal goodness: "Ich gesach nie houbet baz gezogen, / in ir herze kunde ich nie gesehen. / ie dar under bin ich gar betrogen, / dáz ist an den triuwen mir geschehen" ("I have never seen a more beautiful head, but I could never look into her heart. This is precisely what betrayed me. This is what happened to me for all my loyalty," L 52,31; Schweikle 294).

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of her vagueness and grandeur, drawing attention to the total lack of specific physical traits.[31] It is, therefore, not surprising that the lady's emotions and gestures are rarely discussed in the songs of lofty love; their bodily nature makes them incompatible with the concept of bodiless and abstract perfection. The absence of the body natural corresponds to the absence of women's laughter. It is not until the "sensualistic" poetry of Heinrich von Morungen that the lady's smiling red mouth becomes a permanent object of poetic admiration and reflection.[32]

"Her Red Mouth Began to Smile Almost Unnoticeably": Sexualizing the Body Natural

Si hât mich verwunt
rehte aldurch mîn sêle
in den vil tœtlîchen grunt,
dô ich ir tet kunt,
daz ich tobte unde quêle
umb ir vil güetlîchen munt.
Den bat ich zeiner stunt,
daz er mich ze dienste ie bevêle
und daz er mir stêle
von ir ein senftez küssen, sô wær ich iemer gesunt.
Wie wirde ich gehaz
ir vil rôsenvarwen munde,
des ich noch nieder vergaz!
Doch sô müet mich daz,
daz si mir zeiner stunde
sô mit gewalt vor gesaz.
Des bin ich worden laz,

31 Schweikle calls it a "strong idealizing trend" and links it to the Greek ideal of beauty and virtue, *kalokagathia.* He also points out the negative aspects of this idealization, such as a loss of individuality and the projection of the male's dissatisfaction and aggression onto the woman: "Mehr und mehr aber werden die umworbenen Frauen passivschemenhaft—als Ziel einer Fernliebe, eines Dienstangebots—, bis sie dann, erstmals bei Friedrich von Hausen, von den Werbenden als die Abweisende, Gleichgültige, Unnahbare, ja Hochmütige, Launische, Ungnädige, Grausame erfahren werden." Schweikle, *Minnesang*, 182 – 183.

32 The image of the red mouth is by no means Morungen's invention. It appears in two poems by Friedrich von Hausen and Heinrich von Veldeke, where it is tied to eroticism and beauty. Hausen proclaims that a king himself would be elated if he got a chance to kiss the lady's red mouth (*MF* X.X.1,5 – 8); and in Veldeke's *Frauenlied*, the female speaker dreams of kissing her beloved, leaving the rest of their romantic meeting to the audience's imagination (*MF* XI.XXXVII.5,1 – 4). Yet it is Morungen who begins to use the motif consistently and frequently.

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alsô daz ich vil schiere wol gesunde
in der helle grunde
verbrunne, ê ich ir iemer diende, in wisse umbe waz. (*MF* XIX.XXVII)

She mortally wounded me, deep into my soul, as I made it known to her that I raged and raved about her lovely mouth. I once appealed to this mouth that it order me to serve her and that it steal for me one of her soft kisses. Thus I would be healed forever. How can I hate her rose-red mouth that I have not been able to forget no matter what! Yet it pains me greatly that she once ruled over me so. I have become weary of that and would sooner burn in the depths of hell alive than ever serve her without knowing in exchange for what.

He loves her, she loves him not; he pines for her, but she is deaf to his supplications; he is ready to serve her for all eternity, but she remains unresponsive; in this, Heinrich von Morungen's song is representative of a large corpus of medieval love poetry. What is unexpected, however, is how Morungen describes his lofty lady. There is barely any reference to the woman's appearance, not even such generic epithets as "beautiful" or "noble"; and yet there can be no doubt as to the importance of her beauty in this poem and its effect on the male speaker thanks to the prominent image of the red mouth. With its complex triple function as an attractive facial feature, a metonymy for the woman's entire body, and an independent, disembodied entity with power over even its owner, it draws the audience's attention to the lady's body natural and introduces sensuality and physicality into the poem. Despite the use of the familiar tropes like goodness (*güetlich*), power (*gewalt*), and service (*ze dienste bevêlen*), this lady is judged by somewhat different standards; her lordly splendor alone is no longer sufficient for the man who finds both the distance separating them and her control over him disturbing. It is her body natural that he truly desires. The poem makes this point by skillfully juxtaposing the references to the personified red mouth and the woman to whom it belongs, developing two parallel subtexts—eroticism and power. It begins and ends with the references to the lofty lady (*si* and *ir*, "she" and "her") and the traditional concept of love service, placing the sensual image of the red mouth directly at the center of the poem, in the second half of the first stanza and at the beginning of the second one.[33] The focus thus shifts from the woman herself to her orifice, virtually transforming the former into the latter with the help of metonymy and personification. The mouth is given agency and control not only over the male speaker but also over its female owner; it can collude with the man and heal his wounded heart by stealing kisses[34] from her

33 Morungen's strategy of bringing together the motifs of a stolen kiss and of a denied service is highly innovative. See Kasten and Kuhn, *Deutsche Lyrik*, 797.

34 As Kasten points out, the motif of stolen kisses can be found among the French troubadours (known influence on Morungen's writing), esp. Peire Vidal and Peirol, and in the German-

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supposedly unwilling and distant body. The motifs of kissing and lovesickness imbue this bold request with additional eroticism, since both can be seen as allusions to intercourse—kisses as a stage of the *quinque lineae amoris,* and lovesickness as a malady that can be best cured, according to medieval literary and medical texts, by "therapeutic intercourse" with the woman who has inflicted it.[35] Both motifs insinuate that the man would very much enjoy having greater access to the lady's body. Once the speaker's bold request is denied, however, the focus shifts back from the mouth to the lofty lady as the figure of authority and to the concept of service, taking a form of a reproach for insufficient reciprocity.

Remarkably, the man is not angry with the mouth itself, the orifice, the personification that uttered the rejection; he is still under its charm, exclaiming rhetorically: "How can I hate her rose-red mouth that I have not been able to forget no matter what!" (*MF* XIX.XXVII. 2,1 – 3). His anger is with female power alone. While the physical body remains appealing, it is the body politic, so frequently admired in awe by Morungen's contemporaries, that he rejects. The man is bothered by the fact that "she once had so much power over [him]" ("daz si mir zeiner stunde sô mit gewalt vor gesaz" *MF* XIX.XXVII.2,5 – 6). Here the verb *vor sitzen* does not simply refer to his amorous obsession but it also bears legal overtones, still detectable in the modern German word *vorsitzen*, "to chair, to preside." The speaker rejects the idea of an ennobling and selfless service unless he is rewarded for it. The lofty lady's two bodies are no longer separate; in order to be able to tolerate one of them, the man has to have access to the other.

Not every poem that plays with the red-mouth motif ends in such a resolute rejection of the love relationship. In fact, most of Morungen's works uphold, albeit while lamenting, the idea of courtly love service, of a virtuous lofty lady, and of the futility of the man's desires, thus remaining firmly anchored within the conventions of the genre of lofty song.[36] In Heinrich's poetry as well as in that of his later imitators, the lady remains, in actuality, distant and unavailable. On

speaking lyric in the poetry of Reinmar von Hagenau and Walter von Vogelweide. Kasten and Kuhn, *Deutsche Lyrik*, 797.

35 Medieval works utilizing this motif include, for example, Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* (both Riwalin's and Tristan's stories) and Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (Gawan-adventure). For more on medieval views of therapeutic intercourse see Zago, "Women, Medicine," 68; as well as "Introduction" and chapter 1 in Wack, *Lovesickness*, xi–xvi, 3 – 30, respectively.

36 Scholarship on the Minnesang consistently emphasizes Morungen's strict belonging to the lofty song (Germ. *Hoher Sang*). In contrast, two other prominent poets of the time—Walther von der Vogelweide and Wolfram von Eschenbach—consciously position themselves outside this genre. Walther's vast and diverse oeuvre includes both the traditional Minnesang and bold attempts at subversion, taking the lyric in a new direction. For his part, Wolfram consciously chose not to follow the form and aesthetic ideals of the *Hoher Sang.* See Gibbs and Johnson, *Medieval*, 202. Also Schweikle, *Minnesang*, 90.

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the level of fantasy, however, things appear to be quite different. The poem employs the so-called "rhetoric of two spaces,"[37] that is, the poet's keen awareness of two distinct worlds (of his poem and of his audience). When combined with this strategy, the motifs of the red mouth as a metonymic representation of the woman's beauty[38] and of laughter as a silent encouragement of the man's advances allow courtly poets to add an erotic subtext, to sexualize the remote courtly lady, and to make her more attainable by suggesting some seduction or complicity on her part:

> Ich minne ein wîp, diust guot und wol getân.
> diu lât mich aller rede beginnen,
> ich kan ab endes niht gewinnen.
> dar umbe waere ich nû verzaget,
> wan dazs ein wênic lachet sô si mir versaget. (L 120,25; Schweikle 70)

> I love a lady, who is good and beautiful. She always allows me to begin my speech, but I can never come to the end. I would indeed be distraught because of that, if only she didn't smile at me a little bit while rejecting me.[39]

At the same time, the male speakers are careful to protect themselves with the disclaimer that their requests for a reward are nothing but a dream, a wish, or are simply impossible due to their own personal limitations (such as inexperience or even impotence[40]), as is the case, for example, in the following excerpts from one of Morungen's songs:

> Ir lachen und ir schoene ansehen
> und ir guot gebaerde hânt betoeret lange mich.
> in kan anders niht verjehen.
> swer mich ruomes zîhen wil, vür wâr, der sündet sich.
> Ich hân sorgen vil gepflegen
> und den vrouwen selten bî gelegen… (*MF* XIX.VII.4,1 – 6)

> Her laughter, her lovely appearance, and her good manners have long bewitched me. I cannot say anything different. Whoever wishes to accuse me of boasting, truly sins. I have lived through great pain and seldom lain with ladies.

37 Goldin, *Mirror*, 122.

38 "The red mouth is a very common symbolic attribute of the lady. […] It has the associations of beauty, youth, love, and joy (as the phrase *fröiden rich* makes clear)." Sayce, *Medieval German Lyric*, 172.

39 Cf.: "Durch das Lächeln, das Morungen der *Minnedame* mehrfach zuschreibt (vgl. auch Nr. 108,5,1 f. und 112,2,1), erlangt das Bild der *frouwe* im Minnesang der Zeit eine neue, weichere Facette." Kasten and Kuhn, *Deutsche Lyrik*, 790.

40 See e. g., Ulrich von Liechtenstein (*KLD* 58.XLIII).

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Be it the distance that separates him from his lady, her haughtiness, or his waking up from a dream, the poet's erotic fantasy remains forever what it is—just a fantasy. In reality, the woman is said to remain unattainable and safe.[41]

Two of Morungen's poems (*MF* XIX.XXII and *MF* XIX.XXI) illustrate how these strategies can work to both create and obscure the erotic subtext.[42] In both of them, smiling functions as a form of secret communication understandable only to the two lovers inside the poem and disclosed to the public outside it, even though it is always left open whether such communication takes place in actuality or merely in the male speaker's imagination. "Ich bin iemer ander und nicht eine…" (*MF* XIX.XIa and XIb) addresses a public relationship between the lady and her minstrel, which the latter is eager to imbue with private meaning. Aware of the importance of discretion in the presence of others, the notorious *huotaere* ("watchers, guardians"; *MF* XIX.XIa–b.1,3), he relentlessly searches for the smallest signs of the woman's favor in her public behavior, the gestures that could be interpreted as her consent to greater intimacy. Since his own surreptitious glances carry a special message to her, he is eager to detect a response to his plea in her laughter—an encouragement to his silent supplication:

> Mîner ougen tougenlîchez sehen,
> daz ich ze boten an si senden muoz,
> das neme durch got von mir vür ein vlêhen,
> und obe si lache, daz sî mîn gruoz. (*MF* XIX.XIb.2,1 – 4)
>
> Let her read for God's sake a plea in a secret glance of my eyes that I have to send to her as a messenger. And if she smiles, this will be my welcome.

To the outsiders, the woman's smile is nothing but a traditional greeting bestowed by a feudal lady upon her minstrel, but privately, it tells the man that she understands and welcomes his longing and desire: "The secret has persisted, a triangle between him, and her, and her image."[43] However, the illusoriness of this communication quickly becomes apparent in the speaker's jealous outburst (last stanza in XIb; st. 2 in XIa). The intended meaning of the lady's smile turns out to be public, after all; she does not single out the poet, but only bestows on him the

41 Dewhurst mentions the influence of the famous Provençal troubadour Bernard de Ventadorn on Morungen. It is from Bernard that Morungen must have inherited the technique of indirection, for the Provençal poet quite commonly "address[es] an audience of voyeurs, inviting desire and complicity through descriptions of his *domna* which conceal more than they reveal." Dewhurst, "*Vrouwe*," 26.

42 The captivating effect of the lady's mouth is also very clear in Morungen's song "Mich wundert harte…" (*MF* XIX.XXVI), in which its speech and beauty rob the male speaker of his senses. For additional examples see *MF* XIX.XIX, *MF* XIX.IX, *MF* XIX. XXVII, *MF* XIX.XXVI.

43 Goldin, *Mirror*, 136.

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common gesture of courtesy and courtliness available to anybody who deserves it.

> Sî ensol niht allen liuten lachen
> alse von herzen, sam si lachet mir,
> und ir ane sehen sô minneclîchen machen.
> waz hat aber ieman daz ze schouwen an ir,
> der ich leben sol,
> und an der ist al mîn wunne behalten?
> joch enwil ich niemer des eralten,
> swenne ich si sîhe, mir ensî von herzen wol. (*MF* XIX.XIa.2,1 – 8; *MF* XIX.XIb.5,1 – 8)

> She should not smile at everybody so cordially as she smiles at me, and she should not make such a lovely face. What business has anyone to behold all this in her, for whom I must live and in whom all my joy resides? Yet I would wish to never become so old that my heart would not rejoice at the sight of her.

In a jealous outburst, the "I" reproaches his lady for laughing indiscriminately, for not finding the same meaning in their private relationship as he does—the painful fact he has to accept if he wishes to continue the tradition of lofty love service with honor.

The so-called "Venus"-song uses a similar strategy of bold suggestions followed by a retreat into the safety of the convention (*MF* XIX.XXII). "Ich waene, nieman lebe…" opens and closes with the familiar description of the lady's remoteness and the man's futile loyalty and torment:

> Ich waene, nieman lebe, der mînen kumber weine,
> den ich eine trage,
> ez entuo diu guote, die ich mit triuwen meine,
> vernimt si mîne klage.
> Wê, wie tuon ich sô, daz ich sô herzeclîche
> bin an sî verdâht, daz ich ein künicrîche
> vür ir minne niht ennemen wolde,
> ob ich teilen unde weln solde?
> […]
> Ich tuon sam der swan, der singet, swenne er stirbet.
> waz ob mir mîn sanc daz lîhte noch erwirbet,
> swâ man mînen kumber sagt ze maere,
> daz man mir erbunne mîner swaere? (*MF* XIX.XXII.1,1 – 8 and 5,5 – 8)

> I think nobody among the living would beweep the sorrow that I alone bear, unless the good one, to whom I am loyal, does it upon hearing my lament. Oh woe, why do I long for her with all my heart to such an extent that I would not wish to accept a kingdom instead of her love if I could decide and choose? […] I act like a swan who sings as it is dying. But what if my song might at least bring about one thing: that whenever my sorrow is mentioned, people will envy me in my suffering?

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Despite the dejected tone of this frame narrative, the center of the poem is much more cheerful. Between the first and the last lament strophes, Morungen includes memorable descriptions of his fantasies about the woman he loves: of her pursuing him in his imagination (st. 2), her Venus-like beauty (st. 3) that robs him of his senses, and her alleged teasing him (st. 3 – 4) in a game of enticement and rejection, in which her laughter once more plays an important role:

> Und ir liehter schîn
> sach mîch güetlîch an mit ir spilnden ougen,
> lachen sî began ûz rôtem munde tougen,
> sâ zehant enzunte sich mîn wunne,
> daz mîn muot stêt hôhe sam diu sunne. (*MF* XIX.XXII.4,5 – 8)

> And her shining beauty looked at me kindly with frolicking eyes. Her red mouth began to smile at me in secret, and my joy was enkindled at once, so that my spirits remain as high as the sun.

The response that the lady's red lips and barely discernible smile produce in the suffering male speaker suggests that yet again he is eager to treat it as an encouragement, a welcome, and a promise of solace. However, like the previous song, this text is ambiguous as to the true existence of this promise. While the MHG word *tougen* means "in secret, discreetly," the last stanza casts doubt on the man's suggestions about the woman's complicity; he himself acknowledges the imaginary nature of their love relationship by calling everything previously said about her "a joke" (*spot*). The male speaker also returns to the motif of unrequited love by asking himself why he so willingly prolongs his own agony:

> Wê, waz rede ich? jâ ist mîn geloube boese
> und ist wider got.
> wan bite ich in des, daz er mich hinnen loese?
> ez was ê mîn spot. (*MF* XIX.XXII.5,1 – 4).

> Oh woe, what am I saying? Indeed, this belief of mine is weak and against God. Why don't I pray to Him to deliver me from here? What I said before was only a joke.[44]

Together with the last four lines of this strophe quoted earlier, this admission abandons the fantasy of reciprocity and reconfirms the poem as a song of *lofty*

44 Cf. Moser and Teervoren's annotation for line 5,4: "Was ich vorher gesagt habe, war nicht mein Ernst" (*MF*, 68). Also Kasten's translation: "Das vorhin war nur ein Scherz." Kasten and Kuhn, *Deutsche Lyrik*, 790. Also see Goldin: "She smiled at him then *tougen*—discreetly? or only in his imagination? Were her goodness and the consoling promise it brought him real or only his fantasy? Nothing is certain, for something has made him aware that his whole relationship with her was a lonely invention. 'Thus all his heavenly joy is nothing but the illusion of a solitary man.'" Goldin, *Mirror*, 137.

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love with its ethos of glorified suffering, so vividly expressed in the metaphor of a dying swan and the speaker's wish that others might envy him in his torment.[45]

"I Would Gladly Speak of That Which Should Not Be Named": Circumventing Lofty Love

How to voice desire while belonging to the tradition that requires yearning for the lofty, the inaccessible, and the perfect? This remains a problem for many courtly love poets who come after Morungen. The late Minnesang is commonly described as epigonic, shallow, and no longer innovative, full of clichés and repetitions.[46] Mostly grouped in schools (e.g., Swabian or Swiss Minnesang) rather than referenced by individual authors, post-classical lyric is marked by a striking likeness in form, style, and content. The lofty lady's red mouth and laughter become so ubiquitous that it might be tempting to dismiss them as simply inherited tropes as well. The popularity of this motif in the lyric of the late-Staufer period by far surpasses anything found on the early and classical stages of its development.[47] However, its treatment by those innovative poets who do stand out (e.g., Ulrich von Liechtenstein, Gottfried von Neifen, Burkhart von Hohenfels, Ulrich von Winterstetten, to name just a few) reveals their continuous experimentation with the two bodies of the lofty lady and their further attempts to circumvent the convention while proclaiming allegiance to it.

45 Although it does not use laughter, Morungen's famous "Narcissus-song" (*MF* XIX.XXXII) similarly employs the motifs of the attractive red mouth and of the discrepancy between dream and reality. One of the poem's original aspects is its depiction of the lady's mouth as pale, which has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Sayce treats its lack of color as a sober reminder of the transience of all things—love, youth, and beauty—and, ultimately, of the contrast between the speaker's ideal aspirations and his "harsh reality." Sayce, *Medieval German Lyric*, 172 – 173. Goldin sees it as a symbolic representation of the lady's virtue, whose blemish causes the male speaker to question her perfection and thus individualizes her. Goldin, *Mirror*, 155. The evidence that he uses, however, for his interpretation of the red mouth as a traditional symbol of virtue and unattainability is in itself problematic (*Mirror*, 154 – 155, note 42), since the frequency of the motif among the post-classical authors he names (such as Neifen, Luppin, Hamle, etc.) cannot account for Morungen's own use, but rather should be seen as a manifestation of his influence on the later poets. For a detailed periodization of the Minnesang see Schweikle, *Minnesang*, 84 – 102.

46 As Thomas Cramer indicates, the most typical descriptions of the late Minnesang among Germanists include "epigonic nature," "clumsiness and banality," "clichéd and stereotypical content," and a "striking lack of originality" ("Epigonalität, […] Plumpheit und Banalität, Schablonenhaftigkeit und stereotyper Inhalt, ein 'erstaunlicher Mangel an Originalität'"). Cramer, "*Sô sint doch gedanke frî*," 47. Matthias Meyer speaks of the "stagnating canzone" ("die stagnierte Kanzone"). Meyer, "Objektivierung," 185. Also see Kasten, "Minnesang," 181; Schweikle, *Minnesang*, 94; and Hugo Kuhn's seminal study, *Minnesangs Wende.*

47 See the comparison of the frequency of this motif earlier in this chapter.

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What distinguishes this post-classical lyric from similar poetry by Morungen is its starkly diminished interest in suffering and spiritual growth as a necessary component of a courtly love relationship.[48] This new spirit is best summarized by Ulrich von Liechtenstein in his famous work *Frauendienst:*

> Es sol des edelen jungen lîp
> sîn hôchgemuot durch ein guot wîp.
> und ist er niht von wîben vrô,
> sô muotz er immer leben sô,
> daz er an freuden ist verirt.
> sîn trûren im unsælde birt:
> schelten, spotten alle zît
> im sîn swachez trûren gît. (*FD*, st. 1686)

> A noble young man should keep his spirits high for the sake of a good woman. And if he is not made joyous by women, then he must live forever, with joy denied to him. His grieving brings him misfortune: at all times his unmanly sorrow brings him blame and mockery.

Such a drastic reconceptualization of courtly love service inevitably affects the impassable divide between the lady and the minstrel, resulting in what Ursula Bolduan calls "an ever increasing concretization and personalization of the love-wish."[49] While the conventions of lofty love continue to govern the standards for expressing male desire, the emphasis shifts from the ennobling role of the woman to her passing the test of (sexual) reciprocity.[50] The insinuation of return is commonly conveyed in a variety of ways: through euphemisms, sexual metaphors, and word play (such as plucking flowers or roses[51]); through Goldin's

48 See Goldin's observation on the role of *gemach* ("comfort, convenience") in Ulrich von Liechtenstein's lyric. Goldin, *Mirror*, 172 – 173.

49 "Zunehmende Konkretisierung, Personalisierung des Minnewunsches." Bolduan, *Minne*, 153. Also see Kasten, "Minnesang," 178: "Die Hohe Minne ist zwar überall noch präsent, aber nicht mehr Gegenstand einer substantiellen Auseinandersetzung. Sie wird, in mancherlei Form, zum Gegendstand des Spiels."

50 "Die Aufgabe der Frau besteht nicht mehr nur in der distanten Erziehung des Mannes zu höfischer Gesinnung und Haltung, sondern im Realisieren, Praktizieren, Bewähren…" Bolduan, *Minne*, 154.

51 *Bluomen* or *rôsen brechen* is a standard trope for sexual intercourse or rape. See e. g., Walther (L 75,9 and 112,3; Schweikle 278 and 98), Neidhart SL 17.I, Der tuginthafte Schriber (*KLD* 53.I), Graf Kraft von Toggenburg (*SMS* 1.I), and Gedrut-Geltar (*KLD* 13.IV). Schweikle also mentions two other variants—*rôsen lesen* (pick roses) and *ze holze gân* (to go to the woods). Schweikle, *Minnesang*, 198. A telling example of such double talk is found in Chuonrat von Kilchberg's poem: "diu mir ie was liep vor allen wîben, / frœlich in des meien bluot / bræche ich ir ein schatehuot" (*KLD* 33.III.5,4 – 6), which can be translated as "I would gladly break May blossoms to make a hat for her whom I have always preferred to all other women." However, the word *schatehuot* has two meanings: "a hat providing shade" (*Schatten gebender Hut*) and "protection" (*schatehuote von Gott = schützende Behütung*). Lexer, *HW* 2:672. Considering the man's wish to be close to the lady ("if only I could be at her side now" 'solte

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"secret triangle" or what Kremer calls the *chiffre* between the two lovers;[52] and through further sexualization of the woman. The post-classical lofty lady is more likely than ever to be imagined with a body that includes eyes, cheeks, hair, and arms—and sometimes even breasts and legs.[53] But first and foremost, she always has a very attractive laughing red mouth, often described in rather provocative ways. Unsurprisingly, the eroticized female smiles and laughter appear precisely in the poems where the "male gaze" discovers these bodily charms. Ulrich von Liechtenstein speaks not only of the mouth's color—"rœter denne ein rôse," 'redder than a rose'[54]—but of the way it must feel on his lips, sweet and hot—"süez unde heiz" (*KLD* 58.XLVII.6,1 – 2). He also invents a special adjective *kleinvelrôt* to refer to the tender, delicate, and soft skin of the female lips (*KLD* 58.XLVII.7,3; 58.LII.4,1; 58.LVIII.5,1). Kristan von Hamle admires a mouth so red that it can glow in the dark ("nahtes ûz der vinster gleste," *KLD* 30.III.4,3). Heinrich Hetzbolt von Wissense builds his whole Song VIII around the image of the mouth that allegedly challenges him with its redness: "daz stet alsam ez spreche 'ja trutz, wer tar küssen mich?'" ("It is as if it were saying, 'Well, who would dare to kiss me?'" *KLD* 20.VIII.1,7 – 8; 2,7 – 8). These suggestive, erotically charged images reveal what the poets truly desire—physical contact, a response, a physical reward: Wissense dreams of avenging himself on the seductive organ ("könde ich nach dem willen min an ime mich gereche," *KLD* 20.VIII.1,4 – 5) and of being embraced by the bare white arms ("müeste ich noch mit blanken armen vrôlich umbevangen sî," *KLD* 20.VIII.3,3 – 4); Hamle would not mind admiring the shiny redness *in rehter næhe*, "from a right distance" (*KLD* 30.III.4,5) and finds his ideal of love in complete physical surrender:

Von frœlîchem lîbe mit armen umvangen,
ze herzen gedrücket, wie sanfte daz tuot;
von trôstlîchem wîbe mit rœslehtem wangen
vor liebe gelachet, daz fröiwet den muot.

---

ich ir nu wesen bî,' v. 5,2) and to have her gratitude ("I wish to seek her praise and serve her in exchange for her gratitude" 'ir lop daz wil ich trîben gerne und dienen umbe ir danc,' vv. 5,8 – 9), as well as the symbolism of flowers, a different, erotic subtext emerges ("I would gladly break her protection amidst May blossoms").

52 Even though Kremer does nothing to explain the imaginary nature of this code or its effect on the fantasy of medieval courtly femininity, he also notices the erotic subtext of many post-classical songs. Kremer, "Das Lachen," 98.

53 See, for example, Kristan von Luppin: "zwar si treit gar slechte wîze hende, wol gestalt unmâzen gar. sint dâ bein inne? ich wæne nein." ("She has smooth white hands, exceedingly well-shaped. And are those really her legs? I do not believe so." *KLD* 31.VII.2,3 – 5). Also see *KLD* 31.III.

54 The comparison of the mouth to a rose is already suggestive in itself, since the rose is not simply red, but also a flower that above all others symbolizes the female sexual organs. On medieval plant symbolism see Jones, *Secret Middle Ages*, 263 – 264.

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dâ sint zwei herze und ein einiger lîp,
mit worte underscheiden, ein man und ein wîp… (*KLD* 30.I.1,1 – 6)

How sweet it is to be embraced by the joyous body and to be pressed to one's heart! How much it gladdens one's spirits to receive a smile of love from a woman with rosy cheeks who can offer solace! Then there will be two hearts but one sole body, or, to explain it fully, a man and a woman.

Even Ulrich praises kissing (evoking the familiar sensual image of the rose) as the most pleasurable experience imaginable, with the exception of the intercourse itself:

Küssen ist der Minnen rôse,
dâ si reitzet wunne mit,
sô si mit der liebe lôse
ist nâch ir vil süezem sit.
sô getet nie niht sô wol,
wan daz einen des man nennen niht ensol.

Gerne ich von dem selben spræche,
waz ez wunne und fröide gît.
obe ich mîne zuht niht bræche,
ich nantz fröiden hôchgezît
und der minnen lôn alsô… (*KLD* 58.LVI.6,1 – 7,5)

Kissing is Lady Love's rose, through which she causes bliss as she is wont to do with all Love's fickleness according to her sweet custom. Nothing ever feels so good, unless it is that one thing which must not be named. I would gladly speak of that, because it gives bliss and joy. If only I didn't reveal myself as uncourtly by doing this, I would call it a celebration of joy and a reward of love…

And yet the male speaker is careful only to hint at the fantasy without ever naming it explicitly. He candidly admits that he does not dare to put his reputation at risk: "dannoch vil des ich niht tar gejehen" ("however, I dare not speak much of that," *KLD* LVII.7,7).[55] The poets are well aware both of the sensuality of their songs and the limits of the tradition they have consciously chosen. While they pry into their mistresses' "hidden features,"[56] they are no less eager than Morungen to be perceived as courtly, as belonging to the genre of lofty love (*hôhiu minne*). To dispel any potential doubts, Ulrich von Liechtenstein categorically denounces the so-called low love (*nideriu minne*), with its purely

55 Burrow mentions a general move away from public kissing in the thirteenth century. Burrow, *Gestures*, 51. Kissing thus becomes more and more of a private phenomenon. It is quite common for late minnesingers to describe their imagined actions towards the lady as occurring in secret or in private (*tougenlîche*). For a detailed analysis of the medieval German perception of private and public space see Wenzel, "Die schuldlose Schöne," esp. 250.

56 Andreas Capellanus, *On Love*, 35.

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physical satisfaction, and returns to the traditional praise of the high ideals of lofty love (*hôhiu minne*):

> Hôher muot, du twingest mir den lîp ze hôch,
> unde ist dir daz herze mîn dar zuo bereit,
> wanz ie die nidern minne flôch.
> […]
> Nideriu minne: an fröiden tôt
> ist er, dem si an gesigt.
> gît diu hôhe sende nôt,
> doch wol im, der der selben pfligt!
> Sî gît sorge, und ist diu sorge fröiden rîch. (*KLD* 58.III.5,5 – 7; 6,1 – 5)

> High-mindedness, you press me too hard, and still my heart is ever ready for that, since I have always fled "low love." […] As far as low love is concerned, he, who lets himself be conquered by it, is an unhappy man. Even if lofty love causes pain, he who pursues it is still blessed. It causes sorrow, but this sorrow is rich with joy.

The devices used to maintain the appearance of staying within the boundaries of conventions include indirection[57] and familiar topoi of unrequited passion and the lady's remoteness and virtue. In the suggestive song about kissing analyzed earlier, Liechtenstein creates a string of euphemisms and adopts a strategy of neutralization, pairing up each sensual mention of the lady's body with a reference to her virtue and nobility[58]: "rœter denne ein rôse / ist ir munt süez unde heiz. / *sîst mit zühten lôse*" ("her mouth is redder than a rose, so sweet and hot. She is as friendly as modesty allows," *KLD* 58.XLVII.6.1 – 3); "brûn ir brâwe, wîz ir lîp. / *von geburte ein frouwe ist si, / und von tugenden wîp*" ("Her brows are brown, her body is white. She is a lady by birth and a woman by virtue," vv. 6,5 – 7); "*kiuschlîch smielen* lachen / kan ir kleinvelrôter munt" ("Her little soft red mouth can smile and laugh chastely," vv. 7,1 – 2) (my italics in all ex-

57 As Zeyen points out, indirection is typical of medieval writing, especially of an erotic, obscene, or scatological nature. It allows the speaker to unmistakably convey his message while avoiding any improper direct references to the erotic or obscene concept. Zeyen, "*daz tet*," 214. Beutin agrees: "Diese Art der Metaphorik ist nichts anderes als die sprachliche Respektierung des Tabus bei seiner gleichzeitigen inhaltlichen Durchbrechung." Beutin, *Sexualität und Obszönität*, 113.

58 Curiously, as Monica Green demonstrates, in the Middle Ages the red mouth itself functioned not merely as a standard of female beauty but also as an indicator of a woman's social status. According to one of the most authoritative medieval medical treatises, the twelfth-century *Trotula* ensemble, the very ingredients of the potion used to make one's lips red and supple, hardly could have been accessible to women of humble origins. In fact, the *Trotula* itself was intended for a noble audience, addressing "noble Salernitan women" (*nobiles Salernitane*), a scribal correction from "noble Saracen women" (*nobiles Sarracene*): "The attribution of a certain cosmetic preparation to Muslim *noble*women suggests Christian women's turning to this neighboring culture for any symbols that would help secure their own class aspirations." Green, *The Trotula*, 9.

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amples). Similarly, Wissense's provocative fantasies about the titillating red mouth and a sexual union with his beloved are quickly rendered harmless through emphasizing that she, alas, remains deaf to his supplications: "swie vil ichs an getribe so ist toup der Schoene Glanz" ("No matter how much I persist, the Shining Beauty remains deaf," *KLD* 20.VIII.3,7–8).[59] However, while maintained in this way, the convention is also simultaneously conquered since both parties (the poet and the audience) are well aware of the existing erotic subtext: Ulrich's euphemisms ("that one thing that one should not name," "celebration of joy," and "reward of love") in Song XLVII are unmistakable in their explicitness; and his emphasis of the chaste nature of the woman's smiling and laughter (*smielen* and *lachen*)—a distinction in itself unusual for the Minnesang[60]—suggests the poet's awareness of the contemporary controversy around their function and propriety. The poem thus simultaneously denies and validates the erotic quality of the lofty lady's laughter, reinforced by the final lines of the poem that reveal the uplifting effect of her red mouth and bright eyes: "ir munt unde ir ougen liht, / sô mich diu an lachent, / hôhes muotes man mich siht" ("her mouth and her bright eyes—when they smile at me, my spirits are raised high," *KLD* 58.XLVII.7,5–7,7).

When one compares the later lyric with Heinrich von Morungen's songs, it becomes obvious that it has adopted several motifs and strategies, such as the rhetoric of two spaces and the special meaning of consent attributed to the woman's laughter. At the same time, there are also substantial differences in how these techniques are used. Unlike Morungen, who discovers his fantasies of the red mouth to be nothing but an "illusion of a solitary man,"[61] post-classical poetry tends to lack such introspection. It no longer accentuates the love-object's unattainability by dwelling on the disparity between reality and dream, ideal and wish. Its tone is playful, its *minne* is a game, its fantasies no longer refer to the past but belong to the present and are recurrent,[62] while the desire to which it gives voice is often clearly articulated and no longer suppressed. Later authors borrow Morungen's concept of secret communication issuing from the lady's mouth and intensify it. In several poems, the laughing red orifice speaks to them, tempts them, and even provokes them to attack it with kisses.[63] Thus it is made

59 Wissense was clearly influenced by the Romance models. The name "der Schoene Glanz" is a pseudonym, inherited from the Romance tradition (cf. *Bel Esgar*). See Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 406.

60 Also see *KLD* 58.XLIV.3,5.

61 Goldin, *Mirror*, 137.

62 "The courtly ideal is made to coincide with actual conditions." Goldin, *Mirror*, 175.

63 Cf. Kristan von Luppin: "ir mündel kuste ich unde wolde sprechen 'sich, dîner rœte habe dir daz" ("I would kiss her little mouth and would like to say, 'See, your redness brought this upon you,'" *KLD* 31.III.3,6–7). Also see Ruodolf von Rotenburg: "ir minnerîchen munt, gelîch dem alse er zaller stunt spraeche 'küsse, küsse mich!'" ("Her mouth rich with love,

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clear that the love game takes place in the male speaker's head. "Did she or did she not?" is no longer the question to reflect upon, nor is it a source of torment; the focus is on the man's desire alone.

While the performative aspect of the Minnesang is no longer accessible to us now, the poets' communication with the audience is unambiguous even in the extant written text. The audience is invited to guess, to enjoy, and to become voyeurs.[64] The very popularity of the red-mouth motif suggests that the public really took pleasure in deciphering what stood behind the poet's seemingly innocent rhetoric, thus becoming accomplices in his clever impudence. The kind of linguistic play of indirection one finds in the post-classical lyric is part of a new way of talking about sex that, as Joachim Bumke points out, gains more and more popularity over the course of the thirteenth century.[65] It also indicates a changing fantasy about the desirable woman; she is still beautiful, highborn, and honorable, but no longer asexual and no longer invulnerable to seduction. The "new" courtly lady is sexualized by the use of the convention that itself makes use of euphemisms to be suggestive, thereby being both erotic and courtly at the same time.

Vor liebe gelachet: Laughter beyond the Canzone

The sensuality attributed to the lady's mouth and her laughter is only supported by the genres that do not belong to the male-voiced canzone, such as village (*doerper*) poetry and so-called women's songs or strophes (*Frauenlieder*). Authored by men, the latter unsurprisingly echo the male-voiced songs' treatment of both motifs so closely that they perpetuate the male fantasy of erotic courtly femininity rather than subvert it. The absence of the notorious male gaze, so skillfully used in the canzone as the prerequisite for the sexualization of the woman, is compensated by her depiction as desiring, loving, and conscious of her own sexuality and its effect on men.[66] In Heinrich von Veldeke's *Frauenlied*, it is the female narrator who fantasizes about a love encounter: "ich wil in mit blanken armen umbevâhen, / mit mînem rôtem munde an sînen balde

looks as if it were to say 'Kiss, kiss me!'" *KLD* 49. Leich III, vv. 128 – 130). See more of Luppin (*KLD* 31.VII and 31.VI.3,7) and Gottfried von Neifen (*KLD* 15.XXXIII.5,7 – 10; 15.IV.3,1 – 9).

64 Cf. Umberto Eco on medieval symbolism: "It was a type of aesthetic expression in which the Medievals took great pleasure in deciphering puzzles, in spotting the daring analogy, in feeling that they were involved in adventure and discovery." Eco, *Art and Beauty*, 55.

65 Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 412.

66 Many female-voiced songs are quite open in expressing the sexual desire of the female speaker. This is characteristic of the so-called woman's song in general. See the Introduction to Klinck and Rasmussen's, *Medieval Woman's Song*, 1 – 14. Also see Doss-Quinby, *Songs of the Women Trouvères*; and Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 367.

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gâhen," ("I want to hold him in my beautiful white naked arms and to press quickly my red mouth onto his," *MF* XI.XXXVII.5,1 – 2).[67] In the exchange, "War kan iuwer schoener lîp…," by Reinmar von Hagenau, the woman-speaker mentions her inability to resist welcoming her lover with an attractive smile, doing it *vor liebe* ("out of love," *MF* XXI.L.4,4). She, however, does not stop at this confession; her laughter is, familiarly, only the introductory stage of the courtship process that is supposed to and does culminate in a sexual union of the two lovers. Tellingly, it is the female narrator herself who initiates the encounter, using a familiar euphemism of plucking flowers to express her desire: "Ê ich danne von im scheide, / sô mac ich sprechen 'gên wir brechen bluomen ûf der heide'" ("Before I take my leave of him, I may say: 'Let us go and pluck some flowers in the heath,'" *MF* XXI.L.4,5 – 6).[68] Reinmar's woman is thus both elusive and bold. With skillful indirection, she presents herself as a woman in love and willing to grant her love. Her laughter indicates her joy but also bespeaks her sexuality.

Similar themes are found in Walther von der Vogelweide's well-known song "Got gebe ir iemer guoten tac…" (L 199,17; Schweikle 192). The young female narrator does not conceal that she has been wounded by Love's arrows and thus desires to be united with the man she loves:

im wart von mir in allen gâhen
ein küssen und ein umbevâhen:
dô schôz mir in mîn herze daz mir iemer nâhe lît,
unz ich getuon des er mich bat.
ich tætez, wurde mirs diu stat. (L 119,30; Schweikle 194).

In haste he received from me a kiss and an embrace. Then something shot me straight into my heart; and this something will remain there until I grant him what he asked for. I would do so whenever I have an opportunity.

This song is unique, however, in its reflection of the contemporary concerns regarding laughter. Just like her counterpart in Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Das Frauenbuch*, Walther's lady complains about the social control over female emotions and about her need to be ever mindful of the public perception of her

67 Zeyen points out that the adjective *blank* is used ambiguously in this passage. It refers both to color (white) and the nakedness of the woman's arms, which in turn metonymically refer to the lady's whole naked body: "So ist mit der Übersetzung von *blank* als 'glänzend, weiß, schön' nur indirekt ausgedrückt, was eigentlich gemeint ist: Die Arme sind unbekleidet und die nackten Arme wiederum stehen als 'pars pro toto' für den ganzen nackten Körper." Zeyen, "*daz tet*," 180.

68 For example, in Walther von der Vogelweide's famous "Under der linden" (L 39,11) similar imagery reveals to the audience, albeit obliquely, what transpired between the maiden and her lover: the woman remembers the broken roses that served the two of them as a bed.

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behavior. She chooses to conform to social pressure and forfeits laughter as an open display of joy and as proof of her being in love:

> Ich wære dicke gerne frô,
> wan daz ich niht gesellen hân.
> nû si alle trûrent sô,
> wie möhte ichz eine denne lân?
> ich müese ir vingerzeigen lîden,
> ichn wolte fröide durch si mîden.
> sus behalte ich wol ir hulde, daz siz lâzen âne nît:
> ich gelache niemer niht
> wan dâ ez dekeiner siht. (L 119,35 – 43; Schweikle 192).

> I would gladly be joyful, but I do not have a companion. Since everybody is so grave, how could I alone behave any differently? I would have to endure their finger-pointing, were I not to abandon joy for their sake. Therefore, I would rather keep their favor, so that they let me be. I never laugh except there where nobody can see it.

The euphemistic way of speaking is particularly prominent in Walther's most famous female-voiced song, "Under der linden" (L 39,11; Schweikle 228), in which the young woman[69] describes a romantic encounter with her lover in an idyllic setting. While there is no doubt as to the sexual nature of their relationship, the very details of the meeting are hinted at with the help of euphemisms: the falling blossoms, the broken roses, and the lady's red mouth. Circumlocution here is not a mere necessity because of the sensitive subject matter; rather, it helps, paradoxically, to enhance the eroticism of the poem as well. The woman is the one who points to her red mouth as a silent hint at the ultimate outcome of the love encounter: "He must have kissed me a thousand times. See how red my mouth is" ("Er kuste mich wol tûsent stunt, tandaradei, seht wie rôt mir ist der munt," L 39,26; Schweikle 228). The reference to the mouth's redness is ambiguous. It is the symbol of her feminine beauty and the body part inviting the man's caresses, and at the same time, its color is a direct result of passionate kissing, the first stage of the *quinque lineae amoris.*[70]

69 Recent scholarship has rejected the view prevalent in the older Germanistik regarding the age, marital, and social status of the female speaker in Walther's so-called *Mädchenlieder*, as well as the quality of the love they express. On the most recent debates about the famous *vrouwe / maget* and *hôhiu minne / nideriu minne* distinctions, see Schweikle, *Minnesang*, 148 – 149; Gibbs and Johnson, *Medieval German Literature*, 268, 272; Masser, "Zu den sogenannten Mädchenliedern," 3 – 15; Bennewitz, "vrouwe/maget," 237 – 252; Bumke, "Walther von der Vogelweide," 197.

70 Cf. "Almost all physical descriptions and details of the lovers and their act have been erased, replaced by nature imagery and the woman's mouth, which both bear traces of the act. […] The female speaker displays herself as a speaking trace of the sexual union. Her shame, while related to the modesty of the noble lady, does not control the poem. Rather, it has become a coquettish motif, a part of the poem's exhibitionistic rhetoric of concealment and revela-

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It is unsurprising that the laughing protagonists of MHG *Frauenlieder* are sexually active, loving women. Women's songs and strophes pretend to give voice to female desires, yet the only sensibilities truly represented in these male-authored songs are, of course, those of contemporary men. As James A. Schultz succinctly points out,

> Nowhere is the lady more a product of the singer's imagination than in those strophes where she appears to speak in her own voice. These too are visions, fantasies of the singer, who ventriloquizes the lady he wants. Should we be surprised that in so many of these strophes she turns out to want the very same things he does?[71]

Both in male- and female-voiced courtly love poetry, women's laughter ultimately performs the same work and is evaluated according to the same standard: it is encouraged only as long as it stems from or enhances the pleasure it gives to male onlookers.[72]

"I Can't Help Thinking of Love": Woman's Laughter and Man's Dreams of Power

Unlike conduct and religious discourses that present the value of women's laughter as uncertain (to say the least), courtly love song seems to treat it in a surprisingly positive way. It presents an ideal of femininity where laughter is a welcoming gesture, a part of the protocol that suggests the lady's favor toward her vassal-like male servitor. In moving away from suffering as a tool of self-betterment toward more explicit expectations of reward and intimacy, its role in increasing the woman's value and facilitating communication between the sexes grows in importance. The Minnesang echoes Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Das Frauenbuch* and provides additional insights into how courtly women are sexualized through laughter. As Joan Ferrante observes, the game of courtly love is only "a series of fantasies, which work best around the man's mental image of a woman."[73] Despite its unique reversal of traditional gender hierarchy, love lyric, just like other discourses, only expresses the male desire for power and control. E. Jane Burns points out that it is not coincidental that the inverted power structure should coincide with the increased importance of the cult of the Virgin and appear precisely when the real political power of women was at its low

tion." Rasmussen, "Representing," 79 f. Laughter is equally ambiguous in this poem, depending on how the verses are punctuated. See Willson, "Inneclîche lachen," 227–228.

71 Schultz, *Courtly Love*, 122.

72 Cf. Perfetti, *Representation*, 8.

73 Ferrante, "Male Fantasy," 67. Also see Burns, "The Man behind the Lady," 258; Blamires, *Case*, 10 ff.

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point.[74] Both Mary and the idealized courtly lady can be read as elaborate myths developed by the male-centered medieval institutions of the Church and of the lay aristocracy, based on "the underlying concept of woman in the service of man"—a clever strategy of subjugation and subordination[75]:

> To make her into a "lord" is to masculinize her identity, to absorb her into the arena of male activity so that she can be judged by those standards of reciprocity expected of a suzerain toward his vassals. Once placed in the role of Lord, the Lady can be required to repay the lover's emotional investment with *merce*; otherwise she is discredited for neglecting her rightful duty.[76]

It is precisely the expectation of a reward (OF *merce*, MHG *lôn*, *gnade*) that explains the function of laughter in courtly lyric; love poets in the Romance and German traditions all express a desire for recompense, proving that notwithstanding the differences between the individual sub-genres, the most positive and desirable image of the woman ultimately combines virtue and accessibility. Focus on the mouth invests the lofty lady with a gendered attribute, draws attention to her sexualized body, and thus can be seen as a way of obtaining a reward through an erotic verbal game, even if the promise of return exists entirely in the man's imagination. This strategy reverses the unusual power balance and restores the traditional male authority by tying female identity back to corporeality. The eroticized woman of the post-classical song may remain *physically* unattainable; however, she is conquered by means of insinuations,

74 Burns, "The Man," 260. The historian Judith Bennett concurs with Burns: "In the Central Middle Ages, as monarchs began to assert control over localities, as bureaucrats began to replace ad hoc administrators, and as formal institutions began to supplant the informal arrangements of the household, the power of feudal women waned." Bennett, *Medieval Women*, 22.

75 Burns, "The Man," 262. The appearance of these myths of feminine identity is historically related to what Bennett terms a new ideology of gender difference, developed by the twelfth century. Bennett refers to the studies by JoAnn McNamara and Susan Mosher Stuard, who have argued that the eleventh and twelfth centuries have been figured as a time of "gender crisis." In McNamara's view, "an early twelfth-century *Herrenfrage*—or masculine identity crisis—emerged from both the relative pacification of European society (which meant that masculinity could no longer be asserted by military prowess alone) and the strict imposition of clerical celibacy (which fostered male fears of women)." For her part, Stuart observes that a new polarity of gender roles emerged from such factors as the Gregorian reform, the development of new customs of marriage, and the recovery of once-lost classical texts. As a result, "women were more likely to find themselves being directed, rather than directing […] as they had done in the past." Bennett, *Medieval Women*, 21–22. Both Bennett and Burns are echoed by R. Howard Bloch and Alcuin Blamires, who interpret such male devotion and the seeming empowerment of women in courtly lyric as yet another form of misogyny. Blamires, *Case*, 10; Bloch, "Medieval Misogyny," 8. Bloch echoes the earlier observation by C. S. Lewis that idealism and cynicism about women are twin fruits of the same branch. Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, 145.

76 Burns, "The Man," 257.

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double talk, and erotic fantasies, thus allowing the male speaker to regain his masculinity, potentially put into question by the "woman-on-top" hierarchy: "The lover himself acts out stereotypically 'feminine' traits. […] He describes himself as helpless, suffering, waiting, passive and fearful."[77] One of Gedrut-Geltar's poems ridicules what may be perceived as effeminacy by offering a rowdy alternative to the timid, selfless love service of the minnesinger Wachsmut von Künzich:

Von Kunzechen hêr Wahsmuot
der minnet sîne frouwen
über tûsent mîle: dannoch was sim gar ze nâhen,
wande ez im sô sanfte tuot
ob er si solde schouwen
ûf eim hôhen turne und daz er danne solde enpfâhen
von ir hand ein vingerlîn: daz kuste er tûsentstunde.
læge er bî der wolgetânen mit ir rôten munde,
er geruorte niemer sî, wand er vor liebe erwunde.

Wær aber ich sô sælic daz
ich die vil liebe hæte
alters eine an einer stat dâ uns dâ nieman schiede,
wir schieden allez âne haz.
ich weiz waz ich ir tæte,
obe ich ir gewaltic wære: ich sagte ir mîne liebe;
ja n'kuste ich iht daz vingerlîn dazs an ir hende trüege:
ich kustes an ir rôten munt, ich wære als ungefüege:
mich dunket, solde ichs iemer pflegen, michn möhtes niht genügen. (*KLD* 13.Ia)

Lord Wachsmut von Künzich would pine for his lady as if separated [from her] by a thousand miles. Yet she was all too close to him. For it feels so good if he chanced to see her [standing] on a high tower and then received a ring from her hand. He would kiss it a thousand times. Were he to lie at his red-mouthed beauty's side, he would never touch her, for he would already be in bliss from love. If only I were so blessed that I could have the lovely one completely alone in a place where nobody would separate us! We would have solved everything amicably. I know what I would do to her if I had her in my power. I would proclaim my love to her. Truly, I would not kiss the ring on her hand. I would kiss her red mouth; I would [indeed] be so uncourtly! It seems to me that even if I were to do it forever, I would still never have enough.

Wachsmut's choice of the *Fernliebe* ("love from afar") and *asag/asai*[78] as the ultimate test of love and virtue are interpreted here not as a virtue but as a sign of his inaptness and weakness. Depending on the choice of punctuation in the last

77 Ibid., 268.

78 *Asag/asai* is the ultimate test in the Occitan tradition in which a man is supposed to demonstrate the depth of his love for the woman despite her lying naked next to him or allowing him to kiss and caress her naked body. See Nelli, "Love's Rewards," 219–235.

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stanza of Gedrut-Geltar's poem, the speaker's actions to reassert his masculinity can vary in intensity, yet regardless, they provide a stark contrast to Wachsmut's patient inaction. The "I" parades his own masculinity by presenting himself as uncourtly and aggressive, but strong—just as a real man should be. Helmut de Boor's alternative punctuation creates an even bolder reading of lines 15–17 (vv. 2,6–8):

> *obe ich ir gewaltic wære?* ich sage *iu*, mîne liebe:
> Ja enkuste ich niht daz vingerlîn, daz si an ir hende trüege!
> ich kustes an ir rôten munt; ich wære als ungefüge…[79]

> Would I have her in my power? [Would I be violent toward her?] I will tell you this, my dear[s]: I would not just kiss the ring on her hand! I would kiss her on her red mouth. I would [indeed] be so uncourtly!

The question mark at the end of the first sentence splits the possibility of proclaiming one's love into a rhetorical question and an answer, while the pronoun *iu* ("you, to you") rather than *ir* ("her, to her") turns this stanza into a boast or bravado, emphasizing the speaker's manly spirit even more than the previous version does. In addition, the word *gewaltic* has multiple connotations, including "to have power, control over somebody/something" (mod. Germ. *Gewalt haben*) or "to rape somebody" (mod. Germ. *vergewaltigen*).[80] Thus the statement "we would have solved everything amicably" ("wir schieden allez âne haz," *KLD* 13.Ia.2,4) becomes ominous in referring to taking by force what is not willingly granted, in a secluded place where nobody would or *could* separate the two lovers ("eine an einer stat dâ uns dâ nieman schiede," *KLD* 13.Ia.2,3). Lest one dismiss Gedrut-Geltar as unconventionally boisterous, it should be said that similar sentiments can be found in the poetry of more "courtly" poets, such as Kristan von Luppin and even Walther von der Vogelweide:

> Ich wünsche mir sô werde daz ich noch gelige
> bî ir sô nâhen deich mich in ir ouge ersehe
> und ich ir alsô volleclîchen an gesige,
> swes ich si denne frâge, daz si mirs verjehe. (L 184,11; Schweikle 352)

> I wish I were so worthy that I would lie at her side so closely once more that I could see my reflection in her eyes and triumph over her so completely that she would grant me whatever I would ask from her.

These poets hide their desire for domination (MHG *gesigen* means "to win," "to conquer") behind the veil of fantasy; however, all of them reaffirm their own

79 De Boor and Newald, *Geschichte*, 1759–1760. Kraus in his *KLD* also cites the form *vch* for manuscript A. Emphasis is mine.
80 Lexer, *TW*, 70.

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masculinity by imagining their triumph over the haughty lady and their return to the position of "the man-on-top."

One can see the village poetry (*doerper*-songs) as an extension of the overall Minnesang trajectory. The poets, who choose to parody the convention of the lofty love, find their object outside the traditional courtly setting, in an uncouth peasant girl. The eroticized female mouths and laughter in these songs of *nideriu minne* ("low," or sexual, love) no longer have the same effect, since the power balance is much more conventional. According to Andreas Capellanus's popular treatise *De amore*, a woman of lowly descent can and should be obtained with ease any time.[81] In Tannhäuser's poetry, the girl's implied availability is made evident by her extreme and overt sexualization, her body is violated by the male gaze. The audience hears about the maiden's breasts, legs, thighs, and even her genitals:[82]

blanc alsam ein hermelin
waren ir diu ermelin.
ir persone diu was smal,
wol geschaffen überal:
Ein lützel grande was si da,
smal geschaffen andeswa.
An ir ist niht vergezzen:
lindiu diehel, slehtiu bein, ir füeze wol gemezzen. (III.37 – 49)

Her little arms were as white as ermine. Her body was slender and well-built everywhere. She was a little bit large down there, but otherwise slender-built. Nothing was forgotten: tender thighs, slender legs, well-sized feet.

wol stent dinui löckel,
din mündel rot, din öugel, als ich wolde. […]
rosevar din wengel, din kellin blanc. […]
Gedrat dine brüste.[…]
la din sitzel blecken
ein wenic durch den willen min, da gegen muoz ich schrecken. (XI.15 – 18, 21, 23 – 24)

Your little locks become you. Your little red mouth and your little eyes are just the way I would wish them. Your little cheeks are the color of roses, your little neck is white. Your breasts are fragrant. Show your little buttocks for my sake. I am in awe of them.

nu seht an ir fuoze,
die machentz so suoze;

81 "And if you should, by some chance, fall in love with one of their women, be careful to puff them up with lots of praise and then, when you find a convenient place, do not hesitate to take what you seek and to embrace them by force." Andreas Capellanus, *Art of Courtly Love,* 150.

82 The Bakhtinian *snizhenie* ("pointing downward") is very clearly employed here to subvert the tradition and laugh at this lyric's lofty predecessors. See chapter 2 for more information.

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> seht an ir beinel!
> reitbrun ist ir meinel. (IV.125 – 128)[83]
>
> Now look at her feet, they make it so sweet. Take a look at her little legs! Her *mons Veneris* is curly and brown.

Here the desired object is rendered accessible by virtue of her social status; any similarities between her and the traditional lofty lady are only part of the overall parody. There is no need for the euphemistic mode of speaking, and for this reason, the girl's laughter, used as a refrain, sounds like nothing more than a repetitive cliché: "ir zimt so wol daz lachen, daz tusent herze müesten von ir krachen" ("Laughter becomes her so well that it could break thousands of hearts").[84] Women's laughter in the Minnesang thus participates not only in the construction of gender, but of class as well.

Despite the differences in form, perspective, and treatment of gender roles among various types of courtly lyric, the images of women and approaches to laughter consistently reveal more about men's sensibilities and fantasies than about the laughing women themselves. Laughter thus performs similar work to that of conduct discourse, uncovering the tensions within the medieval construct of desirable femininity. Whether the lady is remote and mute, or loving and talking, or a simple peasant girl who happens to attract the attention of a nobleman, the way she is admired, gazed at, and scrutinized bespeaks the repressed male fantasy of love that requires women to be virtuous yet accessible, or to use Walther's words, to remain "women who know how to be grateful" ("vrouwen die können danken").[85]

83 Quoted according to Siebert, *Der Dichter Tannhäuser*, 115. The man openly acknowledges that he thinks of love: "Und ir gürtelsenken machet, daz ich underwilent liebe muoz gedenken" ("And when her belt falls down, I can't help but think of love," XI.11 – 12). The belt is a popular medieval allegory for the loss of virginity.

84 In Siebert's edition, see Songs III, IV, VII, XI. The cliché-like nature of this hyperbole is obvious in the fact that Tannhäuser uses the exact same description for a man in Song I.

85 L 47,36; Schweikle 332.

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5 "She Is Beautiful and She Is Laughing?" Courtly Smiling in the Iconography of Virtue and Vice

"Daz himelrîche ist gelîchet zehen meiden,
der wâren fünf wîse und fünf toerinne..."

(Berthold von Regensburg)[1]

"Bearing makes virtue visible."

(C. Stephen Jaeger)[2]

Querying Smiling Femininity

So far, the uneasy relationship between women's laughter and virtue in medieval vernacular tradition has been examined for the most part in terms of clerical influence on the secular aristocratic society, as a reflection of the overall ambiguous treatment of laughter and its connection to female sexuality based on the symbolic equivalence between the mouth and genitals. However, it has also become clear that the lay and religious worlds in the Middle Ages were engaged in a constant and productive dialogue, sometimes challenging, sometimes adopting the other's ideas. Ecclesiastical discourse responded to the politics and morality of secular society, while the latter accepted or questioned religious authority, views, and pastoral guidance. As the last two chapters have shown, the belief in the inherent weakness and sinfulness of female nature coexists side by side with a different view of femininity promoted in courtly culture—the figure of a beautiful and *virtuous* aristocratic lady whose smile encourages, inspires, and welcomes the interest of male suitors. The enormous popularity of this image in the High Middle Ages and beyond leads to a question about the potential reverse impact of this seemingly positive alternative in religious iconography of virtue and vice: Could laughter ever grace a chaste female body? Art, particularly sculpture, lends itself well to answering this question. Thanks to its size and ability to accurately reproduce human features and bodies, portal sculpture presents vast opportunities for deepening our understanding of medieval emotions. The contemporary debates on women's laughter and virtue are reflected and further tested in the depictions of the popular biblical parable

1 "The kingdom of Heaven resembles the ten maidens, five of whom were wise and five were foolish..." ("1. Klosterpredigt," LXVI) in *VA* I:258.

2 Jaeger, *Envy*, 116.

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about the wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1 – 13), unique in their use of exclusively female characters and their expression of emotions such as joy, grief, jubilation, and despair. The representations of this story on the portals of medieval Gothic cathedrals reveal the familiar tension between the courtly view of smiling femininity and the conservative religious model of a virtuous woman. The statuaries featuring the ten virgins exhibit all the necessary attributes: female figures, the clear contrast between virtue and sin, the involvement of both religious and secular values, and, most importantly, the depiction of women's laughter. The latter's use in plastic art illustrates that by the mid-thirteenth century it became firmly associated with the courtly way of life and was perceived as a liability for women. In Worms, the cruel and seductive Lady World (*Frau Welt*) grins as the knight she vanquished crawls at her feet. Likewise, when smiles are depicted on the faces of the foolish virgins, they represent the young women's preference for worldly pleasures over the purity of their bodies and souls. While the innovative and positive use of laughter found on the *Paradiesportal* of the Magdeburg cathedral (ca. 1240 – 1260) seems to be challenging this stereotype, its reception suggests that it may be just the kind of exception that only proves the general rule that associates female virtue with self-restraint and strict bodily control. The fact that the sculptor's vision does not survive beyond Magdeburg bespeaks the unique circumstances in which this vision of smiling femininity arose. It is also consistent with the strong apprehension of laughter in ecclesiastical and clerical discourses from the thirteenth century on, and with contemporaneous criticism of the courtly worldview. This underscores the importance of moderation within the ideal of the *vir bonus* ("good man") and suggests that, ultimately, dignified composure might have been perceived as more consistent with virtue.

Damned or Chosen: The Parable and Its Visual Representation

Having originated in northern France in the twelfth century, the Gothic style quickly spread across Europe and England, becoming the universal style of architecture by 1400.[3] The portal of a Gothic cathedral usually contains an elaborate iconographic program; on the one hand, it represents the gates to Paradise, while on the other it functions as the *biblia pauperum*, the place where Church doctrine can best be communicated to the people.[4] Typical scenes found

3 For an excellent overview of the use of smiling and laughter in antique and medieval sculpture, see Binski, "The Angel Choir"; Binski, *Becket's Crown*; and Jan Svanberg, "The Gothic Smile."

4 Cf. the following quotation from Thomasin von Zerclaere's *Der Welsche Gast:* "der pfaffe sehe die schrift an, sô sol der ungelêrte man diu bilde sehen, sît im niht diu schrift zerkennen

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on cathedral portals include biblical allegories and depictions of Judgment Day. The story of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1 – 13), which Christ told to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, is one of the most popular parables:

> [1]Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. [2]Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. [3]When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; [4]but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. [5]As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. [6]But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out and meet him." [7]Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. [8]The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." [9]But the wise replied, "No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." [10]And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. [11]Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." [12]But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." [13]Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.[5]

As Regine Körkel-Hinkfoth points out in her analysis of this parable in medieval and post-medieval art and drama, its meaning and interpretation have remained full of ambiguities even until now. Such questions as the difference between the virgins, the essence of the foolish ones' transgression, the symbolism of waking and sleeping, and the significance of the oil lamps are not deducible from the text alone and have always been open to interpretation.[6] In the Gospel of Matthew this allegory is found among references to the Last Judgment—in the parable of the faithful and the wicked slave (Matt. 24:45 – 51) and the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14 – 40). The surrounding context thus defines the symbolism of the virgin parable as belonging to the apocalyptic tradition and its message as that of an admonition about Christ's return and the need for watchfulness. Warnings of this kind are abundant in the New Testament, particularly in the Gospels of Luke and Mark. "You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour," warns Luke 12:40, and he continues: "When once the owner of the house has got up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying 'Lord, open to us,' then in reply he will say to you, 'I do not know where you come from'" (Luke 13:25). "Therefore," cautions Mark, "keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And that I say to you I say to all: Keep awake"

geschiht" ("The cleric shall read what is written, while the uneducated man shall look at pictures, since he cannot read"), as quoted and translated in Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 320, 636.

5 *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 38.

6 Körkel-Hinkfoth, *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen*, 18.

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(Mark 13:35 – 37). Carelessness will result in damnation, in being locked out of the Kingdom of God.

Another aspect of the story, open to interpretation, is the way its ten protagonists respond. The style of the virgin parable is strikingly detached and matter-of-fact, almost stripped to the bone and reduced to a mere enumeration of actions and simple dialogue. To distinguish between the two groups of maidens, the story simply labels them as either wise or foolish, beginning in the second verse ("Five of them were foolish, and five were wise," Matt. 25:2), without providing any explanation for this judgment. The ten appear together and are treated as a group; moreover, initially the wise appear to be not much better than the foolish, for all of them fall asleep while waiting for the bridegroom to arrive. The only difference between the two groups seems to be their degree of foresight; the foolish expect the bridegroom to arrive quickly, and therefore do not bring very much lamp oil with them, while the wise are prepared for a long wait. Aside from these simple events, the story does not explore the characters' feelings; there is not even one mention of the joy of the chosen or of the despair of the condemned. Not a word is said about chastity and carelessness, modesty and seduction, or the opposition between this world and the afterlife. All of these themes, however, are reflected in the mid-thirteenth-century iconography that helps to convey the parable's nebulous message with the help of images.

The two leading interpretations of the virgin parable either place it within the tradition of the *Virginitätslehre* ("discourse on virginity") or approach it from the eschatological perspective.[7] The third-century theologian Origen interprets the midnight hour as the time of the Last Judgment and the virgins' sleep as their death. The foolish virgins' transgression is said to lie in their insufficient good works: "Non autem praeparant se bonis operis" ("They have not prepared themselves for good deeds").[8] In the West, Hilarius (d. 367 C. E.) associates all ten virgins with the Ten Commandments.[9] The virgins are also said to represent those who do and do not believe in Christ, thus moving the symbolism ever more toward the ultimate dichotomy of good and evil. Among the Church Fathers, Augustine (d. 430 C. E.), whose version greatly influenced subsequent readings of the parable by Gregory the Great (d. 604 C. E.) and the Venerable Bede (d. 735 C. E.), interprets the ten virgins as the symbolic representation of the Christian

7 Hildegard Heyne's early-twentieth-century study shows that the Eastern branch of Christianity was particularly prone to interpreting the parable as *Virginitätslehre.* Heyne, *Das Gleichnis von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen*, 41. Also see Körkel-Hinkfoth, *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen*, 20.

8 Körkel-Hinkfoth, *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen*, 20.

9 Ibid., 23.

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Church (*Ecclesia*), the oil in their lamps as compassion, their sleep as death, and the awakening as the resurrection.[10]

Many of these threads are continued in the Middle Ages. Rhabanus Maurus (d. 856) echoes Origen by reading the parable as an allegory of the Last Judgment. Yet in his view, the wise virgins represent those who succeed in preserving both spiritual and physical virginity. In contrast, the foolish virgins lose their purity, for even though they remain chaste in body, they do not do sufficient good. The twelfth-century *Glossa ordinaria* by Anselm of Laon (d. 1117) divides the virgins into those who have not rejected Christ (the wise) and those who do not want to accept the Kingdom of God (the foolish).[11] Around the same time, Honorius Augustodunensis further complicates the matter by adding the component of sexualized female virtue to the parable. In his *Speculum Ecclesia*, the wise virgins give up carnal love for the love of Christ and thus are pure both in body and in spirit ("sed Christi amore carnis voluptates respuunt," "but reject the pleasures of flesh for the love of Christ").[12] Hugo of St. Victor (d. 1142) adds one more detail—he accuses the foolish virgins of vanity and wanting praise.[13] The foolish virgins thus become guilty of more than mere negligence and lack of foresight, they come to represent moral corruption and impurity.[14]

These textual interpretations are echoed in the renditions of the parable in both sculpture and pictorial art. During the High Middle Ages, the virgin motif is widely used as cathedral ornamentation in the form of miniatures, mural paintings, reliefs, and, later, large-sized portal sculptures. Even though they are present in Romanesque art as well (e.g., in Pont l'Abbé, France), the wise and foolish virgins reach the peak of their popularity during the high Gothic period, when they become a common display on cathedral portals.[15] Geographically, the wise and foolish virgins are found predominantly in France and Germany, with very few extant cases in England (Lincoln) and Spain (Najera and León), with almost none in Italy.[16] The cathedrals most known for their representation of the

10 Ibid., 23.

11 Ibid., 24.

12 As quoted in Ibid., 25.

13 Ibid., 25.

14 Cf. the conclusion of Book III of Andreas Capellanus's *Art of Courtly Love* (*De amore*): "Be mindful, therefore, Walter, to have your lamps always supplied, that is, have the supplies of charity and good works. Be mindful ever to watch, lest the unexpected coming of the Bridegroom find you asleep in sins. Avoid then, water, practicing the mandates of love, and labor in constant watchfulness so that when the Bridegroom cometh He may find you wakeful; do not let worldly delight make you lie down in your sins, trusting to the youth of your body and confident that the Bridegroom will be late, since, as He tells us Himself, we know neither the day nor the hour." Andreas Capellanus, *Art of Courtly* Love, 212.

15 Lehmann names St. Denis cathedral in France as the starting point for portal architecture and art. Lehmann, *Die Parabel*, 61.

16 Ibid., 58–59. Körkel-Hinkfoth's volume provides a very extensive and thorough analysis of

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parable include St. Denis, Chartres, Amiens, and Notre Dame of Paris, as well as Basel, Bern, Braunschweig, Erfurt, Freiburg, Hamburg, Lübeck, Magdeburg, and Strassburg.

In tracing the ten virgins across time and different visual media (stained glass, miniature painting, frescoes, relief, and portal sculpture) we can see the particular arsenal of artistic means typically used to separate the damned from the chosen. The easiest and most traditional way to make this distinction is, of course, with the lamps. The foolish are portrayed with their lamps extinguished, held low, or dropped.[17] In contrast, the wise hold their lamps high, carefully protecting their fire. Another marker is often the presence of crowns or nimbi, particularly when the parable is interpreted as an allegory of the Old and the New Covenant, the *Synagoga* and the *Ecclesia.* The crowns sit firmly on the heads of the chosen and fall off the heads of those left behind. The distinction between the saved and the lost maidens can be further suggested through the reproduction of the story's finale. For example, St. Gallus Gate in Basel captures the moment of the Bridegroom's arrival. In the right half of the relief, the foolish virgins face the closed door, telling the viewer that their carelessness has locked them out of the wedding, i. e. heavenly Paradise. The wise group is placed to the left of the door and greeted by the Bridegroom's gesture of blessing.[18] However, as the artistic trend moves away from the Romanesque and toward the Gothic, with its different architectural and sculptural considerations and methods, depicting the parable as a sequence of events becomes less popular.[19] When such important elements of the story as the Bridegroom (Christ) or the door that separates the two groups of maidens are no longer available, a completely new set of tools must convey the difference between the wise and the foolish.

The virgins' clothes and adornments become one way to distinguish them. It is important to point out that the distinction in clothing per se has been used to differentiate between the two groups since early Christian art, with the wise virgins dressed in white to indicate their purity, and the foolish virgins clad in

the use of the parable about the wise and foolish virgins in art and drama. It contains an impressive catalogue of references to the parable in sculpture, mural painting, stained glass, and book illustrations, as well as textual analysis of the medieval and post-medieval drama employing this motif.

17 See, for example, the relief depiction of the foolish and wise virgins on the West portal of the Amiens cathedral (ca. 1230) or on the stained-glass window in Naumburg (ca. 1250). See *LCI* 2:460–461.

18 A similar approach is also used in Eguisheim (1220) in the Alsace region, France.

19 "Mit der Entwicklung der Archivoltenskulpturen bekommen die einzelnen Figürchen eine feste Einfügung in den architektonischen Rahmen und sehr bald wird auch jedes einzelne durch einen Baldachin von dem folgenden getrennt. Dies hat zur Folge, daß bei der Darstellung der Parabel auf die Andeutung eines einheitlichen Vorganges nach und nach gänzlich verzichtet wird." Lehmann, *Die Parabel*, 53.

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bright-colored robes.[20] Lehmann's study of the motif in medieval cathedral art illustrates that the use of clothing was very popular in France and in early-German cathedral sculpture, heavily influenced by the French models. During the High Middle Ages, however, the dress symbolism becomes more subtle. The robes and headwear of both groups reflect the style of the time period in which the cathedral was built (*das Zeitkostüm*). The wise virgins are often clothed in simple robes, with their heads modestly veiled, while the foolish ones parade fashionable contemporary garments and keep their heads uncovered and their hair loose. Thanks to this approach, the sculptural treatments participate in the contemporary discourse on virginity, echoing the ecclesiastical readings of the parable mentioned earlier. The visually depicted story juxtaposes not only watchfulness and carelessness, but also modesty and vanity, asceticism and worldliness, chastity and lack of moderation. The relief panels on Basel's St. Gallus Gate provide a very telling illustration of this. The five wise virgins are recognizable not only by their lit lamps, with the fire still visible in some of them, but also by their attire. Their bodies are covered from head to toe with long, loose robes and their heads with monastic-looking veils.[21] The wise virgins of Basel are clearly a part of the discourse that promotes female monastics as paragons of modesty, purity, and simplicity. In contrast, the five foolish virgins hold their lamps upside down, face a closed door, and model the aristocratic fashions of the time—their dresses display long trains and tightly fitted bodices that accentuate their breasts. Their heads are uncovered, allowing their long, flowing hair to hang freely, indicating their unmarried status but also, and more importantly, working together with their dress to symbolize their love of the world, their vanity, and, consequently, their eternal damnation. Similar iconography can be found on the portals of several other, substantially later Gothic cathedrals, such as Amiens (ca. 1230), Laon (ca. 1200), Chartres (1212 – 1220), Egisheim (ca. 1230), Trier (the Liebfrauenkirche, ca. 1250), and Lübeck (ca. 1400), as well as in the relief figures of the choir of Magdeburg (1210 – 1220).[22]

With its ability to reproduce human emotions much more successfully than the smaller relief sculpture or stained glass art, Gothic portal statuaries add gestures and even facial expressions to the existing iconography to differentiate between the two groups of maidens, particularly in Germany.[23] Interestingly,

20 *LCI* 2:460.

21 "Die klugen haben Kopf und Hals *nonnenhaft* verhüllt" (my emphasis). Lehmann, *Die Parabel*, 44. See illustrations in Körkel-Hinkfoth, *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen*, 531 – 553.

22 There are two independent depictions of the virgin parable in Magdeburg: in the choir and in the so-called *Paradiesvorhalle.*

23 Körkel-Hinkfoth points out that in France, it is mostly Romanesque and not Gothic depic-

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even though it is intended to make the distinction clearer to the viewer, the virgins' body language only further complicates interpretation, as a close examination of the cathedral statuaries in Magdeburg (ca. 1240 – 1260[24]) and Strassburg (ca. 1280 – 1290) proves. Products of roughly the same era, but conceived independently of each other, the two ensembles are famous for their use of emotional expression, particularly smiling, to allude to Matt. 25:1 – 13. Despite the differences in their iconographic approaches, the use of smiling in these two statuaries underscores the same idea about the relationship between laughter, virtue, moderation, and femininity. Importantly, in both cases it functions as a trademark of the secular, courtly world.[25]

Enduring Prejudice: Strassburg's Courtly Femininity and Smiling Sin

The south portal of the west façade of the Strassburg cathedral (ca. 1280 – 1290) presents both the medieval and knowledgeable modern viewer with a powerful message about salvation and damnation, vice and virtue (Fig. 1). The two sculptural groups—the wise and the foolish virgins as one, and the *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga* (created some forty years earlier) as the other—are striking in what C. Stephen Jaeger calls their "plasticity, dynamism, and realism" and in their "moral transparency."[26] To use art historian's language, the Strassburg virgins are not isocephalic, that is, the good are not marked only by some external device, such as lamps, but otherwise depicted as identical with the evil.[27] The message of the virgin parable is meant to be easily discernible from the young women's bodies, which "dramatize and enact virtue or vice" in a way that,

tions of the parable that show the virgins' body language and emotions. Körkel-Hinkfoth, *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen*, 114.

24 These are the ranges for the virgin statues only. Kirschbaum sets the date at ca. 1240. *LCI* 2:460. Behling points out the uncertainty of precise dating. Behling, "Die klugen und törichten Jungfrauen zu Magdeburg," 19 – 20; *LCI* 2:462. Schubert places the Magdeburg virgins at about 1250, based on the comparison between them and two other sets of sculptures: the slightly earlier Annunciation pair (*die Verkündigung*) and the statues of the Ecclesia and Synagoga (ca. 1260). See Schubert, *Der Dom zu Magdeburg*, 19, 26. The construction of the cathedral itself spreads from the tenth well until the sixteenth centuries.

25 Both cathedrals inspired impressive followings. Art historians point out that Magdeburg's overall conception was imitated throughout Central Germany (*Mitteldeutschland*). Its influence is clear in Hamburg (ca. 1300), Osnabrück (ca. 1300), Braunschweig (ca. 1310 – 1320), and Erfurt (ca. 1330 – 1350), particularly in the treatment of the foolish virgins. Lehmann, *Die Parabel*, 77. Strassburg's example was followed by Basel (ca. 1290 – 1300), Nuremberg (ca. 1320 – 1330), and Regensburg (ca. 1330). Körkel-Hinkfoth, *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen*, 78 – 79.

26 Jaeger, *Envy*, 331.

27 Ibid., 338 – 339.

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according to Jaeger, presents a "decisive break with [existing] tradition,"[28] a view to which I will return later.

Every detail in this ensemble appears to have been carefully planned to deliver a message about the right choices and social expectations to the public entering the church, and to portray ideal femininity as virginal, virtuous, and asexual. In this, the Strassburg sculptor chose to follow the earlier, French Gothic models rather than the native German approach represented by its rough contemporary, Magdeburg.[29] The treatment of the virgin parable is strongly reminiscent of Amiens, Chartres, and Laon; the body language and facial expressions of the figures reinforce the message already conveyed through the familiar symbolism of lamps and clothing. While the bodies of the chosen ones are concealed by veils and flowing robes, their faces are peacefully calm and expressionless and their little mouths are tightly shut (Fig. 2 – 3). The wise virgins' monastic-looking attire and perfect body restraint tell the spectator that this group of maidens is virginally pure and chaste. At the same time, the foolish maidens' wrong priorities are indicated in a familiar way through their worldlier and more fashionable clothes: "They wear tight-fitting garments accentuating the shapes of their bodies, particularly their waist, breast, and thighs. The tight-fitting undergarment and the dress worn over it were common from the 12th c. on. […] The foolish virgins wear their hair loose as customary for maidens"[30] (Fig. 4). The sculptures immediately bring to mind the patristic admonitions about the importance of self-restraint and moderation for women as well as the connection between laughter, foolishness, worldliness, and lack of virtue.[31]

The difference between the saved and the condemned is further strengthened with the help of the two male figures who lead each group. To the left of the foolish virgins, there is a statue of a handsome young man dressed in lavish courtly robes, whose back, however, reveals hideous crawling reptiles (Fig. 5). The Seducer (also known as the Prince of the World, *der Fürst der Welt*) offers the

28 Ibid., 339 and 331, respectively.

29 Cf. "Der Skulpturenzyklus der Strassburger Westfassade steht in ikonographischer Hinsicht deutlich unter französischem Einfluß." Lehmann, *Die Parabel*, 71.

30 "So tragen sie z. B. enganliegende Kleider, die die Körperformen, vor allem Taille, Brüste und Schenkel betonen. Das enganliegende Unterkleid und ein darüber zu tragendes Oberkleid waren seit dem 12. Jahrhundert üblich. […] Die törichten Jungfrauen tragen ihr Haar, wie es die Haartracht von Jungfrauen war, lang und offen." Körkel-Hinkfoth, *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen*, 109.

31 Körkel-Hinkfoth mentions an interesting (although much later) example illustrating the idea of the foolish virgins' lack of chastity. She refers to an early-fifteenth-century illustration of the parable in which the wise virgins and the *Ecclesia* were depicted as luxuriously dressed, while the *Synanoga* and the foolish virgins were distinguished by the color yellow: "Gelb war die Farbe der Prostituition, der Weltlust und der Hoffart. In der höfischen Farballegorien war gelb auch die Farbe der erfüllten Liebe." Körkel-Hinkfoth, *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen*, 110.

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first foolish virgin an apple, the infamous fruit of temptation and sin, with a conspicuous smile on his lips[32] (Fig. 6). She grins in return, one hand raised to her breast, ready to unfasten her garment.[33] As if to dispel any remaining doubts about the hopelessness of her situation, the virgin's belt—a powerful symbol of female chastity—has already fallen to the ground (Fig. 6). It is no coincidence that the Seducer is dressed in secular garments of the latest French fashion and that he is depicted with a traditional courtly smile on his face as well—a stark contrast to the solemn, ascetic figure of Christ in the group opposite (Fig. 8 – 9). The overall appearance of both the Prince of the World and the virgin next to him as well as the courtly smiles on both of their faces evoke the traditional ritual of courtship, where the young woman's facial expression is consistent with the contemporary depictions of courtly welcome, love, and encouragement of the man's sexual advances. In the case of the first foolish virgin of Strassburg, the clothes and body language work together to send a message about her imprudent worldliness coupled with moral and physical corruption, proving that, as a contemporary text observes, instead of the salvation of her soul, "all her thoughts are directed toward men" ("aller ir gedanch hin zuo den mannen stavt").[34] This iconography is later picked up in the Basel minster (1290 – 1300), where we find an almost identical representation of the courtly Seducer and the smiling foolish virgin.[35]

In Strassburg and the cathedrals that use it as a model, the depictions of laughter contribute to the strong criticism of the courtly way of life, so prominent

32 The same iconography is used for the female equivalent of the Prince of the World, the notorious Lady World (*Frau Welt*), who is likewise depicted as fair of face but ugly or rotten from behind, seducing her followers with her charms while leading them toward perdition. This imagery was popular in the contemporary poetry as well. Cf. Walther von der Vogelweide: "Dîn zart hât mich vil nâch betrogen, / wand er vil süezer fröuden gît. / Do ich dich gesach reht under ougen, / dô was dîn schœne an ze schouwen wünneclich al sunder lougen. / Doch was der schanden alse vil, / dô ich dîn hinden wart gewar, / daz ich dich iemer schelten wil" ("Your tenderness has deceived me many a time, for it gives much sweet joy. As I looked directly into your face, there you were, truly beautiful to behold. But as I became aware of your back, it was such a disgrace that I shall curse you forever," L 101,5; Schweikle 226).

33 A similar gesture and a smile, albeit less conspicuous than that of the foolish virgin next to the Seducer, can be seen on the foolish virgin who is separated from the main group, to the left. The same gesture and a similar smile are also featured on the face of a foolish virgin from Saint-Sauveur cloister in Vienne (Isère), France. See Figure 7.

34 My translation. As quoted in Körkel-Hinkfoth, *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen*, 27. Körkel-Hinkfoth cites a medieval text that sees physical love in the foolish virgins' case as the main cause for losing God's favor: "die werdent zuo derselben stuond verdampnet, vnd sint als schuldig vor got" ("They are condemned at once and are considered to be guilty before God"). Ibid.

35 The *Fürst der Welt* (Prince of the World) is also found on the portals of three other later cathedrals: in Nuremberg (1320 – 1330), Freiburg (after 1300), and Regensburg (ca. 1330). In the latter, the Seducer is offering an apple, as he does in Strassburg. See illustrations in Körkel-Hinkfoth, *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen*, 531 – 553.

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in contemporaneous religious discourse. In this view I disagree with C. Stephen Jaeger, who considers Strassburg's approach to smiling to be unique among the representations of the virgin parable and evaluates it positively, even in the case of the first foolish virgin:

> Both the tempter and the foolish virgin on his left smile broadly. The man's smile almost turns down and this gives him a sinister aura. His smile is without humor; it seems forced and hypocritical. The virgin, however, smiles broadly, and there is little to read in her face besides abundant good cheer. In fact, her expression places her close to the famous smiling angels of the annunciation and visitation scenes on Rheims [*sic*] cathedral. Both have a puckish, full grin, and the comparison legitimizes the smile of the Strassburg virgin, foolish though she is. The sculptor did not want to convey a vice, but virtue unrestrained and undisciplined.[36]

It is hard to disagree with Jaeger's main point about the Strassburg ensemble reflecting the moral values of the bygone era. However, some of the premises on which he bases his argument about Strassburg's uniqueness are problematic. First, what Jaeger describes as a broad smile on the Seducer's face is really more of a smirk, a visible yet discreet smile—nothing like the actual broad grin on the face of the foolish maiden to his left. Furthermore, Jaeger's evaluation of the young woman's facial expression as consistent with virtue rather than vice, albeit "unrestrained and undisciplined," is inconsistent with the contemporaneous discourses on femininity and laughter, as well as with the rest of the sexual symbolism that the Strassburg sculptor used to hint at the maiden's lack of modesty. The depiction of the first foolish virgin is strongly reminiscent of medieval religious texts, such as the late-thirteenth-century Alemannic poem "Vom Jüngsten Tage" ("Of the Judgment Day"), that associate laughter, smiling, and other forms of entertainment and self-enjoyment, particularly for women, with vanity and a lack of foresight:

> Waz sol ich von den vrouwen sagen,
> Der lîp hie hôhvart wolte tragen,
> Die hie gezieret giengen
> Und sünde vil enphiengen
> Mit stolzheit und mit tenzen,
> Mit schapelen unde krenzen,
> Mit binden und mit rîsen?
> ir ermel ûf ze brîsen,
> Sie trougen heftelîne vil.
> lachen, singen was ir spil.[37] ("Vom Jüngsten Tage," vv. 469–478)

36 Jaeger, *Envy*, 342.
37 Quoted according to "Vom Jüngsten Tage," in De Boor, *Die deutsche Literatur*, 1:172–182.

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> What can I say about women who wanted to be clothed in hybris here, who came here [to hell] all adorned and committed much sin because of pride and dancing, crowns and wreaths, bands and veils? They used to wear many a clasp to fasten their sleeves and entertained themselves with laughing and singing.

The anonymous poet of "Vom Jüngsten Tage" clearly characterizes laughter, singing, self-adornment, and dancing as forms of sin (*sünde*), sufficient to condemn the careless to hellfire.

Jaeger's ingenious oxymoron further ignores the symbolism the sculptor used to hint not only at the foolish and shortsighted nature of the young woman's behavior but also at its sexual consequences: the virgin's hand is raised to her bosom as if unfastening her garment and, importantly, her belt is already lying at her feet—a powerful symbol of her lost chastity.[38] The sculptural depiction of the foolish virgin is thus influenced by and participates in the persistent and pernicious tradition of sexualizing the foolish virgins, of connecting them explicitly to sexual sin and temptation of flesh. Abelard's fourth personal letter to Heloise, for example, unfavorably compares the foolish virgins to the Beloved of the Song of Songs, contrasting their sinfulness with her purity:

> He [the bridegroom] makes her different from other women who thirst for earthly things and seek worldly glory, so that she may truly become through her humility a lily of the valley, and not a lily of the heights like those foolish virgins who pride themselves on purity of the flesh or an outward show of self denial, and then wither in the fire of temptation.[39]

Similarly, some decades after Strassburg's ensemble had been figured, the fourteenth-century religious text *Büchlein von der geistlichen Gemahelschaft* by Konrad (Spitzer) used the foolish maidens as an illustration of sexual sins.[40] However, the most striking example of sexualized sin in the case of this parable comes from the so-called *Erdbeer-* or *Kindheitslied* by the poet Wilder Alexander, who gives us the following description of the poor foolish virgins:

> Wizzet ir daz vünf juncvrouwen
> sich versûmten in den ouwen
> unz der künc den sal beslôz,
> ir klag und ir schade was grôz;
> wande die stocwarten
> von in zarten
> daz si stuonden kleider blôz. (*KLD* 1.V.7,1 – 7)

38 Jaeger's description of the virgin's facial expression is also ambivalent: sometimes he describes it as a smile, and sometimes as a smile and a laugh. I cannot detect any open-mouthed laughter in this case. Jaeger, *Envy*, 343.

39 Personal Letter 4 in Radice, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, 139.

40 Volfing, "Allegorie," 373 – 374.

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> Be it known to you that five virgins tarried in the meadow until the king locked the hall. Their wailing and their grief were great, for the guards tore away their clothes, so that they stood there naked.

Infusing Matt. 25:1 – 13 with the elements of Ct. 5:7, in which the bride laments that her veil was torn by city guards, this version leaves the foolish virgins in front of the closed door conspicuously *nude*.[41] Since corporeality plays no part in Matthew's parable, this innovation is telling. As Annette Volfing justly points out, this punishment by far exceeds its counterparts in both original stories in its harshness.[42] The foolish virgins are not simply excluded from their own wedding, but are turned into objects of sexual humiliation; they are reduced to their sexual(ized) bodies by being stripped naked and left on display for both the diegetic and non-diegetic audiences to disapprove of and to learn from their punishment, while also—who could deny it—voyeuristically enjoying it.

However similar the Strassburg's foolish virgin's smile might appear to the almost grotesque jubilation of the angels and the saved ones at the cathedrals of Reims and Bamberg,[43] it is also qualitatively different: it graces a female, not male, body in the moment of its downfall. Her grin is just one in the arsenal of the elements that tell a tale not of virtue but of an erroneous choice and a lack of modesty, that is, of sin. It is shown in a sort of parody of the Annunciation between the Prince of the World and his female victim, as part of a courtly and courting ritual, a game of seduction, marking the presence of the sexualized female body. Ironically, Jaeger himself explores the erotic potential of female smiling, albeit in the wise virgin group. He describes one of the Strassburg wise virgins (the third one from Christ) as "the most beautiful and the most sensual in the group," "the mistress of her own awakening sensuality," in the "soft line of [whose] lips there is the bemused early awareness of sexuality," and whose almost imperceptible smile contains "the sexual promise and erotic potential of virginity"[44] (Fig. 10). The half-smile on the face of the wise virgin and the broader grin on the face of her foolish sister thus both tell a tale about temptation and its mastery.

Even though the iconography chosen by the Strassburg sculptor did not find great following among the German treatments of the virgin parable, similar choices can be found elsewhere, as, for example, in the depiction of another notorious female figure, *Frau Welt* (Lady World). On the south portal of the Worms cathedral (ca. 1300) we find yet another beautiful aristocratic woman with a smile on her lips; in her case, however, there can be no doubt as to the

41 Ibid., 371.
42 Ibid., 371.
43 Jaeger, *Envy*, 342; see also Binski, *Becket's Crown*, 246, 258.
44 Jaeger, *Envy*, 340.

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degree of virtue or vice this smile represents. The female equivalent of the Strassburg Tempter, Lady World is a great seductress, a dangerous woman who leads her admirers astray with her wiles. Those who follow her promise of reward lose the salvation of their souls, as the medieval poet Hartmann von Aue complains:

> Die werlt lachet mich triegende an
> und winket mir.
> nu hân ich als ein tumer man
> gevolget ihr.[45] (*MF* XXII.V.3,1 – 4)

> The World smiles at me deceitfully and waves to me. And I have followed her like a fool.

Like in its male counterpart's case, the facial expression of the Lady World in Worms is an indicator of her moral corruptness, a beautiful façade hiding her true ugliness represented by her rotten back. It is also, however, an allusion to the contemporary courtly ritual, the same strategy that the Strassburg sculptor used for his first foolish virgin to convey an image of fallen, sexualized femininity. One may wonder if the grammatical gender of the word "world" (masculine in Latin and French and feminine in Middle High German) is the sole explanation for the transformation of the male Prince into the female Lady World, and for endowing her with such attributes as beauty, eroticism, temptation, and moral corruption.[46] What is more important, however, is that for two great seducers and their victims, smiling plays a crucial role in condemning secular society and its values. It helps to present courtly worldliness, particularly courtly femininity, not simply as foolish and shortsighted, but also as seductive, treacherous, and unchaste. The Strassburg ensemble therefore turns out to be far less unique in its approach to laughter; it reflects the contemporaneous views of the connection between smiling and seduction, succumbing to sin, and sensuality/sexuality.

45 Also see Walther's L 67,8 (Schweikle 444 – 447) and L 122,36 (Schweikle 452).

46 It is important to point out that although the gender of the allegorical figures of the Prince vs. Lady World in this case corresponds to the grammatical gender of the word "world" (Latin / French masculine *mundus, le monde* vs. German feminine MHG *diu werlt*, mod. Germ. *die Welt*), this is not always the case, particularly when a specific quality is firmly associated with femininity in other medieval discourses. On the relationship between grammatical gender and the gender of allegorical figures see Starkey, *A Courtier's Mirror*, 62 – 71, esp. 89 – 102. Starkey points out that the inconsistencies depend on aesthetic issues, the influence of other iconographic traditions, and cultural stereotypes. Starkey, *Courtier's Mirror*, 99. As mentioned in an earlier note, three German cathedrals (Nuremberg, Regensburg, and Freiburg) that imitate Strassburg chose to depict the Seducer / Prince of the World as male despite the feminine gender of the word "world" in MHG grammar.

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Enduring Prejudice? Magdeburg's Courtly Femininity and Smiling Virtue

The first to represent the virgin parable in monumental sculpture and the second largest cathedral in Germany between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, the *Magdeburger Dom* precedes Strassburg by several decades.[47] Seeing the wise virgins of Magdeburg (ca. 1245), one is bound to draw parallels between the two ensembles: their conceptions are indeed similar in their astonishingly realistic depictions of the human form and their emphasis on the female body to represent the parable's message of salvation and perdition. Yet they are strikingly different in their respective sculptors' choice of emotions to communicate the divergence between the foolish and the wise.

Magdeburg presents to the viewer a familiar group of young maidens, fashionably dressed and adorned, with lively upward arm movements (one even holding her garments), and even more importantly, grinning from ear to ear (Fig. 11). The element of surprise, however, lies in the fact that these virgins are wise! The symbolism used by the Magdeburg sculptor is indeed very different from what we find in Strassburg or among Magdeburg's predecessors. The contrast between the saved and the lost is visible only when the ensemble is viewed as a whole, since both groups of virgins are dressed in almost identical, lavish courtly clothes, and the only essential difference is in their body language.[48] The foolish virgins can be easily detected thanks to their violent exhibition of grief, in stark contrast to the happy demeanor and broad smiles of their wise counterparts.

The use of vivid emotions to separate virtue from vice did not begin in Magdeburg. According to the extensive catalogue provided by Körkel-Hinkfoth, the depiction of despair is common both in plastic and pictorial arts. For example, the foolish virgins grieve in France on the portals of Aulnay (1130 – 1140), Toulouse (2nd quarter, 12th c.), Châlons-sur-Marne (ca. 1180), Fenioux (ca. 1175), and Pont-l'Abbé-d'Arnould (late 12th c.). The sinners' emotions are also depicted in manuscript illuminations, mural paintings, and stained glass windows,[49] as well as in medieval drama (mystery plays). The profound grief of the foolish

47 Schubert, *Dom* 8. Construction is said to have begun in Magdeburg around 1209. See Gosebruch, "Das oberrheinisch-bambergische Element," 133. Also Schubert, *Dom*, 19; Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 177. According to Binski, prior to Magdeburg the virgin parable has "scarcely existed as a subject to be depicted in art." Binski, *Becket's Crown*, 238.

48 "Sogar der Jungfrauentyp beider Gruppen ist weitgehend identisch." Schubert, *Dom*, 19. In this sense, Magdeburg may be more isocephalic than Strassburg, although not entirely.

49 Cf. Idensen (ca. 1120 – 1130), Hocheppan (1180 – 1200), and Marburg (1232 – 1235). For more examples see Körkel-Hinkfoth, *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen*, 114 – 115.

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virgins in Magdeburg—their faces contorted from crying, their hands wrung in despair, and their tears being wiped with the hems of their dresses (Fig. 12–13)—is thus representative of the larger trend in both the art and literature of the period. Furthermore, it accurately corresponds to the descriptions of the damned maidens' violent outbursts in the late-thirteenth-century Thuringian play *Ludus de decem virginibus* (also known as the *Eisenacher Zehnjungfrauenspiel*): "For we are crying so much as there is water in the sea" ("wan wi geweinen also vel / also wazzers ist in dem mer," vv. 516–517).[50]

The cathedral in Magdeburg also cannot claim to be the first to depict joy on the faces of the virtuous. A few decades earlier, the Reims workshop, whose influence is palpable in Bamberg's *Fürstenportal*, Mainz's *Westlettner*, and Magdeburg itself, introduced a new method of representing the human form marked by an increased interest in facial expressions.[51] However, while the saved souls of Mainz and Bamberg, the crown-holding angel of Bamberg,[52] and Archangel Gabriel (Fig. 14) of Magdeburg's own Annunciation group (*Verkündigungspaar*)[53] do display open smiles, conspicuously all of them happen to be men. In comparison, the expression used for the Virgin Mary in Bamberg's and Magdeburg's Annunciation ensembles (Fig. 15) and St. Catherine, the patron saint of the Magdeburg *Dom* (Fig. 16), is the same as that of Strassburg's wise virgins: all three women are presented as beautiful, but composed and, in Mary's case particularly, monastic-looking.[54] Magdeburg's innovation in regards to the virgin parable thus appears to lie not merely in its choice of emotions to distinguish between the two groups of maidens, but rather in its use of emotion to portray virtuous femininity.[55] And unlike the foolish virgins, the descriptions of the wise ones' joy in the contemporary drama are remarkably vague and non-specific; for example, *Ludus* describes their emotional state simply as *vro und wolgemut* ("joyful and high-spirited," v. 147), saying nothing about the actual manifestation of their bliss.[56]

50 *Ludus de decem virginibus*, in De Boor, *Die deutsche Literatur*, 1:182–202, at 196. Also published as *Das Eisenacher Zehnjungfrauenspiel.*

51 Williamson, *Gothic*, 93, 174.

52 North side, east choir. For an illustration see Williamson, *Gothic*, 175.

53 The *Verkündigungspaar* is generally accepted to be related to the ten virgins, although it is thought to be somewhat older. See Schubert, *Dom*, 25; Schubert, "Der Magdeburger Dom," 38.

54 Cf.: "Neben dieser lieblichen und zugleich ersten Maria verwundert dieser Gabriel, der so archaisch lächelt, dessen Schriftrolle so unverständlich vor dem Leib aufgerollt ist, dessen leicht geschwungener Körper in so starren Faltensträngen steckt." Schubert, *Dom*, 26.

55 The first time I saw a picture of the wise virgins of Magdeburg, I initially misidentified the virgins, mistaking them for their foolish counterparts because of their grotesque smiles. It is only after seeing the whole ensemble that I realized my error. The ensemble can be seen in full in Quast, *Der Dom zu Magdeburg*, 48–49.

56 The old truism that vice is more interesting than virtue appears to ring true in the case of

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Even if virtue and jubilation may prove to be less interesting than vice and despair, they are nevertheless important. The startling effect of the wise virgins' exuberantly joyous faces has not gone unnoticed. Art historian Lottlisa Behling sees it as a novel vision, a great and new creation by a genius ("diese neue und große Tat eines eigenwilligen genialen Meisters"),[57] but not everybody is equally enthusiastic. Elisabeth Vavra points out the unnatural, immoderate aspect of the virgins' smiling and uses the expression "exzessive Mimik" ("excessive facial expression") to describe the Magdeburg ensemble. Her opinion is echoed by Paul Williamson, who writes of the "exaggerated glee of the figures [that] verges on smugness,"[58] and by the creators of the online resource Web Art Museum, calling the wise virgins' facial expressions "very close to grotesque."[59] The intensity of such critique directed at the depiction of female bodies is indicative of what seems to be a gender bias among modern scholars (one may wonder why nobody characterizes the smiles of male angels or of the saved souls at Bamberg and Reims as grotesque), but more importantly, it also brings up a question about a potential medieval response to this peculiar artistic choice. Although Magdeburg's conception was impressively influential, it is the grief of the foolish virgins that continues to be emulated even into the fifteenth century. Nowhere else (in surviving statuaries) is virtue portrayed as smiling so openly again. So, was this unusual broad grinning ("breites Lachen"[60]) of the wise a bold attempt, a new conception, or a mere glitch, as one would say nowadays? Could there have been anything about medieval Magdeburg that might have inspired such a bold combination of smiling and virtuous femininity?

Magdeburg's approach clearly downplays the inherited tradition of garment symbolism that would play such an important role in Strassburg a few decades

modern scholarship as well, which scrutinizes mostly the immoderate gestures of the sinners, leaving the descriptions of the virtuous surprisingly vague or even imprecise. Lehmann observes that while gestures of despair and anguish are common in the case of the foolish virgins, the faces of the wise usually remain expressionlessly steely, displaying "the same immovable, indifferent state which can be seen among the virgins in France" ("Jenes unbewegte, gleichgültige Wesen, wie es bei den Figuren der Jungfrauen in Frankreich zu finden ist"). Lehmann, *Die Parabel*, 74. Körkel-Hinkfoth spends almost two pages describing the foolish virgins' violent body language, yet refers to the wise ones' affect with a single sentence: "The facial expression of the wise ranges from deep seriousness to open laughter, but for the most part, it is a calm or slightly smiling look that can be observed here" ("Der Ausdruck der Klugen reicht von tiefem Ernst zu breitem Lachen, meist aber ist eine ruhige oder schwach lächelnde Miene zu beobachten"). Körkel-Hinkfoth, *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen*, 115.

57 Behling, "Die klugen und törichten Jungfrauen," 19.

58 Williamson, *Gothic*, 155. Williamson also calls the wise virgins' facial expression "grinning" and "what amounts to a grimace." Williamson, *Gothic*, 177.

59 Vavra, "Klug oder töricht," 421. Also see *Web Gallery of Art*, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.

60 Körkel-Hinkforth, *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen*, 114.

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later.[61] As already mentioned, it is common for the foolish virgins to be presented as more richly dressed and adorned than their wise counterparts, who fit a more stereotypical iconographic, timeless image of a virgin or a chaste woman. In contrast, all ten Magdeburg statues are marked by the *Zeitkostüm*, even though according to the experts, the attire of the foolish is in fact somewhat less elaborate and costly than that of the wise:

> A simpler depiction of the foolish is, strictly speaking, yet another difference between the figures on the left and on the right: their adornments are more modest, "probably not unintentionally." In contrast, the wise ones wear rich ornaments as a sign of their celebratory joy, as if glittering with stars, flowers, and shining precious stones—each of them rendered unique by her tiara, brooch, belt, and ring. They are beautiful examples of jewelry of the Staufer period.[62]

It is obvious that all Magdeburg virgins were inspired by a particular social group, namely, the German nobility. Despite the relative inferiority of the foolish virgins' attire and jewelry,[63] their cut and richness as well as the figures' overall posture, elegance, and demeanor all hint at their aristocratic origin. The statues of the ten virgins were put into their present location (the Paradise Porch, *Paradiesvorhalle*) in the first quarter of the fourteenth century; nevertheless, they are in fact a true product of the previous, thirteenth century.[64] Vavra demonstrates this by drawing parallels in the depiction of clothing and gestures between the Magdeburg ensemble and a roughly contemporary literary work, such as Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* (ca. 1210).[65] The ideal of beauty that both the wise and the foolish maidens represent is the one widely available in the courtly poetry, a predominant (almost the only) model of attractiveness in the thirteenth century: they all have slim, shapely, and young figures, are richly and fashionably dressed and decorated, and display delicate, or to use Behling's description, "noble" hands and flowing long blond hair,[66] which is an indicator

61 Ibid., 108–109.

62 "Die Gestalten des linken und rechten Gewändes [unterscheiden sich] grundsätzlich auch darin, daß die Törichten 'einfacher gehalten,' die Schmuckformen bescheidener [sind]—'wohl nicht ohne Absicht.' Dagegen tragen die Klugen zum Zeichen ihrer festlichen Freude reichen Zierat, wie überglitzert von Sternen, Blüten und flammendem Gestein, jede verschieden nach Stirnreif, Brosche, Gürtel und Fingerreif. Prächtige Beispiele sind sie, um den Schmuck der Staufferzeit näher zu charakterisieren." Behling, "Die klugen und törichten Jungfrauen," 25.

63 Cf. "Die Kronreifen haben keine Goldplättchen und flammende Blatzier, keine Blumen und Perlenrauten. Sie sind schmal und glatt oder mit einer Reihe Perlen versehen." Behling, "Die klugen und törichten Jungfrauen," 26.

64 See Binski, *Becket's Crown*, 255–256.

65 See Vavra, "Klug oder töricht," 421–422.

66 Judging by the traces of paint on the back of the statues. Behling, "Die klugen und törichten Jungfrauen," 24.

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of their unmarried status. According to Behling, "It is an image of an aristocratic person of the thirteenth century, ennobled by education and moderation, that arises here in Magdeburg, rendered historically while simultaneously elevated into the realm of the timeless."[67] These virgins thus stand on their portal not merely as a reminder of joy and celestial glory on the one hand and carelessness and despair on the other, but also as reflections of aristocratic femininity as it was conceived of at the time of their conception. Unlike Strassburg's presentation and evaluation of courtly femininity, the Magdeburg virgins—young, beautiful, noble, rich, and smiling—are not sinners. They await the arrival of the bridegroom, welcoming him and the onlookers with their gestures and their faces.

The Magdeburg ensemble is clearly not interested in condemning the courtly way of life. Instead, it is part of the tradition that focuses on the feelings of the saved and the lost. For that reason, it is remarkable that its emphasis on positive joy has not been replicated, even though as the very first Gothic cathedral on the German soil, it is known to have inspired many subsequent sculptural renditions of Matthew's parable. While it may be impossible to account for Magdeburg's uniqueness so many centuries later, the history of the city—marked by strong secular influences, the worldliness of its ecclesiastical authorities, the cathedral's history of prolonged construction, and the unique coincidence of having a prominent female mystic living and writing in the area precisely when the statuary was created—can provide context for the presence of both courtly and religious elements in the iconography of the ten virgins statuary.

Secular influences had always been strong in Magdeburg. By the High Middle Ages, it had a solid reputation as a great royal court (during the reign of Otto I) and later as a major ecclesiastical court. The powerful thirteenth-century clerics, on whose order and under whose supervision the cathedral was rebuilt after the fire of 1207 (particularly Archbishop Albrecht II von Käfernburg), are commonly described as highly educated and courtly princes. The famous liberties, known as *das Magdeburger Recht*, were renewed in 1188 by Archbishop Wichmann von Seeburg. Albrecht II, who began rebuilding the cathedral, is likely to have found inspiration for it in the architecture of the Staufer period during his study in Italy and France. He is described by Giselher Quast as a follower or a legate of Frederick II and a worldly ecclesiastical prince ("geistlicher und weltlicher Fürst").[68] An important source of inspiration may have been the writings of Mechthild of Magdeburg (ca. 1212 – 1282), the famous female mystic, whose

67 "Es ist das Bild des ritterlichen, von Zucht und Maße geadelten Menschen des 13. Jahrhunderts, das hier in Magdeburg […] ersteht, prächtig ins Zeitliche gewendet und doch zugleich ins Überzeitliche erhoben." Behling, "Die klugen und törichten Jungfrauen," 40.
68 Quast, *Dom*, 10, 16.

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work *The Flowing Light of Godhead* (*Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*) coincides in timing not only with the rebuilding of the cathedral in general but more specifically with the making of the sculptures of the ten virgins. Mechthild's imagery is strikingly similar to the one chosen by the creators of the virgin ensemble.

In the case of the five wise virgins, the sculptor might have been trying to achieve the same goal as Mechthild, that is, to use secular, courtly imagery or language to express spiritual ideas. The visionary's imagery and rhetoric are known to have been inspired by the secular courtly love poetry that flourished during her lifetime. It is not surprising that Mechthild (and people of Saxony in general) would be thoroughly familiar with and influenced by contemporary courtly discourse. The literary tastes in Mechthild's Saxony exhibited a strong southern influence. As Sara Poor points out in her study of the mystic's work, Middle High German, the standard literary language of courtly lyric and romance, was of extreme importance even in the areas where native dialects were Low or Middle (Central) German, Mechthild's native language: "Because most courtly poets relied on royal or noble patronage and because the most important courts tended to be in the south, the language of these courts became a sort of literary *lingua franca*."[69] The late-thirteenth-century Saxony was very familiar with the traditions of courtly love and poetry. A number of Askanian princes were minnesingers themselves, such as Duke Albrecht I of Saxony (d. 1261), known as a patron of Tannhäuser, and his brother, Count Henry I of Anhalt (d. 1252), praised by Bumke as "the most interesting figure for literary history" and believed to have been the author of the poems listed in the Large Heidelberg Song Manuscript under the name "Der Herzog von Anhalt" ("The Duke of Anhalt").[70] The court of the margraves of the neighboring Brandenburg was also very influential.[71] Although the exact details of Mechthild's education are not certain, it is commonly accepted that she was, in fact, educated at court before running away to Magdeburg to begin her religious career.[72]

As a record of Mechthild's mystic experience, *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit* is deeply religious, yet reveals an abundant use of the language and imagery of Minnesang.[73] It makes frequent use of such traditional courtly vocabulary as

69 Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg*, 31.
70 Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 480.
71 Ibid.
72 Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg*, 27.
73 Gibbs and Johnson, *Medieval*, 438. The entire work illustrates how the idea of courtly love and service has been transposed into the religious plain of mysticism. However, the use of courtly conventions in religious writing to describe a spiritual experience has been known at least since the twelfth century. See Wainwright-de-Kadt's comparison of Mechtild and Hadewijch's use of courtly symbolism for spiritual material in Wainwright-de-Kadt, "Courtly Literature and Mysticism," 41 – 60. For more information on the courtly themes and in-

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schoene, *liebe*, *minneklich*, and *wol gemuote*. The journey of the feminine Soul to God is called a *hovereise* (a journey to court), and God himself addresses the maiden-soul with a *hovesprache* (courtly speech). The description of maidens in the Lady Love's (*Minne*) retinue strikingly resembles that of both the wise virgins statues and the stereotypical courtly female beauty, "built in a noble way, white and red in blossoming youth" ("adellich gebildet an irme libe, wis und rot in bluejender jugent," *Licht*, VII.XLVIII.18 – 19). The familiar image of the red mouth makes its appearance in a sensual scene, in which God offers the Soul wine: "So the Soul became alive and completely hale, as He poured the pure red wine in her red mouth" ("Also das lebendig wart die sele und gar gesunt, do er [God] den blanken rotten win gos in iren rotten munt," *Licht*, I.22.58).[74] The bodies of the saved who greet the Soul in Heaven are noble bodies that behave according to the ritual of the contemporary courtly protocol, reminiscent of courtly epic and poetry. Book III contains the familiar motif of courtly glances (*minnenklich ansehen*) given in a way that befits the nobility of those present ("als es in nach ir edelkeit mag geschehen," *Licht*, III.1.133). The Soul herself satisfies the requirements of feminine comportment, so reminiscent of contemporary prescriptive literature and courtly romance, in her portrayal as "wise and well-bred" (*wise und wol gezogen*, *Licht*, I.IV.1). Furthermore, William Seaton points out a special significance of the greeting (*Gruss*) in Mechthild's work, similar to courtly love poetry, "by which the beloved signals the suitor that there is some chance of favor."[75] Finally, Book VII speaks of the joy of the chosen souls in the afterlife, echoing the religious message of Luke 6:21, yet described in entirely secular, courtly terms: "Der helige geist git ouch us sinen minnenden himelvlus, da mit er den seligen schenket und si so vollen trenket, das sie mit vroeden singent, zartelich lachent und springent in gezogener wise" ("The Holy Ghost also pours from His loving heavenly stream, from which He serves the blessed ones and makes them drink so much that they sing of joy, laugh or smile gently and jump in a refined manner," *Licht*, VII.1.103 – 105).

While it is, of course, impossible to claim with certainty a cause-and-effect relationship between Mechthild's masterpiece and the Magdeburg ensemble, the parallels in the descriptions of beauty, joy, and welcome in Mechthild's work and the depiction of the wise virgins are too noticeable to be overlooked. Courtly lyric provided Mechthild with the vocabulary to describe the indescribable—her mystic experience and the joys of afterlife. It afforded her the means to render a sublime experience and religious concepts in terms that were under-

fluences present in *Das fließende Licht der Gottfheit*, see Seaton, "Transformation of Convention," 64 – 72; Poor, "Medieval Incarnations of Self," 1 – 33. Also see Chapter 1 in Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg*.

74 All the citations come from Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*.

75 Seaton, "Transformation," 65 – 67.

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standable to her contemporaries, which is precisely what the Magdeburg artists strove to achieve not only in the ten virgins, but in other sculptures as well. For example, the so-called *Herrscherpaar*, the royal couple sitting on their thrones, is thought to represent Otto I and his wife Editha; yet the heavenly orb with seven planets and zodiac symbols in the hands of the male figure and the book in the hands of the female one suggest that it can also be interpreted as an allegorical depiction of Christ and his Bride, the Church. The famous statue of St. Maurice (1240), a Christian African martyr (d. 285) from the times of the Roman emperor Maximian and a patron saint of the cathedral, is also time specific. It depicts a warrior, fully dressed in medieval chain mail of the thirteenth century (Fig. 17).[76]

Comparing the Magdeburg virgin ensemble to the later cathedrals inspired by it—such as Freiburg (1285 – 1300), Erfurt (1330 – 1350), or Bern (ca. 1475)[77]—reveals that such representations of a beautiful, contemporary person indeed appealed to late-medieval tastes. Yet strangely, none of them went as far as to equal the joy on the faces of *their* wise virgins, while sharing the expressive grief of the foolish ones. The seeming appeal of the foolish virgins' lack of self-possession is easy to explain. Moderation and bodily restraint were prominent ideals in both the religious and secular worlds. To depict sinners as excessive and violent in gesture served a dual function: as an allusion to their punishment in the form of eternal anguish and as an illustration of excess, yet another affirmation of the sinners' corrupt nature. In the Thuringian *Ludus de decem virginibus*, one of the foolish virgins even instigates her sisters to hurt themselves: "Nu schrigit, roufit uz di har!" ("Now scream and pull your hair out!").[78]

So what is wrong with the wise virgins? Mechthild's work demonstrates that the very act of rejoicing per se was not at all alien to religious thought. After all, one of the reasons proffered for not laughing in this life was that true joy and true laughter will be possible only for the saved ones in paradise. However, even in paradise one has to be moderate. Even in Mechthild's revelations, the correct way to rejoice and to laugh is delicately, in *gezogener wîse* (*Licht*, VII.1.105). Among the Magdeburg wise virgins, only one—Virgin 3—smiles in a similarly discreet way. The first, second, and fourth wise virgins are grinning from ear to ear.[79] The vision of courtly smiling in Magdeburg is unique among the surviving

76 Williamson sees it as "the growing interest in realistic portrayal": "Nowhere else in Europe did sculpture more closely resemble life!" Williamson, *Gothic*, 177. St. Maurice statue is also the very first attempt to portray him as a black soldier. (Ibid.)

77 For illustrations see Körkel-Hinkfoth, *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen*, 540, 547, 553.

78 V. 522 in "Ludus," 196.

79 Vavra, "Klug oder töricht," 422. Vavra's contrast between moderation of the wise virgins and the "Masslosigkeit in Gestik and Mimik" of the foolish ones is, in fact, too simplistic, since it is easy to see that the difference between the wise and the foolish lies not in the intensity of emotional display, but in the *nature* of their affect. Both groups contain examples of excessive

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depictions of the wise virgins and remains an important and moving example of experimentation with the depiction of emotions and with reconciling the secular and the religious spheres. For example, in Freiburg the ten virgins can be differentiated only by their lamps and their emotions, in a way that is strikingly reminiscent of Magdeburg; yet, there is nothing on the faces of the wise maidens of Freiburg like the jubilation we find so disturbing in its famous predecessor. The smiles of the saved are very controlled, much closer to the expression found on the face of the third wise virgin of Strassburg (Fig. 18).[80] Even though the grief of the foolish virgins is preserved in the post-Magdeburg depictions of the parable, the return to the wise virgins' calm and peaceful facial expressions suggests that a composed and serious demeanor might have been perceived as much more appropriate for the ideal of an honorable woman (even if she is dressed in courtly clothes). The wise virgins of Magdeburg and their reception point to the familiar tensions within the medieval conceptions of virtuous femininity.[81]

Taking one last look at the approaches to the parable of the ten virgins at Strassburg and Magdeburg, I would like to argue that both visions are unique in their original approach; yet, however different these approaches are, they seem to reveal and support the same view of medieval femininity. Jaeger's claim about Strassburg's uniqueness does not account for the differences in the intensity of affect among the Magdeburg virgins, or for the curtailment of the wise virgins' laughter over time.[82] However, these two aspects do, in my opinion, only support

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and more moderate expressions of their respective emotions. The most violent exhibitions of joy and sorrow belongs to K1/T1, K2/T2, K4/T4, and K5/T5 (where K stands for "klug" 'wise' and T for "töricht" 'foolish'). The faces of K3/T3 are rather composed and, actually, very similar. Vavra, "Klug oder töricht," 427, 431 – 432. Also see See Behling, "Die klugen und törichten Jungfrauen," 20 – 21.

80 Freiburg is reminiscent of both Magdeburg and Strassburg: of the former, in its isocephalic approach and its distinction between grief and joy; of the latter, with its figure of Christ leading the wise towards the Ecclesia. However, there is no Seducer leading the foolish virgins in this case.

81 Körkel-Hinkfoth points out that the intensity of emotions decreases after Magdeburg. Körkel-Hinkfoth, *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen*, 115. And indeed, only Erfurt's wise virgins (mid-fourteenth century) are still presented as slightly smiling. At the end of her essay, Vavra emphasizes that eventually the depictions of the wise and the foolish virgins become almost identical in their clothes and facial expressions, which allows later artists to play with the convention, transforming *die Heilige* in *die Sünderin*. Vavra, "Klug oder töricht," 427. Whether this suggests a change of sensibilities and the final disappearance of the medieval views tolerating excess in sinners but not in the virtuous, or whether excessive responses in the female body are perceived as disturbing no matter what, cannot be addressed in this study. To answer this question, one would have to closely examine the attitudes toward female bodies in the Late Middle Ages and all throughout Early Modernity.

82 Cf.: "Conversely, tradition has the wise virgins smiling. They smile, of course, because they are received by the bridegroom, that is, redeemed at the final judgment. […] Their gestures

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his observation about the ideal of virtuous behavior formulated by the Strassburg virgins, and, I would claim, by those of Magdeburg and subsequent ensembles—the ideal that was, as Jaeger points out, "still mouthed and formulated by [their] contemporaries but seldom attained in reality,"[83] the ideal that identifies female virtue with perfect bodily control, self-possession, and chastity. Furthermore, the statuaries at both Strassburg and Magdeburg (and the latter's successors) are apprehensive of immoderation, although they express it in different ways. In both places, immoderation is represented by the foolish, as revealed in their intense outbursts of grief in Magdeburg and in the broad grin of the first foolish virgin of Strassburg. The difference is that Strassburg tells its tale by using the depiction of emotions on only one level; it explores the presence of one emotion/gesture (joy/laughter) or lack thereof. Magdeburg, on the other hand, operates on two levels: to establish the difference between the two groups (two different emotions) and to mark the difference between the individuals within each group by the gradation of their respective affect. (In fact, some of Magdeburg's wise virgins display the same enigmatic serenity as their counterparts at Strassburg.) To communicate the ideal of virtuous behavior and salvation, Strassburg returns us to the "language" of the clergy, to the monastic view of femininity and propriety, and to the strict dichotomies between sexuality and modesty, seduction and virtue, secular and clerical, Prince/Lady World and Christ/the Bridegroom. For its part, Magdeburg tells its viewers a tale that is religious in its content, yet through the "language" of the contemporary courtly laity, not unlike Mechthild or the medieval *Fastnachtspiele*. One may wonder if the Strassburg artist might have known the Magdeburg's vision but not shared its view of broadly grinning and richly clad virtue, choosing instead to return to the simplicity of monastic-looking garments and the calm comportment extolled for early-medieval religious virgins.

At the end of the thirteenth-century Thuringian mystery play mentioned above, the fourth foolish virgin reveals the moral of the story to the spectators, "Nu horit, selgen, di nu leben! / wi sin uch zu eime spigele gegeben" ("Now hear, those of you who are living! We are given to you as an example," *Ludus*, vv. 566–567).[84] Of course, the tale of the ten virgins is a cautionary tale, one of admon-

are tropological, not natural. Wise virgins smile because they are headed for heaven; foolish frown for the opposite reason." Jaeger, *Envy*, 343.

83 I am paraphrasing the following passage here: "The Strassburg group is a nostalgic reconstruction of an ideal still mouthed and formulated by the sculptor's contemporaries but seldom attained in reality." Jaeger, *Envy*, 347.

84 See a similar idea expressed by John of Garland, the late-twelfth-century Oxford-educated man who lived in Paris during the Gothic style: "Templi sculpturas morum dic esse figures / vivas picturas in te gere non perituras" ("Declare our churches'scupltures models of civility, living pictures, to be borne in mind indelibly"). Quoted and translated in Binski, *Becket's Crown*, 259.

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ition, and the virgins are intended to function as a *spigel*, i. e. an example, for the viewers. However, besides this metaphorical meaning intended by the author of the play, the MHG word *spigel* also commonly refers to the straightforward "mirror." Whether in the play or on the portals of German cathedrals, the ten virgins do serve as an example, illustrating right and wrong choices, but they are also a mirror, a *speculum*, a reflection of the contemporaneous views of femininity, beauty, and propriety.

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Epilogue. “Those Days Are Over”? Inhabiting a Tradition

“Er ließ ihr sagen: O komm zu mir,
Ich sehne mich so sehr nach dir,
Ich rufe nach dir, ich schmachte—
Sie schüttelt’ das Haupt und lachte.”

(Heinrich Heine, “Ein Weib”)[1]

“Women have been trained to speak softly,
and carry a lipstick.
Those days are over.”

(Bella Abzug)

What do Enite’s treacherous smile, Isolde’s fake virtue, or the medieval fetish for smiling red lips tell the modern reader? Why should it matter how these imaginary heroines laugh, they who did not even exist except in the minds of their authors?

Laughter and smiling are basic human responses that despite continuous study remain elusive, always raising new questions about their origins, meanings, functions, and universality.[2] One way we can explore these issues is by studying textual laughter. As Sebastian Coxon points out, fictional texts serve as a window—albeit an indirect one—onto social reality. They contribute to a critical discussion of the culture that engendered them and do so “through the imaginative realization of certain values and principles of behavior recognizable and comprehensible to a contemporary audience.”[3] The red-lipped smiles of medieval literary beauties uncover a society that walks a tightrope between the patristic rejection of laughter and its Aristotelian acceptance as an inherently human expression; between the ecclesiastical removal of joy to the afterlife and the courtly ethos that treats it as an indicator of harmonious existence on earth; and between the threat of social intercourse to female chastity and the need for affability and seduction to guarantee smooth interactions between the sexes. The very variety and sheer number of texts discussed in this book and collected in Table 1 in the appendix bespeaks the impressive discursive heterogeneity of this period. Laughter is examined from starkly different angles: theological, clerical-didactic, natural-philosophical, secular courtly, and obscene carnivalesque.

1 “He sent her a word: ‘Oh, come to me. I long for you so greatly, you see. I languish for you and pine.’ She shook her head and smiled [lit. ‘laughed’].” (My translation.)
2 See, for example, Albrecht Classen’s introduction to Classen, *Laughter*, 1 – 140.
3 Coxon, “Laughter,” 25.

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Depending on their approach and ideological position, multiple, even competing views co-exist throughout the Middle Ages, recycling and expanding upon a rich body of discursive material inherited from their predecessors. As the table visually shows, while the foundations of the theological debates about the value of laughter are set before the high-medieval era, the thirteenth-century resurgence of interest in this topic conspicuously coincides with the burgeoning secular aristocratic society and vernacular literary discourses. The sacred and profane spheres clearly interact and respond to one another, sometimes adopting, sometimes rejecting the other's values, yet influenced by them nevertheless.

The disputatiousness of this period can be partially explained by the fact that there is no precise vocabulary to refer to the various forms and gradations of laughter, thus making its codification ever more difficult. The pre-modern texts demonstrate how the modern understanding of laughter and smiling as two qualitatively different phenomena both facilitates and impedes their interpretation. The medieval distinction between the two expressions proves to be more of *degree* than of essence, leading to sometimes confusing attempts to define what kind of *lachen, rire*, or *risus* can be acceptable.

Literary evidence also points to a performative culture where laughter could bespeak one's social status, age, gender, and virtue; to a reality in which the enduring prejudice against women's laughter symbiotically co-existed with its commonplace instrumentalization. All the medieval discourses prove to be markedly gendered in their approach to this essential human expression, whose relationship to the sexual body was perceived to be more threatening to women than to men. Whether attacking or defending women, discourses on femininity always interpret virtue in terms of sexual modesty and place laughter in direct relation to both. Medieval medical and literary (particularly obscene) literature illustrates that the laughing woman's body is treated as open at both ends.[4] An unrestrained, boisterous expression is therefore categorically rejected as incompatible with virtuous behavior. At the same time, even the highly controlled, delicate, and sometimes almost imperceptible laughter—which today would be called a smile and is so frequently featured on Gothic portals, high-medieval tombstones, and in vernacular courtly literature—is gendered as well. While men can smile, it is most commonly women who are described doing so. The tomb statues of Otto of Botenlouben-Hennenberg or Henry the Lion alongside their wives present the royal couples unequally: the man's demeanor is stern and militant, but the lady is depicted with a delicate smile on her face.[5] As Ulrich von Liechtenstein's conduct text *Das Frauenbuch* reveals, smiling plays a crucial role

4 See chapter 1 for discussion of fabliaux.
5 See Fig. 33 – 34 in Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 289 – 290.

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in the construction of courtly femininity and the overall functioning of the courtly world. The sculptures and literary works glorify men's qualities as rulers and warriors; but appeasing those men and facilitating homosocial ties through beauty and demeanor is the responsibility of their wives and mistresses, or the idealized lofty ladies of the lyric—in short, of aristocratic women. This connection between smiling, courtliness, and eroticism is also successfully exploited in contemporaneous religious sculpture to criticize the secular nobility through the portrayals of the Lady World and the wise and foolish virgins.

The function of women's laughter and the image of the attractive red mouth that frequently accompanies it are representative of the overall medieval use and appreciation of symbolic representation, be it visual, as in sculpture or pictorial art, or literary, in a form of indirect discourse such as metaphor, allegory, and euphemism. In his study on beauty, Umberto Eco traces the beginnings of this love of indirection to medieval monasticism, which developed bodies of symbols that the people in the Middle Ages were much more adept at reading than are we, their modern counterparts.[6] Women's laughter and smiling are definitely part of this repertoire of symbols, this shared cultural imaginary that spoke to its audience through both literary and artistic means about the fantasies of beauty, virtue, power, and ideology.

Yet can we really say, with Bella Abzug, that the days when "women [were] trained to speak softly, and carry a lipstick […] are truly over"? Can the fantasy of femininity that combines virtuous perfection and sexual availability be safely relegated to the dark medieval past? It is the evidence again that speaks to the contrary. The story that medieval texts tell transcends the historical boundaries of their time period; they are both firmly anchored in the past and remain relevant to this day. Modern anthropological research proves that stereotypes about women's laughter are not unique to the Middle Ages, but are consistently found in societies where ideal femininity is presented as modest, passive, and polite.[7] A cross-cultural and cross-temporal examination of art reveals a curious trend associating laughter with transgression, otherness, and immorality: "Most teeth and open mouths in art belonged to dirty old men, misers, drunks, whores, gypsies, […] dwarves, lunatics, monsters, ghosts, the possessed, the damned…"[8] Seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century didactic English treatises for women consistently present laughter as an "Offence against Christian Modesty," "a Symptom of a loose impotent Soul," which "begins in *Frolick* [*sic*] only, but too often ends in *Shame*."[9] Yet the very same strict books also recognize

6 Eco, *Art and Beauty*, 53.
7 Apte, *Humor*, 257 – 260.
8 Trumble, *A Brief History*, xxiii.
9 *The Ladies Library*, 150, 119, 36 (respectively).

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the erotic power of the smile, endowing the ideal of "perfect beauty" with "a Little Mouth, the upper-Lip resembling a Heart in shape, and the under some what larger, but both of a vermillion colour, as well in Winter as Summer, and on each side two small dimples easily to be discern'd in their moving upwards, which *look like a kind of constant smile*."[10] Finally, Heinrich Heine's nineteenth-century poem "Ein Weib" quoted in the epigraph is purposefully structured to revolve around the heroine's laughter—erotic, misleading, and cruel.[11] Used as a slightly modified refrain ("she did X and laughed"), it paints the woman as a merciless, cold-hearted, and sexualized *femme fatale* and the man as a love-smitten victim, deserving the audience's compassion, even though both characters are initially presented in very dubious terms.[12]

Our own emancipated postmodern culture may look infinitely unlike the one that required women to be completely stiff, hide their hands under their cloaks, and keep their body concealed at all times; yet under the surface the old stereotypes, clichés, and metaphors remain very much alive. Modern prescriptive literature proves strikingly akin to its predecessors. Until not long ago, Emily Post's etiquette manuals consistently discouraged young women from talking or laughing "loud enough to attract attention" and from "forc[ing] [one]self to laugh."[13] Laughter was also said to be symptomatic of a young daughter's rebellion against parental authority. As Post advises, "Exclaim, 'How shocking!' and a modern girl laughs. Tell her she is outrageous, and she is delighted."[14] It is the pervasiveness of the patriarchal prejudice against women's laughter that allowed Hélène Cixous to appropriate and simultaneously subvert the old motifs in her seminal 1975 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" in order to topple the male-created myths that continue to dominate modern culture. Using the notorious Freudian image of Medusa's head with its sexualized gaping mouth to celebrate feminine writing, body, and sexuality, Cixous proclaimed it to be not horrible, but beautiful and laughing.[15] However, as the American humorist and feminist writer Regina Barreca shows, the connection between sexuality and laughter continues to operate in American culture, relying on the familiar assumptions

10 Dunton, *The Ladies Dictionary*, 364 f. My emphasis.

11 Heine, "Ein Weib" in Heine, *Gesammelte Werke*, 1:457.

12 "Spitzbübin war sie, er war ein Dieb" ("She was a tramp, he was a thief," v. 2). In yet another poem by Heine, a suffering knight is seduced by a water nymph who "kissed him with a laughing mouth": "Der König stöhnt und schluchzt und weint / Alsdann aus Herzensgrunde. / Schnell beugt sich hinab die Wasserfee / Und küßt ihn mit lachendem Munde." Heinrich Heine, "König Harald Harfagar," in Heine, *Gesammelte Werke*, 1:478.

13 Post, *Etiquette*, 147.

14 Post, *Etiquette*, 170. Even in men's case, Post's advice sounds strikingly familiar: "Exhibitions of anger, fear, hatred, embarrassment, ardor or hilarity are all bad form in public." Post, *Etiquette*, 588.

15 Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 255.

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about gender, sexual modesty, and social class:[16] “Bad girls tell jokes, laugh loudly, and don’t cross their legs. Good girls smile appreciatively at the jokes of their boyfriends or husbands. […] They keep their mouths—and their legs—discreetly closed.”[17] The late-twentieth- and twenty-first-century culture is keenly aware of the erotic potential of laughter and smiling. A smile is still used as a gift or bait, a negotiating technique, the first step towards communication, and a promise of reciprocity. The rhetoric may have changed, yet the premise remains the same. Charlotte Ford’s *21st-Century Etiquette* claims that women who smile “have better marriages,” are “more likely to be more mentally focused and achieve an overall sense of joy throughout their lives.”[18] The same cliché hides behind the cold, inaccessible, and permanently frowning looks of today’s supermodels; the style of makeup that draws attention away from their mouths by accentuating their eyes, and the frown itself as the exact opposite of a welcoming and seductive smile, make their abnormally thin, androgynous bodies appear even more surreal and alien. The eroticism of laughter and smiling also informs expert advice that offers practical tips on how to fake a smile:

> What’s in a smile? For one thing, a smile is the backbone of the advertising industry. […] A good many women whose radiant smiles have won them success as models have had to learn how to smile convincingly to be attractive and heart warming.[19]

> There’s a time for fake smiles, too, like on the phone with a new flame. It’s an old salesman’s trick. When the face is smiling, the voice sounds more relaxed. In any circumstance, smiling is easier if you use the beauty pageant ploy of applying Vaseline to the teeth.[20]

However remote and unrelated medieval heroines may appear to twenty-first-century concerns, the symbolism and stereotypes they rely upon and, consequently, the questions they raise about gender, sexuality, and power endure. The pre-modern texts analyzed in this book are part of a far larger cultural

16 See Barreca: “The slightly corrupt ‘vocational school’ girls did joke with the boys, however, and came to a bad end. Their ability to joke was seen as evidence of both their sexual awareness and their lack of femininity. […] The girls with scary hairdos, black leather jackets, heavy eye makeup, and spiked heels (or low, pointed leather boots) chewed gum and laughed with their heads thrown back.” Barreca, *They Used to Call Me Snow White*, 6.

17 Perfetti, *Women and Laughter*, 10. A similar sentiment is expressed by Susan Jane Gilman in her subversive 2001 advice manual. Speaking of the liberated women she interviewed, whom she calls “progressive *prima donnas,*” Gilman points out their one shared characteristic: “They each had a big, fresh mouth and a laugh that could peel paint off the wall.” Gilman, *Kiss My Tiara*, xiv.

18 Ford and De Montravel, *21st-Century Etiquette*, 31.

19 Stark, *Beautysmarts*, 159.

20 Rowley and Rosenzweig, *Swell*, 109. Also see Peggy Borgmann’s observation that laughter “should not simply occur by chance and windfall; [but] can and should occur by design.” Borgman, *Four Seasons*, 127.

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debate on emotions, femininity, and virtue. They do not merely tell us about their world, but also have the ability to bring to light contradictions within our own modern culture. They reveal that we share the same intellectual tradition that goes back to the time of early Christianity, classical antiquity, and the Old Testament and is based on the connection between laughter, society, and the physical body.

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Appendices

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1 Tables

Table 1: References to Laughter in Medieval Works.

← PRIOR TO 1100 C. E. →	1100 C. E. →
LAUGHTER IN RELIGIOUS WORKS	
Fathers of the Church (3rd – 4th c.) Gregory the Great (d. ca. 604) Benedict of Aniane (d. 821) *Regula magistri* (6th c.) Benedictine Rule (popular by 9th c.)	Bernard de Clairvaux (1090 – 1153) Hildegard von Bingen's *Causae et curae* (1151 – 1158) Degrees against Carnival in Paris (1199) Hugh of St. Victor (1096 – 1141) *Marienleben* (1172) John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* (1154) *Die Nonnenregel* (12th c.)
LAUGHTER IN CONDUCT AND COURTESY TEXTS	
	The Trotula Ensemble (12th c.)
LAUGHTER IN COURTLY POETRY	
	early Minnesang poetry of *Des Minnesangs Frühling* Hartmann von Aue, *Erec* (ca. 1180 – 1185)
LAUGHTER IN MEDIEVAL SCULPTURE (THE VIRGIN PARABLE)	
	St. Gallus Gate, Basel (ca. 1180)

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← 1200 C. E. →	1300 C. E. →
LAUGHTER IN RELIGIOUS WORKS	
Berthold von Regensburg (1210 – 1272) Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274) Mechthild von Magdeburg's *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit* (Books I – IV, 1250) *Vom Jüngsten Tage* (1270 – 1280) *Ludus de decem virginibus* (late 13th c.)	*Cursor mundi* (c. 1300)
LAUGHTER IN CONDUCT AND COURTESY TEXTS	
Winsbecke/Winsbeckin (1210/1220) *La clef d'amour* (ca. 1280) Thomasin von Zerclaere's *Der Welsche Gast* (1215/1216) Hugo of Trimberg *Der Renner* (ca. 1300) Freidank's *Bescheidenheit* (ca. 1230) Robert de Blois' *Chastoiement des dames* (ca. 1226)	Marquard vom Stein's, *Der Ritter vom Turn* (mid-15th c.)
LAUGHTER IN COURTLY POETRY	
Walther von der Vogelweide (ca. 1170–d. ca. 1230) Tannhäuser (ca.1225–after 1260) Reinmar der Alte (1160/1165–ca. 1210) Heinrich von Morungen (wrote since 1180) Neidhart von Reuental (beg. ca. 1210–d. 1245) *Post-classical Minnesang (KLD)(1225ff)* Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* (ca. 1210) Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst* (ca. 1250) and *Frauenbuch* (1257)	Oswald von Wolkenstein (b. 1377) *Vom rothen munde* (15th c.) Der Teichner (late 14th c.)
LAUGHTER IN MEDIEVAL ART (THE VIRGIN PARABLE)	
Laon (ca. 1200) Freiburg (ca. 1285 – 1300) Amiens (1230) Hamburg (1300) Chartres (1212 – 1220) Basel Minster (1290 – 1300) Paderborn (ca. 1280) Strassburg (1280 – 1290) Magdeburg *Paradiesvorhalle* (1240 – 1260)	Erfurt (1330 – 1350) Lübeck (1400) Bern (1475)

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2 Images

Figure 1: The wise and foolish virgins, South Portal, West Façade, Strassburg. Courtesy of the author.

Figure 2: Christ leading the wise virgins, South Portal, West Façade, Strassburg. Courtesy of the author.

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Figure 3: Two wise virgins of Strassburg. Courtesy of the author.

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Figure 4: The Prince of the World and the foolish virgins, South Portal, West Façade, Strassburg. Courtesy of the author.

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Figure 5: The Prince of the World (the Seducer), with a view of the back, Strassburg. Courtesy of the author.

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Figure 6: The Seducer and a foolish virgin, Strassburg. Courtesy of the author.

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Figure 7: A foolish virgin, fragment of a portal (archivolt figure, 13th c.). From the former abbey church of Saint-Sauveur cloister, Vienne (Isère), France. Courtesy of Foto Marburg / Art Resource, NY.

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Figure 8: Christ and the wise virgins, Strassburg. Courtesy of the author.

Figure 9: Close-up view of Christ, Strassburg. Courtesy of the author.

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Figure 10: The second and third wise virgins of Strassburg, close-up. Courtesy of the author.

Figure 11: The wise virgins, Paradise Porch (*Paradiesvorhalle*), St. Mauricius Cathedral, Magdeburg. Courtesy of Eric Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

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Figure 12: Two foolish virgins, Magdeburg. Courtesy of the author.

Figure 13: Close-up of a foolish virgin, Magdeburg. Courtesy of the author.

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Figure 14: The Annunciation pair: Archangel Gabriel, Magdeburg. Courtesy of the author.

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Figure 15: The Annunciation pair: Virgin Mary, Magdeburg. Courtesy of the author.

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Figure 16: St. Catherine, Magdeburg. Courtesy of the author.

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Figure 17: St. Maurice, Magdeburg. Courtesy of the author.

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Figure 18: A wise virgin, Freiburg im Breisgau. Courtesy of the author.

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