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The Representation of Emotion and Dispute in Middle High German Heroic Epic

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor Philosophiae
Centre for Medieval Studies
University of Toronto

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Abstract
This thesis approaches the depiction of conflict and emotion in Middle High German heroic epic from an anthropological perspective, thereby establishing the norms and practices that obtain within the fictive societies the texts present. I argue that these epic narratives problematize the anxieties of medieval aristocratic society, critique those human elements deemed most disruptive to it, and establish positive and negative models for its ordering through variations upon a traditional progression of conflict and through the representation of communicative emotion within this progression.

Across many texts, medieval German heroic epics present a remarkably consistent set of practices and behaviour associated with conflict. With recourse to medieval law codes and anthropological observations of societies lacking effective centralized authority, I demonstrate that these practices provide the texts with a flexible narrative structure and are a framework for engaging with social and political concerns. In chapter one, I begin with a consideration of the role played by displays of emotion as symbolic communication within heroic narrative, demonstrating that such displays are a primary means by which status and identity is expressed and established. In chapter two, I contextualize these displays within a semi-standardized
progression of conflict comprising more-or-less discrete stages of dispute. In so doing, I show that the communicative content and performative valence of emotion is dependent upon its position within the conflict progression. In the third chapter, I establish these disputes as the expression of an economy of symbolic capital with honour as its essential currency. Approaching these strategic performances in such a manner reveals that the dispute practices previously outlined function as a form of status competition in which the negotiation and valuation of honour serves to establish and consolidate social hierarchies. The final chapters are devoted to the varied communicative valences of specific emotion displays in this context. Here, I demonstrate that public displays of grief are utilized to delineate and confirm membership within the honour group, even as they broadcast collective injury, solicit aid, and legitimize violence. Public anger, on the other hand, serves to make or refute status claims, threatening or accompanying reactive violence.
Acknowledgments

The present work would not have been possible without the contributions and sacrifices of many, to whom I owe both gratitude and apologies. It is for those who are here now, and those now absent.
# Table of Contents

«

Acknowledgments iv

Table of Contents v

Introduction 1

  Methodology 3
  The Sources 7
  Structure of the Work 13

1. Emotion 17

  1.1. The Beginnings of a Framework 17
  1.2. Rules and Rituals 23
  1.3. Performative Theory 26
  1.4. Spontaneity and Staging, Inner Feeling and Outer Affect 32
  1.5. Supplemental Methodologies 38
  1.6. Applications: Getting at Emotions in Medieval Literature 41
  1.7. Conclusion 49

2. Honour 53

  2.1. Shame and Guilt, Honour and Dignity 54
  2.2. The Composition of Honour 56
  2.3. Shame and the Vulnerability of Honour 61
  2.4. The Honour Cultures of Medieval Europe 65
  2.5. Honour and Practice 67
  2.6. Honour Culture in Middle High German Epic 70
  2.7. Ære 72
  2.8. Ære and Gender 75
  2.9. Ære and triuwe 80
  2.10. Ære and Status 84
  2.11. Ære and lip 89
  2.12. Gain and Loss 93
  2.13. The Precariousness of Honour in Middle High German Heroic Epic 96
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.14.</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Patterns of Vindicatory Violence</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.</td>
<td>Modeling the Feud</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.</td>
<td>Feud and Medieval Europe</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.</td>
<td>Otto Brunner and the Sonderweg of Feud Studies</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.</td>
<td>Developments in the Study of Medieval European Feud</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.</td>
<td>Feud and “Vindicatory Violence”</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.</td>
<td>Vengeance</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.</td>
<td>Feud Practice in Middle High German Heroic Epic</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.</td>
<td>Truce and Peace, Settlement and Reconciliation</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9.</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Grief</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.</td>
<td>The Ruler’s Grief and the Broadcast of Collective Injury in Kudrun</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.</td>
<td>The Cause of Grief: leit</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.</td>
<td>The Manifestations of Grief</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.</td>
<td>The Functions of Grief</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.</td>
<td>Grief as Mark of Loyalty</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.</td>
<td>The Compulsive Power of Grief</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7.</td>
<td>Performed Grief as Social Inversion and Persuasive Force</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8.</td>
<td>Grief as Legitimization</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9.</td>
<td>Grief as the Precursor of Anger</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10.</td>
<td>Grief and Gender</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11.</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.</td>
<td>The Language and Appearance of Anger</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.</td>
<td>Reactive Anger</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.</td>
<td>Anger and (the Loss of) Control</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.</td>
<td>Anger and the Ruler</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.</td>
<td>Anger as Judgment</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6.</td>
<td>Collective Anger</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7.</td>
<td>Anger and Status</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8.</td>
<td>Gender and Anger</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.9. The Stilling of Anger 236
5.10. Conclusion 239

Conclusion 242
Putting the Pieces Together: Munleun Revisited 246
The Staging 248
Final Words 268

Works Cited 270
Primary 270
Secondary 273
Introduction

Consider Irmschart. Noble wife of the illustrious Heimrich of Narbonne, she is mother to a queen and seven sons beside. Invited to the palace at Munleun by her son-in-law, the king, she there witnesses an unexpected conflagration. The most famous of her offspring, the margrave Willehalm, arrives fresh from a defeat on the field of battle. Raging at the manner in which he has been received by his royal sister and her husband, Irmschart’s son flies at her daughter:

Vor al den vürsten daz geschach:
die krône er ir von dem houbte brach
und warf se, daz diu gar zebrast.
dô begref der zornebaere gast
bi den zöpfen die künegîn:
er wolt ir mit dem swerte sîn
daz houbt hân ab geswungen,
wan derzwischen kom gedrungen
ir beider muoter Irmenschart:
des wart ir leben dâ gespart.

(It happened before all the princes, he snatched the crown from her head and threw it such that it completely shattered. Then the angry guest grabbed the queen by her braids: he would have struck off her head with a swing of his sword, but that the mother of both, Irmschart, came between them: thus was her life spared. *Willehalm*, 147,15-24)\(^1\)

Yet despite her intervention and the murderous actions of her son, in the aftermath of the attack, it is with the Margrave that Irmschart sides. Grieving for the injury inflicted upon her son, it is Irmschart who establishes terms when the queen’s daughter Alize attempts a reconciliation:

> »wirt nû niht von ir geklaget

How are we to understand the power of such grief, that its absence might merit death by a sibling’s hand or the loss of honour in a mother’s eyes? What is its meaning?

The heroic poetry produced in German speaking lands during the Middle Ages is suffused by anger and grief. From the multitudinous tales of Dietrich von Bern’s unjust exile, to the manifold sufferings of captive Kudrun, and on up to the monumental Nibelungenlied which stands (upon a heap of corpses) as the tradition’s crowning achievement, bitter tears and burning rage are everywhere to be found. That a genre which famously grants its characters little, if any semblance of interiority should be so dominated by emotion is surely noteworthy. More significant still is the observation that these emotions play out under remarkably similar circumstances, to markedly similar effect, in a whole host of narratives. Time and again we find anger preceded by grief, and spectacles of individual weeping reciprocated by onlookers that occur prior to mobilization with the aim of collective vengeance. Why in Middle High German heroic epic do we repeatedly encounter the same sequence of emotions? Why these emotions, in this sequence? What do they signify, and what does it mean when a text departs from the expected progression?
In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to contextualize the emotions attributed to the characters of Middle High German epic against a set of practices, customs, values, and narrative conventions which obtain across a large number of thematically and generically related contemporary texts. This is indeed possible, for much of Medieval German heroic poetry presents a remarkably consistent set of practices and behaviour regarding conflict and communication. As will be seen, these processes of dispute bear considerable resemblance both to the practices of “self-help” attested in medieval law codes and chronicles, and to the feud practices observed by anthropologists in numerous ancient and contemporary societies lacking effective centralized authority.

In what follows, it will be demonstrated that the narration of conflict in heroic epic follows a semi-standardized progression comprising more-or-less discrete stages beginning with the perception of injury, the promulgation of a public complaint, the collective legitimization of violence, the enactment of vengeance, and, finally, reconciliation. This, in turn, is dependent on the function of honour within medieval society, and in particular to the role symbolic capital plays in the ordering of that society through customary practices of status competition and the establishment of collective identities. In heroic epic, the customary schema of conflict established on the basis of feud practice is contextualized within an economy of honour as a manifestation of continuous status competition.

Methodology

Methodologically, this study is built upon the application of anthropological models to the fictive societies of Middle High German epic, resulting in close readings which ultimately serve to illuminate the function and communicative value of the emotions displayed within key sequences. In looking toward anthropology for solutions to literary problems, the aim is to
establish the structures underpinning interactions between individuals as well as the societies they occupy within heroic epic. As the norms, values, and expectations of these fictive societies become increasingly visible, so too do the anxieties of their creators. These anxieties manifest as disruptive elements within the customary processes of status competition and hierarchical structuring upon which right order depends.

Such a methodology is, of course, of not entirely novel. The idea of approaching medieval customs as a set of rules for actors to follow, as guidelines of custom and behaviour, is, of course, far from new. The notion that such rules are discernible in the records of rituals, of public performance, and indeed, of emotional display, and that being able to recognize and delineate these rules may render the behaviour of medieval people intelligible to the modern scholar has, for example, been the defining element of the historian Gerd Althoff’s much-celebrated career, to say nothing of the scores of scholars who have benefitted from his publications. Amongst these latter must be counted a considerable number of literary scholars.

For many of these scholars, and particularly for the significant subset who have focused their attentions on the emotions, Althoff’s work in teasing out the Spielregeln (rules of the game) of medieval society has served as a basis for the application of performative theory. Although the present study does not hew precisely to the outlines of “speech acts” as developed by J. L. Austin, which underlie performative theory, nor does it closely follow the adaptations developed for broader application to medieval German literature by Kathryn Starkey and Elaine C. Tennant, it shares with these last the aim of establishing what, precisely, constitutes good custom within and across the narratives in consideration for the purpose of determining where and why characters deviate therefrom, and to what effect.²

² J. L. Austin, How to Do Things with Words, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Kathryn Starkey, “Brunhild’s Smile: Emotion and the Politics of Gender in the Nibelungenlied” in
This study will attempt to distil these rules of interaction dispute practice back to their foundational elements. Where it differs from previous studies is first, in the range of texts that it draws on. Rather than focusing on a single narrative in the fashion of Jan-Dirk Müller’s *Spielregeln für den Untergang* (translated as: *Rules for the Endgame*), to which the present study is much indebted, my focus from the outset is more general, and to this end I shall draw on many thematically connected narratives of the high medieval period, specifically drawn from the heroic tradition alongside closely related material.\(^3\) Second, my focus lies not upon a specific emotion, as has been the case for a number of excellent recent publications, but focuses much more specifically upon the communicative role played by the display, not the psychological experience, of specific emotions in sequence, and within a particular context.\(^4\) The norms and practices which form the context for the analysis of the latter chapters is drawn both from attempts to construct an anthropology internal to the texts, in the manner of Müller, but also

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through the application of anthropological models and theories developed in reference to observations both medieval and modern.\(^5\)

The goal, ultimately, is to explain the communicative valences and content of emotion displays by contextualizing them within specific traditions of conflict practice and representation that speak to the foundational elements of medieval society.

The Middle High German narratives here under discussion deal with profound social and political disruption: they are consequently deeply concerned with the establishment, disintegration, and reestablishment of social order. It is thus striking, that even when the action unfolds on the grandest of scales, as in the destruction of an entire people (as in the \textit{Nibelungenlied}), a divisive civil war (\textit{Herzog Ernst B}), or the clash of religions (\textit{Willehalm}), conflict is presented as a fundamentally personal affair. Here, personal relationships are understood to be the fundamental element of social order, and these in turn hinge on the establishment of hierarchy and social status through the medium of honour. The process of this establishment is continuous and tumultuous, and it lies at the root of all conflict. While physical violence plays a frequent and significant role in these texts, it is embodied emotion that functions as the primary means through which dispute is staged and status established or (re-)negotiated.

These elements are deeply interconnected, and cannot be neatly delineated. The representation of emotions and the communicative value of emotions cannot be dealt with in isolation. Likewise, the examination of honour as a principle of identity, of self-worth, and as a means of ordering society through the establishment of a social and political hierarchy, loses a great deal if we do not examine it in conjunction with the processes and practices, particularly those centered on conflict and violence, that it engenders.

The Sources

The selection of texts here under consideration may at first seem somewhat arbitrary. Most fall outside the boundaries of what is commonly termed Courtly Romance, and many within the restrictions of the genre known as Heroic Epic. Although arguably not without medieval precedent, the designation of particular texts as “heroic” or “courtly” is fundamentally a modern convention.

The collections of heroic tales known as Heldenbücher seem, with one known exception (the fragmentary Berlin-Wolfenbütteler Heldenbuch, thought to date from the first half of the fourteenth century), to have been an extremely late-medieval or early-modern phenomena. While these collections may at first suggest an awareness, even if one attested some period after the time of the narratives’ composition, of a distinctive “heroic” genre, the most significant examples do not bear this out. The classic example of the form, and the oldest known after the Berlin-Wolfenbütteler example, is the Dresdner Heldenbuch of 1472. This indeed has at its core typically heroic epics, most drawn from the Dietrich-cycle: Ortnit, Wolfdietrich, Eckenlied, Laurin, and Virginal, but to these have been appended two texts which fall outside the usual conventions of the genre: Meerwunder and, significantly for this study, Herzog Ernst. The Straßburger Heldenbuch of 1476 likewise includes Wolfdietrich, Rosengarten and Ortnit, but
also *Salman und Morolf* – this last is more commonly classed as one of the *Spielmannsepen* or as a Bridal Quest epic than a product of the heroic tradition. Finally, the so-called *Ambraser Heldenbuch*, amongst the single most important repositories of medieval German narrative poetry, is seldom accounted a “true” *Heldenbuch* at all.\(^6\) While this remarkable collection contains *Dietrichs Flucht, Rabenschlacht, Nibelungenlied, Klage*, and *Ortnit*, as well as the only surviving manuscripts of *Kudrun, Biterolf*, and *Wolfdietrich A*, the inclusion of a significant number of courtly texts (Hartmann von Aue’s *Iwein* and *Erec* amongst them) is thought to disqualify the compilation as a genuine example of the type.

What is more, the narratives themselves frequently defy categorization. The *Nibelungenlied* itself, standing, but for the Old High German *Hildebrandslied* fragment, at the start of the surviving “heroic” tradition, displays considerable courtly influence.\(^7\) Over the course of the thirteenth century, as more and more vernacular narratives were recorded (whether composed or codified through writing), such *Gattungsinterferenzen*, to use Sonja Kerth’s term, only intensified.\(^8\) Long before the assembly of the *Heldenbücher*, and centuries still before the divisions established by modern scholars took hold, the borders between the narratives and genres inhabited by Dietrich, Arthur, Charlemagne, and Eneas seem to have been extraordinarily permeable.


\(^7\) The contrast between the courtly and heroic genres and their respective values is, of course, not the only means of engaging with the generic and ethical dynamics of the *Nibelungenlied*. Edward R. Haymes, for instance, has argued that the terms “aristocratic” and “chivalric” may be more productive than “courtly” for our understanding of the poem’s literary and ethical conventions. Edward R. Haymes, “Heroic, Chivalric, and Aristocratic Ethos in the *Nibelungenlied*” in *A Companion to the Nibelungenlied*, ed. Winder McConnell (Rochester: Camden House, 1998), 96-8.

Despite this, the convention of the heroic genre persists. In general terms, it might be suggested that heroic poetry concerns itself with war, rather than love. Massed combat is favoured over the duel, and the fate of groups, peoples, or societies is of greater concern than that of individuals. In the heroic epic we look toward the anonymous product of an oral tradition, where in Romance one seeks the genius of a named author. Where authorities are cited, it is oral authority, rather than the French books of courtly romance; it is the old tales cited at the opening of the *Nibelungenlied*: “Uns ist in alten mären wunders vil geseit.”\(^9\) The heroic epic speaks of honour and loyalty, expressed through martial prowess. These are important qualities for the courtly romance as well, yet in the latter form they are more substantially internalized. The hero of romance must triumph spiritually, where the heroic protagonist seeks renown and external validation. In many cases, the material from which their narratives are crafted originates at least in part in the history or the tales of the migration period and its immediate aftermath: wanderings across the North Sea, the rise and fall of Theoderic the Great, the destruction of the Burgundian tribe on the banks of the Rhine. To this group belong the *Nibelungenlied*, the Dietrich epics (including, most prominently, the so-called historical epics of *Dietrichs Flucht*, *Alpharts Tod*, and *Rabenschlacht*), and *Kudrun*. Finally, we expect the heroic to keep its feet on the ground. Warfare and conflict hew close to reality, although fantasy may at times intrude. Romance, on the other hand, wanders freely outside the bounds of the world we know.

The difficulty of finding the precise inspiration for *Herzog Ernst*, and the confusion of events and characters evident in the *Nibelungenlied* and, to a lesser extent, in the Dietrich epics, is significant. However much frustration it may have generated amongst scholars eager to trace a

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\(^9\) In old tales, many wonders are told to us. *Das Nibelungenlied* (hereafter NL), 1.1. Unless otherwise noted, NL citations are from *Das Nibelungenlied*, ed. Karl Bartsch and Helmut de Boor (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003).
more or less linear genealogy of the narratives, it is precisely the fuzzy nature of these narratives which renders their content so potent. Plausibility and familiarity hang heavy upon them.

When following these more general conventions, and used in reference to narratives which favour one approach over another, rather than imagining the narratives bound by hard and fast generic rules, the term “heroic” retains a deal of utility, and it is in this sense that it shall be employed throughout this work and in reference to the narratives under discussion. The overriding principle of text selection has been to focus on those texts most concerned with the establishment, maintenance, and/or disruption of social order, as opposed to the integration of the individual into an existing order. An additional emphasis has been to emphasize texts concerned primarily with earthly aims, rather than spiritual ones. As a result, privileging this world over the next, a semblance of reality over fantasy, and, most importantly, an emphasis on group action over those of the individual, I have elected to include several texts outside the established canon of the heroic, which rather reside on the boundaries of the genre. The twelfth-century Bridal Quest Epic König Rother is an example of this. Despite the fact that this narrative is more commonly grouped with other “bridal quest” narratives such as Orendel, Oswald, and Salman und Morolf as a distinct genre, König Rother overlaps in significant ways with the “heroic” narratives already mentioned. That the titular protagonist styles himself “Dietrich” during his travels in the East is in and of itself worthy of mention, yet more significant than this is the considerable resemblance between the longest portion of the narrative, during which Rother and his men conspire, disguised, at the court of their enemy to steal away the antagonist’s daughter, and the middle portion of the Kudrun poem. The names, events, and characters of both poems are further united by their inclusion in the later Yiddish narrative Dukus Horant, yet also stand amongst the oldest attested of all Germanic tales. This is to say nothing of the considerable role played by the bridal-quest framework within the Nibelungenlied itself.
Of greater prominence within the present study, and indeed forming the backbone of numerous arguments is the narrative Herzog Ernst B. The poem combines elements of chanson de geste, crusade epic, and the Orientalism of the Alexander tales. For our purposes, it is the Reichsteil of the poem, that portion of the narrative taking place within the medieval German empire which bookends the protagonist’s travels through the East, which is of principal concern. Notably, it is this portion of the tale that also bears the greatest resemblance to the chansons de geste.

Wolfram von Eschenbach’s Willehalm presents itself as even more of an outlier. Not only is the text the product of a known author, who even names himself within the text, it is also an adaptation of a French narrative, namely, the chanson known as Aliscans, drawn from the saga of Guillaume d’Orange. Yet here, too, the selection has not been arbitrary. The chansons themselves share many key features with the heroic epics of the German speaking lands, particularly in their depiction of agonistic interaction and the customary practices through which conflicts are resolved. So too do they share an emphasis on massed combat rather than the duel, and largely eschew the fantastic in favour of a qualified realism. The poet himself seems keen to differentiate this work from the courtly tale of Parzival, writing:

swâ man sluoc od stach,  
swaz ich è dâ von gesprach,  
daz wart náher wol gelendet,  
denne mit dem tôde gendet:  
diz engiltet niht wan sterben  
und an vreuden verderben.  
man nam dâ wênic sicherheit,  
swer den andern überstreit,  
den man doch tiure het erlöst.  
diz was ze bêder site ir trôst:  
niht wan manlîchiu wer.  
(Whatever striking or stabbing I spoke of before, that turned out better than to end with death: here, this is paid for not otherwise than by dying and the destruction of joy. Man received little safety there, when one
overcame another whom riches might have ransomed. On both sides, there was no help save manly defense. *Willehalm*, 10,21-11,1)

It is for similar reasons that reference is also made to the *chanson*-derived *Rolandslied*, as composed by Pfaffe Konrad.

A final text, the *Eneasroman* of Heinrich von Veldeke, may also require some justification. Not infrequently categorized as a pre-courtly epic or even as the first German language romance, the Middle High German narrative as it survives may be traced back first through a (possible) Middle Dutch original, which in turn was derived from an Old French rendition ultimately reliant on Vergil’s *Aeneid*. Yet despite these decidedly non-German origins and the pronounced emphasis on *minne*, this poem too displays many of the characteristics cited above. While in some instances these are traceable to the themes of the *Aeneid* itself, in others, they seem to have arisen more recently. Although the development of the love theme is a notable new introduction to the German speaking realm, the epic characteristics both of its classical ancestor and of its own age, far from being overcome or erased by the still nascent courtly culture, still dominate a considerable portion of the narrative. In any event, we may observe with some certainty that both the tale itself and the mechanisms of conflict resolution, together with all the values they entail, were clearly of considerable interest to the same late-twelfth and early-thirteenth century audiences that so eagerly embraced the *Nibelungenlied*.

All of the narratives mentioned display an abiding interest in the representation and resolution of social and political disruption on a grand scale. The represent fully formed (aristocratic) societies whose inner workings and conventions are perceptible. Informed by, but not identical to historical practice, they are a space of play in which values become systems of interaction and systems of interaction become experimental models.
This said, it must be confessed that there is much that will not be covered in the study at hand. Although the texts under discussion range widely, the tally of those Middle High German narratives furnishing material of relevance is more expansive still. Overtly courtly texts, with their focus on the individual, their pronounced interest in spiritual development, and their occasional gestures towards a nascent interiority, have largely been eschewed. A comparison between the heroic and the courtly in their representation of emotion display and conflict, including an attempt to trace both elements of continuity and departure, might indeed prove profitable. Unfortunately, the constraints of the present work, already stretched near to breaking, are such that a broader study must wait.

Structure of the Work

This study is organized thematically across five chapters. Chapter one addresses emotion as symbolic communication within the medieval court and within medieval literature. It argues that the representation of emotion in medieval literature must be understood as communicative above all, directed either exclusively at the external, listening or reading audience of the narrative, or directly simultaneously at both an internal, fictive audience described as witnessing the display and at the external audience. This latter, in which emotion serves as a form of bidirectional communication, speaking at once to the imagined observers and to the living audience of the poem, is the default form within the heroic narrative poetry here under consideration. As will later be seen, the symbolic content of emotion display takes on enormous significance within the conflict narratives of Middle High German epic, as here we find all conflict is understood fundamentally to exist as interpersonal conflict. Much of the most significant communication
between individuals occurs on the symbolic plane, with perceptible and above all visual displays of emotion shouldering the bulk of the weight in this regard.

Chapter two draws on anthropological research and theory to establish honour, Middle High German ère, as the foundational element of valuation within the fictive culture of heroic narrative. This applies equally to the individual and the group, as well as to the self and to others. Honour is here understood as a form of symbolic capital, but it is also more than this. Honour is system and process, it regulates interaction and behaviour as it creates perceived value, operating simultaneously across a number of intersecting and overlapping planes of individual and collective identity, including gender, economic standing, family, and political office. Perhaps most importantly, it serves to generate, regulate, and necessitate processes of dispute and competition. These processes are continuous and, although occasionally disruptive and tumultuous, ultimately serve to create a structure hierarchy of social bonds and political authority.

Chapter three examines the manner in which conflict and dispute are conceptualized and narrated within the heroic honour culture outlined in the previous chapter. It both demonstrates the manner in which honour necessitates the practice of seeking redress for perceived injury and exposes a semi-standardized progression of conflict practice employed and narrativized with significant consistency throughout the many epic narratives here under discussion. This progression is linked not only to the representation of conflict in Middle High German heroic poetry itself, but is also informed by anthropological models developed through the observation of societies both historical and contemporary that, like the societies of heroic poetry and of the medieval German empire, lack an effective centralized authority laying claim to a monopoly on the use of violence. The actions of the characters engaged or seeking to engage in conflict in Middle High German epic derive from a traditional repertoire of available options, the weight
and significance of which is situationally determined according to its contextualization within roughly delineated stages regulating the practice according to which redress is sought.

Chapters four and five look at the specific functions and communicative valences of emotion display within the social and narrative structures established by the preceding chapters. Public anger, on the other hand, serves to make or refute claims of status and superiority, it threatens, accompanies, and explains violence as reactive judgment and punishment.

Chapter four discusses grief. Expressions of grief within these narratives are in many ways more complex, and function in a greater number of ways than any other emotion. Displays of grief at times indicate conditions of social disorder or personal injury, yet also have the power to serve to serve as a cohesive force, establishing, reinforcing or simply confirming the social ties which bind one individual to another or a society to its ruler. Grief appears as both question and answer, demanding or coercing an expected or desired response from its audience, and in this way may grant or deny legitimization to subsequent action. It is through the public display of tears that aid is sought, allegiance confirmed, and violence legitimized grief is understood as the precursor and the response to anger and to its violent actualization.

Finally, chapter five examines Anger and its varied manifestations. The expression of anger and of angry action as judgment will form an important theme, especially in relationship to the exercise of just or unjust lordship. Beyond this, the use of anger as threat, the symbiosis of this particular emotion with violent action and the fulfillment of anger in the act of vengeance will also be discussed.

Collectively, these chapters cover the core elements employed by heroic poetry in the construction of narrative thought experiments. Through variations on the traditional progression of conflict and the representation of communicative emotion within it, epic narratives problematize the anxieties of medieval aristocratic society, critique those human elements
deemed most disruptive to the social fabric, and establish positive and negative models for the proper ordering of society.
1. Emotion

How is one to engage with emotion in epic? We may begin by seeking broad similarities between texts to provide guidelines for the interpretation of the appropriateness and significance of emotional display within a given context. Understood in this light, we may observe that emotional displays manifest the relationship between the individual and the events that surround them. What follows will attempt to construct a methodology for evaluating the role and function of emotion in the narrative of conflict in medieval epic and to establish a means by which that function may be evaluated according to context and the contemporary norms of narrative and social convention.

The manifestation of emotion is informed by narrative function within an established context of honour/status negotiation and dispute practice. It is the communicative function of emotion that is primary, and the visual representation of emotion, whether intentionally or unintentionally manifested, consequently holds enormous symbolic value.

1.1. The Beginnings of a Framework

The beginnings of a means to establish a framework for the understanding of emotion display and representation within heroic narrative may be found by looking to the work of historian Stephen D. White. Working outside the field of Medieval German literature White has remarked on the tendency of French medieval writers to ascribe emotion according to the appropriateness of a given emotion for a given situation, a practice which also allowed for the expression of
criticism for a given individual or a given action through ascribing an inappropriate emotion.\(^\text{10}\)

Effectively, in reading the emotions attributed to a given figure, the audience must begin not by looking within the figure in search of motivation, but rather with an examination of the context in which the emotion is said to manifest.

White notes further that similar patterns are to be found both in “historical” chronicles and in literary narratives. These observations led to the development of an idealized schema for the narration of feud and dispute amongst the French nobility during the twelfth century. In this schema, attributed emotion, as much as action, is the organizing principle. In its rough outlines, the schema is as follows: First, when a noble enjoys success and gains honour, he displays joy. Second, with a loss of honour, as through insult or injury, the noble experiences shame and displays signs of grief or anger. Third, the aggrieved party seeks assistance in avenging the wrong done to him, and in so doing appeals to a superior, utilizing a display of grief calculated to arouse anger at the wrong done. Fourth, the aggrieved party manifests his anger through violence directed at the one who has wronged him. Finally, with the injury avenged or a settlement between the opposing parties having been reached, the display of anger ceases and is replaced by one of love and joy.\(^\text{11}\)

In its broad strokes, much the same pattern is observable throughout the heroic corpus of Middle High German literature, though variations naturally abound. This core framework suggests the existence of cultural conventions which govern the progression of conflict narratives, and which guide or restrict the actions of the characters within them. Establishing the nature of such a framework, the values which inform it, the strictures which it places on action

\(^{10}\) Stephen D. White, “The Politics of Anger,” 137.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 142-4.
and reaction, the patterns to which it conforms, is essential to the understanding of those signs which appear within it: the representations of emotions.

Although White considers the heroic literary narratives known as *chansons de geste* carefully, his primary focus is on historical practice. Explicitly literary accounts of disputes are utilized to fill in the gaps of ostensibly historical (though still inescapably literary) accounts in order to come closer to medieval practice and conceptualization. Yet such attempts to establish conventions of dispute practice and narrative are also of considerable use when the focus is reversed, and the explication of the explicitly literary becomes the goal.

In its application to epic narrative, in which the underlying structure of the conflict narrative is apparent but the actions of the characters occasionally deviate from the traditional course, we may note with White that such a framework allows for a *range* of possible emotional display within a changing, evolving, and above all, flexible script of action. It positions the display of emotion within a set of semi-conventionalized negotiations and interactions, and allows for a limited, though extensive, range of possible interpretations.

Emotion, or rather, the representation of emotion, cannot be separated in our heroic, literary sources from its communicative function. In literature, even the most private of emotion is rendered public through its communication to the work’s audience. As such, distinction must be made between what is displayed, and to whom, within the narrative world under examination, but each expression of emotion must also be considered as more or less evaluative according to its narrative context. Establishing this context requires an understanding of the rules of interaction and underlying values which obtain within the text. We must seek to identify the customs, rules, and social systems of the society represented by the text, in short, to establish an anthropology of a fictive world.
In constructing such an anthropology of conflict within medieval narrative, we must, after the admonitions of Jan-Dirk Müller, be mindful of the fact that these tales are not direct representations of the present in which their authors and first audiences lived, but rather arise from the “alten mæren” – they are not merely fantastic, they are fictional representations of a distant past. Yet within the imagined past, the syntax of signs must remain intelligible – a fact which preserves not only the content of the sign, in this case, the representation of emotion, but also the systems of which it is part – the processes of honour and conflict. At the outset, two approaches present themselves as possibilities, which this study will do its best to harmonize. First, one may look exclusively within the texts, cataloguing what occurs, in what order, and, to the best of our ability, how it is evaluated or otherwise understood based on the related reactions of the intradiegetic audience and narrator. The second approach is to begin from the outside, to introduce anthropological models based on observations and records of real world interactions between humans to the text as a means of exposing underlying systems and social structures.

The former is central to the approach adopted by Jan-Dirk Müller in his seminal work Spielregeln für den Untergang. Müller argues that “Nibelungen society” must be investigated on its own terms, without reference to or dependence on the “reality” of the court, and with the text itself serving as an anthropological model of a fictional society:

Literarischen Texten sind, wie Texten auch sonst, mehr oder minder explizit anthropologische Modelle eingeschrieben. Diese Modelle sind nicht unabhängig von anderen, in andere Texte eingeschriebenen oder

12 Müller, Spielregeln, 203. Beyond even this, Katharina Philipowski argues that the manifestations of emotions themselves at times serve to distance the action and world of the narrative from that of its audience. As an example of this, she cites the tears of blood wept by Kriemhilt in the Nibelungenlied (1069), considering these less a reflection of any medieval conception of grief than a means of establishing the events depicted as fundamentally alien. Katharina Philipowski, Die Gestalt des Unsichtbaren: narrative Konzeptionen des Inneren in der höfischen Literatur (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 346-7.
praktisch gelebten Modellen der gleichen Kultur, doch empfiehlt es sich, die Frage nach der Beziehung zunächst einmal einzuklammern.  

As a result of this approach, Müller understands emotion in the *Nibelungenlied* to be situationally dependent: it arises not from an interaction between the external world and an internal self, but rather proceeds unmitigated from the situation itself.  

According to Müller’s views, characters exhibit emotions which are appropriate to their actions, rather than being motivated by a particular emotional state which compels them to action. As anger, *zorn*, best befits violent action, so do violent actions and the characters performing them become angry. Violence does not proceed from anger, but rather is inherently angry; the emotional state and the action are one and the same, and are both situationally dependent. For Müller, the tragic battle between Rüedeger and the Burgundians is the example *par excellence*, for here we find expressions of love, regret, and the reluctance to fight immediately followed by the information that the previously penitent and loving character has suddenly begun to rage. At least one of his opponents, Gernot, described as equally as conciliatory just moments before, does likewise. In Müller’s eyes, the statement that Gernot has just seen his friend slain at Rüedeger’s hand provides insufficient explanation for his anger, as Hagen stands close by, and witnesses the act without having any anger attributed to him. This curious configuration is the result of the fact that Hagen has sworn not to engage in the combat, and thus, in the absence of violent (angry) action, is attributed no anger.

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13 “Literary texts are, as texts more generally, more or less explicitly inscribed anthropological models. These models are not independent of other models, inscribed or practically experienced models of the same culture, yet it is advisable to at first set aside the question of the relationship between them.” Müller, *Spielregeln*, 202.


15 des muotes er erobete, (he fell into a rage, *NL* 2206,2).

16 Müller, *Spielregeln*, 205.
This hold true even in those instances where the attribute of emotion is decoupled from action, that is primarily, in those instances where the appropriate action is frustrated or eliminated as a possibility by the circumstance in which it occurs, one might expect something closer to our understanding of emotion to come to the fore, but the attribution of emotion remains primarily descriptive of the situation, as when Gernot is enraged by Hagen’s theft of the hoard, but takes no action in response, or when Giselher responds to Hagen’s attempted murder of the priest.¹⁷

Yet we must also note that emotion representations serve a greater function in the Nibelungenlied and its contemporaries, for the emotion is both reaction to and statement >about< the legal, political and social constellations at play in any given situation. Words like minne and haz have well known legal connotations, but virtually all emotion words in Middle High German epic take on this role. Depending on when and before whom a character grieves, tears may serve as a formal complaint, a confirmation of loyalty, an offer of aid, or a promise of vengeance. Likewise, anger is inseparable from judgment, and consequently may communicate righteousness, the severing of bonds, or a call for the renegotiation of a hierarchical relationship.

Our access to this important symbolic content and its communicative valences can be aided by looking beyond the individual text, or even beyond literature, contrary to Müller’s pragmatic hesitations. Similar characteristics of emotion display are present not only throughout the Middle High German corpus, but also, as observed by Stephen D. White, in the chansons de geste, where they frequently appear in remarkably similar narrative and social contexts. They are also recognizable in texts that purport to be more-or-less accurate representation of “what actually happened.”

¹⁷ NL 1132, 1576; Müller, Spielregeln, 206.
1.2. **Rules and Rituals**

As the semiotic value of emotions as signs is wholly dependent on the context against which they appear, any reading must engage holistically with the given sign and with the surrounding social and narrative environment in which it appears. Here, it is necessary to reach beyond the individual text, and indeed outside of what might commonly be termed literature altogether. In this, we may look to the plentiful research surrounding what has been broadly (and somewhat problematically) termed “ritual.” Through the examination of more or less scripted performances and the countless minor variations on traditional patterns of behaviour, scholars seek to establish the “rules” by which social and political interactions were expected to function within medieval society. Much of the scholarship that has appeared on this topic over the past few decades owes a great debt to the work of Gerd Althoff, who has striven to identify and delineate the unwritten conventions underpinning social and political interaction at the medieval court and rendering performance interpretable. For Althoff, actions and expressions of emotion

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18 The term is, of course, not unproblematic, and has been recognized as such from the beginning. Gerd Althoff himself has written: “Ich glaube nicht daran, daß eine exakte Abgrenzung von verwandten Phänomenen und Begriffen wie Ritus, Brauch, Zeremoniell, Gewohnheit, Habitus und noch einigen anderen wirklich gelingen kann. Und ich glaube auch nicht, daß sie wirklich nötig ist. Mir scheint vielmehr ein Bewußtsein für die fließenden Übergänge zwischen den genannten Begriffen und Sachen adäquater.” Gerd Althoff, “Die Veränderbarkeit der Ritualen im Mittelalter” in *Formen und Funktionen öffentlicher Kommunikation im Mittelalter*, ed. Gerd Althoff (Stuttgart: Jan Thorbecke, 2001), 158.

which strike the modern reader as spontaneous, even unrestrained and excessive, are rather to be
understood as carefully choreographed >rituals< which communicate important information
about the relative status and relationship between the actors according to broadly understood
norms and conventions.

Althoff’s understanding of courtly and royal Spielregeln, and most especially his
engagement with the representation of emotion, has encountered some criticism for supposedly
reducing the expression of emotion to a political function with a fixed and unchanging meaning
and for robbing emotion of any “inner meaning.”

Such criticisms have also been launched more generally at the application of the term
>ritual< in historical studies. As early as 2002, some prominent scholars were already intimating
that it may have outlived its usefulness, if indeed it ever possessed any. Philippe Buc, for
instance, has advanced criticism of historians (and above all of medievalists) and the manner in
which they have appropriated functionalist arguments from anthropologists and ethnologists and
applied them uncritically to their own studies. Yet despite frequent criticism to the contrary,

1 (2010): 1-21; with Christiane Witthöft: “Les services symboliques entre dignité et contrainte,” Annales 58, no. 6
(2003): 1293-1318. See above all the collection of papers published as Spielregeln der Politik im Mittelalter.
Kommunikation in Frieden und Fehde (Darmstadt: Primus, 1997).

20 Barbara Rosenwein, “Thinking Historically about Medieval Emotions,” History Compass 8 no. 8 (August, 2010):
828-842; 830. One of Rosenwein’s primary goals in advancing her conception of >emotional communities< is to
address the paradigm of fixed meaning in the expression of representation of emotion by delineating how these
representations varied chronologically and according to context.

Althoff’s interpretation and its far-reaching influence are also the subject and target of Peter Dinzelbacher’s over-
reaching critique Warum weint der König? Eine Kritik des mediävistischen Panritualismus (Badenweiler:
Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Bachmann, 2009). See also the brief overview provided by Hermann Kamp, “Die Macht
der Spielregeln in der mittelalterlichen Politik: Eine Einleitung” in Spielregeln der Mächtigen. Mittelalterliche
Politik zwischen Gewohnheit und Konvention, ed. Claudia Garnier and Hermann Kamp (Darmstadt:

21 Philippe Buc, The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory (Princeton:
Princeton University Press, 2002). For a compelling counter-argument, see Geoffrey Koziol, “The Dangers of
Althoff’s engagement with ritual does not argue for the attachment of fixed and unchanging meaning to specific acts or representations, but, quite the contrary, may help to illuminate the manner in which the “meaning” of ritual may be altered over time, or may be consciously played upon and manipulated by those who enact it.\footnote{As Althoff himself commented about these rituals: “Vielleicht konnten sie die eine oder andere Regel übertreten, durch Übertreiben anschaulich machen, mit einigen Spielregeln spielen. Doch sicher nur so weit, daß den Zeitgenossen dies durchschaubar blieb. Im wesentlichen mußte die Darstellung gängiger Kommunikationspraxis entsprechen” (Perhaps they could transgress one rule or another, make more clear through transgression, play with their own rules. Yet certainly only so far, that this remained clear to their contemporaries. In essence, the presentation had to correspond to established communications practice. Althoff, “Veränderbarkeit der Rituale,” 176.)}  

Provided that one refrains from the attempt to psychologize the characters described as real individuals, many of these concerns evaporate when Althoff’s theories are applied to the \textit{signa data} of literature. This is particularly true in heroic texts, where the distinction between inner and outer affect figures little or not at all. For the intradiegetic audience, “feelings” and communicative displays functioning as signals for conflict initiation or resolution are essentially indistinguishable. In investigating medieval literature, the question is not whether the representation of emotion corresponds to internal feelings, or whether a social interaction occurs as choreographed mime in contrast to spontaneous engagement, but rather the significance of the representation.

Althoff sees, quite correctly, a close relationship between the weeping of the emperor Karl for Roland or the tears Kriemhilt sheds for Sivrit and the displays of grief attributed to the historical Charlemagne by Einhard, or to Otto I by Widukind of Corvey in reaction to the loss of Polemic: Is Ritual still an Interesting Topic of Historical Study?” \textit{Early Medieval Europe} 11, no. 4 (January, 2002): 367-388.
kin. Although Althoff directs his attention primarily to practice, to the “reality” of the display, his observations are if anything far more relevant to the representation of such grief in literary sources (which, it must be said – and the point is not lost on Althoff – are essentially little different from “historical” sources in this regard). We may therefore set aside the issue of whether or not Althoff is correct in asserting that staged emotional displays were not regarded with suspicion or were not negatively differentiated from “genuine” feeling in the manner that they are today, and may focus on what such representations communicate and the conventions according to which they are structured.

1.3. Performative Theory

The observations of Althoff with regard to the behavioural norms and rules of the medieval court have allowed literary scholars to progress a step further through the application of performative theory. This is the approach suggested by Elaine C. Tennant, and subsequently adopted by


24 This is reflected to some extend in the somewhat differing reception of Althoff’s work by literary scholars on the one hand and historians on the other. As noted by Hermann Kamp, “Während in der mediävistischen Literaturwissenschaft die Althoffschen Überlegungen durchgehend auf positive Resonanz stießen, fanden sie bei den Rechtshistorikern eher ein geteiltes Echo” (“While Althoff’s considerations struck a positive resonance in medieval literary scholarship, they found a divided response amongst legal historians.” Hermann Kamp, “Die Macht der Spielregeln,” 8).

25 “Wir bewerten allerdings diese Inszenierung von Emotionen zumeist negativ, weil wir den Anspruch erheben, dass die Ausdrucksformen der wirklichen Stärke der Emotionen entsprechen sollten. Dieser Echtheitsanspruch, den wir heute an emotionale Ausdrucksformen stellen, ist nun aber ein Problem. […] Damit ist aber klar, dass für die mittelalterlichen Menschen nicht unbedingt die gleichen Normen für den Umgang mit den emotionalen Ausdrucksformen in Geltung waren wie heute.” (However, we generally evaluate this staging of emotions negatively, because we assert that the manner of expression should correspond to the true strength of the emotions. This claim to validity, which we today lay upon forms of emotion expression, is now a problem, however. […] It is thereby yet clear, that for medieval people the same norms pertaining to the forms of emotional expression cannot with certainty be said to be the same as those of today.) Althoff, “Aufgeführte Gefühle,” 7.

26 Elaine C. Tennant, “Prescriptions and Performatives.”
Kathryn Starkey,\textsuperscript{27} for whom the category of the performative provides a means to engage with the representative nature of gesture and emotion in the absence of a strictly defined separation between public and non-public spaces, as developed by Althoff.\textsuperscript{28} Perhaps more prominently still, performative theory has been much employed by the Berlin DFG-Teilprojekt “Emotionalität in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters” headed by Ingrid Kasten.\textsuperscript{29}

This notion of the >performative< is derived from the concept of “speech acts” developed by John L. Austin in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{30} Where speech acts, as conceived by Austin, designate utterances which “at once state and execute an action through the spoken words of the actor,” performatives extend the category to embrace a broader spectrum of gesture and unspoken communication.\textsuperscript{31} The success of such an act is dependent on the existence of broadly understood cultural conventions, the extent to which the individual conforms to those conventions and the ability of the act’s audience to recognize the enactment as convention.\textsuperscript{32} A successful performative may also be understood as an indication that the performer possesses or is otherwise allocated the necessary authority and status required for the act’s completion within

\textsuperscript{27} Kathryn Starkey, “Brunhild’s Smile,” 162. This article has also been reprinted under the title “Performative Emotion and the Politics of Gender in the Nibelungenlied” in \textit{Women and Medieval Epic: Gender, Genre, and the Limits of Epic Masculinity}, ed. Sara S. Poor and Jana K. Schulman (New York: Palgrave Press, 2006): 253-271.

\textsuperscript{28} Starkey, “Brunhild’s Smile,” 164.


\textsuperscript{31} Tennant, “Prescriptions and Performatives,” 288-9.

\textsuperscript{32} Tennant, “Prescriptions and Performatives,” 288.
the society in which it occurs.\textsuperscript{33} The requirement that established conventions exist within a given society in order for a performative to function can at times bring the study of performative close to the study of rituals, and there generally exist a relatively limited number of categories into which performatives fall: blessings, curses, oaths, insults, commands, etc. The identification of such actions and of the conventions within which they obtain has the potential to reveal a great deal about the “cultural dynamics” of the societies and cultures within which they occur.\textsuperscript{34}

Starkey also draws a strong line between \textit{performance} - “those actions by literary characters that are choreographed and calculated to have a certain effect” – and \textit{performatives} - which are distinguished by their ability “to affect socially recognized states of affairs, changing the status of someone or something.”\textsuperscript{35}

The failure of a performative can provide as much information as one successfully executed, and may suggest a number of possible explanations. Following Tennant, a failed performative or speech act, such as Kriemhilt’s attempt to convince her brother and husband that she will not leave Worms without her inheritance, “may have been improperly executed; or it may have invoked a practice that did not have customary status in their society; or it may have appealed to conflicting cultural conventions.”\textsuperscript{36}

As with Althoff, the goal of identifying and evaluating such categories and practices within a fictional culture is to establish some sense of the fundamental \textit{Spielregeln} according to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} Starkey, “Brunhild’s Smile,” 163.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Tennant, “Prescriptions and Performatives,” 288-9.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Starkey, “Brunhild’s Smile,” 163. Starkey illustrates the difference between the two categories by citing Sivrit’s service as satrap/strator to Gunther in the \textit{Nibelungenlied}: here, Starkey argues, Sivrit is successful in his performance – he successfully plays the part of Gunther’s vassal – but unsuccessful in his attempted performative – Prünhilt does not recognize him as Gunther’s inferior on the basis of this act, and needs to be verbally convinced by means of a second, successful performative.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Tennant, “Prescriptions and Performatives,” 290.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
which the imagined society functions, and to do so from an anthropological perspective, “on the basis of the unalterable testimony of its citizens, who are the characters of the fiction […] The identification of individual performatives within a text […] gives the critic a ›historical floor‹, entirely sealed within the narrative itself, upon which to build the superstructure of his interpretive construction.”

Like the employment of >ritual< by medieval historians, this turn has not been without criticism. Particularly serious issues have been raised by Rüdiger Schnell, who voices concerns about five principle problems with the application and performative theory to medieval German texts: first, the lack of clarity regarding the implications and consequences inherent in the use of theories and terms derived from ethnological and theatrical studies to emotions as transformed by being rendered in literature; second, the application of theories dependent on studies of >real< emotion to admittedly fundamentally different representations of emotion in literature; third, the ambivalence and vagueness of the term >performance< meaning both to perform for the benefit of an observing audience, and to bring an action to its completion (this problem highlighted by employment of both German >Performanz< and >Performance<); fourth, that this vague terminology alters previously clear analysis through the introduction of imprecise terms; and finally, that all too often the simple application/presence of the performative is presented as a valuable observation in itself, rather than as a means to an end.

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37 Tennant, “Prescriptions and Performatives,” 316.

One may fairly question whether the application of performative theory in the study of such texts is strictly necessary. As Starkey herself notes, Horst Wenzel’s exploration of the significance of conventionalized gestures and of the function of visual signs in the Nibelungenlied and other texts (as well as their usage as a means to communicate important information about the status and relationships of individual characters to both the >audience in the narrative< and the >audience of the narrative<), does not make recourse to performative theory.

The display of emotion need not be understood as a discreet category, but rather may be viewed as an integral part of the intensely visual language of signs, symbols and performances which were fundamental to communication within the medieval court. Such signs, incorporating a wide variety of actions, utterances and means of display, function dynamically as markers of status, relationship and validity. The ordering of a procession, the seating at a feast, the giving of gifts, the position of the body, the clothes upon one’s person, the presence or absence of weapons serve not only to convey information about the individual, their relations and their status, but are also the means by which bonds and status are cultivated, legitimized, maintained and broken.

The work of Horst Wenzel has proven to be of enormous importance in the reading of non-verbal, symbolic communication as it is represented is medieval literature. For Wenzel, >representation< serves as the key to the whole of medieval courtly communication and performance. Wenzel argues convincingly that Middle High German literature both reflects and describes a culture in which the (above all >visual<) representation of the individual was fundamental to the construction, maintenance and exertion of authority and of identity within the

40 Much of this has been collected in Höfische Repräsentation: symbolische Kommunikation und Literatur im Mittelalter (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005).
courtly and political sphere, and that the possibility of false representation leading, as in the
_Nibelungenlied_, to a fatal gap between private action and open display, was perceived as an ever
present danger. “In einer Gesellschaft, in der es noch keinen Ausweis gibt, muß der Mensch sich
durch die Darstellung dessen ausweisen, was er ist oder zu sein beansprucht.”

Further:

In den ritualisierten Formen des höfischen Zeremoniells wird die Abstufung von Herrschaft dargestellt in
einer signifikanten Formierung des adligen Lebens, die für alle Sinne wahrnehmbar ist und zugleich in
ihrem Deutungspotential auf die öffentlich gültigen (Glaubens-) Werte kollektiver Sinndeutung
zurückverweist. Während ‘Repräsentation’ auf ‘Darstellung’ und ‘Vergegenwärtigung’ abzielt, sollen
Zeremonien und Rituale als Darstellungsmodi von Repräsentation verstanden werden.

Literature by its very nature constitutes representation in and of itself, but in the representation of
a representational society, it naturally contains also the representation of representation, which
must be understood as such both in the context of the audience within the narrative and the
audience of the narrative.

Emotion must be accorded a place of prominence amongst the myriad forms of
representation which occur within medieval literature, and as a form of representation cannot
always be clearly differentiated from the display of expensive clothing, or the physical
occupancy of a specific position at the table. Indeed, as will be seen, the display of emotion
occurs as part of a complex process of representation in which the emotion may both determine
and be determined by its situational context.

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41 “In a society, in which there is no proof of identity, one must prove what one is or claims to be by embodying it.”

42 “In the ritualized forms of courtly ceremonials, the hierarchy of lordship is represented by meaningfully shaping
noble life in a way that is perceptible to all the senses but simultaneously refers through interpretive potential to the
publicly valid (belief) values of the collective making of meaning. While ‘representation’ aims at ‘portrayal’ and
‘visualization,’ ceremonies and rituals should be understood as modes of representational display.” Wenzel,
_Höfische Repräsentation_, 13.
The task which thus falls to us is to make the communicative, valuative content of the emotional display intelligible. Doing so requires an understanding of the context in which the display occurs as it appears to both the characters who perceive the display >within< the narrative itself and as perceived by the audience >of< the narrative. Various, frequently interrelated or at least similarly conceived methodologies have been adopted in an attempt to do so. These range from the grouping and analysis of clusters of emotion words within connected contexts (be they generic, temporal, or geographic), to scripted patterns of culturally determined or mandated displays which may at times be termed >ritual<, to semi-standardized, expected narrative progressions of emotional states.

1.4. Spontaneity and Staging, Inner Feeling and Outer Affect

In approaching the representation of emotion in Middle High German narrative, some scholars first establish sub-groups of emotion according to the manner of manifestation. Kathryn Starkey, for example, has argued in favour of a distinction between displays of emotion which, arising “from an external state of events,” hold political significance, and “spontaneous somatic responses,” like a blush, which speak primarily to the “emotional state” of the individual described.43 Alternately, Ann Marie Rasmussen (following the work of Robert C. Solomon)

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differentiates between linguistic, semi-linguistic, and extra-linguistic representations of emotion.\textsuperscript{44}

Yet, for the purposes of this study, these distinctions rarely appear to significantly alter the content of emotion display in the context of heroic literature. That emotion displays in literature at times manifest in a manner corresponding to what in the real world might be described as “spontaneous” and therefore (presumably) unaffected does not rob them of their political significance. Nor can it be extra-linguistic or somatic manifestations such as blushing are in fact understood to be more spontaneous than speech described abverbially as “angry” or “sad.” The emotions of heroic literature are, in all cases communicative representations. While it is true that (rarely) emotions in these narratives are said to be intentionally obfuscated or contrived by the characters to whom they are attributed, they remain perceptible and communicative. This occurs because emotion display in literature is perceived on two levels:

1. Emotions are “observed” by the intradiegetic audience, the audience >within< the poem, and understood to have communicative valence within the fictive world of the narrative.

2. Emotions are “observed” by the extradiegetic audience, the audience >of< the poem, who thus become privy to information and a broader understanding of the dynamics at play in a manner which may be denied to the fictive inhabitants of the narrative and to comment in a broader sense on not only the figures themselves but also on the world they inhabit and its relationship to the “real” world as understood by its inhabitants (the audience).\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{44} Rasmussen describes the three categories respectively as consisting of “(1) observations, descriptions, and expressions of emotions by characters and narrators (what we might call “emotion talk”); (2) vocalizations, actions, and gestures that communicate emotions; and (3) physical changes such as blushing, fainting, and trembling.” Ann Marie Rasmussen, “Emotions, Gender, and Lordship in Medieval Literature: Clovis’s Grief, Tristan’s Anger, and Kriemhild’s Restless Corpse,” in \textit{Codierungen von Emotionen im Mittelalter}, 175.

\textsuperscript{45} My approach is here similar to that of Maren Jönsson, who notes that signs in the \textit{Nibelungenlied} function on two levels: they serve as communication to the internal >audience within the narrative<, and as communication to the >audience of the narrative<, as “Signale der Textdeutung” (signals of the text’s meaning). Jönsson, “Funktionalität
While it is possible for the second condition to obtain when the first does not, the extradiegetic audience is ever-present.

This said, although we must understand all emotion displays as staged, codified communication between the narrative and its audience, in reading the representation of emotion the question of whether these displays are to be understood within the fictive world as *signa data* or *signa naturalia* may yet arise. It quickly becomes clear, however, that this division, in the sense of a relationship between the internal experience of emotion and its external manifestations, does not frequently occur in heroic narrative. Given the general absence of interiority present in these tales, it is not surprising to find little evidence of privately experienced feelings, rather, there is only the outward manifestations of what we would term >emotions< - tears, shouting, fainting, laughing – and simple statements of fact – this was done in anger, he mourned, she laughed, and so on.

This is in alignment with the observations of Joachim Bumke, who, following the writings of Hugh of St. Victor, saw in the assumed or desired symmetry between inner and outer being a belief that the body >should< reflect in all ways the soul within, as fundamental to not only religious, but aristocratic ideals – especially in the context of the rise of courtly culture:  

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46 “Diese Theorie der Gestik und besonders der Gedanke, daß sich in den Bewegungen des Körpers die Gesinnung des Menschen ausdrückt und daß durch Körperkontrolle der innere Sinn beherrscht werden kann, ist auch für die höfische Gebärdensprache grundlegend. Der Maßstab der Angemessenheit und des Anstands gilt am Hof ebenso wie im Kloster” (This theory of gesture and especially the idea, that the disposition of men expressed itself in the movements of the body, and that the inner mind can be governed through bodily control, is also fundamental for the courtly language of gesture. The benchmark of propriety and decorum was as valid at the court as in the cloister.).
Das ganze Leben am Hof wurde einer Bewegungskontrolle unterworfen, die von denselben Prinzipien geleitet wurde, wie sie Hugo von St. Victor für die Klostererziehung formuliert hat: Angemessenheit und Anstand, zuht und schone site, sollten die Umgangsformen am Hof bestimmen.47

The >effort< to bring the external self into alignment with the internal self, through the control of motion or emotional expression, appears but seldom in Middle High German heroic epic. On the whole, any such discrepancy is so seldom suggested or problematized that it may be assumed not to exist outside of explicit mention. As Müller notes:

Es ist unrichtig, über die Darstellung in mittelalterlichen Texten zu sagen, die Affekte >äußerten< sich auf diese Weise. Körperhafte Vorgänge erscheinen dort nicht als >Ausdruck< oder >Symptom< von Seelischem, sondern innere und äußere Bewegungen verlaufen parallel, die einen können für die anderen eintreten.48

Even in cases of deliberate deception, in which characters, for good or ill, exercise their list, we seldom encounter explicit examples of feigned >emotion<. This may be seen, for example, in Kudrun’s âventiure XXV, when the heroine, cognizant of her kin’s imminent arrival, deceives her Norman captors into believing that she is at last willing to acquiesce to Hartmuot’s marriage proposal. Here, no emotion is attached to the lie itself. When Kudrun and Ortrun are both subsequently described as joyful, Kudrun’s happiness is not feigned, it is only the >cause< of her happiness that remains hidden:

47 “All of courtly life was subject to a form of movement control, which was itself structured according to the same principles as those which St. Victor formulated for education in the monastery: appropriateness and decorum, zuht (>proper upbringing<) and schone site (>beautiful customs<) should dominate behaviour at court.” Bumke, “Höfischer Körper,” 84.

48 “It is incorrect to say of the representation in medieval texts to say that affects >express< themselves in this way. Bodily processes appear there not as the >expression< or >symptom< of the mental state, rather inner and outer movements run in tandem, the one capable of standing in for the other.”. Müller, Höfische Kompromisse, 340.
Noble Ortrun clothed herself immediately, she went joyfully to where she found Kudrun. Then the kinswoman of old Wate came towards her. When they were together, then there was joy and happiness to be seen. They kissed one another under good red gold; their faces shown as well. Their moods differed: it was pleasing to Ortrun, the rich queen, to see the noble washerwoman so wonderfully clothed. Yet poor [Kudrun] was joyful, as we have said, that she should see her noble kin so very soon. The ladies amused one another as they sat. To see the ladies together might teach a sad heart joy. (Kudrun, 1307-1309)

While dishonesty and miscommunication are here acknowledged, no break between inwardly felt and outwardly displayed emotion is made. The discrepancy between the causes of joy is deemed worthy of mention, yet no distinction is made between how Kudrun appears, the emotion she displays, and how she >feels<: it is irrelevant.

In the rare instance in which the distinction becomes relevant, heroic narrative seems almost to struggle with the rendering of the counterfactual. In the *Nibelungenlied*, for instance, a rare exception to the general trend confirms by its very exceptionality that in the absence of explicit confirmation, the distinction between inner and outer essentially does not exist. This break occurs when Gunther seeks to deceive Sivrit into believing that the Saxons wish to pursue a renewed attack on the Burgundian kingdom. As in the first pronouncement of hostilities, Gunther manifests signs of displeasure, both anger and sorrow. Later, the king displays feigned
joy when Sivrit offers to relieve him of his troubles. As Müller notes, the difference in the second instance is the crucial qualifier *als ob* (as though), which serves to differentiate a hidden, internal process from a public, external one. For Müller, this is a “große Entdeckung der volkssprachlichen Literatur um 1200,” positively characterized in Minnesang, but deeply problematic within the Nibelungenlied. Yet it is also worth noting that this distinction occurs only in reference to Gunther’s joy: “Sô wol mich dirre mære”, sprach der kûnic dô, / als ob er ernstliche der helfe ware vro.” The absence of such qualifiers in reference to the king’s anger in receiving tidings of war he knows to be false (der kûnic begonde zûrnen, do er diu mære bevânt), is therefore noteworthy.

It is therefore reasonable that we understand external and internal emotion in heroic epic to be in accordance with one another, or rather, to understand that in most instances, such a distinction either does not exist or is not relevant, >unless< the text itself explicitly states otherwise. Likewise, we shall leave questions of sincerity or the genuine character of emotion

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49 Albrecht Classen has read in Sivrit’s immediate offer of assistance, and his susceptibility to the visual and verbal lie that inspires it, not a display of *trîuwe* but rather a critique of Sivrit as idealized hero, characterizing him as “a nonthinking person who easily gets caught in the trap set by Hagen.” In this way the exceptional nature of Gunther’s false affect serves not as criticism of a broken and/or vulnerable system of interaction, but rather the means of exposing a heroic dupe. Albrecht Classen, “The Downfall of a Hero: Siegfried’s Self-Destruction and the End of Heroism in the Nibelungenlied,” German Studies Review 26 no. 2 (May, 2003): 295-314; 302-3.

50 *als ob er ernstliche der helfe ware vro.*

in valsche neig im tiefe der ungetriuwe man.

(as though he were truly glad of the help.

The disloyal man deceitfully bowed to him deeply. NL 887,2-3)

51 A “great discovery of vernacular literature around the year 1200,” Müller, Spielregeln, 214.

52 Ibid., 215.

53 “I am pleased with this news,” said the king then, as though he really were glad of the help,” NL 887,1-2.

54 The king began to be angry then, when he heard the news. NL 880,4.

55 See discussion of this passage in Müller, Spielregeln, 212-216.
aside, save in those rare instances where a discrepancy between inner and outer affect is
problematized by the narratives themselves.\(^{56}\)

### 1.5. Supplemental Methodologies

The anthropological approach and the application of performative theory are not the only means
by which scholars have attempted to render the *signa data* of emotions in Middle High German
literature intelligible. One alternative approach to the evaluation of emotions in a medieval
context has been to examine the associated >word fields< of closely related emotions.
Concerning conflict, these studies have largely focused on words associated with anger and
hostility (*zorn, nît, haz*) and with grief, injury and shame (*scham, trûren, leit, klagen*). By cross-
referencing instances where each of these words are applied to action, and through comparison
with relatively unambiguous appearances with clear value judgments attached (as in biblical
references), they have sought to establish general rules of usage. Yet such evaluations often
encounter conflicting, even contradictory instances in which medieval authors have seen fit to
employ the same terminology. The approach taken by Klaus Grubmüller, for example, has been
to divide word fields and the valuation attached to emotion words according to genre. In
considering the three lexemes which “denote hostile excitement,”\(^{57}\) namely *zorn, nît, und haz*,
Grubmüller, notes that these lexemes “[…] gerade nicht hierarchisch aus einem Bedeutungskern
auszugliedern sind, sondern sich aus dispersen Redetraditionen begründen,” which demonstrate

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\(^{56}\) Walter Haug has seen this problematization as a core aspect of the *Nibelungenlied*’s characterization of Kriemhilt,
whom he sees as the first figure in Western medieval literature to break the literary principle of correlation between
inner and outer aspects, and who consequently can only be understood as devilish. Walter Haug, “Montage und
Individualität im Nibelungenlied” in *Nibelungenlied und Nibelungenklage. Neue Wege der Forschung*, ed. Christoph
Fasbender (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 17.

\(^{57}\) Klaus Grubmüller, “Historische Semantik und Diskursgeschichte: *zorn, nît und haz*” in *Codierungen von
Emotionen im Mittelalter*, eds. C. Stephen Jaeger and Ingrid Kasten (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 47.
Grubmüller notes that zorn appears as the largely positive attribute of the warrior in heroic (and occasionally in courtly) texts, and as the (again positive) wrath of God against the wicked in religious texts, but is at times also representative of a loss of self-control in courtly romance. Nît also appears in heroic texts in a form largely free from negative valuation, but in other texts, especially religious ones, is closely related to Latin invidia, and consequently appears as sin, contrasting the nît of Cain with the zorn of God. Haz appears in all genres, both positively and negatively characterized, primarily as the antonym of minne (in its non-eroticized form).

Barbara Rosenwein has suggested an alternative but not wholly dissimilar means of engaging with emotion within a historical context through the study of what she has termed “emotional communities.”


careful examination of the words utilized to describe emotions and the frequency with which they occur within a given context. In so doing, Rosenwein focuses not on texts of a specific type, but on commonalities of geography, chronology, and culture, thereby seeking to establish the existence of emotional communities which “are precisely the same as social communities – families, neighbourhoods, parliaments, guilds, monasteries, [and] parish church memberships.”61

While the notion of limited and overlapping contexts within which particular emotions emerge as dominant themes is an appealing approach to emotions within a historical context, much of Rosenwein’s work is arguably over-dependent on supposition, and draws on too limited a sample base (in part an unavoidable pitfall of her predominantly early-medieval focus). While the attempt to draw on a great variety of sources – chronicles, charters, poems, etc. – is admirable, Rosenwein’s insistence, in contrast to Grubmüller, on disregarding genre is problematic. It has been observed, for instance, by Jan-Dirk Müller that vocabulary moves more freely between genres than do concepts.62 He notes, for example, that the notion of the herze as the stage of conflict between competing drives as well as their embodiment, as commonly found in courtly lyric, is applicable to the Nibelungenlied only in part. Almost as often, when linked to an

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62 Müller notes regarding the influence of courtly culture and Minnesang on the Nibelungenlied, that “Häufig ist zwar das Vokabular übernommen, nicht aber das damit verknüpfe Konzept […] Wenn sich also Elemente der Psychologie höfischer Literatur finden, so fehlt im allgemeinen deren semantische Differenzierung. Ihr Vokabular wird meist unterminologisch gebraucht.” (Indeed, the vocabulary is often adopted, but not, however, the concept to which it is bound […] If therefore elements of the psychology of courtly literature are to be found, so normally is it lacking its semantic differentiation. Its vocabulary is used primarily unterminologically). Spielregeln, 218.
emotion, the word functions as simple intensifier, or as a negatively characterized chamber of secret, non-visible (and hence, dangerous) desire.\textsuperscript{63}

Rosenwein’s answer to this, that “people move (and moved) continually from one such community to another – from taverns to law courts, say – adjusting their emotional displays and their judgments of weal and woe (with greater and lesser degrees of success) to these different environments,”\textsuperscript{64} is undoubtedly true, but its application to medieval history frequently necessitates a greater range of sources from a single community than are available to us.

1.6. Applications: Getting at Emotions in Medieval Literature

Emotions, for all their omnipresence in human experience and in the artistic monuments produced by humans of all ages, are surprisingly difficult to delineate and define – all the more so when engaging with (imagined) individuals within a social context far removed both culturally and temporally from one’s own. Generally, when we speak of emotions, we speak of subjective, affective >states< of the human psyche: of things like >joy<, >sorrow<, and >anger<. Yet it does not require a great deal of reflection before one begins to hit upon states and experiences that seem to occupy a grey area in terms of their classification. >Love< seems an easy fit for the emotion label, but its ostensible antonym, >hatred< somehow less so. Hatred might well be classified as emotion, or it might be considered a proclivity, a bias, or a factual description of a state of hostility. It should not be surprising to discover that in the medieval period, the precursor of New High German Hass (hatred), the Middle High German haz, could hold legal significance in denoting precisely this last state of affairs, and that its own antonym,

\textsuperscript{63} Müller, Spielregeln, 216-221.

\textsuperscript{64} Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions in History,” 842.
minne, had a corresponding legal significance as well, in addition to developing associations of love, in both the platonic and erotic senses of the term. Looking further afield, we might question whether >surprise< constitutes an emotion, and if not, why? Perhaps the tendency to characterize surprise not as emotion, but as a somehow more objective >reaction< to stimulus, derives from the tendency to arrange emotional states along a good/bad continuum, with the positive/negative aspects positioned as polar opposite states: happy/sad, love/anger (or hate?). Surprise in and of itself does not have positive or negative connotations, but may be either positive or negatively perceived and experienced depending on context and characterization. Generosity might also prove an unlikely candidate for status as emotion, despite the tendency in English to “feel generous.” Here we are more likely to see generosity as action deriving from the presence of emotions like sympathy, pity, or affection.

For those scholars who seek to engage directly with human experience and who have occasion to interact with and to observe living human beings, the establishment of a working definition of emotion remains an ever present, ever daunting desideratum. Indeed, the literature surrounding the on-going quest for a functional definition of the term capable of maintaining its utility across multiple disciplines continues to grow at a remarkable pace. As noted by Jan Plamper, “Die Schwierigkeit der Definition von Emotion wird oft als ihr Hauptcharakteristikum gesehen.”

While there existed no Middle High German term which corresponding directly to modern English “emotion,” and the closest concept in Latin, affectio, poses many of the same semantic difficulties we experience today in distinguishing between feeling, affect, and

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emotion, emotions as represented in medieval literature in some ways present fewer difficulties than the broader study of emotions as phenomena. Here, the potential origins of emotion in the chemistry of the brain concern us very little, rather it is the character of attributed significance which draws our eye. We may begin by distinguishing emotion from sensation. >Emotion< denotes something beyond mere feeling, for, following Ursula Wolf,

>Emotion< denotes something beyond mere feeling, for, following Ursula Wolf,

[w]hile the sensations have a rather simple structure – if you feel pain, then you feel pain, and that’s all – emotions are more complicated. There is on the one side a person who experiences them, on the other side an object or state of affairs on which the emotion reacts. More exactly, the emotion implies a belief – the person who feels anger believes that he suffers a slight from somebody who hasn’t got a right to slight him.68

In this view, >emotion< presupposes and requires the existence of a mental framework, it is dependent on a system of values held by the individual who experiences it. This is in line with the >Judgment Theory< of emotion. As developed by Robert C. Solomon, “an emotion is a basic judgment about our Selves and our place in the world, the projection of the values and ideals, structures and mythologies, according to which we live and through which we experience our lives.”69 This understanding of emotion has been the subject of considerable debate and has received significant criticism since first being advanced in the mid-1970s. Above all, it is the

extent to which emotions are fundamentally physiologically generated or experienced versus the extent to which they are products of cognition that has been the sticking point.

Yet such debates address primarily the cause and nature of emotion, rather than the manner in which emotions are understood and perceived. When we examine the representation of emotion in literature, we turn away from the reality of the experience and toward the communicative value of emotion >expression<, and here we stand on firmer ground in reading emotion as both culturally conditioned and as being possessed of culturally and contextually specific communicative content.

Yet even given this, the inclination may still exist to question the authenticity of a perceptible emotion, even when merely described on the page – to differentiate between what is perceptible and what is >felt<. This, in many ways, speaks to an Augustinian division by which emotions are understood as signa data (intentional displays) or as signa naturalia (the outward, natural manifestations of things >felt< inwardly) – as affect and feeling. For C. Stephen Jaeger, this is the difference between >emotion<, understood as private “feelings,” and >sensibilities<, which are “agreed-on modes of feeling, widely shared by consensus, not by nature.”

In literature, we find an abundance of the latter and only ephemeral glimpses of the former. Here, by virtue of the medium’s very nature, all emotional representation is inherently

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71 Many of Solomon’s contemporaries argued in favour of a distinction between nature and culture, with cognition belonging to the latter category and emotion to the former, see, for example, Roy Wagner, The Invention of Culture, 2nd Ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

72 C. Stephen Jaeger, “Emotions and Sensibilities: Some Preluding Thoughts,” in Codierungen von Emotionen im Mittelalter, ed. C. Stephen Jaeger and Ingrid Kasten (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), VII-VIII. Naturally, intradietetic distinctions between signa data and signa naturalia, although rare in medieval vernacular literature, which are made >within< the fictional world of the text remain of considerable significance, and I will endeavor to emphasis this distinction wherever it is called for.
signa data – signs from the teller of the tale, communications to the >audience of the narrative<. Consequently, much of what I term the display or representation of >emotion< would certainly be categorized by Jaeger as >sensibilities<, or at least indicative of sensibilities, in that they possess “social and political significance” in excess of that accorded to subjective >emotion<.  

Here, Elaine C. Tennant’s comments regarding gender dynamics within the Nibelungenlied are more broadly applicable to the representation of emotion (as indication of >sensibility<) within the same text:

The behaviours of the male and female characters in these texts reflect the cultural conventions of the fictional societies they inhabit, conventions that determine how these characters have been conditioned to live their lives, according to the sex, social group, and role to which they have been assigned in the fable. These fictional characters, the societies in which they move, and the conventions according to which they operate are the constructions of real poets who inhabited historical time and space in medieval Germany. The dynamics of the genders within the world of the »Nibelungenlied« are doubtless fictional refractions of actual issues, fancies, and patterns from the historical environment of the creators of the poem; but it is impossible to determine in precisely what way the fiction refracts the circumstances from which it derives. 

This then becomes our goal in positioning emotion within a broader social anthropology of conflict in heroic epic: to rediscover what Mary Garrison has termed “the shared understanding of writer and audience” which serves as “the meeting point of emotional experience and cultural constraints, shaping and enabling the externalization of emotional experience in culturally familiar patterns.”

73 Jaeger, “Emotions and Sensibilities,” XII.  
74 Tennant, “Prescriptions and Performatives,” 274-5. Note how the tendency, despite the subsequent explanation, creeps in to engage with the imagined characters as real, psychologically motivated individuals: “[…] how these characters have been conditioned to live their lives […]”  
The description of emotion in literature, or the attribution of an emotion to a character in a literary work, is not the same thing as the manifestation or experience of emotion in the “real world.” Further, as narration is a form of communication between the narrative and its audience, we must understand the description and/or attribution in narrated tales in terms of its communicative content and value. Such elements are fundamentally present in the tale in order that they might tell the audience something: in Philipowski’s words: “die Emotion, die [eine Figur] hat, folgt der Geschichte, die der Erzähler erzählen will.” This is not to say that they appear arbitrarily, for narrated emotions are informed by imagined stimuli within a fictional environment in which they are perceptible and understandable (or not) by the intradiegetic >audience within the narrative<, for whom the communicative content of the emotion may or may not correspond to the communicative content understood by the extradiegetic >audience of the narrative<. In both cases, emotions in literature do not follow the rules of real human emotion, whether biologically or socially conditioned and conceived, but rather the rules established within a fictional world. As Katharina Philipowski bluntly states: “eine erzählte

76 As far as it is possible, I shall attempt to speak not of emotions, not of affective feeling, but rather of the expression and display of emotion. The reasons for this are two-fold. First, there is the nature of literature itself as representation, and second, there is the specifically medieval engagement with emotion as surface level sign, as symbolic communication occurring along the same plane as and often intimately bound up with ritual and gesture. As Mary Garrison has noted, in the medieval period, “Perception, not emotion, was our medieval subject’s language of knowledge, apprehension and opinion” – the feelings ascribed to the figures we encounter on the page are of far lesser concern than the manifestation, the feeling as sign. Mary Garrison, “The Study of Emotions,” 243.

(›codierte‹) Emotion hat soweit mit einer Emotion zu tun wie ein erzählter Krieg mit einem wirklichen Krieg.” 78

This then becomes a principle problem of engaging with emotions in literature, and particularly with the application of various theories developed through the observation and exercise of emotion by living humans (or even of the actions previously living humans), is precisely the absence of living humans: in literature, we have only representation. In Jutta Eming’s words: “An Texten können keine Emotionen, sondern nur sprachliche und schriftliche Zeichen für Emotionen analysiert werden.” 79

These literary representations, following Rüdiger Schnell, are considerably removed from the subjective experience of the individual. Schnell suggests that there are in fact three levels in the representation of emotions, progressing from an internal, hidden origin through two outer forms of >representation<. First, there is the >feeling< of the individual in the “real” world, which is inherently inaccessible to others in any direct fashion, then there is the actual >expression< of this >feeling< in the form of corporeal signs such as blushing or weeping, and finally, there is the textual or visual illustration, the >representation< of the feeling. 80 Katharina Philipowski comments further, that these levels are deeply enmeshed with one another, for each further step presupposes that which preceded it. 81

78 “a narrated [“codified”] emotion has as little to do with emotion as a narrated war with a real war.” Katharina Philipowski, “Wer hat Herzlloydes Drachentraum geträumt?”, 263.

79 “In texts, we cannot analyze emotions, but rather only verbal and written signs of emotions.” Eming, Emotion und Expression, 65.

80 Rüdiger Schnell, “Historische Emotionsforschung,” 179. While largely in agreement with Schnell on this point, Katharina Philipowski suggests a further differentiation between the verbalization or corporeal manifestation of the feeling and a narrative incorporation of this manifestation. Philipowski, Gestalt, 318-9.

81 Philipowski, Gestalt, 322.
Fictional characters playing fictional roles possess no life and no past beyond that crafted by their creator, and ascribed to them by their audience. Emotion in text is not the same as emotion in real space, experienced by real people. The characters and their emotions are consequently both representations bound not to a developed psychology or an inner experience respectively, but creations bound inextricably to the narrative itself.\textsuperscript{82} We may here agree with Müller’s observation that the emotions attributed to a given character in medieval literature are not the expressions of inner feelings which occur first on a psychological plane and are then brought into the public sphere through corporeal actions and symptoms, but rather, that the two elements are understood to manifest in parallel, the corporeal accompanying the incorporeal, with no separation between the two.\textsuperscript{83} Yet we must also go further. As readers, we must understand the representation of emotion as a function of the narrative itself. As Philipowski notes:

\begin{quote}
Die Emotionsdarstellung ist aus dem Ganzen eines literarischen Textes ebenso wenig zu isolieren wie eine einzelne Handlung einer Figur, die ihre Tragweite und ihre Bedeutung erst dann entfaltet, wenn sie im komplexen Gefüge der Erzählstruktur verortet wird.\textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

This last point is a crucial one, both for Philipowski and for the present study:

\begin{quote}
So wie das Innere zum Äußeren werden muss, um anschaulich zu werden, so muss die Emotion der Figur zum Zeichenträger des Geschehens werden, um bedeutsam zu werden. Als Zeichenträger, also als Bestandteil des narrativen Gefüges, das den Erzähltext konstituiert, referiert die Emotionsdarstellung aber
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{82} This is in agreement with Philipowski’s assessment of the representation of shame:

Lancelots Scham ist nicht >seine<, ist nicht ein Gefühl der Figur, sondern ist eine Handlung, die in der (und durch die) Erzählung produktiv gemacht, verarbeitet und diskutiert wird. Lancelot ist zwar Träger der Scham, aber nicht deshalb, weil er sie >hat<, sondern deshalb, weil sie von einer Figur ausagiert werden muss, um ins Geschehen eingeführt zu werden.

(Lancelot’s shame is not >his<, it is not the feeling of the character, rather it is a behaviour, which is made productive, utilized and discussed in (and by means of) the narrative. Lancelot is indeed the bearer of shame, but not because that he >has< it, but rather for the reason that it must be enacted by a character in order to be introduced into the events of the narrative. Philipowski, \textit{Gestalt}, 362).


\textsuperscript{84} The representation of emotions is as difficult to isolate from the whole of a literary text as a single action of a character, which only unfolds its import and its meaning when located within the complex framework of the narrative structure. Philipowski, \textit{Gestalt}, 353.
Emotions in medieval literature are signals and symbols for consumption by the extradiegetic audience, productions of narrative need, and cannot be psychologized or understood as the products of inner processes located within the characters of the narrative, as if they were really people. This does not, naturally, indicate that we cannot or ought not engage with the attributed emotions of characters in medieval literature. Thus we must consider the representation of emotion in Middle High German narratives according to its primary communicative and symbolic function.

1.7. Conclusion

 Violence and conflict are frequently both generated by and generative of heightened emotion, and it is consequently unsurprising to find medieval literary representations of both suffused with the language of emotion. The emotion language of heroic narrative is highly conventionalized: patterns and standardized progressions from one emotion to the next may be observed almost everywhere; emotion adjectives at times attach themselves to particular actions, with seemingly little reference to context. Consequently, coherent characterization and motivation may at times seem lacking to the modern reader. What is more, as a general rule, little distinction is made between internal, >felt< emotion and the external manifestation of the subjectively experienced >feeling<. Where distinctions are present, as in the *Nibelungenlied*, any disconnect between the internal and external affect is generally presented as problematic and potentially destructive.

85 “Just as the inner must become outer in order to become perceptible, so must the emotion of a character become a sign, a symbol of the circumstance in order to become meaningful. As a sign, and thus as a component of the narrative framework that constitutes the narrative text, the representation of emotion no longer refers to an emotion, but rather attains meaning amongst all of the other literary signs.” Philipowski, Gestalt, 355.
Here we find that the expression or attribution of emotion in Middle High German narrative not infrequently defies the modern tendency to psychologize action and affect.

In the context of conflicts and violence, representations of emotion in Middle High German epic appear in strikingly consistent patterns, corresponding to different stages of a traditional, expected progression of dispute. This narrative progression, informed by and informing actual practice around the year 1200, provides a context for reading emotion as symbolic communication and for understanding the role which it plays in advancing the narrative of the text through the representation of social mechanisms understood to function as a part of a complex traditional system of symbolic language and status negotiation. When the attribution or representation of emotion is understood to be fundamentally reactive and/or descriptive of the social, political, and/or legal dynamics and tensions at play within a given narrative situation, then an accurate evaluation of the nature and content of their commentary is dependent on a holistic engagement with the factors governing, shaping, and generating the situation and with the socio-political constellations of characters which are represented within it. In the chapters to follow, I will attempt to elucidate some of the important factors informing both the situational progression of Middle High German narrative and of the pre- and proscriptive rules of emotional display and attribution active within this progression.

In medieval literature, the representation of emotion serves primarily the same function as other forms of *signa data*: it communicates information about the character to whom they are attributed and the situation (broadly conceived) in which they are placed. Where the natural inclination may be read a chain of events according to the pattern of stimulus, followed by an initial reaction (emotional response), which then informs or generates the secondary reaction (the performed response to the stimulus), this chain of events is not always obviously or immediately discernable. Rather, it is not uncommon to find descriptions in which the emotion appears to be
dependent on the action, rather than a generator or conditioner thereof. This is true for violent action, which will almost invariably be characterized as angry, regardless of whether or not anger proceeds logically from what is known about the character’s state of mind, but also for expressions of love and friendship. An act of generosity may be understood to reflect the emotion of love, but it may also be that the act itself is inherently understood to be an act of love, regardless of the context in which it occurs. In this way, emotion and action as distinct categories of description and attribution are blurred, and one may convey precisely the same information and in nearly precisely the same manner as the other.

Perceptible emotions, that is, displayed emotions, are communicative. We may understand them as performative within the narrative and, to a lesser extent, between the narrative and its audience. They are, in most cases, fundamentally reactive - yet this is not to say that the emotion is to be understood as the generative element in relation to action or as the >motivation< behind the action. Rather, the emotion is indicative of the larger relationship between narrative figures, which may, in a certain light, be understood to function as gears within the narrative machine – these emotions describe the stage of the larger process in which these figures find themselves and characterize their interactions both with one another and with their world – the large system of the narrative.

Every instance in which narratives relate the expression of emotion may be read as a performance intended either for the benefit of the other characters within the narrative or for the audience of that narrative. Instances where the reactions of other characters are given provide us with the means to evaluate the manner in which the display corresponds to accepted social practice, as well as the intent and effectiveness of the display.

In order to understand the communicative content of this representation, we must learn how to read it as a context-dependent process of social interaction. The reconstruction of this
process and the factors that shape and constrain the actors within it are the subject of the subsequent chapters. A complete systemization, or even a complete vocabulary, will certainly elude us, but this is perhaps not even desirable if one wishes to capture the multiplicity of literary responses. Despite this, I suggest that we may come a good deal closer to the explication of emotion representation within these narratives by considering them in the light of two crucial aspects to be discussed in the following chapters. First, in their relationship to the honour economy so fundamental to the formation of identity and status within the world of the medieval court, and second, to the conventionalized practice (or at least the conventionalized narrative of practice) which governed formalized or semi-formalized dispute. This latter, as will be seen, has not uncommonly (and not unproblematically) fallen under the heading of “feud.”

Given the context of conflict and dispute, it is unsurprisingly that it should be principally the negative emotions that concern us. For the purposes of this study, these can be reduced in their essence to two categories: grief and anger. Consequently, following the chapters which engage with the honour economy and with feud practice, I shall address grief and anger individually. Behind each of these categories lies a host of individual terms, manifestations, and characterizations, each of which may indicate a specific subset possessing a unique communicative valence, but fundamentally we may distinguish between two closely related states, corresponding to discreet stages of excitement and the dispute progression.
2. Honour

The premises on which this study is built are in essence three-fold: first, that the imagined societies of Middle High German heroic narratives conform in broad strokes to the tenets of what is commonly referred to as an >honour culture<. This is to say that >honour< constitutes the primary valuative element of the self, and that the comparison, cultivation, protection, and exchange of honour in a largely externalized form is the primary principle according to which these societies function.

Given the first premise, the second premise is that broadly understood conventions exist within heroic culture according to which recompense is sought for injured honour and social disruption corrected. These conventions dictate practices which tend to develop through more or less delineated stages of interaction within which the participants are able to draw on a varied, but nevertheless constrained repertoire of actions and reactions. These interactions manifest in a form which closely resembles the >feud< practices studied by cultural anthropologists.

Finally, that the processes of honour, including the transference and exchange of honour as symbolic capital, are encoded into all social interaction; that the varied forms of such interaction are themselves best understood as symbolic communication constituted from a vast repertoire of gesture, spatial practice, and verbalization. Such practice can only be read against the context in which it occurs, and according to the status (in both the narrowest and the broadest senses) of the actors and audience.

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86 This is not to suggest that seeking recompense itself cannot also serve to create disruption, as the Nibelungenlied itself certainly attests. Whether such instances in narrative serve as criticism of general or specific practice, or whether they serve as necessary warnings or worst case scenarios through which the threat of feud gains much of its power as regulatory force, is difficult if not impossible to answer. The latter option is a noted feature of some functionalist interpretations of feud practice offered by anthropologists (see below).
2.1. Shame and Guilt, Honour and Dignity

The notion of a strong division between cultures of guilt, in which moral behaviour is driven by an internalized conception of >sin<, and those of shame, in which >right< behaviour is guided by external sanction, was first popularized by Margaret Mead\textsuperscript{87} and, somewhat later, though to greater impact, by Ruth Benedict.\textsuperscript{88}

Although widely embraced by many social scientists (and in Benedict’s case, by the broader public as well), this dichotomy has also attracted criticism, not least from the Japanese subjects of Benedict’s wartime study themselves.\textsuperscript{89} Today, discarding the negative for the positive in their characterization of such societies, cultural anthropologists are more likely to speak of >honour< cultures than of >shame< cultures. Preserving many of the characteristics of shame cultures, honour cultures remain very much a current concern amongst anthropologists and social scientists, who continue to produce both conceptual and field studies of such groups in significant numbers.\textsuperscript{90}


Many of these studies differentiate between cultures of dignity, honour, and face, and the degree to which elements of each value system may coexist within single societies. The key point of difference amongst them is the nature of self-valuation: in the purest conception of a dignity culture (the conceptual descendant of guilt culture), the valuation of self is an internal process, and its measure, dignity, cannot (at least in theory) be taken away from the individual by others. Good behaviour, according to the standards of society, is determined by a combination of internal guilt and the pressure imposed externally by an effective system of law. In face cultures, the valuation of self is almost wholly external, while good behaviour is meant to be guaranteed by fear of the loss of face and by punishment imposed by a superior or by the collective group. Such societies tend to be structured as strict hierarchies, in which it is possible to lose or gain face according to one’s station, but not to take the face of another as a means of


92 Whitley Kaufman has argued against the belief that honour cultures are “intrinsically externally oriented or even more externally oriented than our own culture.” Kaufman, “Understanding Honor,” 572. Such a notion is, in his view, merely utilized as a foil for the modern “egalitarian democratic ethos.” (Ibid.) Kaufman’s arguments for the interiority of honour, its non-superficiality, its moral character and against what he believes to be a widespread error in understanding honour cultures as fundamentally conformist, however, fails to adequately distinguish what, precisely is to be understood as honour – and, if honour cultures are indeed neither conformist, nor externally oriented, nor more concerned with public reputation than non-honour societies, how are they to be distinguished? A more convincing argument for the existence of interiority within honour cultures may be found in William Ian Miller’s “Deep Inner Lives, Individualism and People of Honour,” *History of Political Thought*, 16, no. 2 (Summer, 1995): 190-207.
acquiring it for one’s self. Direct punishment of others by the victim of any violation is viewed as disruptive and highly discouraged.93

In honour cultures, by contrast, valuation of the self occurs both internally and externally. Honour, as the valuative element of the self, can be taken away from the individual and absorbed into the honour of the individual who takes it. Retribution for any offense is normally taken by the individual who is the victim of a violation, or by affiliated persons representing that individual by virtue of blood, social ties, or political obligation; which is to say, members of the same honour group.94

2.2. The Composition of Honour

To say that honour is the valuative element of self says much of its importance within honour cultures, but little of its substance. Is it possible to come any closer to the nature of honour? If it is, as often said, a form of symbolic currency, what is its specie? If it is dependent on external recognition for its validity, in what manner does it attach itself to the individual?

Perhaps the most common conception of honour is that it is in most cases bipartite – it is comprised of both internal and external aspects. One of the most influential figures in honour research, Julian Pitt-Rivers, has defined honour as “the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his claim to pride, but it is also the acknowledgement of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his right to

For our purposes, we might here say that honour is comprised of the value that the individual places on himself, but that its actualization is dependent on its acknowledgement by society – the validation of his or her right to that claim. Any who claim but receive no recognition do not, in fact, possess that honour to which they pretend. The internal and external qualities of honour are difficult to separate, for in an honour culture, “the individual learns the truth about himself through the intermediary of others.” Such cultures tend to originate and thrive in environments lacking a centralized authority capable of enforcing peace and social order, and retribution, enacted by the individual, consequently becomes an organizing principle, and the alienable nature of honour as valuative characteristic of the self cultivates a competitive environment.

Because the value by which the individual is defined is largely dependent on the validation of that value by a larger group, individual identity itself is highly dependent on the groups (familial, cultural, political, religious, societal) of which one is a member. In turn, the collective honour of the larger group is dependent on the actions and reputation of each member of that group, who must take care to maintain their individual honour according to their status.

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97 On the ability of honour cultures to thrive even in environments where effective or semi-effective centralized authorities do, in fact, at least >claim< a monopoly on violence, see Paul R. Hyams, Rancor & Reconciliation in Medieval England (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), and discussion below.

and gender. And in this way, “pride-eliciting or shame-eliciting events reflect on other people in the group, also causing them to feel proud or ashamed.”

The determinants of honour and the manner in which individual honour is evaluated are typically strongly distinguished between the sexes. Where masculine honour within the ruling classes is closely tied to martial prowess, the honour of women is often centered on sexual shame/purity, chastity, modesty, etc., and the reputation of females is often a primary determinant for the collective honour of the family or group.

An alternate, and extremely useful understanding of the term is offered by Frank Henderson Stewart: Stewart suggests first “that we look on honor as a right, roughly speaking, the family’s collective reputation is a reflection of the reputation of its individual members, while the status of the family’s honour is shared by each family member.” Patricia M. Rodriguez Mosquera, Antony S.R. Manstead, and Agneta H. Fischer, “The Role of Honour Concerns in Emotional Reactions to Offences,” *Cognition and Emotion* 15, no. 1 (2002): 143-163, 146. The manner in which the group is conceptualized is an important one for our discussion: at least one recent study has concluded that differences between honour societies concerning the level of aggression present in reaction to verbal insults is less dependent on differing conceptualizations of masculine or feminine honour than by the degree of emphasis placed on family or collective honour. See van Osch et al, “A Different Kind of Honor Culture,” 334-344. See also Patricia M. Rodriguez Mosquera, Antony S. R. Manstead and Agneta H. Fischer, “Honor in the Mediterranean and Northern Europe,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 33, no. 1 (January, 2002): 16-36, 17.

The extent to which female honour is dependent upon sexuality is one point on which individual honour societies differ when examined closely. Medieval Icelandic society, for instance, appears to have placed significantly less value on female chasteness than that which came to dominate in the German speaking lands. Comparing Mediterranean honour to that of medieval Iceland, Miller reports that while in the Mediterranean, “shame was female sexuality itself,” and that the system of honour challenge almost invariably “centered on the moral condition of one’s women” and to fail in the challenge was to leave one’s women defenseless, in Iceland, “Honor and shame were gendered to be sure, but they were not obsessively focused on the condition of the female genitalia and did not lead to an ideal of a reality of female sequestration.” William Ian Miller, *Humiliation*, 118. As will be seen, the world of Middle High German epic appears to have lain someplace in between, though with notable tendencies towards the former.

Stewart’s conception of the term was prompted in large part by his dissatisfaction with what he believed to be the failure of bipartite definitions to account for the power of insults within honour cultures. Stewart, *Honor*, 13. Although I do not share Stewart’s dissatisfaction, and believe that the bipartite theory accounts adequately for the power of insults, his findings are nevertheless illuminating and extremely useful in broadening our understanding of honour. Stewart’s work also demonstrates that the exchange between Germanists and anthropologists can move

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the right to be treated as having a certain worth […] honor is a right rather than […] a right to some particular thing.”

Stewart enhances this rendition of honour by distinguishing between horizontal honour< and vertical honour<. Horizontal honour is that respect which is due to an equal, one who occupies the same plane within the hierarchy of honour. Vertical honour comes into play between individuals of unequal honour, and manifests in a variety of fluid forms. Two of the most important of these for our purposes are those of rank honour<, “enjoyed by all members of a superior rank in relations with their inferior” and competitive honour<, “enjoyed by those who have shown themselves to be superior as individuals.”

This second aspect is especially important for Middle High German epic and the zero-sum competition for (primarily masculine) honour that governs so many of the interactions depicted therein.

Perhaps the most useful treatment of honour to emerge in recent years is that of Robert L. Oprisko. Oprisko identifies six core concepts or processes of which external honour< is comprised: prestige< (the process by which an individual gains social value for valued characteristics within a social group and increases his or her hierarchical position in relation to the other members of the group), shame< (the counterpart to prestige, by which the individual’s profitably in both directions, as demonstrated by his extensive references to the narratives of Hartmann von Aue in his exploration of honour’s nature and development.

104 Stewart, Honor, 21.
105 Stewart, Honor, 54-63.
106 Stewart utilizes the term “honor group” to refer to “a set of people who follow the same code of honour and who recognize each other as doing so.” Stating further that “[a]nother possible way of defining the honor right would be to say that it is the right to be treated as a full or equal member of the honor group.” Stewart, Honor, 54.
107 Stewart, Honor, 59-60.
position in relation to other members of the group is decreased), >face< (the process by which the individual’s position within the group is maintained – it is exceptionally fragile and its loss threatens ones identity and membership within the peer group), >esteem< (the process by which an individual excels within an honour system which is not necessarily that of those who evaluate the social value of the individual), >affiliated honour< (the process by which an individual and the group of which they are a member gain value from mutual association), and >glory< (the combination of fame and honour). Internal honour has two primary processes: >honourableness< (“the process whereby an individual incorporates honour as a valued quality of his or her self”) and >dignity< (“the process whereby people inscribe themselves with social value” according to a >personal< honour code – as such, it constitutes “a direct challenge to the authority of external evaluation”). 109 In this, Stewart’s vertical honour is subsumed into positive >prestige< and negative >shame<, while horizontal honour is a function of >face<. Although >face< is perhaps the most fragile aspect of honour in Oprisko’s conception, all aspects are ultimately vulnerable and in need of constant maintenance.

Finally, before moving on, we might consider honour conceived as >symbolic capital< in Bourdieu’s terminology. This aspect of honour within societies “in which honour is the key-stone of the system of values” was first noted by Bourdieu in his studies of Kabyle society. 110 In addition to forming the “true basis of the Kabyle political order,” honour also subsumed all economic relationships, which “always remain […] concealed beneath a veil of prestige and honour relationships.” 111

109 Oprisko, Honor, 6-7.
Symbolic capital (including “glory, honour, credit, reputation, fame”), “enables forms of domination which imply dependence on those who can be dominated by it, since it only exists through the esteem, recognition, belief, credit, confidence of others, and can only be perpetuated so long as it succeeds in obtaining belief in its existence.”

It is the nature of symbolic capital not only to function as capital (“that is, as force, a power or capacity for [actual or potential] exploitation”) but also to confer a special, privileged being to the possessor – a justification of existence. The struggle for this capital, writ large in cultures of honour, “is competition for a power that can only be won from others competing for the same power, a power over others that derives its existence from others, […] Although it is the product of subjective acts of donation of meaning (not necessarily implying consciousness and representation), this symbolic power, charm, seduction, charisma, appears endowed with an objective reality […]”

2.3. Shame and the Vulnerability of Honour

In an honour culture, shame is occasioned by the loss of honour, and as such functions publicly as its inverse: it is “the failure to measure up to the external standard imposed by the honor group.” Generally speaking, honour is a prerequisite for the shame – honour must first be

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114 Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 241
115 Miller, *Humiliation*, 118.
present for it to be lost – and as such may occasionally take on positive connotations as the unique privilege of the honourable.  

Loss of honour, and the shame through which that state is both known and experienced, occurs when one is shown to be unworthy of one’s honour claims. This can manifest as the neglect to accord another the standard pleasantries, through defeat in the course of (frequently violent) competition, by a superior individual recognizing the claims of another in place of or in excess of one’s own, or through the counter-claim of another which goes unanswered.

In a society in which self-worth, and indeed even the ability to function effectively within that society, is determined in large part by reputation, insults, verbal or otherwise, take on a profoundly threatening aspect. If an insult is allowed to go unanswered, it suggests the possibility that the content of that insult may in fact be valid. If nothing else, it casts doubt on the ability of the insulted individual (and potentially of the larger group[s] of which that individual is a part) to react in the face of a threat. Consequently, there exists a social imperative within honour societies to avenge insults, often corporally.  

“A refusal to submit to public humiliation is

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116 “In addition, such an emotional reaction [experiencing shame] should reinforce one’s identity as a person who cares for his/her honour. Because reputation is emphasized for both sexes in honour cultures, experiencing shame in reaction to an offence should be elicited in both men and women in these cultures.” Mosquera, Manstead, and Fischer, “The Role of Honour Concerns,” 146.

117 In comparing participants from an honour culture (the American south) and a dignity culture (the American North), the subjects were found to have drastically differing reactions to insult. The Southerners were far more likely to believe that their reputation had been damaged by the insult, to react with physical aggression, and to be “cognitively primed for future aggression.” Dov Cohen, Brian F. Bowdle, Richard E. Nisbett, and Norbert Schwarz, “Insult, Aggression, and the Southern Culture of Honor: An ‘Experimental Ethnography,’” Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 70, no. 5 (1996): 945-960, 957. In reference to Middle High German literature, Thomas Möbius, in surveying references to revenge in the Nibelungenlied, notes that the accepted justifications for seeking revenge are specifically murder (of an affiliated person) and insults. Thomas Möbius, Studien zum Rachegedanken in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters (Frankfurt am Main: Pater Lang, 1993), 49.
therefore a core characteristic of what it means to be a man in honour cultures. In the face of offences, this refusal is expressed in honour cultures by the experience and outward expression of male anger.”\textsuperscript{118} Both males and females are vulnerable to such statements and accusations, though the latter are traditionally more likely to instigate angry reactions in closely related men in order to defend themselves corporally than to act on their own behalf.

This aspect of honour culture is in accordance with the social origins of honour itself, and what Stewart has characterized as >reflexive honour\textless. Reflexive honour stipulates that “if A impugns B’s honor, then B’s honor is ipso facto diminished or destroyed, unless B responds with an appropriate counterattack on A. Rules which govern this matter are part of the code of honor.”\textsuperscript{119}

In Oprisko’s conception, “shame has an absolute characteristic; you can lose shame, but it will never be less than at a zero-point. However, the more shame one has, the lower the social value to the group.”\textsuperscript{120} Yet this does not mean that shame is wholly negative, for, aside from its positive function as a mechanism of social control, “by abiding by the norms of the group, persons show themselves to be honorable, and the burden of shame can become a source of prestige […] there is a direct correlation between the honorableness of people and their internalization of shame.”\textsuperscript{121} In this way, honour challenges, and the experience of shame, can, like other forms of honour insult, serve to constitute community.

\textsuperscript{118} Mosquera, Manstead, and Fischer, “The Role of Honour Concerns,” 145.
\textsuperscript{119} Stewart, \textit{Honor}, 64. One crucial manifestation of these rules is discussed below as “feud.”
\textsuperscript{120} Oprisko, \textit{Honor}, 73.
\textsuperscript{121} Oprisko, \textit{Honor}, 75. Perhaps in some ways reflective of this, Bourdieu notes that a challenge to honour itself may be understood as >honouring\textless: “To make someone a challenge is to credit him with the dignity of a man of honour, since the challenge, as such, requires a riposte and therefore is addressed to a man deemed capable of playing the game of honour, and of playing it well. From the principle of equality in honour there follows a first corollary: the challenge confers honour,” Pierre Bourdieu, \textit{Outline of a Theory of Practice}, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge:
It has recently been suggested that the readiness of honour culture males to respond with violence to insults that impugn their honour is in part a function of their “precarious manhood.” According to this hypothesis, manhood across a wide variety of cultures “is not a developmental certainty, in that even once achieved, it is not guaranteed and can be lost,” in stark contrast to womanhood, for “a woman’s actions may damage her reputation as a woman and that of her family, and she may be deemed a ‘bad’ woman, but these shortcoming will not usually threaten her (socially constructed) status.” As a result, threats, which call the status of manhood into question, are likely to be met with a more extreme response calculated to nullify the threat through a display affirming the masculinity of the maligned, extending, in extreme cases, to the elimination of the maligner. If true, this would suggest not that females are less at risk from a loss of honour (certainly not the case), but rather that their engagement in the honour system functions on a fundamentally different plane than that of men. Their inclusion within a socially constructed and gender determined group is assumed, and their primary concern is their status within that group, whereas for males the primary concern is demonstration or maintenance of their status as a group member, with a secondary concern for their status within that group. This is partially in alignment with Oprisko’s comment that “the honor groups fulfill the ritual obligation of casting men as ‘other’ to a community which consists of women, uninitiated boys, and other men who do not hold the same vision of masculinity. The shame of failing to live up to


the standards of manhood is a threat to men that has been projected onto the actions of women."124

2.4. The Honour Cultures of Medieval Europe

Although naturally differing from region to region and court to court, the records handed down to us from the high middle ages make clear that the European society of this age was permeated by, even obsessed with honour. So near as we are today able to reconstruct this society, it shares much with the anthropological models discussed above. As William Ian Miller has written:

(In medieval society), [h]onor was more than just a set of rules for governing behavior. Honor permeated every aspect of consciousness: how you thought about yourself and others, how you held your body, the expectations you could reasonably have and the demands you could make on others; it determined the quality of your marriage and the marriage partners of your children. It was your very being. For in an honor-based culture there was no self-respect independent of the respect of others, no private sense of “Hey, I’m quite something” unless it was confirmed publicly. Honor was then not just a matter of the individual; it necessarily involved a group, and the group included all those people worthy of competing with you for honor. Your status in this group was the measure of your honor, and your status was achieved at the expense of the other group members who were not only your competitors for scarce honor but also the arbiters of whether you had it or not. In other words, your good standing depended on the judgment of your enemies. Your good standing was also aided by friends, not so much because of their judgment of you, but because you had them. Having friends was a sign to others of your honor and only the honorable had friends. Of course friends constituted the possible class of future enemies and in the sense their judgments mattered.125

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The permeation of honour has been made abundantly clear in Gerd Althoff’s many studies on the semi-ritualized practices that governed courtly ritual and interaction. Althoff’s own comments on the importance of honour in medieval society echo those of Miller, above: “Für die Jahrhunderte des Mittelalters bezeichnet die Ehre einer Person die Summe all dessen, was – aus Vornehmheit, Ämtern, Besitz, persönlichen Fähigkeiten und Verbindungen gebildet – die Stellung dieser Person in den verschiedenen Lebensordnungen ausmacht, die nicht zuletzt Rangordnungen waren.” Honour was therefore crucial to rank, and therefore “etwas existentiell Wichtiges” (something of existential importance), in that it constrained and enabled all possibilities for social interaction.

Two facets of medieval honour are of especial importance for the study at hand: first, that, as in other honour societies, honour was jealously guarded, and any harm that it might suffer must be made good in one manner or another. Second, that, consistent with a largely (although not entirely) external composition and valuation of self, honour was public, and so too were challenges to honour.

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128 “For the centuries of the Middle Ages the honour of a person denoted the sum of all that – refinement, offices, property, personal abilities and connections – which constituted the position of this person in the various orders of life, which were, if nothing else, hierarchies.” Gerd Althoff, “Compositio. Wiederherstellung verletzter Ehre im Rahmen gülticher Konfliktbeendigung,” in Verletzte Ehre. Ehrkonflikte in Gesellschaften des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, ed. Klaus Schreiner and Gerd Schwerhoff (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1995).
2.5. Honour and Practice

It has been noted by Knut Görich that amongst the contemporaries of Emperor Friedrich I, honour was most frequently spoken of when it had been damaged or called into question.\textsuperscript{130} Such injury was not restricted to the personal honour of the individual affected, but extended to the larger group: “Generell war die Beleidigung eines Herrn auch eine Beleidigung seines Gefolges und seiner Vasallen, die sich dann zu gemeinsamer Rache der Ehrverletzung verpflichtet und vom Herrn auch dazu aufgerufen sahen” – a point much emphasized by Friedrich I and his court in their innumerable references to the honor imperii.\textsuperscript{131} This vengeance could and not infrequently did involve violence and killing, but these were not the only means of repairing damaged honour. There existed a large vocabulary of symbolic acts whereby the offending party might publically shame himself and simultaneously pay honour to the offended, thereby balancing the scales of honour. Such an act could constitute compositio (composition) through satisfactio (satisfaction) – the >making good< (Genugtuung in Althoff’s terms) for a perceived offense.\textsuperscript{132} This making good could simply be the public admission of fault or error – no small thing, in that such an act would potentially both validate the honour claims of one’s opponent and invalidate one’s own, or a more dramatic Fußfall or deditio - the surrender of one’s self via physical prostration before one’s opponent.\textsuperscript{133} This last made visually manifest the relationship of dominance and submission between the two parties, exposing clearly the reduced


\textsuperscript{131} “Generally an affront to the ruler was also an affront to his retinue and his vassals, who then pledged themselves to collective vengeance and saw themselves as being called thereto by the ruler.” Görich, Die Ehre, 23.

\textsuperscript{132} See Gerd Althoff, “Genugtuung.”

state of the losing party by removing from him all the traditionally perceptible signs of honour. Althoff notes that in many cases, this act seems not to have totally destroyed the honour and prestige of the surrendering party. If this is so, we may be able to see in the perception of the act something of the workings of the honour economy during the period: if the goal of the action was the restoration of balance, it was necessary that the submissive party demonstrate honour injury equal to, or ideally greater than, that which he had inflicted on the other. This accomplished, that honour (plus interest) accrued to the victor, and, theoretically, the scales returned not to a point of true balance, in which the parties were held to be of equal honour, but rather to a socially sanctioned balance point that confirmed the relative status of each side.

It is clear that in most cases precisely what constituted acceptable satisfactio was determined by the victor and the extent to which he felt his honour to have been slighted. The famous Tübinger feud, for example, was touched off by a slight against the honour of the Welfs when the count palatine Hugo II of Tübingen pardoned two ministerials in his own service.

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134 Althoff, Spielregeln, 102.

135 Consider here the thoughts of William Ian Miller: “When the debt is of honor (and in an honor society few undischarged debts do not engage one’s honor) the notion of getting even is understood to embody a hostile intention to make the other feel your pain, to get him down, if not to obliterate him. At a minimum it means you want to make sure you (and others) can see he is as humiliated as you were seen to have been. And if we can with some degree of confidence blame the wrongdoer for having started it – that is, if his wrong can in no way be seen as merely having taken his turn in a relationship of hostile turn-taking known as feud – then the wrongdoer deserves an extra kick in the pants for upsetting the initial equilibrium. But there is nothing extra in the humiliation of the initial wrongdoer to compensate adequately for the humiliation suffered by the first victim. It is merely squaring the account, as any justice worthy of the name would require.” William Ian Miller, Eye for an Eye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 18.

136 This episode and its relationship to dispute practices of the high medieval period are discussed in greater detail below. Other scholars have emphasized underlying political causes for this feud, seen by them as a proxy-battle between the great princes of the twelfth-century empire, who strove to increase their resources and power-base at the expense of their contemporaries. This may well have played a substantial role, but it is nevertheless significant that the insult to honour was selected as the justifiable excuse for the feud, that is to say, that an attack upon one’s honour constituted legitimate grounds for entering into open hostilities. See Heinrich Bütter, “Staufer und Welfen im politischen Kräftespiel zwischen Bodensee und Iller während des 12. Jh.” Zeitschrift für württembergische Landesgeschichte 20 (1960): 17-73, 51-54; and Helmut Maurer, Der Herzog von Schwaben. Grundlagen, Wirkungen und Wesen seiner Herrschaft in ottonischer, salischer und staufischer Zeit (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1978), 247.
while hanging a third, who belonged to Duke Welf VI. This caused the duke’s son, Welf VII, “permutus maxima indignatione” (moved by the greatest indignation), to move against the count “igne et ferroque” (with both fire and iron).\textsuperscript{137} Hugo’s response to the Welf, offering only “contumacem ac minacem” (defiance and threats) as satisfaction, was a further attack on the honour of the Welf house (“quasi bone fame Guelfonis invidens,” [just as if attacking the good reputation of the Welf]).\textsuperscript{138} Eventually, after years of conflict and despite notable victories on the battlefield,\textsuperscript{139} Hugo was compelled to submit to the Welfs and their powerful allies. He surrendered his person to the younger Welf, prostrating himself before his foe in the presence of Duke Heinrich, Duke Friedrich and the emperor himself. Despite Otto von St. Blasien’s report that the count fell at Welf VII’s feet a total of three times,\textsuperscript{140} the younger Welf did not feel this act to be sufficient recompense for the injury done to the honour of his house and commanded the unfortunate count bound in chains, where he remained until Welf’s death.

Paramount in such conduct is that honour, both in its injury and its reparation, was a public matter. Both aspects function according to the principle that honour demands external validation to obtain its power. The effectiveness of the Fußfall was dependent first and foremost on its ability to make the honour relationship between the two parties physically manifest; manifest in order that it might be seen; seen in order that it might be actualized.

\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Historia Welforum}, \textit{MGH SRG} XLIII, 37-40.
\textsuperscript{139} One of the battles of this feud is mentioned by Wolfram von Eschenbach in his \textit{Willehalm}, where the narrator references a particularly humiliating defeat for the Welf forces at Tübingen in 1164 and wishes a similar fate upon his poem’s antagonists. \textit{Willehalm}, 381,26-30.
\textsuperscript{140} Otto von St. Blasien, \textit{Chronica}, 22.
2.6. Honour Culture in Middle High German Epic

Scarcely a decade after the publication of Ruth Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, the anthropological division between >guilt culture< and >shame culture< was already being applied by literary scholars in their studies of medieval literature, and in particular, of medieval German literature. Viewed through this lens, it was suggested that the theoretically older, more purely >Germanic< heroic narratives might be understood as the product of the latter, while the more thoroughly Christianized, courtly romances were held to be indicative of a budding internalization of the self, and thereby tending tentatively towards the former. Yet, even if one accepts the distinction as valid, few heroic narratives in their extant forms are free of “courtly” influence or interference, nor, even in the most extreme cases, is the internalization of self complete or even a dominant mode in courtly narrative of the high medieval period.

The theoretical construction of honour culture indeed provides a useful frame of reference, and point of comparison, for engaging with the fictive worlds of Middle High German Epic, though it must always be remembered that honour cultures are not homogenous, and as such must be engaged with individually. We must be careful not to view the characteristics discussed above as absolutes or as given – even if the conventions of honour in Middle High

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141 Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (see note 2).
142 George Fenwick Jones, *Honor in German Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959). Since this time, the application of an anthropological lens to Middle High German texts has proved a popular and exceptionally useful tool. Approaches have ranged from the application of existing anthropological models (see Jones above, as well as Ann G. Martin, *Shame and Disgrace at King Arthur’s Court: A Study on the Meaning of Ignominy in German Arthurian Literature to 1300* [Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1984]) to the construction of new models within the confines of a specific text (Jan-Dirk Müller, *Spielregeln*).
German heroic epic function in normative ways which closely resemble those of other honour cultures, it is well to remember that they are also frequently questioned and challenged. Even within the same text, honour may prove a dynamic concept, every bit as much as that presented in the Homeric poems.  

What then can we say of honour and its manifestations within these narratives? How was the honour of the imagined cultures of Middle High German narrative conceived? What are the strictures and rules that govern and bind its adherents?

As noted, the traditional narrative is that during the medieval period, Christian guilt culture, little evidenced within the heroic epics, gradually replaced heathen shame culture; externalized shame was supplanted by internalized guilt and sin, while externalized honour was replaced by an internalized valuation of ethical behaviour. Yet, as remarked by Jan-Dirk Müller, if this transformation indeed occurred, it was a gradual process, and one from complete even in the later courtly epics.  

It is on these that the majority of the existing scholarship has focused, for in the courtly epics, honour, shame and guilt are more extensively thematized – in

\[144\] One of the earliest applications of the shame/guilt culture to the epic poetry of pre-modern Europe may be found in Eric Robertson Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), see esp. 28-63. For a recent discussion of this dynamism in a Homeric context, see Douglas Cairns, “Honour and Shame: Modern Controversies and Ancient Values,” *Critical Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (April, 2011): 23-41.


most cases, honour and shame remain the primary valuative elements of the self, but are questioned and complemented by developing alternative and more internally focused perceptions of guilt: “Das für eine Adelsgesellschaft zentrale Prinzip der Ehre bestimmt durchgehend weiterhin das Selbstverhältnis der Helden, doch ist sie nicht mehr dominant gesellschaftlich gefasst […] Es ist weniger eine Disparität der Wertordnung als der individuellen Einstellung zu ihnen.”

In the heroic epics here under consideration, even those of relative late date, there is less evidence of this nascent shift. Here, honour remains primarily (although not invariably) “gefasst als gegenwärtige und künftige Fama.”

2.7. Êre

The word most commonly translated as “honour,” and which most closely corresponds to our sense of the term, is ëre – the ancestor of New High German Ehre, and descendent of Old High German erâ. The ultimate origin of the word remains obscure, but from a very early point

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147 Josef Szövérffy, for example, offers a vision of a dominant shame culture being pulled towards guilt culture. Szövérffy, “Artuswelt,” 33-46., see esp. 40-42 for Szövérffy’s engagement with Benedict’s shame culture. This is in agreement with Maurer, who saw externalized honour as the dominant form in Hartmann’s works, with hints of internalization present in Wolfram’s narratives. Friedrich Maurer, “Tugend und Ehre,” *Wirk. Wort* 2 (1951): 72-80, 77.

148 “The principle of honour, central to an aristocratic society, continues to determine the self-conception of the heroes throughout [these narratives], yet the societal composition [of honour] is no longer dominant. […] It is less a disparity of value systems than of the attitude of individuals towards them.” Müller, “Scham und Ehre,” 93.

149 “conceived as present and future *fama*.” Müller, “Scham und Ehre,” 66. At the same time, Sonja Kerth has remarked that while later heroic epics, in particular the “historical” Dietrich epics of the thirteenth century, they increasingly seem to regard heroic honour considerations as less understood conventions than as situationally or character dependent. Sonja Kerth, “Die historische Dietrichscheip als ‘späte Heldendichtung,’” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literature* 129 vol. 2 (2000): 154-75; 167.
onwards it seems to have had two principal aspects, the first connected with the idea of >awe<, as before godly or worldly power, and the second with renown and worth – the attributes of such powers.\textsuperscript{150} Both erâ and ère are used to denote external esteem. As such, it incorporates elements, and is at times nearly interchangeable with ruom (>praise<, >renown<) and pris (>praise<, >glory<, >good fame<). It is also closely tied to tugent (>manly excellence<, >quality<, >noble manners<). Otfrid Ehrismann connected it in this respect “mit der späteren Ehre-Theorie des Thomas von Aquin, die ihrerseits auf Aristoteles zurückging: honor est exhibition reverentiae in testimonium virtutis.”\textsuperscript{151}

In narrative, êre could be possessed, it could be granted or given,\textsuperscript{152} it could be won,\textsuperscript{153} and it could grow.\textsuperscript{154} At the same time it could be damaged,\textsuperscript{155} lost,\textsuperscript{156} or taken.\textsuperscript{157} Whether attached to persons or groups, it was vulnerable, and consequently needed to be guarded.\textsuperscript{158}


\textsuperscript{152} “ich gibe dirz lop unt die êre / unt lone dir sîn iemer mêr,” (I will give you praise and honour and be in your debt forever more, Rolandslied, 3811-2).

\textsuperscript{153} “Ich gelige tot, od ir gewinnet wider romisch ere,” (I will lay dead, or you will win Roman honour again, Rabenschlacht, 37,6). Cited from: Rabenschlacht. Textgeschichtliche Ausgabe, ed. Elisabeth Lienert and Dorit Wolter (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2005).

\textsuperscript{154} “was èren an im wüehse,” (his honour grew, Nibelungenlied 22); “wo sy volgent weyser lere, davon steiget ir ere.” (Where they followed good counsel, whereby their honour increased, Dietrichs Flucht, 1914). Cited from: Dietrichs Flucht. Textgeschichtliche Ausgabe, ed. Elisabeth Lienert and Gertrud Beck (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2003).


\textsuperscript{156} “ich mûz wole unfrô sîn, / daz ich ie wart geboren, / sint ich mîn êre han verlorn,” (I must indeed be unhappy that I was ever born, since I have lost my honour, Heinrich, Eneas, 301,26-27). Cited from: Heinrich von Veldeke, Eneasroman, ed. Ludwig Ettmüller (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986). Hereafter: Eneas.
Êre is valuatative, its presence is a good thing, its absence a bad one. It is constituted of specific aspects, and its presence and quality are established according to understood criteria. Getting at precisely what constituted virtue and tugent in these texts is therefore of primary importance. When we are told that an act was performed “mit ëren” (with honour), as frequently occurs, we know that the act is positively valued, but according to what process of evaluation? Such a phrase indicates that the act was >appropriate to the station of the person performing it<, that the act was >done according to the rules prescribing that person’s conduct according to the situation in which it occurred<, and that consequently honour was gained and/or maintained thereby.

In that it is sought after, that it may be possessed, and that its possession is both representative and determinate of an individual’s dominance, standing and social value, honour is indeed a form of symbolic capital in the Middle High German heroic epics, but, given the broadness of its application as positive worth, it must be seen as capital of multitudinous specie. Adopting Oprisko’s view of honour as a composition of various processes allows a greater understanding of the particular dynamics at work within a given circumstance, interaction or valuation.

When a character performs an action according to (nâch) his or her honour, it is understood that both the act itself and the manner in which it is performed is worthy of the

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157 “lête ez andèr iemen, sô zurnte ich alsô sere, / dan Ludewic der vater mín, ich name im beide lîb und <…> ëre,” (had anyone other than my father Ludewic have done this, I would be so angry, that I would take from him both life and honour, Kudrun, 964,3-4). Cited from: Kudrun, ed. Uta Störmer-Caysa (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2010).

158 “daz er tuo als ein degen / und sîn lant alsô bewar, / swie halt sîn dinc gevar, / daz er beüete sîn ëre,” ([she told him] that he ought to act as a warrior and therefore protect his lands, whatever danger threatens his affairs; that he ought to guard his honour, Herzog Ernst B, 1030-3), cited from Herzog Ernst. Ein mittelalterliches Abenteuerbuch ed. Karl Bartsch and Bernhard Sowinski (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1970). Hereafter HEB.
individual’s status within the honour group. Actions performed “mit êren” serve to maintain the honour of the individual, incurring no loss through dishonourable action. They further have the potential to increase one’s prestige, at the same time that they work to ensure one’s continued membership within the group: one of the most basic conditions for the maintenance of honour or face is always continuous exertion in the game of prestige.

2.8.  Êre and Gender

Êre, like the honour of most honour cultures, seems to impose quite different strictures on the individual according to gender. For females, cultural norms restrict engagement with competitive honour, save through the processes of collective honour via their husbands. In its passive form, female êre is dependent in large part on schœne (beauty) and zuht. Zuht is a particularly difficult word and concept to translate, and for males it could at times be virtually interchangeable with tugent (>manly excellence< or even >martial prowess< in this sense). For females, >proper breeding<, both in the literal sense of ancestry and status, but also in the sense of having been raised properly, that is, possessed of chastity, good manners, discipline, and decorum. Above all, a woman “konnte êre nicht erkämpfen, nicht mehren, nur wahren und behüten, war zur Passivität verdammt.”

This must be qualified, first in that the passivity here referenced ought not be taken to indicate a complete lack of agency, but rather applies specifically to female engagement in status

159 Ehrismann, *Ehre und Mut*, 68.
160 This aspect of female honour may be seen in *Kudrun*, when it is reported: “Diu was geheizen Hildeburc. frou Hilde, Hagenen wîp, / diu hêt erzogen nách êren ir tugenthaftên lip,”(She was called Hildeburc. Lady Hilde, Hagen’s wife, had raised her according to the honour of her virtuous person, *Kudrun*, 485,1-2).
161 “could neither win nor increase êre, only preserve and protect it, [she] was condemned to passivity.” Ehrismann, *Ehre und Mut*, 68.
competition. On the contrary, the women of Middle High German epic are frequently shown to be exert considerable agency in a host of contexts, even when, as so often occurs within Bridal Quest epics, this attributed agency serves primarily to underscore patriarchal notions of value: by willingly submitting to the desires of the male protagonist (by actively choosing him above others), these women are shown to validate not only their suitors’ claims to preeminent status, but, in awarding themselves as prizes, they legitimize the system of masculine status competition itself.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, the drive of female characters to participate in active status competition according to the processes of honour receives considerable recognition despite the strictures which forbid this to them. Profound anxiety about this engagement permeates the Nibelungenlied, in which status competition between two women occupies a central position. It is consequently clear that, however anxiety inducing, status competition between women up to and including competition against the interests of affiliated males, or even in opposition to those males, was far from unthinkable for a medieval audience. On the contrary, it seems to have weighed heavily on their thoughts.¹⁶²

For males, it is clear that ère is closely tied to martial prowess – when warriors fight, they “strive for honour.” Honour is gained by victory (unless one breaks triuwe in fighting) and lost in defeat. Honour is also enhanced and maintained by ostentatious display, which functions as the

¹⁶² Cf. Andrew Cowell’s discussion of the Nibelungenlied’s engagement with female drive for integrity in the context of masculine desire and the symbolic economy of the warrior aristocracy, where, in arguing that the poem depicts the integrity drive “as a recent outcome of (foreign) romance tendencies which excessively empower the woman, and [in which] the bride-quest narrative is effectively parodied and destroyed as an effective counternarrative,” he notes that “[t]he text ends up implicitly suggesting that men would, in the absence of “subjectified” women acting out their own, independent desires, engage in exchanges centering on homosocial solidarity and peacefulness, but that courtliness has disrupted this process and unleashed a flood of violence.” Andrew Cowell, The Warrior Aristocracy: Gifts, Violence, Performance, and the Sacred (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), 134-52; 146-7; 146. Cf. Also Stephanie B. Pafenberg, who argues that the “intrusion” of women into “male spheres of actions” suggests that the warrior culture of the poem has lost the means of controlling gender definitions, thereby leading to its destruction. Stephanie B. Pafenberg, “The Spindle and the Sword: Gender, Sex, and Heroism in the Nibelungenlied and Kudrun,” The Germanic Review 70 no. 3 (Summer, 1995): 106-115; 111.
signifier of wealth and status. Two of the most important aspects of masculine honour are that it is bound in many ways to dominance – it is competitive and is principally validated in those circumstances in which one individual is shown to occupy a position superior to that of others, and that it necessitates active engagement at all levels. This is to say that the possession and cultivation of masculine honour is dependent on constant pursuit of prestige at the expense of one’s peers, and unending defense of that honour to which one lays claim.

In descriptions of masculine honour, tugent is a primary constituent. The word, as difficult as zuht or ère itself to pin down, appears in frequent combination with ère throughout heroic epic.\(^{163}\) >Virtue< functions as a translation in a broad sense, and like virtue, tugent is dependent upon the station of the individual displaying it. When applied to warriors, tugent is in large part comprised of >martial<, excellence.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Vor ir gesidele stuonden} & \quad \text{die wætlîchen man}, \\
\text{die manige zuht kunden} & \quad \text{und hêten vil getân} \\
in \text{ir tagen tugende} & \quad \text{in manigem strîte schône}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{163}\) Examples include: “Nu gesiht man nimmer mere / von dir weder tugende noch ere,” (now no one will ever again see virtue or honour from you, Rabenschlacht, 911,5-6); “willic sint ime sine man. / dà ist tugent unt ère” (his vassals are always willing. There is virtue and honour, Rolandslied, 9063-4); “Úf Kunstenoible ze Kriechen ein gewalteger kûnic saz. / an dem tugent noch ère manheit nie vergaz / sîn meister und sîn schepper, der in ðà werden liez,” (A powerful king sat over the Greeks in Constantinople. His master and creator, who placed him there, had forgotten to endow him with neither virtue, nor honour, nor manhood, Wolfdietrich A, 1,1-3), cited from Ortnt und Wolfdietrich A, ed. Walter Kofler (Stuttgat: Hirzel, 2009); “Schouwe, werder ritter, ob iht wandels an mir sî. / tugent unde ère wonet mir noch bì,” (See, worthy knight, whether there is any imperfection in me. Virtue and honour yet wait upon me, Wolfdietrich B, 568, 1-2) cited from Wolfdietrich B: Paralleledition der Redaktionen B/K und H, ed. Walter Kofler (Stuttgat: Hirzel, 2008); “Nu hat got bedacht sich / an dir so hoher selikat / und alles das an dich gelait, / das tugent und ere hayssen sol,” (Now God has thought on such high perfection in you, and all that is invested in you, that should be called virtue and honour, Dietrichs Flucht, 300-303); “Owe, getriwer Nere, / du ware chune unde milt: / Nie nihtes dich bevilt, / daz tugende unde ere heizen sol, / des was din reinez herze vol,” (“Alas, loyal Nere, you were bold and mild: nothing was ever too great for your that should be called virtue and honour, your pure heart was full thereof, Dietrichs Flucht, 9939-9938).
It is in this sense that the unknown author of *Herzog Ernst B* maligns those who would doubt his tale:

> genougen ist von herzen leit  
> die dâ heime ir lant bûwent  
> unde nimmer des getrûwent  
> swaz man von heldes nœten saget.  
> die sint an wirdekeit versaget:  
> sie habent der arbeit niht erliten  
> und wirt ouch von ir gar vermiten,  
> wan sie dar zuo niht entugen  
> und velschent die rede swâ sie mugen.  
> [...]  
> den wonet niht guoter tugende bî.  

(Those who stay at home in their lands and never believe that which is said of a hero’s struggles are vexed in their hearts, lack worth: they have not experienced hardship and avoid it entirely, because they are unsuited thereto and slander the talk as they might. [...] good virtue [*tugent*] does not wait upon them, *HEB*, 8-20)

This sentiment captures not only the idea that excellence on the battlefield is a crucial component of masculine honour, but also the necessity of actively >pursuing< honour in order to >maintain< honour. For although honour functions in many ways as the ultimate form of symbolic capital within the heroic epics, it cannot be hoarded like capital, cannot be sat up and saved up for a rainy day – to >not< pursue honour is to lose what honour one has, however great or small. Honour must be put at risk, it must be wagered. It is a game in which the chips are liable to disappear when taken out of play. This aspect of honour is more fully developed in the courtly epics, above all in Hartmann’s *Erec*, where the hero’s loss of honour through inactivity is a
major motivator of the plot, but is also present in heroic narrative: in *Kudrun*, King Sigebant’s wife questions her husband’s honour, since he seems seldom engaged in knightly contests:

> “Dô ich magetlichen in Frideschotten saz
> - her kûnic, mûniù màre merket âne haz -,
> dô sah ich tegelîchen mines vater man
> nûch höhem prîse werben, des ich hie künde nie gewan.”

Si sprach. “Ein kûnic sô rîcher der solte dicker <geste> sehen,
als ir sît genennet und ich iu hêre jehen.
er solte mit sinen helden ofte buhurdieren,
dâ mite er sîniù erbe und sich selben solte <…> zieren.

(“When I sat as a maid in Scotland, – noble king, mark my words without resentment – there I saw daily my father’s men striving for high praise, which I have never known to happen here.” She said: “A king as mighty as you are said to be and as I have heard reported of you, should see guests more frequently. He should often engage in the buhurt with his heroes, and thereby glorify his inheritance and himself,” *Kudrun*, 30-31)

Although kindly meant, the queen’s words constitute a challenge to her husband’s honour: if he is the man he claims to be, he must demonstrate it, and to demonstrate that he possesses honour, he must pursue honour according to his gender and station. In so doing, the queen is looking after not only her husband’s honour, but her own. Ensuring that the masculine half of the couple does not allow their collective honour to be reduced is an important aspect of the feminine maintenance and protection of honour.\(^\text{164}\) The queen’s goading is therefore neither untoward nor

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\(^{164}\) As noted by Winder McConnell, “Ute remains more aware of the components integral to courtly life than does Sigeband… [w]ithout the benefit of Ute’s advice, Sigeband would have incurred the displeasure, even wrath of his nobles and seriously compromised the stature of the Irish ruling house.” For McConnell, the passage is evidence for Sigebart’s status as borderline *rex inutilis*, whose attempt to correct the defects pointed out by Ute results in further disaster, namely the abduction of their son, Hagen. Winder McConnell, *The Epic of Kudrun: A Critical Commentary* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1988), 8; 6-12.
unprecedented, as indicated by Sigebant’s response: “ich wil iu gerne folgen <als> ez mèr geschach, / daz man nâch frouwen rate lobeten hôchzîte.”

2.9. Îre and triuwe

One of the most important constituents of îre is triuwe – commonly translated as >loyalty<, although the word also encompasses aspects of >allegiance<, >devotion<, >duty<, and keeping one’s word. The degree to which one maintains all aspects of his or her triuwe is both indicative of and a >source< of honour. To be or display untriuwe is always shameful and dishonourable; thus when Hagen treacherously slays Sivrit in the Nibelungenlied, “Hagen sine triuwe vil sere an Sîfriden brach,” resulting in the “üngetriuwen tôt” – the faith-breaking murder is especially egregious because Sivrit himself “was iu ie getriuwe.”

A warning against such conduct appears in the Münchner Oswald:

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165 “I will gladly follow [your advice], as it has often happened that festivals are staged following the advice of ladies,” Kudran, 35,2-3. Such an occasion is to be found in König Rother, where Constantine’s daughter advises her father:

“woldit er nu, vater min,
dise pinkesten hir heime sin,
daz duchte mich ein ere getan,
unde sameneten uwere man,
daz die recken sagin,
ob ir ieht recht waren”
(If you, my father, would remain at home this Easter, I would think it honourable that you summon your men, so that the warriors might say whether you are proper, König Rother, 1545-1550), to which the emperor replies “we du nach den heren strevis / und retis ie das beste!,“ (how you strive for esteem and ever counsel what is best! König Rother, 1556-7). Cited from König Rother, ed. Peter K. Stein and Ingrid Bennewitz (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000), hereafter Rother.

166 Hagen broke his faith to Sivrit most egregiously, NL 971,4.

167 Faithless death, NL 988,4.

168 Was ever loyal to [his killers], NL 989,3.
verliuset er in deme vride daz leben sîn,
daz stat übele an den èren dîn
und muost sîn ouch iemère laster haben,
wâ man ez sol singen oder sagen:
man sprichet, du siest worden triuwelôs
(If he should lose his life during [your] truce, that will reflect ill upon your honour and you will be
disgraced ever more, wherever it is sung or spoken of: it will be said that you have become faithless,
*Münchner Oswald, 1015-9*).

In the *Eneasroman* of Heinrich von Veldeke, Latinus’ queen, seeking to dissuade her husband
from giving their daughter Lavinia to the Trojan hero, lists a virtual catalogue of honour, which
she finds wholly lacking in the “ungetrouwen man.”
Alongside criticism of Eneas’ lack of
conquests (he is a man who “nie lands teil gewan / also breit als ein schaft”),
the insufficient
quality of his breeding (“im nis von geborde / solich ère niht geslaht”),
and his cowardice (at Troy he “niht getorste vehten”),
his lack of *triuwe* is deliberately given chief of place: there is
no more base crime than having deserted his lord and kin:

> ez kumet von unsinne,
daz dü kêrest an den man,
der üzer Toie entran
sînem hèren und sînen knehten
[…]
her entran sînen màgen,

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169 In the *Nibelungenlied*, Kriemhilt is also cautioned by Dietrich against betraying her kin and her *triuwe*: “diu bête
dich lützel èret, vil edeles fürsten wîp, / daz du dinen màgen rætest an den lip” (The request does you little
honour, most noble prince’s wife, that you conspire against the lives of your kin, *NL* 1902,1-2). Since Kriemhilt “der
untriuwe an dem Bèrnære niht envant” (found no faithlessness in the Veronese, *NL* 1903,1), she is forced to turn
elsewhere for aid in her vengeance.

170 Disloyal man, *Eneas* 4178.

171 Never won a piece of land so wide as a shaft, *Eneas* 4180-1.

172 For one of his birth such an honour is not fitting, *Eneas* 4184-5.

173 Did not dare to fight, *Eneas* 4216.
(It is madness that you turn to this man, who abandoned his lord and his servants at Troy... He abandoned his kin, who lay there slain, *Eneas* 4212-18)

Karl’s paladins in the *Rolandslied*, whose *triuwe* was so great that they would sooner die than abandon their king without honour on the battlefield, represent the polar opposite of the queen’s grim portrait.

Loyalty and allegiance of this kind is often strengthened or established through the giving of gifts. Gift giving serves multiple purposes, at once confirming the honour status of the giver and potentially increasing relative status at the same time, but it also serves to create obligation by establishing a bond of *triuwe*. In *Herzog Ernst B*, it is for this reason (namely that “durch êre … / teilte er swaz er mohte hân”) that Duke Ernst’s men “dienten sie im sere / sît dô er kam in arbeit / und den grôzen kumber leit.”

The *Nibelungenlied* provides what is surely the best known example of the crisis experienced when *triuwe* owed to two or more parties in conflict necessitates two diametrically opposed courses of action: Near the conclusion of the poem, the noble Rüedeger is forced into an impossible position: he has earlier sworn to his queen Kriemhilt that he will avenge any wrong done to her. He has also taken her relatives and their followers, the Burgundians, into his hospitality as guests, creating a sacred bond. On top of this, he is a vassal of the lord Etzel, Kriemhilt’s husband, and owes him both loyalty and service in combat. After Kriemhilt has conspired to ensure open combat between Etzel and the Burgundians in an attempt to gain

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175 He shared whatever he had, for honour, *HEB* 98-99.
176 Served him very well later, when he came into strife and very great misery, *HEB* 102-104.
177 *NL* 1256-8.
redress for the many wrongs done to her by the Burgundians in the past, both she and her husband demand that Rüedeger fight on their behalf.

That Rüedeger in the end determines that he must fight may be a simple mathematical calculation on his part: collectively, Etzel and Kriemhilt hold at least three claims on his honour, while the Burgundians have but two.¹⁷⁸ Yet even here, Etzel and Kriemhilt come out ahead, for both of the obligations which Rüedeger bears them predate either tie to his Burgundian friends. It may also speak to the hierarchy of loyalties which forms so great a part of the *Nibelungenlied* and which is so frequently called into question – for Rüedeger, the ties of vassalage bear more heavily than those of host-and-guest or the ties of kinship inter-marriage. Whatever the case, though sorely grieved by the decision, his foes seem ultimately to understand, bearing him no lasting ill will, though he lies dead by their hand.¹⁷⁹


¹⁷⁹ The notion of loyalty to one’s lord and to the *sippe, triuwe*, is extremely important in virtually all the narrative works produced within the German speaking lands during the medieval period. An early articulation may be found in the Old Saxon *Heliand*:

“[…] that ist thegnes cust, 
that hie mid is frâhon samad  fasto gistande,
dôie mid im that an duome.  Duan ús alla sö, 
folgon im te therof ferdi:  ni lâtan úse fera uuði thiu 
uuihtes uuðrîg,  neba uu an them uuðeðe mid im, 
dôian mid úson drohtine.  Than lêbot ús thoh duom after, 
guod uuord for gumon  […]

(“That is the hero’s choice, that he stand fast together with his lord and die with him at the judgment. Let us all do so, follow him on his journey together; let us not think our lives of any worth, if only we die in the host with our Lord. Then our fame will live after us, good words before men” *Heliand*, 2996-4002).

2.10. Ère and Status

Due to the almost exclusively aristocratic focus of heroic narratives, where non-nobles seldom appear at all, honour seems the exclusive purview of the nobility, and only transferable within this class. While in reality, it is likely that the non-nobles of the medieval period possessed a notion of honour as highly prized and developed as that of the aristocracy, there is little evidence to suggest that this was of any concern to the audience or the composers of heroic poetry. Wate’s reaction in Kudrun when asked to play the part of a merchant is typical in this regard, and displays the characteristic contempt of the aristocratic warrior: “ich kan niht koufes phlegen: / mîn habe ist vil selten müezic her gelegen. / ich teiltes ie mit helden.” For Wate, wealth and material possessions exist for the purpose of status confirmation and the solidifying of ties between warriors. There is no honour in trade.

For the most part, Middle High German heroic epics depict a nearly exclusive aristocratic society, allowing only for the occasional appearance of the lower classes en masse as audience for aristocratic display. The few exceptions to this rule tend not to end well for the non-nobles:

For a discussion of triuwe and its translation into modern English, see Jones, Honor in German Literature, 26, where he suggests that “allegiance” may in many cases be a more accurate rendering of the concept. As an alternative to Rüedeger and his interactions with the Burgundians as tragic embodiment of heroic triuwe, Neil E. Thomas suggests that the margrave may here be cast as a representative of chivalric, rather than heroic knighthood, “whose moral profile best resembles that of contemporary romance heroes,” who serves (in contrast to his success in the Rabenschlacht) as an ineffectual mediator. Neil E. Thomas, “The Epic in an Age of Romance: Genre and Discursive Context in the Nibelungenlied,” Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies 44, no. 3 (September, 2008): 301-317; 310-2.

181 I cannot be occupied with business: my possessions have very seldom lain idle. I have ever shared them with heroes,” Kudrun, 253,1-3.
the *Nibelungenlied*’s ferryman may be *rîche*¹⁸² and have *knehte*¹⁸³ at his command, may even be considered a hero by his master,¹⁸⁴ yet though he is “ein starker man,”¹⁸⁵ he remains an upstart: *übermûete.*¹⁸⁶

Even Wolfram’s *Willehalm*, which, true to its considerable courtly influence, acknowledges the possibility of honourable behaviour amongst non-nobles,¹⁸⁷ provides evidence of a harsh distinction between the classes: having learned of his magistrate’s attempt to extract a toll from the titular hero, Count Arnalt exclaims:

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geunêrten,
ir alle, die daz lêrten,
daz ir vûr die koufman
dehaine ritter soldet hân!
waz zolles solt ein ritter geben?
het er iu allen iuwer leben
genomen, daz solt ich wênic klagen.
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(All of you who counselled that a knight be taken for a merchant are dishonourable! What toll should a knight pay? I should little lament it if he had taken all your lives, *Willehalm*, 116,13-19)

Given such strongly drawn class-based divisions, it is not surprising to find that the display of status markers is an important component of honour. The habitual display of the status markers

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¹⁸² Wealthy, *NL* 1551,1.

¹⁸³ “Servants,” or even “squires,” *NL* 1551,3

¹⁸⁴ *NL* 1603,4.

¹⁸⁵ A strong man, *NL* 1561,3.

¹⁸⁶ Haughty/arrogant. *NL* 1553,4. To be sure, *übermuet* is a trait the ferryman shares with many of the tale’s noblemen, but he is denied their many other honourable appellations.

¹⁸⁷ “dô kom ein koufman von der stat, / der in vil zühteclichen bat / durh aller koufliute êre / mit im der dankêre,” (then came a merchant from the city, who very politely bade him to come with him for the sake of the honour of all merchants, *Willehalm*, 130,17-20) – Wolfram notes too, that the merchant speaking these lines “was von ritters art erborn” (was of knightly birth, *Willehalm*, 131,1). Whether to mean that the merchant was of noble blood, or that his nature was noble, is ambiguous. In any case, the sentiment is rather more courtly than heroic, and functions primarily to highlight the dishonour of the emperor’s own court.
which determine membership within the honour group are necessary if one is indeed to remain a member of that group.\textsuperscript{188} The loss of the ability to engage in such display threatens one with disgrace or even a loss of membership within the honour group. Thus is the case with the poverty-stricken nobles of König Rother who “ne hatten die kleider noch die ros, / darumbe verbot man en Constantinis hof. / des livete ville manich riche / harte iamerliche.”\textsuperscript{189} Nor are the noblest of heroes immune from such disgrace: when Dietrich reports to Rüedeger that, “anders gütes han ich niht, / niwan als iwer ouge siht,”\textsuperscript{190} Rüedeger is compelled to lament the exile’s “grozen scham.”\textsuperscript{191}

The display of wealth and status signifiers serves not only as a means of securing one’s place within the aristocratic honour group, but also contains an element of competition for within that group – as honour, prestige, and wealth are often equated, those who possess and display more are understood to hold a correspondingly greater share of honour.\textsuperscript{192}

Status within the aristocratic honour group is not the only form of honour status that requires maintenance – the status as member of a kinship group is likewise of considerable importance. When Kriemhilt invites her brothers to Etzel’s court, she disguises her true purpose by explaining to them that she fears that if her relatives are not seen, she will be taken for an

\textsuperscript{188} As an extreme example, Gunther and his two companions in the Nibelungenlied require three changes of clothes and fine garments besides in order to avoid disgrace when traveling. \textit{NL} 360, and it is precisely to avoid shame that Gunther serves the best food available at his feast, \textit{NL} 309). Elsewhere, Kriemhilt tells her maidens to seek out the finest clothing “sô wirt uns von den gesten lob unt êrê geseit” (so the guests will speak praise and honour of us, \textit{NL} 568,4).

\textsuperscript{189} Had neither clothes nor horse, [and] therefore were banished from Constantine’s court. Because of this, many mighty men lived in great misery, \textit{Rother}, 1317-20.

\textsuperscript{190} I have no other possessions than what your eyes see, \textit{Dietrichs Flucht}, 4778-9.

\textsuperscript{191} Great shame, \textit{Dietrichs Flucht}, 4781.

\textsuperscript{192} The notion that one might preserve or even gain honour through renouncing the outer trappings of wealth and prestige, as occasionally occurs in courtly narratives, seems to be alien to heroic culture. Regarding the appearance of this notion in Gottfried’s Tristan, see Jutta Eming, “On Stage. Ritualized Emotions and Theatricality in Isolde’s Trial,” \textit{Modern Language Notes} 124, no. 3 (April, 2009): 555-571; 561-570.
exile, bereft of family and friends. This poses a challenge to the Burgundian honour – despite the rift between Kriemhilt and her brothers, if they are thought to have abandoned her (against their triuwe), it is not only her honour, but potentially their own that will be damaged. In this manner triuwe and status are connected within honour, for one must confirm and maintain status not only within the aristocratic honour group, but also within the family group, the kin. What is more, the demonstrated willingness of the family to defend its own members serves to maintain the status and membership of that family within the immediate honour group.

Due to the importance of affiliate honour, membership in such groups is highly exclusive – the integration of a new member through marriage is a fraught affair. Unequal marriages, in which one lays claim to lesser status than the other, is potentially as damaging to the more elevated of the two as it is advantageous to the party sitting lower on the social scale (a shift in status which would naturally also affect all of his or her affiliates and dependents). This is a primary driving force in the Bridal Quest genre, and it is thus reported of King Hagen in Kudrun that he refused to give his daughter Hilde in marriage to any less powerful than himself, and killed all lesser men who made the attempt. After a suitor eventually succeeds in winning Hilde’s hand, she and her husband subsequently follow much the same practice concerning their daughter, and their rejection of potential suitors to their daughter’s hand on the basis of status sets in motion the series of wars and conflicts which dominate the remainder of the narrative.

An additional aspect of the relationship between honour and status worthy of note is that honour is normally only transferable between those who meet specific criteria, i.e., they must both be of the appropriate social standing. As noted by Martin Dinges, “Auseinandersetzung

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193 NL 1403, 1416.
194 Kudrun, 199-203. The sentiment is not confined to Hagen, nor solely related to the protection of women: in the same text, note the captive Hartmuot’s preference for death over marriage to a woman beneath his station, even in the face of imminent execution at Kudrun, 1638.
Disputes about honour are only possible between virtual equals, because each challenge to the honour of another contains always also the recognition of the opponent as a notable person.” Martin Dinges, “Die Ehre als Thema der historischen Anthropologie. Bemerkungen zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte und zur Konzeptualisierung” in Verletzte Ehre. Ehrkonflikte in Gesellschaften des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit, ed. Klaus Schreiner and Gerd Schwerhoff (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1995), 50-51.

Honour exchange through personal combatant is a theme more explicitly developed in the courtly epics than the heroic. Perhaps the best examples are to be found in the work of Hartmann von Aue. Indeed, Hartmann’s metaphors in the climatic combat between Gawein and the titular hero of Iwein seem to stop just short of articulating Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of honour as a form of symbolic capital:

“unde nămen dâ wuocher an
sam zwėne werbende man,
  si pfľagen zir gewinne
herte vremder sinne.
dehein koufmann het ir site,
ernd verdürbe dâ mite;
da wurden si rîche abe.
[…]
da entlïhen si stiche unde slege
beide mit swerten unde mit spern:
desn mohte si niemen gewern
vol unz an daz halbe teil.
des wuohs ir êre unde ir heil.
ir wehsel was sô bereit
daz er nie wart verseit
manne noch wîbe,
sine wehselten mit dem libe
arbeit umbe êre
(and there they received profit, just as two men of business, although towards their profits they cultivated a strange attitude. If any business man had their habit, it might ruin him: yet they became rich thereby […] there they lent strokes and strikes with both sword and spear of which no one could pay back even a half portion. Their honour and good fortune grew because of this, Iwein, 7193-7208).
narratives to learn the names of their opponents and of their fathers, a practice already evident in
the *Hildebrandslied*.

2.11. Êre and lîp

In noble society, those who possessed the greatest honour were those who most prized their
honour – even at the expense of their own life. Indeed, “Honour and life” are frequently paired in
heroic epic, making the close link between the two abundantly clear. The loss of honour is
tantamount to the loss of life, while an insufficiently noble defeat resulting in death may serve to
destroy both. When placed in opposition to one another, it is honour that is the more dearly
prized.

Such is the nature of status competition, that the willingness to lose one’s life is
frequently understood as a prerequisite for participation: “Ich wel hye noch eren wagen mynen

Cited from Hartmann von Aue, *Gregorius, der arme Heinrich, Iwein*, ed. Volker Mertens (Frankfurt am Main:
Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2008).

197 See for example, Hagen’s warning to King Gunther that in entering the contest against Prünhilt, he risks losing
his honour and also his life: “ir muget wol hie verliesen die êre und och den lîp” (You might well here lose
honour and also life”) *NL* 425,3. Later, he uses also precisely the same phrasing to warn his lords about the dangers
of accepting Kriemhilt’s invitation, substituting only *da* (there) for *hie* (here): *NL* 1461,3. Volker’s advice to Hagen
at *NL* 1774 again pairs the two words: “Wizzet ir, friunt Hagene, ob si iu siîn gehaz? / sô wil ich iu daz râten, ir
hüetet deste baz / des lîbes unt der êren. jâ dunket ez mich guot. / als ich mich versinne, si sint zórnc gemuot”
(Do you know, friend Hagen, whether she is hostile to you? If so, I would counsel you thus: guard better life and
honour, indeed it seems good to me; as I see it, they are in an angry mood).

198 As example, in *Kudrun*, it is reported that in slaying the prince of Wâleis, Hagen “nam im beide lîb und êre”
took from him both life and honour, *Kudrun*, 200,4).

199 This is true not only of personal honour, but also of collective honour, see, for example, *Rolandslied*, 7871-7879,
where Karl’s warriors are praised for their willingness to die before allowing their lord to suffer dishonour on the
battlefield.
jongen lyp announces the doomed Alphart in the poem of his death. Alternative conceptions of honour in heroic epic tend to be negatively characterized.

The crisis of loyalty experienced by Rüedeger in the *Nibelungenlied* says much about the relationship between honour and life. When Kriemhilt reminds Rüedeger that “nu habt ir uns, edel Rüedegêr, allez her geseit, / ir woldet durch uns wâgen, die êre unde ouch das leben” (now, noble Rüedeger, you have always told us that you would risk honour and life as well for our sake, *NL* 2148,2-3), Rüedeger responds by protesting:

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“Daz ist âne lougen: ich swuor iu, edel wîp,
daz ich durch iuch wâgte êre unde ouch den lip.
daz ich die sêle vliese, des enhân ich niht gesworn.
zuo dirre hôhgezîte brâht’ ich die fürsten wo geborn.”
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(That is no lie. I swore to you, noble woman, that I would risk honour and life as well. That I would lose my soul – that I did not swear. I brought the well-born princes to this feast, *NL* 2150)

The phrase “Honour and life” appears several times throughout the *Nibelungenlied*, and makes clear that these two concepts were inextricably linked. The *sêle* mentioned by Rüedeger, is something of an anomaly in the *Nibelungenlied* in its placement above both life and honour, and

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200 Here I will risk my young life for honour, *Alpharts Tod*, 1100.

201 An example may be found in *Kudrun*: besieged within the Norman stronghold, the *tiuvelinne* (she-devil, *Kudrun*, 1381,1) Gerlint – the narrative’s clearest villain – advises her honourable son Hartmuot not to engage the enemy in person. “’behüetet iuwer êre, verliest niht den lip. / mit armbrusten heizet ûz den venstern schiezen / die grimmên verschwunden, daz ez ir friunt dâ heime beriezen,’” (you may guard your honour and not lose your life. Command crossbows to shoot from the windows, which cause grim wounds, so that their friends at home will have cause to rue it,” *Kudrun*, 1384,2-4). The command to use *armbrusten* is perhaps intended to drive home the cowardice inherent in this advice – for the use of crossbows against Christians was prohibited by the Second Lateran Council, although there is little suggestion that the proscription was any more widely followed than that placed at the same time on tournaments and the joust.

202 See for example, Hagen’s warning to King Gunther that in entering the contest against Prühilt, he risks losing his honour and also his life: “ir muget wol hie verliesen die êre und ouch den lip” (You might well here lose honour and also life”) *NL* 425,3. Later, he uses also precisely the same phrasing to warn his lords about the dangers of accepting Kriemhilt’s invitation, substituting only *da* (there) for *hie* (here): *NL* 1461,3. Volker’s advice to Hagen at *NL* 1774 again pairs the two words: “Wizzet ir, friunt Hagene, ob si iu siîn gehaz? / sô wil ich iu daz râten, ir hüetet deste baz / des lîbes unt der êren. / als ich mich versinne, si sint zôrnéc gemuot” (Do you know, friend Hagen, whether she is hostile to you? If so, I would counsel you thus: guard better life and honour, indeed it seems good to me; as I see it, they are in an angry mood).
consequently requires mention. The word appears but nine times in the whole of the epic. All save three of these occur in reference to offerings made for the good of Sivrit’s soul, and a fourth seems an idiom of desire. The last two are in reference to Rüedeger, that cited above and a subsequent comment by the narrator that once the warrior determines to enter the fray, “Nu liez er an die wâge sêle unde lîp.” Rüedeger himself returns immediately to talk of honour:

‘Owê mir gotes armen, daz ich dîze gelebet hân.
aller miner êren der muoz ich aber stân,
triuwen unde zühle, der got an mir gebôt.
owê got von himele, daz michs niht wêndet der tôt!’
(“Alas for me, Godforsaken, that I have lived to see this. I must relinquish all of my honour, loyalty, and propriety, which God commanded of me. Alas, God in Heaven, that death does not spare me this!” NL 2153)

To underline this point, the narrator subsequently explains: “vil sere vorhte er daz, / ob er ir einen slüeg, faz im diu werlt trüeg haz.” The soul as an element of the self, superior to or independent from honour, consequently seems an element alien to the heroic ethos everywhere else in evidence. The margrave’s own words, however, seem to indicate that his fears centre

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203 In reference to offerings for the good of Sivrit’s soul: NL 1052,3; 1053,4; 1060,4; 1063,3; 1103,3; 1281,3. Earlier, Sivrit himself proclaims that “diu [Kriemhilt] ist mir sam mîn sêle und sô mîn selbes lîp” (She [Kriemhilt] is body and soul to me, NL 388,3). Following Ehrismann, the offerings for Sivrit’s soul and the associated rituals represent “eine typische Form nibelungischer contaminatio” (a typical form of Nibelungen contaminatio) whereby contemporary Christian memorial practices are introduced into the older heroic material of the epic. Ehrismann, Nibelungenlied, 105.

204 Now he wagered soul and life, NL 2166,1.

205 “He was sorely frightened, that if he slew one of them [the Burgundians], that the whole world would despise him.” NL, 2156,2-4.

206 Werner Hoffmann argues that Rüedeger’s concern for his soul here casts the margrave in a Christian light, deliberately contrasting Rüedeger’s concern for his soul with the honour concerns of the other warriors. Werner Hoffmann, Das Nibelungenlied (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1969), 39-40. This is largely in agreement with the reading of Maurer, who also remarks a the imposition of Christian values in Rüedeger’s dilemma, but also notes that this is quickly dispensed with in favour of the consideration of êre and triuwe. Maurer, Leid, 35. Against this, Katherine DeVane Brown argues that “‘sêle’ probably refers to Rüdiger’s moral integrity rather than his soul in a specifically Christian sense.” Katherine DeVane Brown, “Courtly Rivalry, Loyalty Conflict, and the Figure of
principally on a loss of prestige and reputation. Although here seemingly distinct from ère, Rüedeger’s soul does not seem independent of honour. Consequently, Rüedeger has only life and honour to lose, and it is plain that he adjudges his life cheap in the face of his honour. In facing at last his Burgundian friends, Rüedeger continues to lament: “Daz wolde got”, sprach Rüedegêr, ‘vil edel Gêrnot, / daz ir ze Rîne wæret unde ich wære tôt / mit etelîchen êren.”

This emphasis on honour above life can be understood in a number of ways and depends on a number of different aspects of honour and the honour code. First, that possessing honour dictates concern for honour – the greater the concern, the greater the honour. To place honour above life indicates the greatest concern possible for the individual. This is a function of competitive honour – it elevates one’s honour within the group above those who demonstrate lesser concern for honour by prizing life first, honour second. Second, it may be understood as a manifestation of the importance of collective honour – though the individual may be lost, the symbolic capital of the larger group is increased thereby. Third, it is a manifestation of the potential for honour to transcend time and space (a process which Oprisko identifies as >glory<), and finally, it represents the role of honour in self-valuation in its most externalized form, as an element of self construction which is not only external, but which survives the body and the subjective experience of life entirely. It is a characteristic that coheres around a self which exists independent of the material body and which may transcend its destruction.


207 “Would to God, noble Gernot, that you were by the Rhine and I dead with some honour.” NL, 2183,1-3.
2.12. Gain and Loss

Honour as prestige is seen to increase primarily through acts of violence and acts of generosity; the latter are not infrequently themselves tied to violence in that gifts frequently serve as payments against future acts of violence by establishing bonds of *triuwe*.208

In this way Witege is able to first win honour from his young foe Alphart: “Es was dye grost ere, die here Wytdich da geschach, / das er syn sper da zu sticken uff Alparts brusten zubrach,”209 and then immediately after finds his honour in dire peril:

Alpart der jonge myt elenhaffter hant
stach den rytter kune nyeder uff das lant,
das der hylt Wytdich fere hinder dem raß lag.
Er sprach: “Uwe dyßer schande, das ich ye gelebt den tag!
Das muß got erbarmen, das ich ye wart geborn,
sal ich also schyer myn leben han verlorn.”

(Alphart the young with a valiant hand struck the bold knight down upon the ground, so that the hero Witege lay far behind the horse. He said: “Alas for this shame, that I ever lived to see this day! God must be moved to pity, that I was ever born, if I should have lost my life so soon! *Alpharts Tod*, 920-925).

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208 The idea is well articulated in the *Nibelungenlied*: For example, when Kriemhilt rewards a minstrel, it is said that “daz waz ir êre getân,” (it did her honour, *NL*, 1498,4). The degree to which honour was bound up with the giving of gifts is further demonstrated when the shield of the slain Nuodunc is given to Hagen and it is said “diu gâbe was mit êren an den recken gewant” (that was bestowed upon the warrior with honour, *NL* 1701,4) – the phrasing is unclear >whose< honour is being referred to – does the gift honour the giver or the receiver? The answer of course is that both purposes are accomplished in the single act. The relationship between gifts and violence may be seen in Hagen’s concerns about Kriemhilt’s generosity whereby she cultivates *tugende*: “Dô sie den hort nu hête, dô brâhtes’ in daz lant / vil unkunder recken. Jâ gap der vrouwen hant, / daz man sô grôzer milte mere nie gesach. / si pflac vil guoter tugende, des man der küneginne // den armen unt den richen begonde si nu geben, / daz då reite Hagene, ob si solde leben / noch deheine wile, daz si sô manigen man / in ir dienst gewunne, daz ez in leide müez’ ergân,” (Now that she had the hoard, she brought many unknown warriors into the land. Indeed the lady’s hand gave so freely that no one ever saw such generosity. It was said of the queen that she cultivated great virtue, she now began to give gifts to poor and rich, such that Hagen then said that if she lived much longer she would win so many men to her service that it would be much to their sorrow, *NL* 1127-8); and in Rüedeger’s reply when his lord Etzel demands an explanation for Rüedeger having killed one of his men: “Dô sprach der ritter edele: ‘da beswârt er mir den muot / unde hât mir gëítewîzet êre unde guot, / des ich von dînen handen hân so vil genommen,” (Then the noble knight said: ‘since he grieved me and taunted me with the honour and goods that I have received in such plenty from your hands, *NL* 2146,1-3), i.e. that Rüedeger had dishonoured himself by not fighting on Etzel’s behalf after having been so well rewarded.

209 It was the greatest honour which there befell Witege, that he broke his spear to pieces upon Alphart’s breast, *Alpharts Tod*, 916-7.
The implication that any defeat has the potential to fully annul previous gains in honour, to the point of an absolute loss, is also present in *Kudrun*: Here the heroine’s betrothed, Herwic, under attack by Sifrit of Morland, sends messengers to his beloved, begging the aid of her family. For although his warriors strive in battle for honour,210 “si fürhtent tegelichen, si verliesen lib und ère.”211

This holds true in the *Rolandslied* as well, in which Friedrich Maurer noted that “ere gewinnen bedeutet ‘als Kreuzritter siegen’” and that “5443 behabent di christen di ere ist identisch mit 5441 scol Rolant gesigen, und es bedeutet also ‘die Oberhand behalten.’”212 Much the same sentiment is articulated in the *Straßburger Alexander*: “unde wirt er danne sigelös, / sô ist er imer èrenlôs / under sînen genôzen.”213

Yet if defeat tends to be disastrous for one’s honour, absolute victory or glorious death are not the only condition under which one may gain prestige in battle. Under rare conditions, excelling in the face of extreme odds may bring some increase. When Hartmuot and Wate engage one another on the field, both strive for honour,214 but Hartmuot is able to win honour

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211 They fear daily that they will lose life and honour [as a consequence of being defeated, *Kudrun* 684,3.
212 “‘To win honour,’ means ‘to triumph as a crusader… 5443 ‘should the Christian have the honour’ is identical to 5441 ‘should Roland triumph,’ and therefore means ‘to hold the upper-hand.’ Corresponding to this, defeat was synonymous with dishonour, as in the formula “ane sige unt ère” (without victory and honour, *Rolandslied*, 5461). Maurer, *Leid*, 273.
214 Hartmuot und Wate wurben vaste umb ère, *Kudrun* 1468,4.
simply by >not< being defeated: “dō bestuont er Waten den grimmen; daz was dem helde ein êre.”215

The competition of prestige seldom exists in a vacuum, and the pursuit of honour on the battlefield is likewise grounded in multiple processes of honour that extend beyond the immediate contest for dominance.

In Rolandslied, the heathen lords compete for the honour of leading the attack against the hero’s isolated host. In this, several processes of honour are simultaneously engaged: first, the princes are motivated by the maintenance of face – Roland has previously done them harm, and their honour has suffered as a result. Restoration of that honour and of their corresponding social value requires vengeance. This reflects on both the individual honour of each lord and on their collective honour. Second, they compete with one another for the privilege of killing Roland, an act that holds the promise of an increase in honour and status within the honour group. Third, this competition is itself an affirmation of membership in the honour group, which demands the active pursuit of prestige. Finally, the petition of each seeks validation of the honour status of the petitioner from the supreme authority of the social hierarchy.216

Likewise, in Kudrun, Herwic’s plea to Kudrun, referenced above, is not merely a desperate request for aid in the maintenance of his honour and status (as well as the collective honour of his house). Herwic states explicitly that the request is a test of Kudrun’s own honour, her triuwe217 – this is a challenge which must be met if the honour claims of Kudrun and her

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215 There he withstood Wate the grim; that was to his honour, Kudrun, 1466,3.
216 Rolandslied, 3540-3844. This passage also suggests the sometimes fluid movement of honour between lord and vassal, for many of the heathen princes both ask honour of their lord (of leading the battle and gaining the chance thereby to increase their honour yet further by taking Roland’s head), but also >offer< honour in exchange.
family are to be validated, as well as a request for validation of Herwic’s membership within their honour group (or, if reversed, of Kudrun’s membership in Herwic’s).

That honour may be acquired and increased through the distribution of possessions is evidenced by the actions of Sivrit’s parents in the Nibelungenlied: “Sigmunt unde Siglînt    die mohten wol bejagen / mit guote michel êre;    des teilte vil ir hant. / des sach man vil der vremden    zuo z’in rîten in daz lant.” The strophe’s concluding line makes clear the practical benefit of acquiring honour by such means – it attracts and expands triuwe, increasing the future resources of the giver. In Herzog Ernst B, it is reported that Duke Ernst was well versed in the same practice, for in order to cultivate loyalty and honour: “er ensparte silber    noch daz golt / vor keinen sînen êren” (he spared neither silver nor gold for the sake of his honour, HEB 154-5).

2.13. The Precariousness of Honour in Middle High German Heroic Epic

In Middle High German heroic epic, we also have ample evidence of the precarious nature of this honour. As in the honour cultures discussed above, the power of words or symbolic display to wound is terrible– the desperate fear of being made less by being said to be less. In the world of heroic narrative, as was also true of medieval German society, one must “die eigene Ehrenhaftigkeit auch ständig darstellen. Öffentlichkeit heißt aber dauernde Gefährdung. Durch die ständige Neubewertung des Ehrvermögens einer Person entsteht eine zusätzliche Zerbrechlichkeit der Ehre.” Here again, we may turn to the Nibelungenlied. The most obvious

218 Sigmunt and Siglînt could well acquire great honour through their possessions; these were much shared by their hand. Because of this, many foreigners were seen to ride into their lands, NL, 29.3-4.

219 “Continually display one’s own honour in the public sphere. However, public means continual endangerment. Through the constant re-evaluation of the honour ability of a person emerges an additional fragility of honour.” Martin Dinges, “Die Ehre,” 53.
example is that of Prünhilt, who is willing to spur her husband and his vassals to murder in order to avenge a perceived slight.

In the quarrel of the queens which sets in motion the murder of Sivrit and subsequently Kriemhilt’s quest for vengeance, we encounter a form of honour competition amongst women.\(^{220}\) We see first that the honour of the women is tied directly to that of their husbands.\(^{221}\) Second, we can see that both queens are determined both that their honour be recognized by the other >as it is<, and that their respective positions within the honour hierarchy be acknowledged: just as their husbands, they are in competition with one another. Honour is here allotted in large part on the basis of the number and quality of persons whom the males hold subject. That the contradiction of an honour claim is itself an insult, an act of aggression capable of damaging the other’s honour is evident by the care with which the ladies at first attempt to soften their words, all the while remaining ever cautious that no ground be given regarding their own claims. The ultimate determinant of the contest lies in the court of public opinion: If Kriemhilt is able to enact her honour claim, to physically occupy the superior position in the social ritual of entering the

\(^{220}\) On this point I differ from the interpretation of Otfrid Ehrismann, who in attempting a psychologically coherent interpretation of Kriemhilt’s actions and characterization rejects the notion that Kriemhilt’s initial statements function as a deliberate claim to power status, arguing instead that she acts naively out of love for Sivrit. Otfrid Ehrismann, “’ze stücken was gehouwen dô daz edele wîp’: The Reception of Kriemhild” in *A Companion to the Nibelungenlied*, ed. Winder McConnel (Rochester: Camden House, 1998), 23-5. Müller reads Kriemhilt’s statement in the context of courtly interaction, stating that Kriemhilt’s assertion that her husband might well hold all kingdoms in his hands “ist nach den Bedingungen höfischer Rede kein Angriff auf Gunthers Herrschaft” (is not, following the terms of courtly discourse, an attack upon Gunther’s rulership, Müller, *Spielregeln*, 415), and further that it is Prünhilt’s misinterpretation of these words that sets off the senna. I cannot completely agree on this point, for whether Kriemhilt’s statement was intended as an attack or not, it is a contradiction of Prünhilt’s belief about her husband’s status and therefore >is< damaging. For further discussion of this important sequence see, among others, Werner Hoffmann, *Nibelungenlied*, 24-35; Jan-Dirk Müller, *Spielregeln*, 276-80; Peter Göhler, “Von zweier vrouwen bagen wart vil manic helt verlorn. Der Streit der Königinen im ‘Nibelungenlied,’” in 6. Pöchlarner Heldenledgespräch. 800 Jahre Nibelungenlied. Rückblick – Einblick – Ausblick, ed. Klaus Zatloukal (Wien: Fassbaender, 2001); Otfrid Ehrismann, *Nibelungenlied*, 92-8; Eric Shane Bryan, “Indirect Aggression: A Pragmatic Analysis of the Quarrel of the Queens in Völsungasaga, Þiðreks Saga, and Das Nibelungenlied,” *Neophilologus* 97 (2013): 349-65.

\(^{221}\) That the reverse is also true may be seen in Sivrit’s later comment that he is shamed by his wife’s behaviour: “’ir grôzen ungefüege ich mich wærlîche scham’” (“I am truly shamed by her great impropriety,” *NL* 862,4).
minster before her rival, then the claim is adjudged valid. But this is not all, for Kriemhilt is careful to specify that her ladies clothe themselves in rich garments – both here and in the evaluation of the queen’s husbands, beauty, the appearance of wealth, and the quality of honour are closely linked. Kriemhilt’s concern that her person not be shamed emerges not only from the fact that, should Prünhilt’s claim be proved valid, Kriemhilt will be revealed to be of lesser honour than she had previously believed, but also because in pressing her own honour claim she is putting herself at risk: to have her claim denied would mean not only that her store of honour is less than she believes, but the false claim would actively serve to cause dishonour.

When, later in the same aventiure, Kriemhilt’s claim is validated, it is a great shame to Prünhilt, but the greater injury occurs when Kriemhilt makes an additional accusation against Prünhilt’s sexual purity – that Prünhilt’s maidenhead was lost not to her husband, but rather to Sivrit. It is this latter claim that causes Prünhilt to weep, first when it is made and again when it is publicly validated. This, in fact, is the slight that determines Prünhilt in her murderous purpose, for even before her treacherous husband denies her justice, she is set on Sivrit’s death.

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222 Cf. Müller, Spielregeln, 279-80.
223 This is also evident in the vocabulary used: tiure (from which NHG teuer [expensive]) indicates something or someone of high value and great worth. rîche may mean literary rich, but also noble, mighty, costly or even joyful. Regarding the extravagance of dress in medieval aristocratic society, see Bumke, Höfische Kultur, 175-88.
224 NL 843,1; 850,3. Cf. Müller, Spielregeln, 279.
225 NL 860.
226 ez gêt an Sîfrides lip, (“it will mean Sivrit’s life,” NL 845,4). Note that it is not Kriemhilt herself that Prünhilt selects for punishment, but rather her husband Sivrit. Nor does Prünhilt strike the blow herself – this task falls to her vassal Hagen. In this Prünhilt, despite her previous prowess as a warrior, displays acute knowledge of the gendered rules of the game. When Kriemhilt eventually meets her own death on the blade of a sword, the blow is struck not in recompense for the thousands of deaths she has caused, but for the crime of slaying a single man by her own hand (NL 375-6). Against Prünhilt’s own selection of Sivrit as a target (see above), Albrecht Classen sees Hagen as turning the events to his own interest and shifting the focus to Sivrit. Albrecht Classen, Sexual Violence and Rape in the Middle Ages: A Critical Discourse in Premodern German and European Literature (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 46. While it is undeniable that Hagen seeks to press his own advantage, he has no need here to push Prünhilt toward
Hagen’s involvement in the matter, his willingness not only to kill but to die in order to avenge the slight, speaks to the collective honour of the group of which both he and Prünhilt are members. It is by evoking this collective honour that Hagen attempts to convince the other members of the group to follow through with Prünhilt’s desired vengeance: “‘Suln wir gouche ziehen?’ sprach aber Hagene: ‘des habent lützel êre sô guote degene.’” In so saying, Hagen equates allowing the insulting claim, that Sivrit took Prünhilt’s virginity, to go unavenged, with allowing the claim to stand as truth (the Burgundians would be “raising cuckoos” – i.e., the bastard children of others).

Prünhilt and the Burgundians are not the only characters in the *Nibelungenlied* who are willing to kill in order to avenge a verbal slight against their honour. Noble Rüedeger himself slays one of his own lord’s men in retaliation for being named a coward and unworthy of the honour bestowed on him. This over-powering fear of slights against one’s honour, and the necessity of correcting the situation (even through triuwe-breaking violence, itself a dishonourable act) lies at the core of the tragic misunderstanding which leads father and son into combat against one another in the *Hildebrandslied* as well.

Elsewhere, many conflicts turn on the less explicit, but no less deeply felt, perception of slight: a particularly strong example being found in *Kudrun*, where the Norman attack on the Hegeling stronghold of Matelane and the kidnapping of the titular heroine is precipitated at least

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Sivrit, nor in targeting Sivrit is Kriemhilt neglected. An alternate view, in which Hagen murders Sivrit as an indirect means of targeting Kriemhilt and restricting her power, is suggested by Stephanie B. Pafenberg, “The Spindle and the Sword,” 110.

227 ‘daz er sich hât gerüemet der lieben vrouwen min, / dar umbe wil ich sterben, ez engê an daz leben sin’ (“that he grieved my dear lady, therefore will I die, if it does not cost him his life,” *NL* 867,3-4).

228 “Are we to rear cuckoos?” replied Hagen: “such good warriors would have little honour thereby,” *NL* 847,1-2.

229 *NL* 2138-2146.
as much by the Norman desire for vengeance at having been rejected on the basis of their social and political status as vassals as it is by Hartmuot’s desire for Kudrun herself.  

Calling on an ally or an enemy to think on their honour may function either as motivation or provocation – for it implies that if the recipient does not act in accordance with the honour he or she has claimed, then a corresponding loss of honour will occur. It calls into question the status, even the membership, of the individual within the honour group – remember who you are.

In some instances, it appears to be believed that God himself is susceptible to such tactics, as when Karl looks heavenward in the *Rolandslied* and asks God to think on his honour and reveal his might.  

These insults and slights provide insight into the composition of honour: for men, *triuwe* stands together with martial prowess above all. For women, chasteness and upright behaviour occupy a similar position. For individuals of both sexes, the recognition of nobility and one’s status within the social hierarchy is also crucial.

Any insult against the collective group must be avenged even as that against a single individual. In the competition for prestige between groups, collective honour must be guarded

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230 Des was dâ vil genœte diu alte Gêrlint, / wie si daz rechen möchte, daz Hetele sin kint / versagete småheliche ir sune Hartmuoten. / si wunschte, daz si hâhen solten beide Wate und Fruoten (Because of this, Old Gerlint was very eager to learn how she might avenge the fact that Hetel had so contemptuously denied his child to her son Hartmut. She wished that they would hang both Wate and Fruote, *Kudrun*, 737). As noted by Schmitt, Gerlint here plays the “Agentin dynastischer Machtpolitik” (the agent of dynastic power politics), seeking to avenge the humiliation of her family both through violence and through marriage. Schmitt, *Poetik*, 233. The reason for singling out Wate and Fruote in this passage is not clear. While I find Winder McConnell’s suggestion that it is because “they may represent the greatest impediment to a successful abduction of Kudrun,” unsatisfactory, I concur with him that “[w]hatever her reasons for singling out these two, Gerlind’s determination to strike at the Hegelings is no longer primarily motivated by her desire to see Hartmut procure a spouse.” McConnell, *The Epic of Kudrun*, 58.

even as one’s own, for any loss of collective honour will be reflected by a corresponding decrease in the personal honour of each member. Each individual is comprised of multiple group memberships, ranging in size from the very small to extremely large. In the Rolandslied, Karl seeks the death of the treacherous Genelun for having delivered one of his followers into the hands of the enemy, but also gives equal weight to the great shame that Genelun has inflicted on the larger group of which Karl and Roland are each members – Christendom.232

2.14. Conclusion

In der neueren Forschung erfüllt Ehre die Funktion eines Relations- und Prozeßbegriffes, der dazu beitragen soll, Prozesse und Mechanismen der Zuordnung von sozialer Wertschätzung zu ermitteln und zu erklären. Ehre, die regelgeleitete Wechsel- und Austauschbeziehungen herstellt oder verändert, kommt einem Transfer von Informationen, Einstellungen und Gesinnungen gleich.233

The narratives here under consideration are not facsimiles of the culture which produced them or in which they enjoyed their greatest popularity, yet they are of course informed by them. They are thought-experiments, constructed worlds which function according to rules imposed on them by their creators and their audiences. These rules and the characters that are constrained by them develop in various ways, revealing, celebrating, and criticizing as they do so. The crises that form the crux of these narratives are more likely to be societal and systemic than in courtly epic,

232 “man scel ez iemer ze mære sagen, / daz wirz an im gerochen haben, / unz an der werlte ende. / diu christenhait ist harte geschendet, / des gât uns michel nôt. / jâne geschach nie sus getân mort” (‘The tale will always be told, that we have taken revenge upon him, until the end of the world. Christianity has been gravely dishonoured, because of which great distress has happened to us, never was such murder done before.’ Rolandslied, 8779-8784).

233 “In more recent research, honour fulfills the function of a concept of relation and process, which ought to serve to identify and clarify processes and mechanisms of assigning social esteem. Honour, which establishes or alters relationships of change and exchange according to specific rules, amounts to a transfer of information, disposition, and sentiments.” Klaus Schreiner and Gerd Schwerhoff, “Verletzte Ehre – Überlegungen zu einem Forschungskonzept,” in Verletzte Ehre. Ehrkonflikte in Gesellschaften des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit, ed. Klaus Schreiner and Gerd Schwerhoff (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1995), 11.
which displays a greater tendency to turn on the place of the individual within his or her society. As with all else, these are not hard-and-fast rules, but rather general tendencies.

As a result, it is possible to approach the societies of these fictive worlds and the culture in which they share from an anthropological perspective. In so doing, honour provides a crucial key to understanding the mechanisms of social interaction and valuation.

Honour is the foundational and essential element of Middle High German heroic culture. It is both the measure and the mechanism by which the social hierarchy of value is established, and which in turn functions as the critical aspect of order. Ère is the means of valuation within heroic society, and it is through ère that fictional characters and their audience alike perceive the relative status that makes the world sensible, it is a prerequisite of >right< order. Yet, as ère requires continual exertion, it is perhaps here more sensible to speaking of >ordering< than of >order<, for the process is continual.

Moving forward, we may say that in Middle High German heroic epic, honour is the primary means of valuation, both of the self and of others. This honour is further comprised of a number of different overlapping and interacting processes which both govern and are generated by the interaction of the individual with others and the interaction between the constituent parts of the self (gender, status, family, office, etc.). Finally, we observe that honour is encoded in all social interaction and is continually negotiated and renegotiated according to broadly understood rules (the >honour code<) which are in turn relative to circumstance, status, and gender.

From this point, we may now turn to the structures and patterns of conflict engendered by the competition for honour and status, and in particular to the means by which characters react to threats against status integrity. In the context of conflict, honour is at once the object of competition, in that it accrues to the victor, and the reason for retaliation, it is lost through injury.
and must be regained. At the same time, the strictures of honour also constitute a code of
behaviour within conflict, and thereby inform the narrative progression of dispute.
3. Patterns of Vindicatory Violence

Near the close of the late-twelfth century Rolandslied of Pfaffe Konrad, the once esteemed villain Genelun stands before his Emperor, accused of conspiring to bring about the death of his lord’s paladin, Roland. Although faced with a punishment of certain (and, as it turns out, gruesome) death, Genelun does not hesitate to admit the deed, and even expresses delight in the violent deaths of Roland and his companions:

Genêlun bade them be silent. He said: “Lord, it was my desire, I will not deny it to you. I am glad at the death of the twelve, it is certainly the result of my counsel. Rolandslied, 8739-3)

Genelun seems confident that his actions were justified and legitimate, yet his only defense is that he publicly declared his hostility before the deed: “ich hête in ê widersaget / ze diner antwürte offenliche.”234 This same belief in the power of Genelun’s widersage to justify all of his subsequent actions against Roland is evinced by Genelun’s nephew and champion, Binabel, who volunteers to wager his own life in a judicial duel for his oheim’s sake:

How comes it that these men are so imperious, so certain of their actions’ justness in the face of their doom? It is for the same reason that the treacherous Count Heinrich in Herzog Ernst D ensures that his foe, the tale’s protagonist, is absent when he sends a notice declaring Ernst his enemy before attacking his lands in force, but still sees fit to send notification of the on-coming attack. The declaration of offenses is here represented as a significant element in the proper progression of conflict within heroic culture. It is a means, though hardly the only one, of legitimizing violence within the honour group. Viewed from a greater distance, the *widersage* is one possibility within a repertoire of possible actions available to antagonistic characters. Its presence or absence within a semi-standardized progression of events is a signal to the audience, one among many, through which the legitimacy of action is evaluated.

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235 Binabel’s statement in the adaptation of this narrative composed some decades later by der Stricker is even more explicit:

> ern hât deheinen mort getân.
> ez ist der merren meneg kun, 
> daz min oehim dristunt 
> Ruolande offenliche 
> widersagte vor dem riche.

(“He has committed no murder. The tale is known to many, that my uncle thrice declared his hostilities to Roland publicly before the empire.” Stricker, *Karl der Grosse*, 11798-11802).


236 Herzog Ernst D ed. Hans-Friedrich Rosenfeld (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1991), 705-716. This account differs from that found in the earlier Herzog Ernst B, in which the lack of notification before the onset of hostilities is a feature of Heinrich’s treachery. In Herzog Ernst D, the Count’s villainy is made apparent both through ensuring that Ernst is not present to receive the letter declaring him Heinrich’s enemy, but also in the fact that Heinrich is already on the march before the letter is publicly read (717-8).
This customary progression of conflict is a manifestation of the honour economy and its attendant processes of continual status negotiation. It occurs within a context in which all injury and offense is subsumed into and mediated by the >honour system<, and in turn it is the honour system which governs the means by which recompense is sought and achieved. The cultivation, accrual, and protection of honour are driving themes for all of the protagonists, and the obligation to seek recompense and redress for any injury done to that honour is an overriding obligation for all. The frequent application of metaphors drawn from practices of monetary exchange, gift giving, and debt to combat within Middle High German texts may also be profitably applied to the economy of honour.

The means by which the characters who populate these narratives seek redress for their injuries are drawn from a commonly held repertoire of dispute practices, many reflective of an inherited notion of self-help (some of which also bear considerable resemblance to those practices often labeled “feud” by anthropologists and medievalists alike), and that as such, the progression of each dispute follows a variable but nevertheless distinctive pattern whose roughly delineated stages would have been recognizable to a contemporary audience.

These feud practices (and other dispute practices, not all of them actually involving violence, but underpinned by the >threat< of violence) are one of the means by which honour is negotiated. This is true both in the sense that violence is a means by which damaged or threatened honour may be recovered, and in that the progression of dispute, and the choices made by the antagonists in employing their repertoire of dispute actions, functions as a means of evaluating honour: an honourable man follows the rules, or at least recognizes the appropriate moment at which to break them.
3.1. Modeling the Feud

Modern studies of feud practice are commonly traced back to the work of the anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard. Evans-Pritchard studied the Nuer, a Nilotic people living primary in southern Sudan, and utilized the term “feud” to describe the various intra-tribal conflicts that frequently arose amongst them. In Nuer practice, the close agnatic kin of a man slain or injured are obligated to seek vengeance for the death or injury on the agnatic kin of the offending party. Guilt and obligation are therefore communal within the family group. What is more, although direct responsibility lies only on the closest of kin, the larger communities of both victim and perpetrated almost invariably become involved in the conflict and frequently in the violence that ensues as one party seeks satisfaction.  

Such communal conflicts are a “tribal institution” amongst the Nuer, and serve as an injured party’s only means of gaining reparation. Crucially, Evans-Pritchard noted: “Fear of incurring a blood-feud is, in fact, the most important legal sanction within a tribe and the main guarantee of an individual’s life and property.”

This last point was subsequently seized on by Max Gluckman, then at the University of Manchester, in his now famous lecture, later published as “The Peace in the Feud.” Evans-Pritchard’s work formed the basis for Gluckman’s conclusion that societies, like the Nuer, “in which private vengeance and self-help are the main overt sanctions against injury by others, and where this exercise of self-help is likely to lead to the waging of feuds […] are organized into a series of groups and relationships, so that people are friends on one basis and enemies on

238 Ibid.
another. Herein lies social cohesion, rooted in the conflicts between men’s different allegiances.” Gluckman identified in the marriage practices, rituals, and prescribed wanderings of the Nuer tribe a system that at once demanded the periodic outbreak of violence between members of the same larger social and political network, but which also ensured that members allied to both parties would work to ensure an end to the fighting. The “tribal institution” observed by Evans-Pritchard therefore functions first as a mechanism of social control – fear of feud prevents violation of social norms – and second as means of limiting violence – once feud begins, the conflict spreads outwards through the social networks via group liability until such time as one or more individuals with ties to both parties becomes engaged and works to bring the conflict to a close.

Gluckman’s theories were quickly adopted and much employed by other anthropologists, either in whole or in part. Amongst the most important of these have been the works of Jacob Black-Michaud and Christopher Boehm. While still engaging with feud practices as mechanisms of social control and fundamental elements of social structure within feuding societies, not all later anthropologists have been willing to support Gluckman’s conclusions.


regarding the extent to which feud effectively limits violence according to the >peace in the feud< model. Black-Michaud in particular has argued that it is a primary characteristic of feud to be essentially interminable, and that once feud has begun, attempts at settlement may forestall, but will not ultimately prevent future violence:

Feud is a closed system unmitigated by anything but feud. Fear of feud is the only possible deterrent to feud, since a necessary prerequisite for its existence is the absence of more elaborate types of social control and of all those formal institutions which, under other social conditions, serve to inhibit the unrestricted use of violence by individuals for their own ends. Compensation does not hinder the development of feud, but, on the contrary, is a source of impetus propelling it from one killing to another. 243

Black-Michaud’s work is elsewhere in alignment with Gluckman in seeing feud practice not merely as an activity that is habitually engaged in, but as one of the primary structural principles of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern society. He places considerable emphasis on environmental factors (with feud being more prevalent and accorded greater importance amongst sedentary peoples than amongst nomadic ones) and on the role of social networks that, through feud practice, serve to establish hierarchies of power amongst peoples who in other respects are largely egalitarian.

Christopher Boehm’s work on Montenegrin society has also emphasized the fundamentally structured and structuring nature of feud. For Boehm, a primary constitutive element of the institution, beyond the regulating aspects which serve to limit its spread and duration, is the keeping of score between the two combatants, with honour serving as the means of evaluation and appraising injury (see below).

What remains a constant across these studies is the communal aspect of justice within societies that rely at least in part on self-help in place of external or centralized mechanisms of

243 Black-Michaud, Cohesive Force, 118.
social control, the existence of prescribed methods and patterns according to which justice is to be sought, and the presence of complimentary social structures which aid in both the pursuance and the avoidance of continued conflict. In this, feud practice may be understood generally to be not merely an >aspect< or >form< of social interaction, but rather, as Black-Michaud describes it, as “a social system in its own right.”

3.2. Feud and Medieval Europe

Gluckman’s suggestion that “it would be profitable to apply these analyses [of feud] to those periods of European history when the feud was still apparently the main instrument for redress of injury,” was shortly taken up by his then colleague at the University of Manchester, J. M. Wallace-Hadrill. Wallace-Hadrill applied some of Gluckman’s ideas to his own study of the Merovingian Franks and their neighbours and their own practice of what he termed “the most undoubtedly Germanic of all barbarian institutions, the bloodfeud” in a lecture entitled “The Bloodfeud of the Franks.”

Wallace-Hadrill was careful from the outset to emphasize that in Merovingian Francia, there may never have existed a legal right to feud, but that the institution existed rather as a moral imperative. He saw a reflection of the Nuer’s tribal wanderings and careful inter-marriage practices in the settlement of the Franks within former Roman cities and in their establishment of dependent relationships between the ruler and his fighting men. It was his firm

244 Black-Michaud, Cohesive Force, 128.
belief that “The Frankish kin was probably less often involved as a fighting force than as a composing one... it must be wide of the mark to conceive of the Franks being at all often engaged in major kin-warfare.”

In the English-speaking world, it was Wallace-Hadrill’s approach that dominated, quickly gaining the reputation of being “a significant moment in the application of functionalist anthropology to the understanding of early medieval society.” For many decades, the >peace in the feud< became a dominant paradigm amongst historians, “because it addressed one of their perennial concerns: how to explain how order might be maintained in societies with weak state institutions.”

3.3. Otto Brunner and the Sonderweg of Feud Studies

Some decades before the publication of Evans-Pritchard’s seminal work on the Nuer and the introduction of the functionalist argument to studies of feud in medieval Europe by Wallace-Hadrill, Otto Brunner had also discerned a similar cohesive tendency in the late-medieval conflicts between nobles in what is now Austria. Brunner’s scholarship today is scarcely less controversial than the man himself: oriented around the valorization of “folkish” traditions of

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250 As noted by Jeppe Büchert Netterstrøm: “Since Wallace-Hadrill’s seminal work, the tendency has been to ‘discover’ the existence or ‘survival’, the functionality and legal or quasi-legal, legitimate character of feuding in more and more historical societies where previous historians had either ignored or denied it or where it was not regarded as having had any significance.” “Introduction: The Study of Feud in Medieval and Early Modern History,” in *Feud in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jeppe Büchert Netterstrøm and Bjørn Poulsen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2007), 11.

lordship, Brunner’s work was embraced by the Nazi party, a relationship he actively courted. Yet despite the caution necessitated by the author’s ideological perspective, Brunner’s *Land und Herrschaft* retains considerable significance in the study of pre-modern conflict within the German lands, both as touch-stone and target (see discussion below).

Brunner positioned himself against notions advanced by legal historians who regarded feuding practices as universally lacking in legitimacy and fundamentally antithetical to their conception of the state and social cohesion. In so doing, he argued that there existed no fundamental distinction between public and private warfare, and that as such, feud itself belonged to the basic concepts underlying the structure of medieval society.

In Brunner’s view, despite the efforts of the church and of some rulers (the Staufer in particular) to limit private violence, it may be seen in the medieval period that the underlying social structures of vengeance and settlement (“Rache und Sühne”) “setzen voraus, daß der ‚Staat’ kein Monopol legitimer Gewaltanwendung besitzt, sondern daß es in ihm ‚rechte Gewalt’ gibt.” As such, the majority of the anti-feud provisions advanced during even the twelfth and thirteenth centuries never enjoyed much success in their own age. According to Brunner, this conviction that legitimate violence could exist within the confines of the “state” extended well into the late medieval and even the early modern period, but reached its peak between the

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253 “Take for granted that the ‘state’ possesses no monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, but rather that ‘right violence’ exists within it.” Brunner, *Land und Herrschaft*, 18.
collapse of Carolingian authority and the end of the Salian dynasty, an age which he referred to as the “Blütezeit des Fehdewesens.”

What is more, it is important to recognize that medieval “peace” is not to be equated with the modern sense of the term, and incorporated violence or potential violence in the form of protection. This protection was secured through friendships, alliances, and kinship: the establishment of shared honour groups who would act in concert to preserve their own interests and integrity.

The structure of these friendship groups reflected older forms of Germanic household organization, and was closely tied to feud practice and the obligation of friends to fight on behalf of an injured or otherwise maligned member of the group. These structures were reflected on every level of German society, up to and including the very highest levels, as was feuding practice. Crucially, feuding practice enjoyed widespread legitimacy, and could be employed within the bounds of society without calling that society’s existence into question.

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254 Ibid.

255 “Doch ist der ursprüngliche Sinn des Wortes nicht wie heute wesentlich negativ, Ausschaltung der Feindschaft, sondern er hat eine aktive Bedeutung. Er schließt den Begriff des Schutzes in sich, der Sicherheit, die die Freunde einander gewähren, der Hilfe und des Beistandes, zu denen sie einander verpflichtet sind” (Yet the original sense of the word is not essentially negative, as it is today, meaning only the absence of enmity, but rather has an active meaning. It includes the concept of protection, of the security that friends afford one another, the help and assistance through which they are bound to one another. Brunner, Land und Herrschaft, 21).

256 Brunner, Land und Herrschaft, 20.

257 Brunner, Land und Herrschaft, 30. Despite this, Brunner admits that “Ein richtiger Kern liegt doch in dieser Lehre vom vorrechtlichen, vorsozialen Wesen von Feindschaft und Rache. Sie sind nicht beschränkt auf den Kreis der Rechtsgenossen, die durch die Fehde und Rache kennende positive Rechtsordnung verbunden sind. “Rechte” Fehde greift weit drüber hinaus. Wir sahen ja, daß man auch Fehde gegen den Herrscher und Fehde im fremden Lande führt. Da auch diese Fehde in ihrer Begründung wie in der Art ihrer Durchführung “rechte” Fehde sein will, muß diesen ganzen Vorstellungen ein anderer Gedanke des “Rechts” zugrunde liegen als der uns vertraute des positive Rechtes eines bestimmten Staates und seiner Staatsgewalt und der Völker Gemeinschaft” (Yet there lies a kernel of truth in [the] notion of the pre-lawful, pre-social nature of enmity and vengeance. They are not confined to the circle of those possessing legal rights who are bound together in the positive, feud and vengeance-recognizing legal order. Indeed we have seen that feuds were also waged against rulers and in foreign lands. And since these feuds too in both their basis and in the manner in which they were conducted claimed to be “just” feuds, a different
Despite the problematic ideological lens through which Brunner viewed his sources, his theories regarding pre-modern feud practice have cast a long shadow over the field, and continue to be much discussed, corrected, criticized, and at times expanded, primarily by German scholars. The most direct attacks have perhaps come from Gadi Algazi, who criticizes Brunner’s thesis of a mutuality between ruler and ruled, in which the former provided protection and the latter aid and counsel, and in which force, manifesting especially and primarily through the feud, inhered to the ruler at all levels, and consequently legitimized private warfare. In Algazi’s view, the protection offered by medieval rulers to their peasantry has more in common with the mafia practice of extorting protection money from the hapless and defenseless – it was an imposed Schirm (>protection<) that had more to do with purchasing protection from the lord himself than from external threats. Feud was not only the exclusive purview of the knightly class, Algazi argues, but was fundamentally a war waged by the nobility against the peasant classes – for it was by damaging the possessions (human and otherwise) of one’s opponent that feud was chiefly carried out. The end result was not the establishment of mutually beneficial relationships between ruler and ruled, but rather of subjugation and social stratification.258

This understanding of the feud has been called into question by Christine Reinle’s work on peasant feuds within Bavaria during the late medieval period. Adopting much of Brunner’s methodology but focusing on the lower classes rather than on the nobility, Reinle observes that the feud, far from being an exclusive right of the nobility, appears to have permeated all ranks of

understanding of “right” from that of the positive law of a specific state and its authority and of the international community in which we trust must underlie this entire concept). Brunner, Land und Herrschaft, 28-29.

society. Reinle argues that most of the anti-feud legislation which has previously been believed to restrict or outright prohibit the ability of non-nobles to pursue self-help were in fact rather limited in their reach, applying in most cases to all levels of society and most frequently target at particular practices rather than at the institution as a whole.  

Hillay Zmora sees in late-medieval Franconia proxy-feuds waged by lesser nobles on behalf of late-medieval princes as a means of gaining access and privilege, thereby ultimately contributing to the establishment of state rule. The resulting coalescence of power in the hands of the greater princes ultimately served to reduce and all but eliminate feud during the early modern period, at which time the principle conflicts arose not between minor nobles, but rather between the greater nobles and the emperor.

### 3.4. Developments in the Study of Medieval European Feud

In recent years, medievalists have continued their engagement with theories of feud, at times continuing to build off the work of anthropologists, and at times breaking free from it. Due in large part to the nature of the available sources, the primary areas of focus have been the continent during the late-medieval period and saga-age Iceland, whose society and the

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unique opportunities presented by the Icelandic sagas as source material, perhaps more closely resemble the stateless cultures studied by anthropologists.

The contributions of three scholars are of particular importance for the study at hand. The first of these is Stephen D. White. White has concerned himself primarily with the French-speaking territories of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, utilizing chronicles, court records, peace settlements, and chansons de geste as a means of reconstructing and analyzing the mechanisms and practices of “dispute-processing” during this era.263 Although drawn from and directed towards the French lands, much of what he has written is also applicable to the German sources and territories of the same period. White has consistently focused on the manner in

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263 Much of White’s most important work on the subject has been collected in Stephen D. White, Feuding and Peace-Making; but see also “Un Imaginaire Faidal: La Représentation de la Guerre dans quelques Chansons de Geste” in La Vengeance 400-1200, ed. Dominique Barthélemy, François Bougard and Régine Le Jan (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2006).
which disputes were not merely pursued but narrativized both during and after the fact.\textsuperscript{264} In so doing, he has worked to identify the expectations and norms of practice with which antagonists played in pursuit of their goals and in their attempts to legitimize their methods or discredit their opponents. In so doing, White argues that, especially during the eleventh century, disputes were resolved through loosely structured negotiations, conducted according to received practice, and that violence and recourse to the courts each formed but two options amongst many available to disputants.\textsuperscript{265} Most crucially, White has placed great importance on the display (or attribution) of emotion to disputants as a means of establishing status, explaining hostilities, negotiating or re-negotiating relationships, and, finally, in securing peace.

The second is William Ian Miller, whose broad ranging work has often focused on the sagas, laws, and culture of medieval Iceland. Miller understands feud in large part as a system of balance and exchange, with honour as its principal medium. For Miller, both feud and law are ostensibly intended to function as means and mechanisms for “getting even,” yet both were commonly, perhaps even primarily utilized by their adherents to advance their own interests.

Lastly, Paul R. Hyams has written extensively on the co-existence of institutional mechanisms driven by a largely centralized authority and the recourse to self-help in high medieval England, and, more recently, on the applicability of feud studies and feuding terminology to the medieval period.\textsuperscript{266} Hyams largely dispenses with the standard

\textsuperscript{264} In White’s words: “When people engaged in a feud, they re-created an important genre of political action. A feud can therefore be seen both as a political process and as an ideological construct that feuding parties and monks could use both to represent and to explain and legitimate political actions.” “Feuding and Peace-Making,” 747.


\textsuperscript{266} Paul R. Hyams, Rancor; “Was There Really Such a Thing as Feud in the Middle Ages?” in Vengeance in the Middle Ages: Emotion, Religion and Feud ed. Susanna A. Throop and Paul R. Hyams (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 159-60.
anthropological studies (cited here and elsewhere) which seek to characterize feud practice as an >institution< in favour of understanding such practices as a malleable process capable of functioning either in opposition or complement to juridical methods of social control imposed from above. In Hyams’ view, strong and highly developed patterns of social organization are not inimical to violence, even internecine violence, within societies where violence is “not wholly pathologized.” Indeed within honour cultures, where violence may be perceived as normative and culturally appropriate, such organization may serve to direct rather than prevent violence.\footnote{Dov Cohen has documented similar patterns in the contemporary United States, see “Culture, Social Organization, and Patterns of Violence,” \textit{Journal of Personality and Social Psychology} 75, no. 2 (1998): 408-419.}

Like Miller, Hyams accords honour an important role in the medieval conceptualization of feud, vengeance, and the justice that each hoped to achieve.\footnote{Like Reinle, Hyams views the concern for honour and reputation, and the pursuit of vengeance for injured honour, to have transcended class and status. Paul Hyams, \textit{Rancor}, 242.}

Hyams also aligns with White in foregrounding the role of emotion in feud and vengeance practice.

3.5. Feud and “Vindicatory Violence”

One of the most common difficulties encountered within studies of feud and feuding societies lies in delineating precisely what constitutes >feud<, and to what extent might it be distinguished from similar or related concepts like vengeance, vendetta, raiding, and war.\footnote{John G.H. Hudson, in reference to feuding in tenth- to twelfth-century England, has suggested that while medieval people may have distinguished between different types of dispute, the evidence for a particular vocabulary or mental categories related to these differences is lacking, and that it may therefore be most in keeping with medieval usage to use the term “in an very general sense to cover a multiplicity of types of dispute.” John G. H. Hudson, “Feud, Vengeance and Violence in England from the Tenth to the Twelfth Centuries” in \textit{Feud, Violence and Practice: Essays in Honor of Stephen D. White}, ed. Belle S. Tuten and Tracey Billado (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 48.}

Black-Michaud and Peters differentiate between vendetta, a finite conflict between individuals terminated by a retaliatory killing, and feuding, which possesses mechanisms for the
limitation of violence, but not its permanent cessation.\textsuperscript{270} Black-Michaud also classifies the practice of raiding as similar to, but distinct from, that of feuding, following his observations that raiders generally do not keep a tally or score, whereas feuding parties invariably do.\textsuperscript{271} Warfare is also distinguished from feud, being collective action but insufficiently selective in the targeting of individuals, as occurs within a feud.\textsuperscript{272}

Boehm, although agreeing with the distinction drawn by Black-Michaud between feuding and warfare,\textsuperscript{273} believes that a broader definition of the feud than that offered by Black-Michaud was justified, one which embraced a wider spectrum of potential combatants (i.e. one that extends beyond kinship ties). Boehm expands on the notion (not wholly disputed by Black-Michaud) that “in any society that practices both feuding and warfare, one important function of feuding, as a highly rule-bound activity, will be to control the potential for expression of the warfare pattern within the local group or between closely cooperating groups,”\textsuperscript{274} suggesting further that “even the most-enduring feuds are only potentially interminable, not necessarily so.”\textsuperscript{275} In this, he aligns himself to some extent with Gluckman in his belief that the >notion< of interminable feud, whether or not it can actually be documented to exist, is an important concept within feuding societies, and one which acts as a primary impetus for effective settlement, writing that “it is precisely a recognition of the potentially interminable nature of feuding that

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{273} Boehm, \textit{Blood Revenge}, 198.
\textsuperscript{274} Boehm, \textit{Blood Revenge}, 204.
\textsuperscript{275} Boehm, \textit{Blood Revenge}, 205.
\end{flushleft}
drives parties in a feud to pacify, in spite of the fact that for both sides it is usually more honourable to continue the feud.”

For Wallace-Hadrill, the feud was “first, the threat of hostility between kins; then, the state of hostility between them; and finally, the satisfaction of their differences and a settlement on terms acceptable to both.” Following from this, medievalists, on the whole, have tended to rely on and develop looser definitions for their feud studies. Vengeance and feud, for instance, are both fundamentally manifestations of Feindschaft (>enmity<, Latin inimicitia) and represent the negation of Friede (>peace<), what differences exist are less differences in practice than distinctions of scale and duration. Wallace-Hadrill, for instance, remarked that no clear conception of feud as a distinct institution existed amongst the Franks during the early medieval period, as evidenced by the range of Latin terms (faidus, inimicus, hostis, vindicta, etc.) which may at times have referred to feuds, and at times not. This trend is evident in various vernaculars as well, extending into the modern era. In German, one encounters Fehde, Blutrache, Faustrecht and Selbsthilfe; in French, vengeance, vendetta, guerre privée, and faida, and in Italian faida, vendetta, and vendetta private – each of which, depending on context, may be seem to interchangeable with one another or to refer to something somehow distinct, and all of which may function as “feud.” Despite this, Wallace-Hadrill asserted confidently that simple vengeance, vendetta and civil war were not to be confused with bloodfeud proper.

276 Boehm, Blood Revenge, 206.
278 Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings, 122-3
Today, one of the most frequently cited descriptions of feud in a medieval context is perhaps that developed by William Ian Miller, which has proven extremely useful beyond the regionally, culturally, and temporally specific contexts (Iceland and England, respectively) for which it was developed:\textsuperscript{280}

1. Feud is a relationship (hostile) between two groups.
2. Unlike ad hoc revenge killing that can be an individual matter, feuding involves groups that can be recruited by any number of principles, among which kinship, vicinage, household, or clientage are most usual.
3. Unlike war, feud does not involve relatively large mobilizations, but only occasional mustering for limited purposes. Violence is controlled; casualties rarely reach double digits in any single encounter.
4. Feud involves collective liability. The target need not be the actual wrongdoer, nor, for that matter, need the vengeance-taker be the person most wronged.
5. A notion of exchange governs the process, a kind of my-turn/your-turn rhythm, with offensive and defensive positions alternating after each confrontation.
6. As a corollary to the preceding item, people keep score.
7. People who feud tend to believe that honor and affronts to it are the prime motivators of hostilities. Cross-culturally, there appears to be a correlation between the existence of feud and a culture of honor.
8. Feud is governed by norms that limit the class of possible expiators and the appropriateness of responses. For instance, most feuding cultures recognize a rough rule of equivalence in riposte, the lex talionis being but one example.
9. There are culturally acceptable means for making temporary or permanent settlements of hostility.\textsuperscript{281}

Many of these points are readily applicable to the conflicts and disputes of Middle High German epic: that conflict is understood as a function and process of honour concerns, the existence of norms at least ostensibly limiting targets and assigning responsibility for collective guilt, the seemingly turn-based nature of violent exchange, the tallying of injuries inflicted, and the

\textsuperscript{280} Miller, \textit{Bloodtaking and Peacemaking}, 180-1.

\textsuperscript{281} Neither Miller nor Hyams (see below) make duration a part of their definition. For a contrasting view, see Jesse L. Byock’s 18-point definition, which establishes the length of hostilities as a key point of differentiation between \textit{>feud<} and \textit{>dispute<}: Jesse L. Byock, “Defining Feud,” 96-99. For additional discussion of feud models and their application to medieval Europe, see Helgi Þorlákksson, “Feud and Feuding in the Early and High Middle Ages: Working Descriptions and Continuity” in \textit{Feud in Medieval and Early Modern Europe}, ed. Jeppe Büchert Netterstrøm and Bjørn Poulsen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2007).
“culturally acceptable means for making temporary or permanent settlements of hostility” may all be accepted unproblematically.

Yet other points raise issues within a Middle High German context. The extent to which one wishes to distinguish between the actions of a group and an “individual matter” rests very much on the purposes of one’s inquiry. In the context of honour, all action undertaken by the individual has the potential to become group action, and all injury to the individual is capable of being interpreted as collective injury to the honour group. Vindicatory responses to injury, whether individual or collective, are each constrained by and evaluated according to the honour of the society within which they occur. The underlying and motivating emotions and sentiments remain very much the same, as do the risks and potential scope of conflict.

In Herzog Ernst B, for example, Duke Ernst’s assault on the imperial court, in which he attempts to assassinate the emperor and succeeds in killing Count Heinrich, may read at first as an individual act of vengeance. Had he been successful in slaying both of his antagonists, one might imagine that it could be so characterized. Yet as it stands, Ernst’s actions appear as part of a sequence of events – strike and counter-strike. Furthermore, Ernst does not act alone – his faithful ally Wetzel is with him. In the immediate aftermath, the allies and kin of emperor and duke alike rally to their sides, each affirming the justice of their own cause, and both groups hurl themselves into the fray. The conflict is at once profoundly personal and profoundly public. All that is public is personal, all that is personal is public – the individual is status – honour – and the honour group is the individual.

The same factors apply when one attempts to differentiate between war, even public war (bellum publicum) and feud. In Middle High German heroic epic, I would argue that the distinction between warfare and feuding is seldom present (a fact which is also likely to have been true, to a lesser extent, for a great deal of the conflicts which arose during the high medieval
period). Christopher Boehm differentiates between the two by stating, that “feuding is limited to one or a few killings at a time; only one side takes the offensive at a time; and there is no necessary political objective beyond the maintenance of honor.”\textsuperscript{282} Despite this, time and again we encounter kings and great armies taking the field over questions of personal honour, with questionable or non-existent political objectives. These conflicts are pursued following precisely the same patterns and mechanisms of intensification or resolution as the smaller-scale conflicts more easily designated as feud. That they incorporate raiding and large-scale warfare is perhaps most directly attributable and explicable by reference to the social and political hierarchy of the high medieval period in which these events occurred.\textsuperscript{283} This hierarchy, which allows direct exchange of the crucial currency of honour only between members of the same class, enables narrators to engage with the great conflicts of entire peoples as interpersonal conflict between those individuals at the top, and to understand all of those unnamed individuals who find their place nearer the bottom of the social hierarchy as extensions of their self and household. What we find are repeated instances of conflict which progresses according to certain patterns, and which appears to be governed, at least theoretically, by certain rules and expectations of conduct.\textsuperscript{284} These patterns are malleable, but retain the same basic form and set of expectations.

In answer to the problem posed by the often blurry lines of vengeance, vendetta, and feud, Stuart Carroll has proposed the alternate term “vindicatory violence.” In Carroll’s usage,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[282] Boehm, Blood Revenge, 221.
\item[283] Brunner noted that while vengeance was the primary motivation for feud, by the late medieval period, the practice of seeking to damage, distress, and plunder an enemy’s territory had become one of the principle manifestations of conflict between German nobles (Brunner, Land und Herrschaft, 32-3), thus distancing their feud practice even further from Black-Michaud’s model. For representations of this practice in Middle High German literature, see the discussion of roup und brant below.
\item[284] As with feud proper, it has been noted that in historical practice, “revenge may operate either to control levels of killings or to accelerate them, depending on the political and historical contexts.” Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, Violence: Theory and Ethnography (London: Continuum, 2002), 113.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the term encompasses “acts of violence, such as revenge killing and the duel, which repair an honour or injury and which are suggestive of a reciprocal relationship between the parties, such as one finds in the feud.” Carroll distinguishes such acts, although admitting occasional overlap, from both “atomized and aimless acts of violence, domestic violence, and brawls” and from “state violence, particularly war, or violence against the state in the form of revolt.” This overlap is crucial in the examination of Middle High German epic, for on examination, one discovers that the overlap is so complete as to render distinction impossible. In the imagination and narrativization of violence within these texts, violence is at once personal and societal, but rarely national.

Consider the conflicts of Kudrun: here we find vast armies committed to the field, and great kingdoms entering into conflict with one another. Yet the heart of the conflict remains deeply personal, and originates in all cases from the wrong done to the honour and person of the ruler. Those mobilized in seeking recompense for this wrong are named the kin of this ruler, the pain shared. Peace is made not between peoples, but between kinships. Even when crossing religious lines, as in the conflict between Sifrit and Herwic, the cause and root of the matter remains bound to the honour of the antagonists, who, as rulers, hold in their person the honour of all their folk and dependents. Never is there the intimation that differences of religion or culture in anyway occlude the shared understanding of the game rules.

To take a more extreme example, even in Wolfram’s Willehalm, for all the rhetoric of crusade, we find the heart of the conflict to be rooted in injured honour, and that the conflict

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286 Ibid. “State violence” is naturally an inappropriate term when applied to the medieval period, and certainly in application to the German lands of the Empire.
turns more on familial pride than on anything resembling “national” interests. Wolfram’s explanation of the sentiments with which the conflict began makes this clear:

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waz heres des mit töde engalt!
Ir man, der künic Tibalt,
Minnen vlust an ir klagete.
Úz vreude in sorge jagete
Mit kraft daz herze sînen lîp.
Er klagete êre unde wîp,
Dâ zuo bürge unde lant.
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(What a host paid for this [that Giburc accepted baptism and ran away to marry Willehalm] with death! Her husband, the king Tibalt, lamented her lost love. His heart pursued him powerfully out of joy and into sorrow. He lamented his honour and wife, as well as his fortresses and lands. Wolfram, Willehalm, 8,1-7)

Even in the Rolandslied, where at first glance a clear distinction between war and “mere” vindicatory violence or feuding practice might seem to emerge most clearly, we find the clash of civilizations, Latin Christendom against Islam, frequently coloured by, even immersed, into the language of honour, vengeance, and tit-for-tat exchange.

In Middle High German epic, it is rare indeed to encounter a conflict that is not reducible to a context of injured honour and a quest for recompense. The description of feud offered by Paul R. Hyams goes some ways toward addressing these concerns for our purposes:

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287 Willehalm, 8,1-7.
288 The heathen princes who compete against one another for the privilege of leading the attack against Roland in lines 3540-3844 make it clear that their motivation for doing so is primarily to seek satisfaction for the injuries which he has inflicted on them and on their possessions in the past.
289 This reducibility of even the greatest conflicts to personal matters of honour, and feud practice was noted in historical practice by Brunner (“Auch ein bellum publicum ist Fehde, aber eine des Königs,” [a bellum publicum is also feud, but one of the king’s], Brunner, Land und Herrschaft, 41). Gerd Althoff has similarly noted in conflict, kings of the Ottonian and Salian periods appear to have been constrained to play by the same rules as their nobles: “Das Konfliktverhalten von König und Großen im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert ist deutlich Prinzipien verpflichtet, die wenig mit “Staatlichkeit,” viel dagegen mit der Austragung von Gegensätzen auf “privater Ebene” zu tun haben,” (The conflict behaviour of king and nobility in the tenth and eleventh century is clearly bound by principles that have little to do with “statehood,” but on the contrary much more to do with playing out antagonisms on a “private level,” Althoff, Spielregeln, 53).
1. Feud starts as an effort to avenge an act perceived as a wrong, generally violent injury and often a killing.
2. It represents this wrong as the act of an enemy and signals a lasting enmity between those who inflicted it and the “victim.”
3. The wrong that provokes and justifies feud is understood to affect a larger group around the original victim that was in part known and even recruited in advance of trouble. That group’s solidarity, threatened by its inability to protect its own, may now seem to need reassertion.
4. Given a similar sense of the vicarious liability of the injuring party’s associates, these were sometimes targeted for vengeance in the principal’s stead.
5. The level of response is constrained by a notion of rough equivalence, requiring the keeping of a “score.”
6. Emotions both fuel the response and help to determine its quantum and nature.
7. The response is open to public view and ritualized in ways that proclaim the acts to all as legitimate and honourable. This distinguishes it from the kind of secret killings and ambushes perpetrated by traitors and called by such names as murder and felony.
8. Action from the side of the “victim” nevertheless raises the high probability of a further tit-for-tat response from their enemies.
9. To dispel this and offer hopes of an end to the violence, something much more than the punishment of individual offenders is necessary, amounting to a veritable peace settlement between the wider groups involved.
10. This settlement, though widely recognized to be legitimate, is nevertheless understood in some broad sense to be distinct from any act of public authority.²⁹⁰

Such a description broadens the potential scope of dispute practice to allow for the fluid transition between individual and collective action, as well as noting the fundamental requirement of public action if violence is to be legitimized. Despite this, Hyams here crucially does not address the honour processes that enable the collectivization of injury and vengeance responsibility. Ultimately, there may be more profit in viewing the actions of antagonists within Middle High German narratives as occurring not in the context of an institution (i.e. >Feud<), but rather along a continuum of violent or potentially violent dispute practices: practices which are not scripted, but drawn from a repertoire of possible actions broadly understood by their contemporaries are more or less appropriate, each one advancing or retarding the progression of

²⁹⁰ Paul R. Hyams, “Was There Really Such a Thing as Feud in the Middle Ages?” 159-60. An earlier version of Hyams’ model appears in his Rancor and Reconciliation, 8-9.
the larger conflict. The existence of such a scale, a “set of values that define normative standards for what is considered honourable and dishonourable, disgraceful behaviour;” following an >honour code< active within the confines of a specific context, is a common feature of honour societies. ²⁹¹

3.6. Vengeance

“Rache ist das Ziel der Fehde wie des Gerichtsverfahrens.”²⁹²

“The ultimate vindication of honour lies in physical violence.”²⁹³

The drive for vengeance seems to be a basic human trait, though the legitimacy of acting on such a drive varies widely between cultures and eras. Medieval Europe has been termed a >vengeance culture< as well as an >honour< or >shame culture<, and it is clear that the practice of vengeance was endemic, both in reality and in fiction. Even the clergy, ostensibly so deeply invested in the promotion of forgiveness at the expense of vengeance,²⁹⁴ were immersed in the language of vengeance and understood it well.²⁹⁵


²⁹² “The goal of feud, as of legal action, is vengeance.” Brunner, Land und Herrschaft, 23.


²⁹⁴ Written evidence of such efforts survive in the form of exempla used in sermons: see Richard Kaeuper, “Vengeance and Mercy in Chivalric Mentalité” in Peace and Protection in the Middle Ages, ed. T. B. Lambert and David Rollason (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2009).

²⁹⁵ For some examples, see the citations of Paul R. Hyams in chapters 4 and 5 of Rancor and Reconciliation (esp. in regard to Orderic Vitalis). Elsewhere, Karl Shoemaker has argued that vengeance was understood at times, even by figures of the stature of Augustine and Gratian, as “partaking in the good,” writing: “The man who pursued revenge on behalf of his wronged lord, dependants, or the church did so both in the image of God and in imitation of earthly lordship.” “Revenge as ‘Medium Good’ in the Twelfth Century,” Law, Culture and the Humanities 1, no. 3 (2005): 333-358, 357.
Vengeance grows from the impulse to strike when struck, but it is more than this. When we speak of vengeance, we often speak of justice, or at least of a >subjective< justice, at the same time; about correcting imbalance. When a wrong has been committed it is wholly natural to think it must be corrected. To a vengeance minded culture (and indeed, to many who live in cultures which have ostensibly forswn vengeance as a matter of moral principle), this correction is understood to mean that the wronged party, the one who has been struck, must strike, harder if possible, the striker.  

As Richard Kaeuper has written, “vengeance wipes the slate clean and reorders a disordered world.”

The relationship between the two parties is one of exchange, understandable in monetary terms or in metaphors of play and point scoring. If both parties in a given conflict are understood initially to stand 0/0 in score, the wrong done to one party, to the advantage of the other, may adjust this score to 2/-2. In one sense, “balancing” the situation would seem to require that both parties return to zero – that a punishment precisely balancing the initial wrong, this time to the advantage of the wronged party. Yet for the wronged party, this may not feel much like justice – the wrong-doer has been able to enjoy the advantage for a time, while the injured party has been forced to endure deprivation. If both parties are brought back to zero, the corrective element is extremely limited, and the wrong-doer may fairly be said to have gained from the wrong. >Justice< therefore requires that the offending party not only be deprived of their ill-gotten

296 Following Byock: “Feud’s behavioural crucible is that someone, whether through violence, insult, shaming, dishonouring, etc. wants to hurt someone else. The pain that the perpetrator of the last act inflicts (however justified) hurts the psyche and pride of those that have taken the hit, calling for vengeance.” Byock, “Defining Feud,” 97. See also Miller, Eye for an Eye, 18. This “calling” for vengeance experienced by those who participate in vengeance minded cultures points toward the underlying forces behind Susanna A. Throop’s observation that “vengeance has not only been used to explain violence, it has frequently been used by some to justify violence.” Susanna A. Throop, “The Study of Vengeance in the Middle Ages” in Vengeance in the Middle Ages: Emotion, Religion and Feud, ed. Susanna A. Throop and Paul R. Hyams (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 1.

gains, but that they suffer genuine deprivation as well. Because the experience of deprivation, and of suffering more generally, is a subjective one, the extent to which the wrongdoer must suffer (and be seen to suffer) in order for the wronged to feel satisfied is equally subjective.  

Likewise, it is not surprising that injured persons may place quite a high value on their suffering. What is more, there exists a general propensity to desire not that the scales of suffering be balanced, but towards what might be thought excessive punishment – up to and including the total destruction of the wrong-doer. This performs a number of functions beyond assuaging the pain of injury and restoring honour status and self worth: it also serves as a more severe warning against future wrongdoers, and cultivates social (and at times material) advantage in a manner that may be justified as legitimate. This is a balancing act, avenging a wrong provides the opportunity for gain, but excessive gain, gain acquired in violation of the rules, may rob the avenger of this legitimacy and reveal his or her pursuit of justice to be nothing more than a sham.

In Middle High German heroic epic, the whole of this process, from the initial strike, through the process of payback, and up to the moment of satisfaction, is subsumed into the system of honour. Here the self, being inseparable from the processes of honour which give it shape and identity, perceives each slight against its honour in as real a fashion as the physical body perceives a slap, or a blow from a fist. If anything, we must regard the honour self as a far
more sensitive and fragile being than the physical one, and consequently both more likely to respond to injury in kind.

So too may we see in honour the means by which debts of violence, both in the symbolic and in a very physical sense, often come to be distributed amongst larger groups. It is through the processes of affiliate honour that “heartfelt lethal retaliation becomes culturally abstracted into a matter of clan honour, and it is in such societies that feuds are likely to involve a long series of lethal exchanges, rather than ending with a single, emotionally-satisfying instance of lethal retaliation[.]”\(^{300}\)

Seen in this light, private vengeance, feud, and warfare begin to look very much like overlapping sections of the same continuum.

### 3.7. Feud Practice in Middle High German Heroic Epic

Where honour systems in various guises have been widely studied in medieval literature, particularly in reference to the courtly literature whose poets showed much greater concern for defining, categorizing and describing the nature of honour, feud studies have rarely been employed in this capacity (save indirectly) by the scholars of literature.\(^{301}\)

Historians of the feud, however, have not hesitated to employ literary depictions of feud practice when filling in the blanks left by the scanty documentation to be found elsewhere. As the evidence provided by charters, court records and chroniclers often record in isolation the outcome, the initial offense, or the settlement of what might have been an on-going feud described, context and overall narrative arc must be sought elsewhere. At the same time, with

\(^{300}\)Boehm, “Natural History of Blood Revenge,” 200.

\(^{301}\)For an exception to this trend, see Holzhauer, Rache und Fehde.
particular regard to medieval chronicles, historians have been critical of the narratives imposed on dispute by the chroniclers themselves, and the varied ways in which this narrative imposition may seriously distort our understanding of both motivation and practice. This is less of a danger when taking the reverse course and applying what can be understood of practice to narrative as a means of providing context for the manner in which the disputes of these narratives, as well as the narratives themselves, were structured and “read” by their contemporary audience.

My own approach to identifying distinctive stages within the progression of disputes in Middle High German narrative owes much to the work of Stephen D. White. White believes that feud in medieval narrative can be identified in large part by its animating emotions, and that it may be further analyzed according to the turn-based actions of its antagonists. 302 Accepting this idea of a semi-standardized progression of dispute, wherein the principals attempt to gain recompense for the wrongs done to them by engaging in varied actions from an expansive but nevertheless limited repertoire of behaviours, allows for its application to a broader spectrum of dispute than is allowed by the more restrictive and fraught >feud<.

There are, to be sure, examples to be found in heroic epic which very much resemble fully developed feuds: the conflict between the titular protagonist of *Herzog Ernst* and the emperor Otto chief amongst them, but to this one might also add the dispute between Turnus and Eneas of Heinrich von Veldeke’s *Eneasroman*, that between fox and wolf in the *Reinhart Fuchs* of Heinrich der Glîchezâre, or between the Hegelings and the Normans in the final third of the *Kudrun* poem. What appear to be feuds also flit about the edges, coming occasionally into view, in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival* and *Willehalm*, as well as in the *Tristan* of Gottfried von Strassburg. Taken as a whole, the historical Dietrich epics might also be included in this number.

Throughout, similar patterns, scenes, motivations and practices emerge, and render the anthropological distinction between feud, simple vengeance, and war of limited use in understanding the rules governing social interaction and narrative progression within the texts at hand.

The structural role played by dispute practice in narrative progression has also been noted by Jesse L Byock in the Icelandic sagas, and above all, in the short stories known as *thættir*. Byock coined the term *feudemes* to refer to small, distinctive “action particles” which comprise the fundamental building blocks of Icelandic saga, and which are arranged by narrators according to a conventional progression of dispute.\(^{303}\) Within this progression, Byock observes: “The individual actions and their patterned arrangement serve as a system of signs, channelling the teller/author’s prose and fixing the audience’s attention. They triggered the rich social understanding that the medieval listener/reader shared with the sagateller.”\(^{304}\) Although the *thættir* deal far more directly and intensively with feud process than most Middle High German epic, many of the same underlying elements of dispute process and structural patterning may nevertheless be discerned.

In Middle High German heroic narrative, more or less discrete stages of dispute are discernible. The first stage is Peace. The court is depicted in its more or less pristine state, functioning (or not) as best it is able – expressions of love, joy, and generosity\(^ {305}\) in the context

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\(^{304}\) Byock, “Choices of Honor,” 171.

\(^{305}\) In the necessity of generosity during peacetime we can again see the manner in which the conceptualization of honour in medieval society is both informed by and informs feuding practice. A ruler must be generous – generous in order to establish an honour claim as a wealthy and powerful individual, to maintain his honour and esteem.
of feasting and games predominate.\textsuperscript{306} >Peace< is not understood to indicate a total absence of conflict, violence or, above all, of competition, for each of these are necessary components of the joyful expression of aristocratic status. Rather, we find such impulses channelled and confined: the \textit{bûhurt} being the most common manifestation.\textsuperscript{307}

If there is to be a narrative at all, this peace must inevitably be broken, and because heroic narratives are all in all cases deeply concerned with >right order< and the well-being of noble society as a whole, indications of malignancy within the court itself are sometimes present. This can be seen when no opportunity for honour competition exists, (as at the beginning of \textit{Kudrun}), when joyful competition turns deadly (as in the tournament between the Burgundians and the Huns in \textit{Nibelungenlied}), or when the ruler fails to properly honour his vassals (as amongst both his own followers and his peers, and also to ensure the bonds of \textit{triuwe} which strengthen the ties of honour between himself and his followers, thereby protecting that honour against future injury.

The norms apparent in Middle High German epic do not differ drastically from the observations of Black-Michaud, who writes:

> Wealth can only be enjoyed by the leader if it is in greater part recirculated among those who support him. Both leadership and wealth are conditional. Neither are inalienable rights. Both are prerogatives dependent upon popular consent. If a leader loses the respect of the majority by becoming a despot, by monopolizing resources and discontinuing the tradition of lavish hospitality expected of him, in short, by acting in a fashion incompatible with a whole series of values going under the general heading of honour, all confidence will be withdrawn from him and group loyalties will be transferred to another more ‘honourable’ man. (\textit{Cohesive Force}, 183-4) \textsuperscript{306}

\textsuperscript{306} Representative examples include the description of Sigmunt’s court and its festivities in \textit{Nibelungenlied}, av. II, and the circumstances surrounding the first meeting of Kriemhilt and Sivrit, \textit{Nibelungenlied}, av. V; Sigebant’s court in \textit{Kudrun}, av. I; as well as Ernst’s childhood (57-174) and the court of Emperor Otto (449-645) in \textit{Herzog Ernst B}.

\textsuperscript{307} The \textit{bûhurt} was a form of military sport characterized by group encounters with competitors employing lance and shield, see William Henry Jackson, “Lance and Shield in the \textit{buhurt}” in \textit{German Narrative Literature of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: Studies presented to Roy Wisbey on his Sixty-fifth Birthday}, ed. Volker Honemann, Martin H. Jones, Adrian Stevens and David Wells (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1994) and Joachim Bumke, \textit{Höfische Kultur. Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter} (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), cited from the 11\textsuperscript{th} edition, 2005, 342-380.
Constantine in *König Rother*). Effective rulers, who will become exemplary protagonists, display great largess, thereby ensuring not only the health and happiness of their current court, but also shoring up loyalty against future calamity.

The peace is broken by an injury to honour. Most commonly, this insult is perpetrated by an outsider,\(^{308}\) or one imperfectly integrated into the court,\(^{309}\) but this does not need to be the case.\(^{310}\) The injuries inflicted take various forms; the abduction of a relative,\(^{311}\) improper treatment or detention of a vassal,\(^{312}\) a claim of precedence or the denial of a status claim,\(^{313}\) a refusal to render aid,\(^{314}\) an armed assault,\(^{315}\) a murder.\(^{316}\) What each of them has in common is that they not only damage the honour of an individual (and via affiliate honour, that of the larger group), but that they occur in a manner which breaches social convention; the act of aggression

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\(^{308}\) The challenges presented by the suitors of various brides in *Kudrun*, namely Hetel and his men (av. V-VIII), Hartmuot (av. X and XIV-XXXII), Herwic (av. XI-XII), and Sifrit (av. XIII-XIV) are each examples of injury inflicted upon the court by an outsider.

\(^{309}\) Here one might consider several figures (Sivrit, Prünkilt) from the *Nibelungenlied*, the titular hero of Heinrich von Veldeke’s *Éneas*, or even Rother/Dietrich in *König Rother* and Horant, Morunc, and Wate in *Kudrun*.

\(^{310}\) The treacherous Heinrich in *Herzog Ernst*, for example, is a blood-relative of Emperor Otto.

\(^{311}\) *König Rother*: Rother absconds from Constantine’s court with the emperor’s daughter, who becomes his wife and pregnant with his son (2896-2946), and is in turn abducted by her father’s men (3225-3251); *Kudrun*: Hilde is abducted by Horant, Morunc, and Wate at Hetel’s bequest (av. VII), and Kudrun herself is abducted by the Normans (av. XV). In Wolfram’s *Willehalm*, the central conflict between Tibalt and the titular hero begins when Willehalm takes off with his wife Arabel (later Giburc) (7,27-8,3).

\(^{312}\) *König Rother*: Rother’s messengers are mistreated and imprisoned by Constantine (324-359); *Kudrun*: Kudrun is greatly mistreated and forced to perform menial duties by the Normans (av. XX-XXI).

\(^{313}\) *Herzog Ernst*: Otto is initially turned against Ernst when it is reported to him that his step-son wishes to supplant him as the most powerful man in the empire (673-813); *Kudrun*: The honour of the Normans is greatly affronted by the Hegeling refusal to entertain Hartmuot’s marriage proposal on the basis of their status as vassals (av. XI), a slight which greatly contributes to Queen Gerlint’s desire for vengeance (737); *Nibelungenlied*: the quarrel of the queens begins with an argument over the respective status of their husbands and their own precedence at court (av. XIV).

\(^{314}\) It is in part a refusal of assistance at a time of great need that leads the titular hero of Wolfram’s *Willehalm* to nearly kill his sister and queen: *Willehalm*, Book 3.

\(^{315}\) *Herzog Ernst B*: Heinrich leads the emperor’s forces against Ernst’s lands without formal warning of enmity (853-910); *Kudrun*: Sifrit attacks Hetel’s lands and possessions (av. XIII), the Normans launch an assault upon Matelane (av. XV).

\(^{316}\) *Herzog Ernst B*: Ernst kills Otto’s nephew Heinrich (1243-1326); *Nibelungenlied*: Hagen murders Sivrit (av. XVI), Hagen kills Etzel’s son (1961).
is perpetrated without warning, unannounced. Such assaults on honour threaten to destabilize the social order, and restrict or eliminate the possibility of immediate peaceful resolution; the breach of protocol invalidates the mechanisms of resolution internal to the court.

The injured party responds by broadcasting the existence of the injury. This can take the form of an appeal for mediation (in the case of an appeal to a superior, for satisfactory judgment) or a plea to one’s allies for aid in gaining satisfaction. This is in many ways the most fascinating and intriguing stage of the narrative's progression. In broadcasting the nature of the injury done, the injured party clarifies for both the poem's audience and his or her followers the significance of the act, and the rightness of his or her position – it is a justification of the corrective action (vengeance) that is to be sought. The appeal also attempts to illustrate the shared nature of the injury done; it is designed to establish that the injury has been done not merely to the honour of the ruler as individual, but to his court, his kin and all of his dependents – it is, in short, and injury to society itself. This broadcast then becomes part of an appeal for aid, an act which itself has interesting implications. That this appeal should be necessary at all demonstrates that the mere existence of social bonds, legal obligations and even kinship, was not in itself sufficient to guarantee support in the face of conflict. The justness of the aggrieved

317 Eneas: Turnus appeals first to King Latinus (138,21-139,28), and later to the queen (140,31-141,31); Herzog Ernst B: Ernst appeals to both his mother (949-961) and the princes (1093-1101) for mediation with the emperor; Nibelungenlied: before calling directly for vengeance, Prünhilt complains of her disgrace to Gunther (851), Kriemhilt expresses her sorrow and anger to her brothers without gaining satisfaction (1099, 1111, 1138).

318 Eneas: Turnus laments the disgrace he has suffered from both Latinus and Eneas to his allies, calling for vengeance (150,7-152,30); Herzog Ernst B: Otto laments Ernst’s actions and calls upon his vassals for aid (1351-1421); Kudrun: Hervic complains of the damage done to his people and lands, asking his bride and her family for assistance (676-691), Hilde laments the Norman attack to her husband and his allies (806-809), Hetel laments his injuries to his men (816-824); Nibelungenlied: Gunther complains of the Saxon challenge to his allies (147-149 - here, in response to the widdersage of the Saxons, Gunther comments “disiu starken mære sol ic mînen friwenden klagen” [I ought make complaint of these grave tidings to my friends, NL, 147]), and to Sivrit (157-8 - this following Gunther’s honour challenge to Sivrit by implying that the hero is not one of his “stæten vriwenden” [steadfast friends, NL, 155,3], Prünhilt laments being disgraced by Kriemhilt and Sivrit to Hagen (864), Kriemhilt begs the Huns on bended knee to avenge her upon Hagen (1765), pleads with Dietrich first Dietrich and then Bleedelin for the same (1899-1906), and finally both Kriemhilt and Etzel beg Rüedeger to avenge them upon the Burgundians (2147-2162).
party's cause, the extent of the injury, and most importantly the vengeance to be taken must in
effect be ratified by those who will pursue the case. Complaints and appeals in this context are
almost always accompanied by, or take the form of perceptible manifestations of grief –
lamentation, tears, and open weeping.

This practice in particular appears to resemble two important aspects of feuds in the
medieval German lands that were (at least ostensibly) necessary for obtaining legitimacy: that
violence be preceded first by a public complaint (gerichtliche Klage), and second by a public
statement of enmity (Absage). 319 The necessity of both a public declaration of enmity and
seeking peaceful redress under the aegis of a recognized authority before engaging in violence
was codified in the Mainzer Landfriede) issued by the emperor Frederick II in 1235, 320 though,
as evidenced by texts like the Rolandslied (ca. 1170 – see below), is likely to have been accepted
practice long before this time. 321

319 This has been noted as a crucial element of the legitimate feud at least since Brunner; see Land und Herrschaft,
49-50, 73-77.
320 Si quis vero coram iudice sicut predictum est in causa processerit, si ius non fuerit consecutus et neccessitate
cogente oportet eumdiffidare inimicum suum, quod vulgo dicitur widersage, hoc diurno tempore faciat, et ex tune
usque in quartum diem, id est post tres integros dies, diffidans et diffidatus integrum pacem servabunt sibi in
personis et rebus.

(If in truth one will has proceeded thus in the aforesaid manner in the presence of a judge, and if justice has not
followed then, bound by necessity, let him give warning to his enemy, which in the common tongue is called
widersage. Let him do this by day, and from thence until the fourth day, that is after three intervening days, the
warner and the warned will preserve the peace for both persons and property). Constitutio Pacis, 1235. Aug. 15.,
MGH Const. 2, nr. 196, 243. This document is one of the most significant in a long line of Landfrieden dating back
to the eleventh century. The Land-peaces of the German lands were an offshoot of the treuga dei movement so
prevalent in France. As evidenced by the Mainzer Landfriede here referenced, private violence was not so much
prohibited as regulated. See Benjamin Arnold, Medieval Germany 500-1300: A Political Interpretation (Toronto:
University of Toronto Press,  1997), 151-6. For an alternate interpretation, see Elmar Wadle, “Zur Delegitimierung
321 Regarding the relationship between literature and legal practice in this period, William H. Jackson has noted that,
while “[r]eflexes of the church’s Truce of God are rare in German literature,” “the peace enactments of the German
rulers did provide an important normative legal thread in the discourse of violence and order that runs through
German culture in the High Middle ages. The literature produced with a view to secular, aristocratic audiences in the
twelfth and thirteenth centuries plays an important part in this discourse…” William H. Jackson, “Court Literature
and Violence in the High Middle Ages” in German Literature of the High Middle Ages, ed. Will Hasty (Rochester:
Camden House, 2006), 265; 267.
The rendering of public complaint, (Latin *querimonia*), in particular, has also received considerable attention from Gerd Althoff. Althoff’s work on the medieval feud emphasizes the importance of this statement as a means of making the feud public and thereby both legitimizing subsequent violence (should the subject of the *querimonia* not render satisfactory composition) and initiating a sequence of events leading either towards settlement or open violence: “Eine demütige Antwort auf eine querimonia schafft den Spielraum für Verhandlungen, eine drohende Antwort dagegen ist das Signal, die Waffen sprechen zu lassen.”322

In those instances where the latter held true and a *querimonia* failed to produce a satisfactory result (i.e. an offer of settlement), Brunner observes that formal notice of >enmity< or of >defiance< (Latin *diffidatio*), which served to break the bonds of faith (*fides*) which existed between the two parties, was always necessary if violence was to be considered legitimate within the broader community. 323 Although such notice could be delivered orally, the trend towards ever increasing formalization of dispute practice in the later medieval period eventually led a written “letter of defiance” to become the accepted norm.324

*Diffidatio* appears in the vernacular as *widersage*. In *Herzog Ernst B*, the absence of this public declaration stands as one of the great sins committed by Pfalzgraf Heinrich in his initial assault on Ernst’s lands.325 A latter rendition of the same tale, *Herzog Ernst D*, amends this

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322 “A submissive answer to a *querimonia* creates latitude for negotiation; a threatening answer, in contrast, is the signal to let weapons speak.” Althoff, *Spielregeln*, 66.

323 Much more recent, Robert Bartlett has argued, in a primarily French context, that publically proclaimed >enmity< constituted a specific legal status which served two legitimize violence between them. See “‘Mortal Enmities’: The Legal Aspects of Hostility in the Middle Ages” in *Feud, Violence and Practice: Essays in Medieval Studies in Honor of Stephen D. White*, ed. Belle S. Tuten and Tracey L. Billado (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010): 197-212.

324 Brunner, *Land und Herrschaft*, 73-7

325 Heinrich, the “ungetriuwe man” (*HEB*, 814), lays out his treacherous plan, and the necessity of keeping the declaration of hostility secret until after the initial strike, in HEB 815-852. Crucially:

“daz sol vil heimliche ergên,
passage to inform the audience that Heinrich contrived to inform Ernst of his hostility during an arranged absence, preventing the hero from mounting a defense.\textsuperscript{326}

The potential importance of the \textit{widersage} within Middle High German Epic may be inferred from the trial of Genelun in the \textit{Rolandslied}: having betrayed the hero Roland to the heathens, resulting in not only the death of Roland but of all his paladins besides, Genelun defends himself by stating that he declared his hostility openly and before the court – thereby legitimizing his subsequent actions against him and his.\textsuperscript{327} Although Karl has no patience for such a justification, Genelun is supported in his claim by Binabel,\textsuperscript{328} and it is on this principle that the subsequent judicial duel (ending poorly for Binabel and Genelun alike) turns.

Although its function may be clear, the location of the appeal within the standard narrative progression is more difficult to define. Its first appearance usually follows the insult directly, but it is not uncommonly repeated as various attempts at resolution or gaining support fail and other alternatives must be sought. The first appeal may occur in pursuit of a peaceful

\begin{verbatim}
daz ieman müge daz verstên
wen du wellest bestân
oder war diu reise welle gân,
unz man im den schaden tuo.
Dâ mac er danne niht zuo,
Wan er keine were hât.”
\end{verbatim}

(“That should be done very secretly, so that no one realizes whom you wish to attack or where the expedition is headed until the injury has been inflicted upon him. Then he will not be able to do anything, as he shall have no defenses” \textit{HEB} 839-845).

\textsuperscript{326} \textit{Herzog Ernst D}, 646-716.
\textsuperscript{327} \textit{Rolandslied}, 8740-8746.
\textsuperscript{328} \textit{Rolandslied}, 8785-96.
resolution; as an appeal for mediation or mediated justice. The failure of this attempt legitimates the violence that follows. In this, the epics elevate the moral and ethical standing of their heroes.

In the German epics of the high medieval period it is notable that feuds and feud-like behaviour frequently occurs between either kings and kings, or between nobles and their king, rather than between nobles of roughly equal rank (for where equality of combatants does exist, they are almost invariably of royal status). This is an important distinction between Middle High German epic and the *chansons de geste* studied by White; though it is worth noting that neither the mechanisms employed in seeking aid, nor the practices associated with further pursuance of the feud seem to have substantially differed.\(^{329}\)

In cases where mediation has failed, the disputing party must again appeal for aid from those who will help him or her to achieve redress through violence.\(^{330}\) These may be the same individuals to whom he or she appealed for mediation, but in Middle High German epic, they are more likely to be subordinates – vassals whose counsel and valour is valued, but who do not occupy a position of sufficient authority to bring about a peaceful settlement.

Generally speaking, the chief disputants are not themselves killed (or at least, not right away), though significant vassals may be. Less significant vassals and peasants exist merely as a means to keep score. The most frequent targets, and this again reflects historical practice, are the dependents and possessions of the opposing party via “roup und brant” (>pillaging and burning<).\(^{331}\) Damage inflicted on this property is damage inflicted on the honour of the

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\(^{330}\) Kriemhilt’s, and later Etzel’s repeated pleas in the *Nibelungenlied* are perhaps the clearest example of this.

\(^{331}\) Amongst other instances, the practice appears in this phrasing within Rudolf Ems, *Alexander*, 2839, 4491, 4882, 5947, 21121; *Biterolf und Dietleib*, 4562, 9446; *Dietrichs Flucht*, 2950, 3860, 4105; *Herzog Ernst* B, 599, 860, 876, 905, 1678, 4698; *Kaiserchronik*, 3484, 5880, 7010, 7685, 8470, 15593, 15629, 15925, 16923; *König Rother*,
possessor and a statement denying the possessor's ability to protect his own, in addition to
serving the obvious purpose of limiting an opponent's resources and consequently his ability to
resist.

The action normally proceeds in a roughly turn-based fashion, sometimes in rapid
succession, but frequently with significant delay between moves, often exacerbated and retarded
by geographical separation of the antagonists. Such a separation may be born of necessity, as
when one side becomes so severely reduced as to be unable to continue the struggle, or arranged
as a matter of course – to provide breathing room, as it were. This may in some ways reflect

Nu schuof er herverte in sîner vînde lant.
durch die armen wolter füeren deheinen brant.
swâ ir mit übermüete deheiner wart erfunden,
dem brach er die bürge und rach sich mit den tiefen verchwunden.

(Now he made sallies into the lands of his enemies. For the sake of the poor, he did not order any arson, yet
wherever the arrogant were found, he broke their fortresses and avenged himself upon them with deep mortal
wounds, Kudrun, 195).

For a discussion of this practice in historical sources, see among others Stephen D. White, “Feuding and Peace-
Making in the Touraine around the Year 1100,” Traditio 42 (1986), 202; and “Debate: The ‘Feudal Revolution,’

Examples include the separation of Kriemhilt from Hagan and her brothers accomplished via her marriage to
Etzel in Nibelungenlied, the long years which Hilde must wait for vengeance after her husband has been killed in
Kudrun, the exile of the titular hero from his lord’s court in Heinrich von Kempen, and the periods of exile endured
by Dietrich at Etzel’s court throughout the various Dietrich epics. A positive example, in which a pause in hostilities
is followed by peaceful reconciliation between the disputing parties is found in Herzog Ernst.
historical practice, which seems frequently to have allowed for a cooling-off period, at the end of which might lie peaceful resolution or renewed hostilities.\footnote{One thinks here of Henry the Lion and his forced exile by Barbarossa, but such an extended period of separation may also be observed in the famous Tübingen feud.}

In the exchange of violence, it is not uncommon to find what I term a >quasi-juridical execution<.\footnote{The term “quasi-juridical” is borrowed from Stephen D. White, who applied it both broadly and correctly, building on anthropological theory, to expressions of anger. My usage in reference to action is a narrower application. White, “The Politics of Anger,” 140.} Such events may occur in private or on the battlefield, but each possesses a strikingly similar character: an opponent of standing is reduced to a vulnerable or helpless state, whereupon the aggressor vocally reiterates the wrong done and the powerless foe is beheaded.\footnote{Compare this with the practice, so prevalent in romance literature, of sparring an opponent after he has been defeated and humiliated. This may be read not as a move away from >honour culture< or even from >vengeance culture<, but rather as an ethical shift within >vengeance culture< in which the infliction of sufficient shame is deemed preferable to physical destruction – a shift which may also be understood as an intensification of honour competition and the value accorded to honour. Richard Kaeuper has named this turn the “Romance Compromise,” through which “the danger of a disruptive paradox between mercy and vengeance is averted.” Kaeuper, “Vengeance and Mercy,” 178-9.} Beheading by the sword in this period has unmistakable juridical overtones that are deliberately played on in these scenes.

Yet vengeance is seldom the end of the tale. In order for the narrative to achieve a satisfactory resolution, it is necessary that the social order be restored. The restoration of the social order, the final resolution and “happy ending” of the heroic epic, requires not only the victory of the “right” party in the dispute, but the integration or reintegration of the “wrong” party into the social fabric of the ruler's court. The punishment and humiliation inflicted on the initial aggressor may in some cases be severe (especially where dependents and allies are concerned), but their person is seldom damaged. At the end of the conflict, they fall into the power of the victor, who arranges a means of binding their defeated opponent to himself or herself as a subordinate, increasing both the personal and affiliate honour of the (originally)
wronged party, while at the same time restoring a significant part of the honour of the defeated, commonly through a marriage alliance. With this act, the order of the court is restored and society begins to function as it should once more. Joy, feasting and games once again predominate.

3.8. Truce and Peace, Settlement and Reconciliation

In German sources of the late-medieval period, *Friede* (>peace<) is a term applied in the context of violence to indicate both an agreed upon a pause in hostilities and a final settlement, while Latin sources differentiate between *treuga* (>truce<) and *pax* (>peace<). The word *vride* in Middle High German epic in the context of conflict refers simply to a state of non-violence, either permanent or temporary, and is consequently closer to the sense of truce when used to indicate a cessation of hostilities. For example, it is used explicitly to refer to a temporary cessation of hostilities in *Kudrun*, when the titular heroine pleads with her father and Herwic, her suitor, to cease their combat:

“For my sake, you should both be peaceful [make a truce], rest now your heart and limbs from the fight, while I ask you both whence Prince Herwic has the best of kin.” Then the noble knight said: “There will be

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no peace [truce] lady, unless you allow me to come unarmed before you. Thus will I tell you about my best kin. If I have peace [a truce] for that time, you may ask me whatever you will,” Kudrun, 651-652).

A similar usage is found in the Eneasroman of Heinrich von Veldeke, where the temporary truce between the Turnus and the Trojans is named vride:

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Minnechlichen her in bat
Eins frides sehs wochen.
Dô wart der fride gesprochen
Vierzich tage und vierzich naht.
(Courteously he asked him for a truce of six weeks. Then the truce was agreed: forty days and forty nights. Eneas, 9276-9)
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A more permanent settlement or reconciliation is generally referred to as suone.\(^{337}\) Suone and vride are often paired, as one tends to proceed from the other: thus in Herzog Ernst B, Otto informs the princes that his foe will never win peace nor any settlement from him,\(^{338}\) while in the Nibelungenlied, Giselher excuses Rüedeger from the feud between the Burgundians and their Hunnish hosts, promising “vride und suone” to him and his men.\(^{339}\)

The difference between vride and suone is perhaps best highlighted by the conclusion of Kudrun, in which vride is established when the fighting comes to an end and Queen Hilde agrees


\(^{338}\) “fride noch suone er nimmer Gwinnet” (“He will never win peace nor settlement,” HEB 1163).

\(^{339}\) NL 1997,2.
to her maiden’s request that she leave off her feud, but suone is not achieved until Kudrun is able to establish marriage ties between her own kin and the surviving Norman nobles.

The (at least ostensible) finality of suone is also illustrated by the Eneasroman of Heinrich von Veldeke, where the term is applied to the various attempts to end the ever-growing enmity between Eneas and Turnus. This continues up until the final moment when Eneas announces that there can be no settlement between the two.

The happier suone of Kudrun is exemplary, particularly in the attention paid to the restoration of order, but also in the manner that it illustrates how reconciliation may itself also function as a continuation of competition. Here, the final settlement is brought about by a mediator, namely Kudrun herself, who intervenes between her own family and the Norman sippe. Yet the establishment of peace and order is not merely reconciliation, for it occurs only after the Normans have been reduced to submission and utterly crushed in battle. Vengeance for the injuries done to Kudrun’s Hegeling family and their allies is taken in the killing of the heads of the honour group, King Ludewic and his wife Gerlint. Even if mercy is shown, and new order established by the merger of two honour groups, this occurs more by force than by diplomacy, and works exclusively to the advantage of one party. The process of making peace, even when the reconciliation is also an attempt to establish lasting alliances and to expand the Sippe of the two parties, is both a conclusion to and an extension of the original conflict. Precedence does not lose its importance, and the establishment of a superior bargaining position is of considerable

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340 Kudrun, 1594.
341 Kudrun, 1644.
342 Eneas: 4915, 5477, 8574, 9587.
343 “hien mach sûne niht geschehen,” (“Here there can be no settlement,” Eneas, 12591).
interest to the actors involved. Peace does not entail equality, nor does it signal an end to competition (note that the conclusion of peace seems frequently celebrated with the holding of a bühurt).

As to the effectiveness of these arrangements, if indeed we view their primary goal as the elimination or prevention of violence, we need only look to the earlier alliance in the same poem formed by Kudrun’s marriage to Herwic. Here we find a suone and alliance that result in both considerable loss and great profit for both Herwic and the Hegelings, though certainly not peace as we might conceive of it. It is only through Herwic’s allies that the king of Seeland repels an attack led by Herwic’s rival suitor Sifrit, yet it is also this same alliance that results in the death of King Hetel and the sack of Hetel’s homeland. When the Hegelings ride to Herwic’s aid, it is worth remembering that it was Herwic who earlier fought his way into the very hall of the Hegelings and who occupied the dominant position at the time the alliance was formed. That such arrangements are made as much in the interest of establishing a superior force for future conflict as for ending current strife is made perfectly clear by the potentially ominous closing lines of the poem, in which Ortwin and Herwic swear their loyalty to one another, promising “that they would both capture and slay any who would do them harm.”

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344 “Was auf diese Weise von Kudrun und ihren Helfern hergestellt wird, ist… eine Art ‘Gleichgewicht der Kräfte’, mit einer gewissen, aber tolerable Dominanz derer, die das Arrangement aus der Position des Überlegenen getroffen haben” (“what Kudrun and her allies establish is… a sort of ‘balance of power’, with a certain, but tolerable dominance by those, who have made the arrangement from the superior position,” Gisela Vollmann-Profe: “Kudrun – eine kühle Heldin. Überlegungen zu einer problematischen Gestalt” in Blütezeit: Festschrift für L. Peter Johnson zum 70. Geburtstag, ed. Mark Chinca, Joachim Heinzle and Christopher Young (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 2000), 242. Cf. the comments of Kerstin Schmitt on the functionalization of marriage in the conclusion of Kudrun: Poetik der Montage. Figurenkonzeption und Intertextualität in der ‘Kudrun.’ (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2002), 159-66; and the extensive discussion of Frakes, whose reading is close to my own. As Frakes notes, “[in the suone of Kudrun] there is in all cases a clear and often designated hierarchical rank of the parties to the Settlement… Suone in Kudrun is not innocent, not egalitarian, not peaceful and harmonious. It is not ‘reconciliation’ before or instead of conflict, but rather the settlement, including the victors’ conditions of peace, imposed upont he vanquished, after the conflict, often amid the smoking ruins…” Frakes, Brides and Doom, 219-54; 223.

345 Kudrun, 1705.
If we accept this latter understanding of *suone* as presented in *Kudrun*, an arrangement designed to confirm advantage and power both on and off the battlefield,\(^{346}\) there is little to gainsay their effectiveness within the poem’s world.

### 3.9. Conclusion

Feud and dispute practice in Middle High German heroic epic, inseparable from the honour culture that both shapes and is shaped by it, therefore helps also to shape the narrative progression of tales themselves. It is the field upon which emotions are painted, generating and reflecting, guiding and being led all at once.

The customary progression of dispute and the practices and processes which constitute it help to explain both the actions of the fictional adversaries within the narratives and to illuminate something of the broader understanding and expectations of the narratives’ audience – people who may themselves have engaged in similar practices, their own actions informed by received ideas of how such conflicts were >supposed< to be conducted.\(^{347}\)

At the same time, it must be seen that in Middle High German epic, as in human practice, it is readily apparent that neither the >honour code< of aristocratic society, nor the understood norms of conflict and dispute practice can be understood to constitute a set of hard and fast rules. We may note general trends – the most fundamental of which is that action should be >public< - but we must also be conscious of the ease with which such constraints are cast aside by seemingly honourable figures, even great heroes. *König Rother, Kudrun, and Salman und*

\(^{346}\) Here Frake’s preference for reading *suone* in *Kudrun* as “settlement” in place of the more usual “reconciliation”, on that grounds that it does not seem to replace violence but rather to follow from it holds some weight. Frakes, *Brides and Doom*, 221-3.

\(^{347}\) See the comments of White, “Feuding and Peace-Making,” 247.
Morolf all feature protagonists who are not condemned for gaining the advantage of their foes through outright lies and deception, but rather praised for their *list* (>knowhow<, >savvy<, or even >cunning<). In *Herzog Ernst B*, Ernst is not praised for his furtive, night-time assault on the emperor in his private quarters – indeed, the episode is treated by the narrator with considerable ambiguity – but neither is the action explicitly condemned (in stark contrast to Heinrich’s unannounced attack on Ernst’s lands). 348

This subjectivity of honour evaluation does not, however, diminish the importance of the evaluation itself, nor does it mean that the fictional characters of these narratives do not understand themselves to be genuinely constrained by the proprieties of honour or the rules of dispute. Rather, it should be understood that the honour economy, as is true more generally of all symbolic currency, is not to be likened to a standardized system of weights and measures. Norms are certainly recognizable, but a sympathetic eye may at times perceive greater value, and hence honour, in the violation of established practice than in its pursuance. The same may be said of most subsets of honour interaction and exchange, feud and dispute amongst them.

Where the honour economy and its attendant processes establish the values and foundations of social order and individual worth by providing the framework of both a social hierarchy and a system of lateral bonds, this framework is more process than static order. It not only allows, but necessitates constant competition, the jockeying for position, and the continual renegotiation of status. Viewed in this light, the practices of feud, vengeance, and self-help are

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348 As noted by Hans-Joachim Behr, “[n]icht einmal die Ermordung des Pfalzgrafen und der Angriff auf den Kaiser werden ihm vom Autor als Schuld angerechnet, da in der Fürstenversammlung, als man den Rachekrieg gegen Ernst beschließt, mit dem zweimaligen ‘lasterliche’ (v. 1400 und v. 1416) lediglich die Auffassung des Kaisers referiert wird” (The author does not once lay guilt upon him [Ernst] for the homicide of the Pflazgraf and the assault upon the emperor, since in the assembly of the princes, when the war of revenge is declared against Ernst, it is merely the emperor’s perception [of the attack] as ‘lasterliche’ [disgraceful] that is referenced, Hans-Joachim Behr, *Politische Realität und literarische Selbstdarstellung. Studien zur Rezeption volksprachlicher Texte in der lateinischen Epik des Hochmittelalters*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1978). Cf. Monika Schulz, who argues for Ernst’s position actions against Otto as *bellum iustum*: “*Âne Rede,*” 423-8.
understood as conventions of status competition and preservation. In literature, they provide set of narrative possibilities, whose ordering serves to aid or inhibit the restoration or enhancement of personal and group integrity. The progressive levels of dispute provide the staging for emotion displays, which are seen to serve particular functions in advancing or resolving the dispute, at the same time that they communicate information regarding the relative status and integrity of the participants.
4. Grief

A king, campaigning in a foreign land receives news from his wife that his homeland has been looted and ravaged in his absence. After interrogating the messengers, he orders his followers assembled at his court and weeps before them. Soon, the Hegelings of Kudrun will set sail and seek collective vengeance on their foes. Elsewhere, in the Nibelungenlied, a widowed queen still weeps for her slain husband long years after his death, but wishes the fact concealed from his murderers lest they become wary of her desire for revenge. And in yet another tale, Willehalm finds a sister withholds her tears on learning of her brother’s distress and is threatened with beheading by her own kinsmen. The performance of grief, it seems, is fundamental to conflict in Middle High German epic. Wherever one discovers the beginnings of a conflict, whenever a character seeks to explain his or her violence, we find grief. What is more, we find the display of grief, again and again, as the precursor to anger and violence. In some instances grieving seems so pregnant with the possibility of violence that it must be concealed, lest a hated foe recognize the danger in which he stands. Grief may emerge seemingly spontaneously or it may appear conspicuously staged, but it is consistently narrated as a >perceptible< phenomenon. Why do we find displays of grief and acts of violence so consistently linked? What does grief signify within these narratives, and what social function does it serve? Is the manner in which grief is expressed dependent on the actor or on the intended audience of the expression? How do expressions of grief intersect with markers of identity, such as gender and class? In seeking to answer these questions, it is to the narrative representation of the processes of honour and the patterns of dispute that we must turn.
4.1. The Ruler’s Grief and the Broadcast of Collective Injury in *Kudrun*

One of the clearest and most developed examples which demonstrates the multifaceted social functions of grief and highlights the precarious and ephemeral border between staged and spontaneous displays of grief occurs within the *Kudrun* poem:

King Hetel of the Hegelings departs from his fortress Matelâne with his army in order to come to the aid of Herwic, the king of Seeland, recently betrothed to Hetel’s daughter Kudrun. During the king’s absence, the Norman King Ludewic and his son Hartmuot, one of Kudrun’s rejected suitors, launch an assault on Matelâne, devastate the Hegeling lands, and kidnap Kudrun along with a large number of her ladies. It then falls to Kudrun’s mother, Queen Hilde, to alert her husband and his vassals to the tragedy. Having given the matter careful consideration, Hilde sends a report calculated to elicit sympathy and distress by driving home the extent of the injury inflicted on her and her family. Once the messengers have located Hetel, the king asks how things go with his wife, and they deliver the queen’s words: “dîn bürge sint zerbrochen, verbrennet ist dîn lant.”

They report the destruction of Hetel’s possessions, the wasting of his land, and the theft of his wealth, in addition to the kidnapping of his daughter and the deaths of his kinsmen. Having received the news, Hetel immediately summons his kin and vassals. As he repeats Hilde’s report, tears stream down his cheeks, and soon his followers join him in weeping: “der was frô deheiner, die dem künige stuonden also nâhen.” Each pledges his willingness

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349 “Your castles are broken, your land is burned.” *Kudrun*, 816,2.

350 “No one was glad there who stood near the king.” *Kudrun*, 824,4. In contrast to the reading of Beck, who characterizes Wate alone as vengeance-minded from the start and an exception to the general weeping, I here take the narrator at his word that >all< present (824,3), Wate included, weep in concert. This is in contrast to 1342, where Beck correctly notes that Wate upbraids his kin for weeping. Adolf Beck, “Die Rache als Motiv und Problem in der ›Kudrun‹. Interpretation und sagengeschichtlicher Ausblick” in *Nibelungenlied und Kudrun*, ed. Heinz Rupp (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976), 472.
to avenge the injury. The king’s performance is revealed to be immediately and profoundly affecting and effective as all who bear witness are caught up in the same grief that afflicts Hetel and participate in their lord’s leit: As a result of Hilde and Hetel’s successful performatives, the Hegeling King and his army set off in pursuit of the Normans, catching up with them on an island called Wülpensant and immediately engage them.\(^\text{351}\) In the ensuing fighting, Hetel is slain by Ludewic, and the Normans are able to leave the field of battle before a final victory can be achieved for either side.

In the aftermath of the Norman attack, it is the klage of Hilde (and subsequently that of Hetel) that occupies the central position and that is absolutely foundational for all that follows within the narrative. As one half of the ruling couple, Hilde stands near the pinnacle of the Hegeling honour group. As royal female, she is a repository of honour not merely for herself and her husband, but for the entire sippe and all its dependents. Acutely aware of the damage inflicted on their collective honour, Hilde feels perhaps more intensely than any other the necessity of corrective action, yet as a woman, she is incapable of physically pursuing any direct response without violating the gender-specific strictures of Hegeling honour culture. Consequently, the course of action open to her lies with the mobilization of affiliated males; her position as queen grants her direct access to the highest status male within the honour group, her husband Hetel, to whom the motivation of dependent males will subsequently fall.\(^\text{352}\)

The enormous significance of the manner in which the tragic news will be communicated to Hetel is made clear by the consideration which Hilde gives the matter before acting:

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\(^\text{351}\) Hetel’s role in bringing this to pass has generally been undervalued by scholars, as in the reading of Werner Hoffmann, who characterizes hetel as excessively dependent upon his followers, especially Wate. Werner Hoffmann Kudrun. Ein Beitrag zur Deutung der nachnibelungischen Heldendichtung (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche,Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1967), 41-3.

\(^\text{352}\) Regarding the extent to which Hilde may in fact exceed her husband, both as ruler and as military commander, see Schmitt, Poetik, 228-32.
The content of Hilde’s *klage* is reported multiple times within the narrative. The first occurs near the end of *aventiure* XV, when the narrator first informs the audience that Hilde reported to her husband that his knights at home lie dead, that she desired to see Hartmuot die in his blood for the act, and that his daughter and her maidens had been kidnapped. In her own words, she instructs her messengers to tell the king that she is very much alone, that things go poorly with her, that Ludewic sails full of pride back to his own land, and again that a thousand or more lie dead at Hetel’s gate:

> Wie rehte klagelîche si dem künige enbôt,
> daz im då heime lægen sine ritter tôt.
> si hiete Hartmuot lâzen in dem bluote touwen.
> sîn tohter wêre gevangen und då mite fuorte er manige schœne frouwen.

> »Ir boten, saget dem künige, daz ich vil eine bin.
> ez ist mir komen übele. Mit hôchverte hin
> vert ze sînem lande Ludewîc der rîche.
> tûsent oder mère ligent vor der porte jæmerliche.«

(How rightly lamentably she reported to the king that his knights at home lay dead. Hartmuot had let them die in their blood. His daughter was taken prisoner and he took many beautiful ladies with her. “You messengers, tell the king that I am very alone. It goes poorly for me. Ludewic the mighty sails hence with pride to his land. A thousand or more lie woefully before the gate. Kudrun, 806-7)
The klage conveys three crucial pieces of information: First, the state of grief brought about by honour injury. This state is grounded both in somatic manifestations communicated directly to the audience of the poem and more or less consciously inscribed in her words in a manner approved by the narrator as culturally and contextually appropriate to her station: “Wie rehte klageliche si dem künige enbôt.” Second, it clarifies the identity of the perpetrator(s): “diu herzenliche leide / geschach von Hartmuote.” Third, it explicates the nature of the injury itself: we have been violated, we are vulnerable, we must respond.

When, at the start of âventiure XVI the narrator again reports Hilde’s klage, the emphasis falls squarely on the depth of the honour injury inflicted on Hilde and Hetel, and through them on all the Hegelings and their allies. After Hilde has carefully considered the matter, it is said of the queen that:

Ir manne und Hêrwige diu frouwe dô enbôt,  
ir tohter wære gevangen, ir helde wæren tôt  
und hêten si al eine mit ungemüete lâzen.  
ir golt und ir gesteine fuorten die von Ormanîe an den strâzen.  
(To her husband and to Herwig the lady then reported that their daughter had been taken prisoner, their heroes were dead, and they had left her all alone in distress. Those from Normandy bore their gold and their jewels upon the streets. *Kudrun*, 811)

With this, the depth of the violation is deepened and its nature expanded upon: daughter kidnapped, heroes slain, possessions carried away. On this last point the public nature of the violation, that the gold and gems of the Hegelings should be carried “an den strâzen” adds a special humiliation to an already painful injury as does the fact that Hilde reports the perpetrators

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353 As in the “Rüefen unde weinen” (crying and weeping) reported at *Kudrun*, 802,1.
354 How rightly lamentably she reported to the king…. *Kudrun*, 806,1.
355 The heartfelt suffering was brought about by Hartmuot, *Kudrun*, 810,3-4.
to have comported themselves with arrogance. This is perhaps a motivational twist of the knife, which enhances the potential effectiveness of the klage within the honour group by heightening the intensity of the pain experienced.\footnote{Mit hôchverte hin / Vert ze sinem lande \quad Ludewic der riche (With arrogance mighty Ludewic fared hence to his land, \textit{Kudrun}, 807,2-3.}

When at last Hilde’s messenger, here embodying the queen in all her grief and injury and fully empowered by the nature of his mission to accomplish the necessary performative in the transference and conveyance of that grief between husband and wife, delivers the queen’s words to the king’s ear, the same points are emphasized and underlined yet again:\footnote{As in \textit{Minnesang}, where the messenger could at times fully embody the lover, so too may the bearer of complaint or lament embody the injured author of the missive. See Horst Wenzel, “Vom Körper zur Schrift. Boten, Briefe, Bücher” in \textit{Performativität und Medialität}, ed. Sybille Krämer (München: Fink, 2004), 269-91; “Boten und Briefe. Zum Verhältnis körperlicher und nichtkörperlicher Nachrichtenträger” in \textit{Gespräche – Boten – Briefe. Körpergedächtnis und Schriftgedächtnis im Mittelalter}, ed. Horst Wenzel (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1997), 86-105; Peter Göhler, “Zum Boten in der Liebeslyrik um 1200,” \textit{ibid.}, 77-85.}

> »…
> dîn bürge sint zerbrochen, \quad verbrennet ist dîn lant.
> Kûdrûn ist gefüeret \quad hin mit ir gesinde.
> schaden alsô grözen \quad ich wæne dîn lant niht überwinde.«

Er sprach: »ich klage dir mêre, \quad des gêt uns michel nôt.
> dîner mâge und dîner manne \quad lit wol tüsent tôt.
> dîn schaz ist gefüeret \quad zuo fremden kûnicrîchen.
> dîn hort ist angerüeret: \quad daz stêt sô guoten helden lasterlichen.«

(“…your fortresses are broken, burned is your land. Kudrun has been abducted and taken hence with her companions. I do not believe your land will overcome such great damage.” He said [further]: “I will lament more to you, we have great suffering because of it. Of your kin and your men, a good thousand lie dead. Your treasure has been carried off to foreign kingdoms. Your hoard has been violated: this shamefully befits such good heroes.” \textit{Kudrun}, 816,2-817,4)

This is the narration of grief – the queen herself is not present to display her tears, but rather makes them plain by her words. Hilde focuses on the extent and nature of the violation, touching
on not only all the status markers of the ruler (wealth, possessions, land) but also those things which are most dear and most protected (his daughter, his hoard, his kin) – every aspect of the honour group’s integrity has suffered injury and ignominy and all that ought to be symbolically integral to the honour group and physically internal to the lord’s fortress and kingdom – women, treasure, family, has been violently ripped out and alienated, carried off to “fremeden künicrîchen.” It is a crime which not only “shamefully befits such good heroes” but which is fundamentally incompatible with their status as “guoten helden.”

Hilde’s performative (a performative enacted according to her instructions, by a messenger embodying the queen before her husband), is successful in transmitting her grief to her husband, and impressing on him the need for retaliation. Ready to strike back, Hetel immediately asks who has inflicted this injury on the sippe: “Er frâgte, wie er hieze, der ez hête getân.” When it is revealed to Hetel that it was the Norman Hartmuot and his father, the reason for the assault is immediately clear to the Hegeling king: by having earlier denied Hartmuot his daughter’s hand in marriage on the basis of unequal social standing, Hetel and Hilde inflicted an unbearable injury to Norman honour.

So too is the next stage in the correction of the honour injury and the prosecution of the feud immediately obvious, for Hetel remarks “Man sol unser vînde disiu mære gar verdagen, /

359 With their purpose as conduits of grief and the embodiment of their lady dispensed with, the messengers disappear from the text and receive no further mention.

360 Kudrun, 818.1.

361 Kudrun, 819. Hetel’s suspicions are confirmed elsewhere by the Norman queen’s own comments. The attack is indeed an attempt to gain recompense for the honour injury earlier inflicted upon the Normans by the royal couple:

Des was dâ vil genête diu alte Gêrlint,
wie si daz rechen möhte, daz Hetele sîn kint
versagete smâhelîche ir sune Hartmuoten.

(Old Gerlint thought hard how she might avenge the fact that Hetel had so scornfully rejected her son Hartmuot. Kudrun, 737,1-3).
man sol si unsern friunden heimlichen klagen.”

This process of klagen involves both the transmission of information (“we have been injured”) and the communication of injury (the expression of grief): Hetel swiftly summons his kin and followers to the court, a space that immediately establishes the public, official, royal context of the display. Before he even begins to speak, the king’s grief is visible to all: “man sach den kûnic Hetelen in sinem muote truobe gebâren.” Once again, even before the king’s tears begin to flow, the state of grief is understood to be perceptible to those in its presence. Hetel now sets about communicating the grief imparted to him by Hilde to his allies. Here, the transmission of grief takes on an even more formal character, for Hetel lays out his complaint and his sorrow on the mercy and grace of his followers: “…ich wil iu klagen / und muoz iu ûf genâde mînen kumber sagen…», This is a social inversion which, as in the more dramatic performance of the Fußfall discussed elsewhere, alerts his audience to the seriousness of the situation and the fundamental state of affairs being “not right.” Weeping, Hetel then reiterates Hilde’s report, touching on the same themes: fortresses destroyed, lands burned, daughter kidnapped, and kinsmen slain:

»…
Mîn lant ist verbrennet, mine börge gebrochen nider.
uns ist gehüetet übele da heime leider sider.
mîn tohter ist gevangen, erslagen mine mågen,
die mir <mines> lands und <miner> ére da heime phlägen. «

Dô trehenden Herwîge diu ougen umbe daz,
daz diu Hetelen ougen von weinen wurden naz.

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362 “This news should be hidden from our foes and privately lamented to our friends,” Kudrun, 820,1-2.
363 They are summoned “ze hove,” 821,1 and 821,3. The context is at once public, it occurs at court, in the open, before the king’s followers, and private (heimlich), in as much as the court has been established in proximity to the army of the king’s foe, from whom the performance is hidden.
364 King Hetel was seen to be downcast in his mood, Kudrun, 821,4.
365 “I wish to lament to you and upon your mercy must speak my misery,” Kudrun, 822,1-2.
alsō tāten die andern alle, dō sis weinen sāhen.
der was frō deheiner, die dem künige stuonden alsō nāhen.

(“…My land is burned, my fortresses broken low. Our home has sadly been poorly guarded. My daughter is captured, my kin slain, who looked after my land and my honour at home.” Then Herwic’s eyes welled with tears, because Hetel’s eyes had become wet from weeping. Thus did all the other as well, when they saw them weeping. No one who stood near the king was glad. Kudrun, 823-4)

In this manner, the somatic manifestation of grief is incorporated into a staged performance which aids in its communicability. The king’s performance is revealed to be immediately and profoundly affecting and effective as all who bear witness are caught up in the same grief that afflicts Hetel and participate in their lord’s leit.

Far from casting Hilde as helpless woman, her husband Hetel as a “weak king” or the weeping Hegeling warriors as feminine or incapable of action, this passage illustrates clearly the communicability of grief as injury experience within the honour group, and the social function of this grief in binding the group together for the purpose of corrective action. 366

When Hetel indicates that the news of the Norman attack must be kept secret from his foes, he recognizes that to broadcast the existence of the honour injury will actualize and increase the diminishment of Hegeling honour which has occurred as a result. More importantly, when he continues by indicating that the news ought to be lamented to all his kin, his words demonstrate the existence of a culturally recognized traditional course of action appropriate to these circumstances: now the injury must be lamented and formally proclaimed amongst the

366 On this point I disagree strongly with the reading of Winder McConnell, who describes Hetel in this instance as a “hapless, indecisive monarch,” writing further that “Hetel’s primary obligation at this point is to rally his men and devise a plan to rescue Kudrun, but he does not grasp the initiative.” McConnell, The Epic of Kudrun, 60. In this passage, Hetel’s tears are precisely the means by which the ruler initiates a course of action seeking vengeance for the Norman attack, and the targeted, goal-oriented nature of the gathering is underscored by Hetel’s keenness to learn the identities of the attackers before calling his men to counsel. Ian Campbell’s presentation of Hetel as generally lacking in decisiveness is more convincing, but does not reference this moment, which actually finds Hetel a functional and effective ruler. Ian R. Campbell, Kudrun: A Critical Appreciation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 84-108.
honour group. This is done, as the tale reports, by means of both grieving before a targeted audience and by the enumeration of the injuries received. Within a healthy honour group, the grief proves easily transmissible, and the shared experience of the injury itself suggests and approves corrective action through violence and the transformation of that grief into anger. In the wake of Hetel’s report, his vassal Wate swiftly responds by expressing his certainty that the Normans will be made to pay for the attack, and that the damage to Hegeling honour will thereby be made good.367

In this Kudrun passage, the expression of grief fulfills a multitude of social and narrative functions. It manifests first as the response to injury and the embodiment of violation. It appears both as spontaneous, somatic response and as calculated, staged performance (with little clear differentiation between the two aspects). By contextualizing grief within the pattern of conflict, we may begin to appreciate the communicative significance of Hetel’s tears. We may see that Hilde’s expression of her own grief is indicative not merely of a mother’s distress at having her daughter kidnapped but indeed of knowing participation in a system of violence and dispute as a means to make good the honour injury which she has experienced.368 Likewise, the weeping of the warrior king Hetel is revealed not as weakness or as paralysis, but rather as the initial stage of a dispute progression in which the king will mobilize his Hegelings to seek redress for the wrong done against them, and finally serves as both indicator of the honour group’s integrity and as mobilizing element in the call to action. The lamenting of injury through the public, though

367 Kudrun, 825.
368 While ample attention has been paid to Hilde’s role in motivating the subsequent (and successful) Hegeling campaign against the Normans, surprisingly little attention has been paid to her role in crafting the initial response through her husband. Here, more attention has been laid upon Hetel’s alleged indecision and dependence. See, for instance, Hoffmann, Kudrun, 41-3, 74-81;
targeted, expression of grief confirms and solidifies the honour group even as it mobilizes that group for collective action in response to the aggression of a rival group.

This multi-functional engagement with grief is far from unique to Kudrun, but rather appears again and again through the Middle High German epic corpus. In taking this passage as a positively connoted example of a successful performative, we may begin a further exploration of the role played by grief within the broader context of conflict and its narration.

4.2. The Cause of Grief: leit

That the perception of injury or suffering should bring forth the outward display of grief or sorrow seems so natural a thing, so common to human experience, that it is easily passed over in considering the literary representation of the process. In heroic epic, the injury that brings forth expressions of grief may be either internal – what we might term emotional suffering – or external – physical injury, and the individual response is represented in much the same manner. Jan-Dirk Müller’s observation that, in the Nibelungenlied, there exists “keine semantisch scharfe Grenze zwischen äußerer Verletzung und innerer Beleidigung,”\textsuperscript{369} holds equal validity for much of the heroic corpus. Both aspects are contained within the notion of leit and at times in a host of related words, including nöt, swære, and ungemach.

At its most basic, leit is simply suffering, regardless of cause. The leit expressed and embodied by Hilde’s klage originates from both physical and psychic injury. Kinsmen have been slain, castles burnt, a daughter kidnapped, and treasure carted off to foreign lands. On the one hand, each of these constitutes a loss of material resources. This reduction in resources

\textsuperscript{369} “No sharp semantic distinction between outer injury and the inner perception of offense,” Müller, Spielregeln, 209.
corresponds to a loss of status within a larger community (all the denizens of the narrative appear in essence to share in the same conception of honour and status) and thus a reduced ability to wield influence or indeed to function amongst peers and competitors. Beyond this, the successful attack indicates vulnerability; it suggests, perhaps even confirms, that the honour status previously claimed by the Hegelings was false, and calls into question their ability to defend their status and their dependents. The alienation of wealth and women, along with the destruction of men and property, represents an attack on the very core of the sippe and its identity – an attack which is inconsistent with heroic status: “daz stêt sô guoten helden lasterlichen.” Such causes of suffering appear as relative constants throughout the heroic corpus, for amongst the most common causes, we find the death of a related or otherwise closely bound person, a public insult, fear, the presence of unrequited desire, the contradiction of assumed status or

370 “This shamefully befits such good heroes,” Kudrun 817,4.

371 Examples of this and other causes are too numerous to enumerate here, so a small selection will have to suffice for each. In relation to the death of a loved one, we might think of Karl and his forces when they find their companions lying slain on the battlefield:

ich wæne, ouch iemer mère werde
clage alsô fraissam.
wer mâchte sich des enthaben?
von den rossen si vielen.
ûf den tôten si giengen.
ir iegelijk suochte den sînen.
die nöt nemächte niemen gescrîben,
diu unter in wart.
(I believe there will never be so terrible a lament. Who could restrain himself in the face of it? They fell from the horses. They passed over the dead, and each searched for his own. No one could describe the suffering that was amongst them. Rolandslied, 6957-64).

372 Here, the Nibelungenlied provides the most obvious example. When Prünhilt is named a whore by Kriemhilt in the presence of her maids, she experiences great leit from her words: “mir ist von iuwern sprüchen, daz wizzet, léidé geschehen.” (NL, 846,4).
honour,\(^{373}\) and bearing witness to the *leit or trüren* of a closely allied person or persons; all of these represent the recognition of a threat or the actuality of a reduction in honour status. In Kudrun’s case, the removal of a young woman, herself a repository of that honour, stands as an especially egregious insult and injury.

Neither Hilde, although witness to the attack and perhaps roughly handled by the Normans, nor Hetel, nor his allies are physically injured in the course of the Norman assault, yet this does not limit their expression of grief and suffering. Through the construction of the honour self, physical and psychic injury bleed into one another. Bodily *leit* originates from the violation of the physical body, while honour injury – a form of psychic injury – occurs from the violation of the honour self. The former is seldom present without the latter - bodily *leit* almost invariably generates honour injury, for even at its most base, if honour claims anything, it must be the integrity of the physical body and its ability to defend itself. Yet the honour self is far more sensitive and vulnerable than the body itself: any claim which either implicitly or explicitly denies or contradicts the honour claims which bound and define the status of the honour self may constitute injury simply through having been spoken. Any injury to the components of the honour self is an injury to the whole of the self (and by extension to any individuals or entities with whom it overlaps) and consequently generates *leit*. It is through grieving that *leit* gains its release into the world and is made known, shared, acknowledged, and – possibly – transformed.

**4.3. The Manifestations of Grief**

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\(^{373}\) *In Herzog Ernst B*, when the Pfalzgraf Heinrich is excluded from the court in favour of the emperor’s stepson, “daz was im leit unde zorn” (*HEB*, 668).
If grief in medieval narrative may then be understood as the public expression of injury, how then does it appear – what perceptible signs constitute its manifestation? For all that the closing lines of *Kudrun’s* fifteenth and the beginning of its sixteenth *aventiure* are saturated with grief, relatively little is said of precisely >how< that grief manifests – a fact typical of Middle High German heroic epic. Hilde’s report to Hetel is “rehte klagelîche,“ and her pain is heartfelt – but what this might look like we do not know. Concerning Hetel, it is apparent from the start that his grief is visible: “man sach den kûnic Hetelen in sinem muote truobe gebâren.”

Nevertheless, the visual cue by which Hetel’s grief becomes transmissible is the only definitive somatic marker present in the scene: Hetel weeps and, as a result, so do all in his presence.

In almost all cases, as with that of Hetel and of Gunther mentioned above, the state of grief is understood to be visible. This is assumed to be true even in those instances when the pain is said to be borne inwardly or secretly. For example, Queen Helche and all at the Hunnish court have no difficulty recognizing the great pain which afflicts Dietrich in the opening passages of the *Rabenschlacht.*

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376 King Hetel was seen to be troubled in his mood. *Kudrun*, 821,4.
377 *Kudrun*, 824.
378 Do sich des niht wolde mazen der here Dietrich noch sin weinen lazen so reht unmæzlich, daz begunde merchen sere vrov Helche diu milde und diu here. (When the Lord Dietrich would not leave off his great and unmeasured weeping, Lady Helche the mild and noble began to mark it greatly. *Rabenschlacht*, 12)
These somatic manifestations, whether understood to be spontaneous, informed by ritual, or to result from calculated intent, form the foundation for the communication of grief and the proclamation of violation.

Hetel’s tears illustrate some of the difficulties inherent in attempting to differentiate between >internal< and >external< manifestations of grief, or between spontaneous, somatic expressions of grief (as well as of other emotions) and semi-ritualized or staged displays of grief within Middle High German epic. Here we encounter the “emotions” and “sensibilities” described by Jaeger.379 Starkey, too, perceives the difference as an important one: “While emotional display in the Nibelungenlied generally serves a social and communicative function, there seem to be clear differences between displays of emotion as political statements, such as those isolated by Müller, and spontaneous somatic responses, such as Dancwart’s blush.”380

These difficulties occur first, because of a lack of semantic distinction in the verbs employed – trûren is especially problematic in this regard. When the Nibelungenlied’s Gunther is informed of the Saxons’ hostility, we are told “Dem künege in sînen sorgen was idoch vil leit. / dô sah in trûrénde ein riter vil gemeit,”381 we understand that the king is sad, weighed down by his hardship, but we know also that this sadness is >visible<. Sivrit >sees< him mourning, yet precisely how this grief becomes perceptible and what form its outward manifestation takes cannot be known with certainty. Secondly, because many somatic responses, weeping, especially, do not preclude staging, and must be understood within their individual

379 Jaeger, “Emotions and Sensibilities,” VII-VIII.
380 Starkey, “Brunhild’s Smile,” 161.
381 Yet this was great pain to the king in his sorrows. Then a very gallant knight saw him grieving. NL 153,1-2.
context, and finally, because the privileging of “spontaneous” emotions as being in some manner more “genuine” or “real” than orchestrated, situationally dependent displays of the same cannot be assumed to be a view shared by a medieval audience.

Somatic manifestations of grief include hot tears, red eyes, and fainting. In extreme cases, blood may erupt from the eyes or the mouth. The *Nibelungenlied* contains a host of such instances, with many of the most dramatic accompanying Kriemhilt’s discovery of Sivrit’s murder. Here, she declares her hostilities against all joys, falls mute to the earth, gives voice to great wailing, and screams such that her chamber resounds and she falls faint. Soon, the suffering of her heart is so great that it spews forth blood from her mouth. Elsewhere, the great hero Roland himself collapses from grief upon his saddle when Olivier is wounded, and later faints from grief when weeping above the corpse of his friend.

Beyond the manifestations of grief arising from the body, we encounter actions and signals which constitute encultured expressions of emotion. The pulling out of hair or beard is one such example, as when no less a figure than the emperor Karl himself tears at his beard and falls to the earth in his mourning on the discovery of his nephew’s death. To this we might also add the numerous instances of weeping which occur at the parting of dear friends, kin or close allies.

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382 *NL* 1008-10.
385 der Kaiser brach úz sîn bart. / er viel zuo der erde. *Rolandslied*, 6965-6. The self-rending of the ruler’s beard, a *topos* in heroic literature, draws part of its strength from the power of forcing those present to bear witness to the (self-inflicted) violation of the ruler’s body. When the social superior, upon whom the honour identity of his or her subordinates is dependent, is thus violated, the injury is simultaneously inflicted upon the whole of the subordinate honour group.
386 In the *Nibelungenlied* alone, one finds that Sivrit’s departure from his parents (*NL* 70); the departure of Sivrit and the Burgundians for Iceland (*NL* 373); Prühilt’s departure from Iceland (*NL* 525); the departure of the Burgundians from Worms (*NL* 1522) and finally their departure from Pöchlarn (*NL* 1711) all occasion weeping.
Public weeping in response to a death, especially in the context of a funeral may also speak of ritual and forethought. It is in these instances above all that the continuing debate amongst historians concerning the ritual display of emotion becomes of concern for the scholar of literature as well. Certainly, we must understand all literary representation as staged for the benefit of the narrative’s audience, yet the extent to which emotion displays are understood to be staged by the fictive audience within the poem remains open to question, and may in fact prove unanswerable. More productive is the question of whether or not a given display corresponds to an understood tradition or pattern of behaviour within a given context. If the audience understands that it is proper for a figure to weep and that figure is reported as weeping, doubts about whether or not the grief prompting the tears is heartfelt or not quickly become irrelevant. Unless we are told otherwise, the emotion is understood to be a “true sign.”

In Middle High German epic, the rituals surrounding burial provide ample opportunity for the display of grief and loss. The display of the corpse occupies a prominent position within the ritual as a physical manifestation of the injury inflicted on it and on the surviving members of the deceased’s honour group. Examples may be found in the various renditions of the Herzog Ernst narrative, where the body of the dead Pfalzgraf is publically displayed upon a bier before his uncle, the emperor Otto, laments his suffering to his vassals and thereby secures their aid in seeking vengeance on his killer. Above all, it is seen in the Nibelungenlied, with the endlessly protracted funeral arrangements surrounding Sivrit’s burial. The long days and nights during which Kriemhilt demands that a vigil be kept over his corpse serve not only to draw out

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387 As noted by Ann Marie Rasmussen, “As genuine as Kriemhild’s grief appears to be, she also appears at times to be exploiting the social conventions of widowhood in order to pursue the course of action she has determined for herself: avenging Siegfried’s slaying.” Ann Marie Rasmussen, Mothers & Daughters in Medieval German Literature (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 82. Gephart, too, remarks upon the public, communal emphasis of Kriemhilt’s grief and the funerary rituals surrounding Sivrit’s death, in contrast to the mourning of other females in Middle High German literature. Gephart, Zorn, 94-102; 96.
countless tears and cries from his kin, but also to extend the visual display of violation made so very explicit when Sivrit’s body bleeds anew in the presence of his murderer, indicating not merely an injury inflicted but an injury on-going. The physical closeness and visual presence of the corpse prevents those who hold him dear from escaping the knowledge of their own violation.

Public weeping and other somatic expressions of grief are not infrequently accompanied by the verbal enumeration of the causes of that grief and the description of the leit suffered by the afflicted. Our Kudrun passage is again particularly illustrative, for here, a chain of communication – both of grief and of information – stretches between Queen Hilde, her messengers, her husband Hetel, and Hetel’s vassals. This is all accomplished “rehte klageliche,” with many tears, and, crucially, with many witnesses.

4.4. The Functions of Grief

Although stemming ultimately from the representation of violation and injury, grief serves a variety of functions within the society of heroic epic. Grief appears at the start of the conflict progression because it must: it is fundamentally reactive. Once enacted, its varied functions serve both to initiate or enable the practical undertaking of seeking vengeance as a collective unit (that it is, it is necessary for the mechanism being described) and to make that action intelligible and justifiable (that is, it is necessary for the audience of the tale). In the Kudrun scene, we encounter grief as the manifestation and embodiment of injury, as the marker of shared interest and

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388 Cf. Ehrismann, Nibelungenlied, 104-5.
389 Kudrun, 806.
identity, the validation and verification of social ties and alliances, the validation of complaint, as a call to action, and, finally, as the precursor to anger and vengeance.

Grief is not the only possible reaction to injury, and it is often found in company with anger. The relationship between the two emotions is a complex one, and both, properly mingled and ordered, are necessary for the pursuit and enactment of vengeance. In Jan-Dirk Müller’s conception, the two represent alternative reactions: trüren and zorn are characterized as respectively representing a passive or an active response to defective status.\(^{390}\) trüren, in particular, is understood as a form of “vorübergehende[] Lähmung.”\(^{391}\) Yet, this is a simplification, and captures only a small part of its significance as a response to leit. Müller’s characterization has been rejected by Elke Koch, who notes that “Im Willehalm... sind Trauer und Zorn nicht als Gegensätze von ‘passiv’ und ‘aktiv’ konzipiert, sondern als zwei verschiedene Kommunikationszusammenhänge mit unterschiedlichen Handlungsmustern und Adressaten.”\(^{392}\) This is closer to the truth of the matter, for while trüren is the expression of leit, the means by which leit is made known, it is not inherently passive, and may in fact be very active indeed. In as much as it indicates helplessness, this may be understood as request for help and readiness for action. When witnesses to grief fail to respond in kind, further defect is made apparent, and the opportunity or even the necessity of a renegotiation of status and social bonds appears.

Following from this, we may perhaps conclude that where anger demands, grief asks. Yet this is also too simple a rendering, especially with the understanding that a refused request may quickly become anger. Grief may also demand, even as it seeks to ascertain where membership and
allegiance lie. What is more, trûren, in making leit manifest, announces the possibility of violence.

This alternate reading of grief as not necessarily passive but rather as an integral part of the expected and customary initialization of legitimate conflict is reflected not only in German sources, but also in the French chansons de geste. Here, Stephen D. White has identified two points in the progression of feud practice at which grief may appear: the first of these, where either grief or anger may be displayed in reaction to shame incurred by receiving an injury, is evaluated by White in terms at least partially in alignment with the views of Müller: “When nobles lose honour… their joy should turn to shame, which they display as grief or anger. …those who fail to show anger when they have been shamed are open to criticism…”393 Yet White also observes a second role played by grief in the negotiations preceding violence. Following the initial reaction to injury, White notes that it is usual for the aggrieved party to approach a superior in order to seek aid in gaining vengeance for the wrong, this is done “dolefully, tearfully, and deferentially” in an attempt “to make him [the superior] angry.”394 In Kudrun, we do not encounter the appeal of a vassal to his lord, but rather the appeal first of a wife to her husband – a queen to her king – and subsequently, the appeal of a ruler to his dependents. In contrast to the chansons, this is the staging which predominates in Middle High German epic. Regardless of the relative status of the participants, the narrative and quasi-legal role of the plea remains much the same. Within the conflict process, grief is not passive, but rather demarcates a social group while simultaneously enlisting the members of that group in the

preparation for the act of collective vindication. In this, grief speaks of activity, social cohesion, and vengeance to come.

4.5. Grief as Mark of Loyalty

The existence and strength of a collective identity – the honour group – is a necessary precondition for the seeking of collective vengeance. In Kudrun, the ties which bind Wate and the other Hegeling allies together with King Hetel and Queen Hilde are readily apparent. This is made manifest above all by their shared grief in the wake of the Norman assault. It is Hetel’s tears which transmit this information both within the group and to the external observers who constitute the narrative’s audience.

The larger importance of these bonds, and the manner in which they are delineated, is a subject of extreme importance not merely within Kudrun, but within Middle High German epic more generally. Furthermore, throughout this corpus, not just the importance, but also the manner in which these bonds are expressed and engaged remains remarkably consistent. Jan-Dirk Müller, for instance, identifies the importance of the bonds of loyalty in the Nibelungenlied which guarantee social cohesion and establish right order, going so far as to name these bonds the true hero of the narrative, and Kriemhilt’s antagonist.395 Although not elsewhere so problematized, the general principle is present throughout the corpus of heroic epic. The network of these bonds is made up of both horizontal and vertical bonds, Müller here differentiates between friendship and vassalage,396 and, as discussed, the various overlapping groups formed thereby are understood in large part through the medium of honour, and are fundamental to both

395 Müller, Spielregeln, 153.
396 Müller, Spielregeln, 159.
individual and collective identity. As the honour-self cannot be cleanly differentiated from the honour-group, and injury on one is an injury on the other, and an injury on one individual an injury on all. Thus too the grief which arises in response to injury is similarly both collective and individual.

The expression and experience of grief more than any expression of love is the principal means by which social and familiar bonds are confirmed. Members of the same honour group, whose intangible, socially constructed and status-dependent selves are naturally sensitive to the honour injuries of all other members of that group on whose honour they are dependent. This is true for the closest of bonds between friends, lovers, and immediate family as it is between lords and their vassals. Group expressions of grief may consequently be understood as expressions of solidarity, as confirmation of shared ties, and agreement that the cause of grief is common or that the injured or slain party >over< whom the group weeps is indeed a member of the larger group. Examples are numerous. In the Nibelungenlied, we find general expressions of subordinates mourning for injuries inflicted on those who stand above them in the honour hierarchy, as when the Danes suffer “vil grimme leit” to learn that their king has been taken prisoner. At other times, the connection between the injured and those who experience

397 This function of grief has in recent years begun to attract more attention. Elke Koch, in particular, has noted that while the expression of grief has been much discussed by cultural anthropologists, the “Zusammenhang von Trauer and Zugehörigkeit” present in the literary motifs of collective lamentation, the staging of public grief and the appeal for sympathy have received insufficient attention. Elke Koch, Trauer, 3.

398 Koch has artfully described this process as a chain-reaction, writing: “Die Gefühlskommunikation setzt eine Kettenreaktion in Gang, denn vom Mit-Leiden des Stammvaters geht nun ein Appell an die anderen Sippenmitglieder aus… Die Leid-Mitleid-Kommunikation verbindet Individuen, etabliert bilaterale Bindungen, so dass ein Netzwerk der Unterstützung gebildet wird.” (The communication of emotion sets a chain-reaction in motion, the co-suffering of the patriarch launches an appeal to the other members of the sippe… The communication of suffering and co-suffering binds individuals, it establishes bilateral bonds, such that a network of support is constructed.” Koch, Trauer, 134-5.

399 Den von Tenemarke was vil grimme leit, / ir herre was gevangen, dô in daz wart geseit, (it was a savage sorrow for those from Denmark when they were told their lord was captured, NL 192,1-2).
suffering as a result is made more plain. When Sivrit is murdered, it is specified that those who lament him bear him loyalty. The situation is much the same when Sivrit’s corpse is borne to the minster, for here it is the grief of Sivrit’s vriunde which is highlighted. In the Nibelungenlied, the connection between lamentation and loyalty is made especially clear by Gernot’s statement when he goes out of his way to (falsely) justify his right to lament Sivrit by claiming to be innocent of his murder and ignorant of any enemies he may have had at court: the implication is that by grieving Gernot lays claim to a shared bond with the warrior whom he betrayed. Grief is not merely transmissible and contagious within honour and kinship groups. As the case of Gernot illustrates, it may function as a claim to membership (at least of a sort) within a given group. Conversely, a lack of grief in the face of a grieving ally or relative, the inability or refusal to share in the leit of one’s kin or friends, demonstrates a serious rift between the parties, and consequently in the social fabric which is comprised of and supported by the accumulation of these networks.

By the same token, the refusal to share grief, or the attempt to hide it, functions as a means of excluding individuals from the honour group. This is particularly apparent in the Nibelungenlied when Sivrit perceives King Gunther’s sorrow and worry in the face of the Saxon’s widersage. Gunther’s response is to share the news of the coming conflict only with his closest relatives and officers, a group from which Sivrit is, at this time, excluded. When

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400 die iht triuwe hêten, von den wart er gekleit; / daz het wol verdienen der ritter küen’ unt gemeit, (He was mourned by those who had any loyalty; the bold and gallant knight had well deserved that, NL 991,3-4).
401 swaz er dâ vriunde hête, die sach man weinende gân (whatever friends he had there, these were seen to walk weeping, NL 1039,4). It is only later, when the public displays of grief become overwhelming, that those more removed begin to weep (NL 1048).
402 “got weiz daz wol von himele, an Sîfrides tôt / gewan ich nie die schulde… / … Ich sol in billîche klagen.” (‘God in heaven well knows that in Sivrit’s death I had no guilt… I should justly mourn him. NL 1097).
403 Although Liudeger and Liudegast’s messengers do not use this term, their declaration of hostility is later named as such at NL 235,4.
Sivrit, ignorant of the cause, inquires what so troubles the man he takes for his friend, Gunther responds:

“Jane mag ich allen liuten die swære niht gesagen,  
die ich muoz tougenliche in mime herzen tragen.  
man sol stæten vriwenden klagen herzen nôt.”  
(“Indeed I cannot tell every person the heaviness that I must bear secretly in my heart. Heartfelt suffering should be lamented to steady friends,” NL 155,1-3)

Sivrit’s response is extremely telling – immediately the hero blanches and then turns red. Here, the king’s refusal to share his grief cuts Sivrit out of his peerage and out of the privileged honour group of which the king is a part. Sivrit’s anger and shame indicate his recognition of this fact, and his immediate offer of assistance, alongside his protestations that he has never refused Gunther anything, function as a plea for affirmation of his bond with the Burgundian ruler.

4.6. The Compulsive Power of Grief

Because grief within the honour group is contagious and shared, its presence is cause for extreme alarm. The drive to correct the defect in status made manifest (and painful) by the perceptible presence of grief is enormously powerful, and consequently, its affective display frequently serves to rally the honour group to action, even in the absence of a formal plea. This is amply apparent in the sequel to the episode referenced above where Gunther’s grief prompts Sivrit to volunteer his aid as a sign of shared interests and common membership in an extended honour group.

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404 diu Sîvrides varwe wart dô bleich unde rôt, NL 155,4.
Later in the narrative, after Kriemhilt has at least partially exposed the deception practiced by Gunther and Sivrit on Gunther’s wife Prűnhilt, causing the Burgundian queen to demand Sivrit’s life, Gunther conspires with his brothers and loyal Hagen against his brother in law. Seeking a stratagem by which Kriemhilt might be made sufficiently concerned for her husband’s well-being that she would reveal his hidden weakness, the Burgundians determine to claim that their one-time enemies, the Saxons, have determined to renew their hostilities.

The means by which Gunther involves Sivrit in the feigned conflict is simplicity itself: he looks sad. By registering a defective status, an injury within the honour group, he causes Sivrit to experience that injury, and immediately draws out an offer of assistance:

Eines tages si Sîfrit rûnende vant.
dô begonde vrâgen der helt von Niderlant:
“wie gât sô trûreliche der künic unt sîne man?
daz hilf’ ich immer rechen, hât im iemen iht getân.”
(One day Sivrit found them whispering. The hero from the Netherlands then began to ask: “Why do the king and his men walk so sorrowfully? If anyone has done something to him, I will always help to avenge it.” NL 883).

Naturally, positive counter-examples to the perversion of honour custom performed by Gunther and his allies may be found elsewhere in the heroic corpus of Middle High German literature. The Rabenschlacht, for example, demonstrates the power of one figure’s grief to affect and afflict an otherwise functional honour group. Here, as in the Nibelungenlied, it is the perceived injury of one member and his visible grief that elicits offers of assistance and ultimately inspires the collective drive for vengeance. Numerous lines at the opening of the poem are devoted to establishing deep sorrow that troubles the lord Dietrich at all times. The ultimate trajectory is made clear from the outset, when the narrator tells his audience:

Nu sult ir horen gerne
von grozer arbeit,
wie der vogt von Berne
Having been dispossessed of his lands, Dietrich resides in exile at Etzel’s court. No matter what anyone does, he remains sunk deep in his sadness,\(^{405}\) he cares for nothing but his sorrow and laments his great suffering night and day,\(^{406}\) and frequently falls to weeping.\(^{407}\) All the court takes note and grieves as well, especially Etzel’s queen, the lady Helche, who presses Rüedeger to inquire what might be done to aid the mourning lord. Rüedeger makes it plain that due to the bonds of loyalty that exist between them, Dietrich’s \textit{leit} is equally the \textit{leit} of those loyal to him.\(^{408}\) It is precisely this shared grief over the injury dealt to Dietrich that kicks off the campaign against Ermrich that dominates the narrative.

The expression of grief within the honour group cannot remain unanswered. Either it is ignored, in which case the membership of the grieving individual within the group is effectively denied (see the discussion of \textit{Willehalm}, below), or it must be corrected. To acknowledge the

\(^{405}\) Swaz ieman tet, er gehabt sich trôrichliche, \textit{Rabenschlacht}, 7,6.
\(^{406}\) Er lebte mit getwange
naht unde tach
und treip daz so lange,
daz er niht anders phlach
wan starches leit mit grozen sorgen.
Also cholt er sich abent und morgen.
(He lived with suffering, day and night, and bore it so long that with great sorrow he cared for nothing beyond his enormous pain. Thus, he suffered evening and morning. \textit{Rabenschlacht}, 9)
\(^{407}\) im truobten ofte siniu ougen, \textit{Rabenschlacht}, 11,5.
grief of an ally in heroic literature is to confirm the existence of an honour injury inflicted not merely on the individual, but on the integrity of the group itself.

4.7. Performed Grief as Social Inversion and Persuasive Force

As shared grief is the mark of membership within an injured honour group, it is highly transmissible within that circle. This opens the possibility for wilful transmission in the hope of bringing an affiliated person to bear. The infliction of grief on another member of the honour group is an extraordinarily powerful tool. Particularly in the hands of a ruler, extreme expression of grief, as in the rituals of deditio and the Fußfall, are capable of temporarily inverting the social order. Here, the pain of grief often proves an irresistible force. This becomes most apparent in instances when the performance’s audience proves unwilling to participate. Here again, we find further evidence for the understanding of leit as violation, for grief – the perceptible expression of the experience of leit – may be most effectively accomplished through the violation of social norms. The high make themselves low, proprieties ignored or inverted, and the physical markers of disorder or hostility are introduced into protected spaces.

This is accomplished in part by demonstrating grief through a physical display which makes the profoundly disruptive nature of the injury even more apparent to the observer. As the proper countenance for a ruler is joyful, so too is right order illustrated by the physical, spatial relationship of the ruler to his or her subjects and inferiors. The ruler sits at the head of the table, plays host to his or her company, and is in all ways spatially elevated and granted physical primacy over inferiors. Gestures indicating supplication, lowness, or helplessness do not become the ruler. All that is lordship must be synonymous with superiority. Consequently, when a ruler lowers him or herself physically, or in any other way places him or herself at the mercy of
his or her subjects, it seems to register as not only dissonant, but actually painful to those forced to witness the display. When the injuries done to one's lord may be perceived as injuries done to one's self, the \textit{willing} degradation of the ruler may be more painful still, for the very identity of the observer and their place within the world and all the elements thereof by which the self is ordered and understood become unmoored. Loyalty to one’s lord is a defining characteristic of the honourable vassal. How is this loyalty to be maintained if the lord places himself below those whose identity is itself dependent on >being below< the ruler?

By far the most famous and dramatic instance is surely Kriemhilt and Etzel’s famous performance before Rüedeger in the \textit{Nibelungenlied}. As the royal pair plead desperately with their vassal Rüedeger for aid against the Burgundians, they at last throw themselves at his feet, an act which prompts the warrior to cry out “harte jâmerlichen” and to exclaim: “Owê mir gotes armen, daz ich dize gelebet hân.”

Over the course of \textit{âventiure 37} of the \textit{Nibelungenlied}, in which Rüedeger is convinced to enter the fray and meet his doom, the audience is presented with a tour de force of grief in all its performative manifestations: First, we see Rüedeger grieved by the words of a Hun who attacks the margrave for the limited support he has provided his lord and lady in their conflict against the Burgundians. The progression from injury to grief to anger to action plays out rapidly:

\begin{quote}
Mit trûrigen muote er enruoche, der vil getriuwe man, 
den er daz reden hörte, der helt der bliht’ in an. 
er dâhte: “du solt ez arnen; du gihest, ich si verzagt. 
du hâst dîniu mære ze hóve ze lûté gesagt.”

Die fûst begond er twingen. dô lief er in an 
unde sluoc sô kreteclîche den hiunischen man, 
daz er im vor den füezen lac vil schiere tôt!
\end{quote}

\footnote{409 “Alas for me, forsaken by God, that I have live to see this.” \textit{NL}, 2152-3.}
With a sad mood the loyal man, the hero, looked at the man who had said this. He thought: “you should pay for this, that you say I am cowardly. You have told your tale too loudly at court.” He clenched his fist.

Then he ran at him and struck the Hunnish man so powerfully that he was suddenly laid dead at his feet!

Then Etzel’s misery was yet increased. *Nibelungenlied*, 2141-2\(^{410}\)

That the killing was committed in anger is made explicit when Kriemhilt appears, and the mood cycles back to grief as a result of the *leit* which Rüedeger has now inflicted on her and Etzel:

**Dô kom diu küneginne unde het iz ouch gesehen,**

**daz von des heldes zorne dem Hiunen was geschehen.**

**si klaget ez ungefuoge; ir ougen wurden naz.**

**si sprach ze Rüedegêre: “wie habe wir verdienet daz,**

Daz ir mir ünt dem kûnege mëret unser leit?

(Then the queen came, and she had also seen what had happened to the Hun from the hero’s anger. She lamented it enormously; her eyes became wet. She said to Rüedeger: “How have we earned it, that you should add to our injury, the king and I?” *Nibelungenlied*, 2147-2148,1)

In part, Kriemhilt and Etzel follow on the Hun’s earlier accusations in pleading for Rüedeger’s aid. They play on his loyalty and call his honour into question. Yet they go much further, and all of their words are accompanied by tears and lamentation. Kriemhilt begins by calling the justness of Rüedeger’s act into question. The queen reiterates the margrave’s claim that he would risk both honour and life for the sake of his lord and lady (nu habt ir uns, edel Rüedegêr, allez her geseit, / ir woldet durch uns wâgen die êre unde ouch das leben, *Nibelungenlied*, 2148,2-3). Beyond this, she reminds him of the personal oath he swore to her when he first convinced her to wed Etzel, that he would avenge any injury done to her until death (…ir mir habt gesworn,
/ do ir mir zuo Etzeln rietet, ritter üz erkorn, / daz ir mir woldet dienen an unser eines tôt.

Nibelungenlied, 2149,1-3):

Si sprach: “gedenke, Rüedegêr, der grôzen triuwe dîn, der stæte und ouch der eide, daz du den schaden mîn immer woldest rechen und elliu mîniu leit.”

(She said: “Think, Rüedegêr, of your great loyalty, your constancy and also of the oath that you would always avenge my injuries and all my suffering.” Nibelungenlied, 2151,1-3)

Rüedeger initially stands firm, but is seriously shaken by the royal couple’s Fußfall:

dô buten si sich ze füezen beide für den man.
den edelen marcgrâven unmuotes man dô sach.
der vil getriuwe recke harte jâmerlîchen sprach:

“Owê mir gotes armen, daz ich díze gelebet hân.
...

(Then they both fell before the bondsman’s feet. The noble margrave was then seen to be upset. The warrior great in loyalty spoke with much distress: “Alas for me, forsaken by God, that I have lived to see this.” Nibelungenlied, 2152,2-2153,1)

This is the visualization of great social inversion – a “Verkehrung der legitimen Hierarchie” in Müller’s words 411 – which is the extreme manifestation of what grief itself signals. 412 Rüedeger yet pleads to be released from his obligation, but to no avail, at last he breaks in the face of the royal plea and marches off to face certain death, having assumed the affect of the royal couple:

“Man sah in von dem künege vil trûreclîchen gên.” 413

411 Müller, Spielregeln, 161. Similarly, although without reference to the emotional aspect of the act, Ehrismann describes the performance as an attempt to force Rüedeger’s hand “durch einen symbolischen Kraftakt… in dem sie vor ihm hinknien und damit die vasallitische Bindung bildlich umkehren” (through a symbolic power-play… in which they kneel before him and thereby upend the relationship of vassality, Ehrismann, Nibelungenlied, 129).

412 The fact that, as noted by Werner Hoffmann, the word man at 2152,2 may denote not merely a masculine person, but a bondsman emphasizes this inversion. Hoffmann, Nibelungenlied, 40.

413 “He was seen to part from the king in great sorrow, NL 2167,1.
This is, of course, a literary representation of the Fußfall - the act of falling on one’s knees at the feet of another in seeming supplication - granted so much attention by Gerd Althoff in his studies of medieval ritual and performance.\textsuperscript{414} It is far from the only such instance: a similar act is depicted, for example, in the Judeo-German Dukus Horant, and demonstrates the same power to generate discomfort and pain among the observers. Here, King Etene falls on his knees to beg the aid of his reluctant friend and vassal Horant, threatening to remain there until Horant takes pity on him. At this, Horant finally and immediately agrees to wager his life, if only his lord will end the performance and rise once again to his feet, restoring a tolerable spatial ordering more in agreement with the understood relationship which defines the two men.\textsuperscript{415}

Historical parallels are not difficult to come by. Althoff notes, for instance, an example found in a record of the Saxon war waged by Henry IV, where it is recorded that: “[Henry] summoned the princes… and threw himself abject upon the floor first before each individual and then before the entire congregation and raised his complaint.” Against his will, he had been forced to surrender his castle to the Saxons that it might be destroyed, yet beyond even this, the Saxons had designed to disgrace and befoul the monastery in which the king’s son and brother were interred. Not even the holy relics housed therein were safe. “All of this he said not without many tears, then he kissed each [of those assembled] on the feet and pleaded that they might at least not allow the dishonour done to God and the Saints to go unpunished, even if they did not wish to avenge the injury inflicted on himself.”\textsuperscript{416} A yet more famous historical example, and

\textsuperscript{414} See esp. Althoff, “Compositio,” “Genugtuung,” and “Der König weint.”

\textsuperscript{415} Dukus Horant, 47,1-2.

\textsuperscript{416} Congregatis itaque illarum partium principibus nunc singulis, nunc universis humiliter se prosternens querimoniam fecit, dicens, quod priores suae expulsionis injuriae sibi nunc leves essent, istas sibi magnas et insanabiles videri; in prioribus se sum suis principibus suisse despectum, in istis vere suu suorumque despectui coniunctum esse coelestis militia, et quod esset his maius, maiestatis divinae contemptum. Nam narravit eis lacrimans, quia, dum ipsorum consiliis contra suam voluntatem cedens Saxonibis suum castellum regali sumptu
closer in chronological proximity to the Nibelungenlied’s creation, is to be found in Barbarossa’s Fooßfall before Henry the Lion.\footnote{In the possibly apocryphal tale of Friedrich I’s break with the Welf duke, the Emperor in desperation prostrated himself before his cousin Henry to seek his aid for a doomed Italian campaign. Accounts of the event are recorded by Burchard von Ursberg and in the Sächsische Weltchronik, both sources dating to the thirteenth century. See Die Chronik des Propstes Burchard von Ursberg, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger and Bernhard von Simson 2nd Edition (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1916), 52-3; Sächsische Weltchronik, ed. Ludwig Weiland, Deutsche Chroniken und andere Geschichtsbücher des Mittelalters ed. Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde, vol. 2 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1877), 325.}

As previously discussed, Gerd Althoff’s observations on the importance of ritual and visual display in the medieval courtly sphere have brought to light a host of historically attested stagings of grief – indeed, it was on grief that Althoff focused first and foremost.\footnote{Althoff notes that rituals of departure during the high medieval period held such great importance that to part without taking leave was all but a sure sign of conflict to come, and that, as a result, it was little wonder that tears as a sign of loyalty should come to play a role in the process of those trusted: “Eine Abreise ohne Abschied war dagegen ein eindeutiges Zeichen, daß ein Konflikt bevorstand. Insofern nimmt es nicht wunder, daß der Abschied besonders Vertrauter als tränenreich geschildert wird.” Althoff, “Der König weint,” 250.}

Performances of this sort appear to be well represented in historical accounts of the period, and Althoff has frequently emphasized that tears and other visual cues were amongst the most commonly employed tools utilized by rulers who sought the aid of their vassals. Althoff identifies a number of additional reasons that rulers regularly shed tears: for the death of kin, in parting from friends,\footnote{See Althoff, “Der König weint.”} in lamentation for their sins, or as a means to command or determine a
favourable outcome through a ritualized form of submission like the *Fußfall* – Althoff notes that the combination of tears with the physical act of falling before another made a denial all but impossible.⁴²⁰

For heroic grief to obtain its power, it must always be visible or otherwise perceptible. In literature, the blurry lines between staged, ritual display and spontaneous, somatic manifestations channelled through established cultural practice are entirely erased. Here, all grief is codified, and the narrative itself provides the staging.

As grief is an expression of suffering, and as, within the heroic sphere, to witness the suffering of a person bound to oneself is to suffer as well, this opens the possibility for one member of an honour group to inflict their grief on another. This ability and the shared nature of *leit* within the honour group explains in large part the importance and power of the demonstration of *leit* as a tool of persuasion. The existence of *leit*, as made perceptible by *trûren*, indicates disorder. This triggers first a sympathetic, shared *leit*, which recognizes the validity of the injured party’s claims: the social order has been disrupted, the honour of the group has been damaged or is at risk, and corrective, collective action must be undertaken to restore that order. Due to the hierarchy of the honour group, and the close relationship between its integrity and >right order< within the world, the position of the injured party within that group may serve to significantly alter or intensify the effectiveness of the grief display.

4.8. Grief as Legitimization

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⁴²⁰ “Konventionell ist auch die Technik, die inständige Form der Bitte, die des Fußfalls, mit Tränen zu verbinden, was eine abschlägige Antwort fast unmöglich machte” (“The technique of combining the most ardent form of the plea, the Fußfall, with tears was also conventional, and this made a refusal all but impossible,” Althoff, “Der König weint,” 247).
Much of the work achieved by Hetel’s successful grief performative before his assembled men lies hidden. When Hetel announces the details of the injury inflicted on him and all who stand with him, the news demands a response. When the king’s followers commiserate with him, they not only confirm their membership in his honour group, they also signal their recognition that Hetel’s complaint is legitimate. The king has been wronged, the injury is real, and corrective action will ensue.

The efficacy of grief, and its necessity as a precursor to anger, is further demonstrated in *Herzog Ernst B*. When the emperor Otto has been falsely led to license an attack on his step-son, Ernst responds by seeking the intervention first of his mother, the empress Adelheit, and subsequently of his peers, the great princes of the Reich. In both instances, he sends messengers who emphasize the “starke nôt” caused by the “grôzen schaden” done to him. Importantly, they also insist that he suffers despite the fact that he is innocent (“âne schulde”) of any wrong and that the action against him was undertaken “âne reht.” Both parties are moved by the plea: the queen hears of her son’s distress “mit weinenden ougen” and repeats the claim that the action was “âne reht,” the duke stands “âne schulde,” though to little avail. Here the

422 Note that here, as in *Kudrun*, the effective performance of grief does not require the physical presence of the individual issuing the complaint, but may be embodied by a proxy.
423 “enormous suffering,” *HEB* 1099; “great injury,” *HEB* 952.
425 “With weeping eyes,” *HEB* 961.
426 That Adelheit attempts to intervene not only as Otto’s wife and Ernst’s mother, but also as formal mediator in a political sense is perhaps indicated by the fact that she addresses her husband ad “keiser here” (967). See Martini *Facetten*, 145.
duke’s grief moves those who continue to recognize him as a member of their own honour group, but not the emperor who understands the bond between the two to have been dissolved.\footnote{Cf. the discussions of these two attempted mediations in Schulz, “Àne Rede,” esp. 398-400; and Ebel, “Huld,”196-9.}

In hearing the princes’ plea, Otto not only rejects the notion of even treating with his stepson, but speaks “in zorne unsiteclîche.”\footnote{“in inordinate anger,” \textit{HEB} 1159. Following :Hans-Jochen Schiewer: “Otto macht mit seinem \textit{zorn} informell und öffentlich unmissverständlich deutlich, dass er zu keinerlei Entgegenkommen bereit ist, das heißt die Emotion… signalisiert Kompromisslosigkeit und Festhalten an der einmal getroffen Entscheideung” (With his \textit{zorn}, Otto makes it unmistakably clear, both informally and publicly, that he is in no way ready to budge an inch, which is to say that the emotion… signifies an unwillingness to compromise and a holding fast to [the emperor’s] initial decision.” Hans-Jochen Schiewer, “Herzog Ernst und Graf Wetzel.\textit{Erzählen vom Hof im ‘Herzog Ernst,’} in \textit{Adel und Königtnum im mittelalterlichen Schwaben. Festschrift für Thomas Zotz zum 65. Geburtstag}, ed. Andreas Bihrer, Mathias Käble, and Heinz Krieg (Stuttgart:Kohlhammer, 2009), 275.} This display of anger is also an attempted performative, but fails to bring out the hoped for, productive response:

\begin{verbatim}
Die fürsten üf höher muosen stân
und die bète durch vorhte lân.
swie liep in der fürste mære
dâ vor gewesen wäre,
und die im gerne warn gestanden,
mit üf gerahen handen
die muosen hervart üf in swern:
des torsten sie sich niht gewern,
sie muosen im alle widersagen.
\end{verbatim}

(The princes had to stand up and leave off their plea through fear. However dear the illustrious prince had been to them before, and how eagerly they would have stood by him with outstretched hands, they had to swear a campaign against him: they did not dare to refuse, they all had to declare a feud against him. \textit{HEB}, 1177-1185)

Angrily rejecting Ernst’s entreaties, the emperor is unable to convince Ernst’s allies of the justness of his cause: his anger elicits no corresponding emotion in his followers or his wife, though he is able to compel their obedience to his will by virtue of his office.\footnote{Martini reads Otto’s actions here as the clearest evidence for a characterization of the emperor as tyrannical despot. Martini, \textit{Facetten}, 149.} In their
reluctance, and in their lack of emotion, the princes indicate that they do not recognize the legitimacy of Otto’s complaint: they still consider Ernst innocent and undeserving of the anger and violence inflicted on him.

It is only later that Otto is able to draw out the full support of his vassals and gain validation for his feud against the duke. This occurs after Ernst kills the Pfalzgraf Heinrich, Otto’s nephew, during a failed attempt to assassinate the emperor himself. In the aftermath, the emperor commands that the corpse be set upon a bier and cries “daz leit und disiu schande / müeze gote geklaget sin.” Over the body, he orders a vigil to be kept, and the count is buried amidst great honour. At this point, the already emotionally charged occasion of a funeral, Otto summons his princes to complain of the great injury inflicted so shamefully on him by the duke. Surrounded by the trappings of grief, Otto informs the princes that Ernst has shamed not only their sovereign, but the princes and the empire itself. In the princes’ commiseration, the emperor’s complaint against Ernst is legitimized, and the principle of grief preceding anger in righteous action is confirmed.

430 “That suffering and this injury ought to be lamented to God,” *HEB* 1372-3.
431 só gröz laster unde schaden, / des er sich nimmer kunde entladen / die wile und er mohte leben, (such great shame and injury he could never escape, so long as he might live, *HEB* 1405-6).
432 Sus was der keiser unfô.

den lichamen hiez er dô
Schône ûf eine bäre legen.
die naht hiez er obe dem degen
wachen, als wir noch site haben.
des morgens wart er begraben
mit vil grözen êren.
dar nâch hiez er die hêren
alle hin ze hove laden.
dô klagete er den grözen schaden
beide armen unde rîchen,
In a recent analysis of this scene, Thorsten W. D. Martini focuses on the \textit{ira regis} and the rightness of Otto’s cause in explaining the princes’ turn-about.\textsuperscript{433} In his perception, it is Ernst’s angry, \textit{zornec} action that causes the princes suddenly to approve Otto’s anger, yet to focus on

daz in só laterlichen
Ernest der herzoge
hæte gessuochet dâ ze hove
und der grâve Wetzel sîn man,
daz sie im hæten getân
sô grôz later unde schaden,
des er sich nimmer kunde entladen
die wile und er mohte leben:
er kunde im nimmer mêt vergeben
die schulde umb sînes neyen tôt.
noch ware diz ein græzer nôt,
sie heten im nách den lip benomen:
wêr er niht iin ein kappellen komen,
sô hæte er den lip verlorn.
„helde, lât iu wesen zorn
daz er iuch und daz rîche
sô rehte laterliche
bediu alle hât geschant.“
dô verteilten si im zehant,
dô sie in nuosen vêhen,
beide eigen unde lêhen,
dar zuo gar sîn erbe.

(Thus was the emperor unhappy. The body he then commanded to be lain, beautiful upon a bier. He commanded the warrior to be watched over throughout the night, as we still are accustomed to do. In the morning, he was buried with very great honour. Thereafter he commanded all the lords to be summoned hence to the court. Then he lamented the great shame to both poor and rich, that Ernst the duke and Count Wetzel, his man, had so dishonourably visited the court there, that they had done him such great dishonour and shame that he could not free himself of it so long as he might live: He could never, ever forgive him the guilt of his nephew’s death. It was yet a greater injury, [that] he would have taken his life, had he not escaped to a chapel, thus he would have lost his life. “Heroes, you should be angry that he has so disgracefully dishonoured both you and the empire alike.” Then they immediately agreed that they must make war upon him, both his own possessions and his fiefs in addition to all his estates. \textit{HEB} 1389-1421).

\textsuperscript{433} Martini, \textit{Facetten}, 150-2.
this is to miss the crucial difference in tone that accompanies the two speeches. Where earlier the emperor “sprach… in zorne unsiteclîche,” now he unhappily laments his disgrace: “klagete er den grôzen schaden.” While it is true that Otto initially acted unjustly and that Ernst’s actions have provided him with precisely the just cause to pursue his revenge, we may see in this the context dependent nature of the ruler’s emotional expression: when Otto’s cause is unjust, the manner of his appeal reflects this. When granted legitimate grounds for complaint, his actions and demeanor corresponded to understood custom, the grief which begins the process of vengeance. It is through grief, expressed as *klagen* and *weinen*, that the plea for support gains its strength, and it is through grief that vindicatory violence gains its authorization.

4.9. Grief as the Precursor of Anger

In what follows from the initial display of grief, one discovers that the power of the grief/anger pairing, in which the one flows into the other, is very strong. Following Hetel’s initial plea, the Hegelings’ circumstances necessitate a slight pause before the angry, action phase of the vengeance process begins, yet it nevertheless proceeds directly from the earlier expressed grief. The connection between the two is made more explicit in the second phase of the conflict. After Hetel’s death, the Hegeling forces are left in ruins and the Normans escape. Hilde and the survivors are forced to wait a generation, until the children of the men slain in battle against the

434 “Spoke… in inordinate anger,” *HEB* 1158-59.

435 *HEB* 1398. An alternate reading is offered by Monika Schulz, who sees a crucial difference between the emperor’s earlier attempt to force a *widersage* against Ernst from the reluctant princes and his successful plea in the aftermath of Ernst’s attempted assassination not in an altered affect, but rather in the emperor’s shift from arbitrary, unilateral despotism to an emphasis on the unity between himself and the princes in constituting the empire. This, in combination with the (now genuine) public accusation of rebellion and high treason suffices to move the princes and, in fact, to temporary re-establish the harmony between lord and vassal (Ernst excluded) earlier broken by Otto’s rejection of the princes’ plea. Schulz, “Âne Rede,” 409-10.
Normans have grown old enough to carry a sword. Perhaps not trusting to memory alone, the men who will fight for vengeance are first gathered on the island battlefield where their kinsmen lie buried. As a direct consequence of this, we are told that:

\[
\begin{align*}
der \text{schiet nu vil maniger} & \quad \text{von sînes vater grabe} \\
\text{mit solhem ungemüete,} & \quad \text{daze z wart jenen swære,} \\
\text{an den si daz erkanten,} & \quad \text{dêr in schedelîch in strîte wære.}
\end{align*}
\]

(many a man of these departed from his father's grave with such anger, that it was later hard on those whom they knew to have treated them disgracefully in battle. Kudrun, 1122,2-4).

The connection between grief and anger, and indeed, between grief and vengeance, is here consciously exploited by the *sippe* as a motivational technique for the continuance of the conflict.

This pairing of grief and anger may be seen repeatedly throughout the heroic corpus. In the aftermath of Sivrit’s murder, his kin fluctuate between the two repeatedly. After Kriemhilt has discovered her husband’s corpse, she dispatches a messenger to her father-in-law Sigmunt asking that he help her mourn. Sigmunt at first does not believe the news, and requires the sound of Kriemhilt and her maidens’ own weeping before he accepts the truth of the matter. Sigmunt and his men arm themselves and race in confusion towards the sounds of lamentation, having lost their senses. As news spreads outward, the wailing that accompanies it passes from mouth to mouth and the communal expression of grief swells throughout the palace amongst those loyal to Sivrit and his kin. Here the escalating expression of sadness serves not to

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436 The word “ungemüete” here further emphasizes the connection, for it can convey unhappiness or suffering as easily as it does anger.

437 NL 1014-22.

438 Kriemhilde jâmer wart unmâzen grôz / do erschrê’ si nâch unkrefte, daz al diu kemanâte erdôz (Kriemhilt’s grief grew immeasurably great, she screamed to the point of fainting so that all the chamber resounded, NL, 1009,3-4); Allez ir gesinde klagete unde schrê / mit ir lieben vrouwen, wandê in was harte wê (all her kin lamented and
underline the tragedy of the hero’s death, but also to establish the scale of the vengeance to be sought and the outsized passion which drives it.\textsuperscript{439}

Kriemhilt is the first to give voice to the desire for revenge, lamenting that if only she knew who had struck the blow she would have him dead.\textsuperscript{440} Next, when Sigmunt’s men learn of the sad tidings, their first reaction is to seize their long sharp swords and rush to where they hear Kriemhilt’s maidens weeping, ready to avenge the deed.\textsuperscript{441} When Sigmunt inquires of Kriemhilt who the murderer might be, she tells him she does not know, but if only she did, that she would cried with their dear lady because they had great pain, NL 1013,1-2); jâne móhten si der sinne vor leide niht gehaben. / in wart vil michel swære in ir hérzen begraben ([Sigmunt’s men] had lost their senses for grief. Very great pain was buried in their hearts. NL 1022,3-4); dô wart von sînen vrunden der jâmer alsó grôz, / daz von dem starken wuofe palas unde sal / und auch die stat ze Wormz von ir wéinén erschal (then the crying of his friends was so great that palace and hall, and even the city of Worms, resounded from the cry, NL 1025,3-4); dô was den sînen liute von grôzem jâmer starke wê (then his people had enormous pain from the great grief, NL 1026,4); Lu enkunde niemen daz wunder volsagen / von rittern unt von vrouwen, wie man die hörte klagen, / sô daz man des wuofes wart in der stat gewar. / die edlen burgære die kômen gâhénde dar. / Si klageten mit den gesten, want in was harte leit. (No one could tell you the wonder in full, how knights and ladies were heard to lament, so that the cry was heard in the city itself. The noble burghers came hurrying, they lamented with the guests for it was pain to them. NL 1036-7,1); etc.


\textsuperscript{439} Dô rief vil trûreclîche diu küneginne milt:
“owê mich mines leides! nu ist dir din schilt mit swerten niht verhouwen; du list ermorderôt.
wesse ich, wer iz het getân, ich riet’ im immer sînen tôt.”
(Then the gentle queen cried out most sadly: “Alas for me in my suffering! Your shield has not been hewed apart by the sword: you lie murdered. If I knew who had done it, I would ever seek his death,” NL 1012)

\textsuperscript{440} si zuhten zuo den handen diu scharfen wâfen lanc, / sie liefen zuo dem wuofe vil jâmerliche dan, (they reached for their long, sharp weapons, then they ran towards the great sorrowful crying, NL 1021,2-3).
make his friends weep. More than this, Sivrit’s warriors boast that they will always seek to avenge him, and seize their own swords, and Sigmund again indicates his readiness Yet at the moment, the seemingly inevitable march toward violence, as grief swells and spills into anger, the progression is thwarted. Kriemhilt marshals her sadness for a different purpose, and grieves to see Sivrit’s kin armed, fearing them insufficient to overcome the host of her brothers. In the end, she must plead with them repeatedly before at length convincing them to busy themselves with preparing Sivrit’s body. Kriemhilt’s pragmatism serves to retard and turn aside the action most appropriate to the situation. Yet as the grief is neither discharged nor forgotten, it hangs pregnant in the air, alongside the ever building threat of violence it portends.

Once Hagen and Gunther approach, and Sivrit’s corpse begins to bleed anew, the intensity of his kin’s grief is yet again heightened: “die è dâ sêre klageten, des wart nu michel mè.” As a result, and also because a target now presents itself, Sivrit’s warriors once again arise and wish to do battle, and so Kriemhilt must once again prevent them from doing so. As before, she accomplishes this in part by emphasizing that the mourning is not yet finished: “nu tragt mit mir die nôt.” From this point forward, the rituals of grief and its display continue to

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442 “...ich geriete im alsô leide, daz die friunde sîn / von den mînen schulden müesen weinende sîn,” (I would bring such suffering upon him that his friends would weep because of me,” NL 1024,3-4).
443 NL 1027-8.
444 NL 1029-1035.
445 “From this the number of those who already lamented were now much increased,” NL 1045,2. Following Ehrismann, the Bahrprobe serves to make >guilt< visually manifest. Ehrismann, Nibelungenlied, 104. For more on the Bahrprobe and its role as evidence in assigning guilt, see Tilo Renz, “Siegfrieds Mörder. Eine Poetik von Täterschaft und Schuld im Nibelungenlied und in den Landfrieden um 1200,” Daphnis 40 (2011): 39-61; esp. 43-6.
446 Ehrismann sees here an expression of the “Germanic” practices of revenge, namely, the art of finding the right moment to enact vengeance. Ehrismann, Nibelungenlied, 104-5.
447 “now bear with me this suffering,” NL 1047,1.
increase: Sivrit is displayed upon a bier, yet Kriemhilt delays his burial, he is placed into his coffin and offerings are brought forth, more than a hundred masses are sung, a vigil is held for three days, many refuse food and drink, some thirty thousand marks or more are distributed, there is singing, weeping, and lamentation among all. When the time for burial comes, Kriemhilt orders the coffin broken open, holds her husband’s head in her hands and, kissing him, weeps tears of blood before passing out and nearly dying of sorrow, many of Sigmunt’s men continue to refuse food and drink, yet without any possibility of release, this continued grieving serves to create a sense of both emotional and narrative frustration. The process continues in the following âventiure as Sigmunt takes his leave, and Kriemhilt remains in Worms to grieve ever more. Once again, the natural flow of grief into anger and thence toward violence and the enactment of vengeance is retarded and delayed. As the tale continues, each new obstacle, each new pause before the progression is permitted to complete itself, serves to increase the certainty of the devastation to come. In the cycle of grief and anger, injury and revenge, excess demands the eventual excessive response.

4.10. Grief and Gender

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448 Without wishing to assert too direct a parallel, the escalation of grieving in this sequence, accompanied by forestalled possibilities of violence, in some ways reflects the later escalation of violence, and the repeatedly frustrated possibilities of reconciliation, which close the poem.

449 For Winder McConnell, Sigmunt’s departure without having taken vengeance for his son’s murder is the last in a chain of failures, beginning with his failure to curb Sivrit’s superbia, which characterizes Sivrit’s father as not merely weak king, but failed patriarch. I not avenging his son, “[Sigmunt] abdicates any sense of sovereignty one might expect to associate with a monarch.” Winder McConnell, “The Father as Failure: Siegmund and Ludwig,” Neophilologus 69 (April, 1985): 236-245; 240.

450 Ottfrid Ehrismann has seen in this sequence a deliberate and gradual “immersion in[to] the archaic structures of revenge,” abetted by Kriemhilt’s efforts “not to deviate from the path of legality.” Ehrismann, “ze stücken,” 27.
The status and position of the individual who weeps may considerably affect the interpretation of
that grief and the response which it engenders. Yet, the degree to which it informs the manner in
which that grief itself is displayed does not seem so great as one might at first suspect.
Throughout Middle High German epic, both men and women alike weep to express their grief,
not infrequently with considerable abandon. As a result, in heroic epic, the gendering of weeping
and lamentation is often ambiguous. It is true that women are frequently depicted as weeping:
references to the weeping of ladies for their knights occur in great number, and function as a sort
of short-hand for tragedy and status. Displays of excessive weeping and extreme somatic
responses, as when blood wells from Kriemhilt’s mouth and eyes, also occur, yet equally
extreme expressions of grief amongst men are also far from uncommon. In many texts, the
Rolandslied being an especially notable example, it is clear that weeping for fallen allies or their
injuries is closely related not only to masculine loyalty, but indeed to the valour of the warrior.

The motif of ladies weeping for fallen knights is exceptionally widespread throughout the
whole of the surviving Middle High German corpus. Indeed, it is so common, that the grief of
ladies for one’s foe appears to function as something of a byword for victory. Masculine heroes
boast or promise to make women weep by their actions on the battlefield: to triumph over an
enemy is to inflict grief and injury on their kin. Most commonly, this is conceived as causing
women to weep and men to experience leit (the means by which this leit might be expressed
going unremarked upon). If injury manifests outwardly as grief, and if the manner to regain lost
integrity or to augment status is to return injury for injury, it follows naturally that to cause grief

451 Typical in this regard is Sivrit’s boast to his companions during the campaign against the Saxons: “hie wirt mër
getan, / ê sich der tac verende,     sol ich haben den lîp. / daz müet in Sahsen lande     vil manec wætlîchez wîp”
(“More will be done here before the day ends, should I survive, it will grieve many lovely women in the land of the
Saxons,” NL 194,2-4.)
may well be a source of pride or joy, just as it is certainly understood to be a key aspect of vengeance.

It is also true that women seem more likely than men to experience leit to such a degree that they expire from the suffering – a fact remarked upon by Ann Marie Rasmussen in regard to diu Klage. In this text, Rasmussen notes that it is women who stand helpless in the face of their grief, while men retain greater control. It is the women of the Klage who tear their clothes, lose their senses, and die from their grief, while men only approach such a state, but do not submit entirely.452

Yet this division between the sexes is not universal, and elsewhere, male grief draws closer to the brink. The most extreme examples of this are perhaps to be found in the Rolandslied: Here, as mentioned above, when the emperor Karl walks upon the battlefield where Roland fell, he and his men weep countless tears, and the emperor himself rips at his beard and falls upon the earth.453 Yet it is not merely the great ruler who falls prey to grief. When Olivir receives a mortal wound, the hero Roland too breaks inwardly from his anger and grief, such that he collapses upon his saddle and nearly falls to the ground.454 Profound grief is thus as much the mark of the heroic warrior in his loyalty and honour as it is of the noble lady. This makes it difficult to parse episodes such as that which appears in Wolfram’s Willehalm, where lamentation is the mark of familial loyalty and all the much-praised heroes of Heimrich’s family, Willehalm and his brothers, weep together. Yet their mother, Irmschart subsequently upbraids them for behaving like women – the time has come for action.455 In Kudrun, there is no

453 Rolandslied, 6965-6.
454 Rolandslied, 6442-5.
455 Willehalm, 152,12-27.
suggestion that Hetel’s tears rob him of authority or feminize him in any way. Nor does it serve to characterize him as a ‘weak king’ – Hetel’s grief is performative and serves as a recognized means to bring about a desired outcome. This is equally true of Hilde, whose tears do not mark any feminine weakness or passivity, but rather function as the primary means by which the queen engages the system of honour and restitution.

The display of grief, it seems, does in some way reduce or otherwise render vulnerable the one who grieves, yet this very vulnerability proves a strength in mobilizing affiliates. Indeed, vulnerability is a core element in its power to move and to bind the members of an honour kinship together. Where individual grief indicates vulnerability, its collective manifestation is indicative of strength, shared identity, and common purpose.

4.11. Conclusion

In her consideration of *diu Klage*, Ann Marie Rasmussen suggests that the *Klage* poet sees grief and anger (here, *s_FRAMEBUFFER* and *zorn*) united in the drive for vengeance: a fact demonstrated elsewhere by the fluidity with which one transitions into the other in the act itself. Rasmussen writes further that in “*The Lament*, Kriemhild is dead, but the conceptual problems created by her vengeful grief-rage remain. *The Lament* sets out, I think, to address this problem by recuperating and naturalizing grief, creating a notion of grief as an emotion that is distinct from anger and that is socially unifying rather than socially destructive.” 456 Yet this unifying aspect of grief cannot be said to be lacking in the *Nibelungenlied* itself. In those rare instances when grief is concealed by design, as with Kriemhilt, the narrative invariably calls attention to this (problematic) fact. Kriemhilt herself is well aware of the possible consequences if her kin should

456 Ibid.
learn that she yet grieves, instructing the messengers who will guide the Burgundians to the fatal festivity that they are under no circumstances to inform her brothers that they ever witnessed her in sad spirits, and that they shall be well rewarded for their silence. The same recognition of the close connection between grief as the marker of leit and the precursor of vengeance lies behind Dietrich’s words when the Burgundians arrive at Etzel’s court: “ist iu daz niht bekant? / Kriemhilt noch sere weinet den helt von Nibelunge lant.” Tears promise blood.

The connection between grief, vengeance, and social cohesion extends throughout the heroic corpus, and indeed, the expression of grief in reaction to injury is found close to the root of most conflict in Middle High German epic. Grief, largely conceived, is indeed perhaps the emotion most fundamental to the narrative of dispute in Middle High German epic. In their essence, most expressions of grief, be they spontaneous, somatic displays or verbal statements expressing emotional distress are Verletzungsreaktionen - reactions to the perception of injury. The vast majority of these injuries are not physical in nature, rather they are injuries to the extended social self, the larger being comprised of kinship ties, social status, personal and political bonds, whose health and integrity is perceived and evaluated through the processes of honour. Where grief is displayed, its presence makes known a problematic or defective status brought about by leit, nôt, schade or schande.

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457 “...Unde swaz ir miner vriunde immer muget gesehen ze Wormez bi dem Rîne, den sult ir niht verjehen, daz ir noch ie gesæhet betrüebet minen muot.

(And whatever you may see of my friends in Worms on the Rhine, you should not tell them that you ever saw me troubled in my mood. NL 1415,1-3)

458 “Is it not known to you that Kriemhilt still greatly weeps for the hero of Nibelungenland?” NL 1724,3-4.

459 In courtly romance, and in those heroic epics which have to a greater extent adopted elements and sensibilities derived from the courtly tradition, borderline cases appear, above all in their engagement with eroticized minne, but the general rule and essential foundation of the emotion as reaction to injury holds true.
Grief in heroic narrative is performative. It calls the attention of an audience well-versed in the symbolic language of gesture and emotion to the existence of the damaged or problematic status and suggests the potentiality of violence and conflict. Within the narrative, such displays provide first the opportunity for the delineation and negotiation of those alliances and honour groupings which form the core of social identity (and through this, the valuation and description of those grouping and their collective health as society), and second, initiate and guide the development of a conflict progression.

The display of grief, alongside its many other narrative and social functions, is crucial to the narrative and development of the conflict progression. The grief for the fallen kinsman or ally speaks to his or her honour, which in turn heightens the experience of injury for his or her relations and for the audience. This experience of injury must be answered and ameliorated. The grief of the characters initiates the pattern of conflict, and the audience sympathizes with their pain even as they recognize objectively the manner in which its expression pushes forward the conventionalized behaviour that seeks to correct the disorder which engenders it. Meaning, or at least the individual significance and perspective of the narrative, arises in part from its engagement with and/or deviation from this pattern. The narrative framework, which mirrors (even as it no doubt informed) medieval dispute practices, exists as a foundation, a set of expectations. Interest arises both from the manner in which the audience is guided through anticipated events and the manner in which expectations are confounded.
5. Anger

Middle High German heroic narrative is as saturated by anger as it is by grief. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the two emotions in these narratives are closely related and often inseparable. They have at times been characterized as two sides of the same coin, or even as culturally generically determined alternatives characterizing, respectively, active and passive responses to stimuli. Yet anger is more than the active alternative to grief, and its expression is the outer representation of a host of obscured but implicit and understood social and political judgments and processes.

Anger and its expression is central to the Herzog Ernst narrative. This is especially true for the protagonist’s step-father, the emperor Otto. Indeed, in Herzog Ernst B, as elsewhere in the Middle High German corpus, anger seems to be the defining characteristic of the emperor Otto (or Otte). What is more, although the two actions most crucial to the plot’s development in the first half of the poem (namely the slandering of Duke Ernst and Ernst’s assassination attempt on his step-father) are both described as manifestations of anger, the emotion is otherwise almost wholly bound to Otto: of some twenty-two appearances of the word zorn and

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460 Jan-Dirk Müller, Spielregeln, 201-12.
461 The Emperor Otto found in Konrad von Würzburg’s Heinrich von Kempten is similarly angry, as is the Otto of Rudolf von Ems’ Der guote Gerhart, and Otto as angry ruler seems to have been an established character. See Otto Neudeck, Erzählen von Kaiser Otto: zur Fiktionalisierung von Geschichte in mittelhochdeutscher Literatur, (Köln: Böhlau, 2003). Yet, as noted by Bernhard Sowinski (notes to Herzog Ernst, 369, n. 813) the Otto of HEB also bears a strong resemblance to medieval characterizations of Frederick Barbarossa. The resemblance (in broad strokes) of the central conflict described in Herzog Ernst and that which existed between Barbarossa and Henry the Lion, resulting in the latter’s exile, as well as the popularity of Henry’s image as crusader further support the possibility of an intentional link between the Staufer ruler and the fictional Otto. Konrad von Würzburg, Heinrich von Kempten. Der Welt Lohn. Das Herzmaere, ed. Edward Schröder (Stuttgart: Reclam,1968). Rudolf von Ems, Der guote Gërhart (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1971). See also Martini, Facetten, 134; Heinz Krieg, Herrscherdarstellung in der Stauferzeit: Friedrich Barbarossa im Spiegel seiner Urkunden und der staufischen Geschichtsschreibung (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2003).
its derivatives (zorneclîche, etc.), all save five reference the anger of the emperor.\footnote{Regarding Otto’s zorn in Herzog Ernst B: 813, 978, 998, 1034, 1113, 1135, 1159, 1224, 1414, 1524, 1555, 1616, 1676, 1686, 5956. For comparison, there is only one reference to Heinrich’s zorn (668), and one to Ernst’s zorn (1269). Other instances appear at: 2771, 5124, 5515.}

At the time of his introduction, the narrator paints a convincing picture of Otto as a consummate and wholly reasonable ruler, speaking of the “great honour” with which Otto wears the imperial crown, of the manner in which he looks after widows and orphans, rich and poor, and of his great virtue and praiseworthy character.\footnote{See especially lines 186-96 and 222-33, where Otto is credited as ruling with great honour, with protecting widows and orphans, with maintaining the peace, with looking after the poor, and with practicing great virtue. While Thomas Martini sees “einen frühen Hinweis auf die Möglichkeit kaiserlichen Verdrusses” (an early indication of the possibility of imperial displeasure, Martini, \textit{Facetten}, 140 ) in the comment that Adelheit ably calmed her husband when things went wrong and he became vexed (538-540), though I am more inclined to see this as evidence of their (initially) ideal coupling. Certainly, beyond this, neither the emperor’s description nor his actions hint at a wrathful nature, whether reasonable or not, until after Heinrich’s treachery.} Yet, once the emperor’s sister’s son, the treacherous Pfalzgraf Heinrich, convinces Otto that his stepson Ernst has turned against him, it is anger alone which seems to govern the great lord’s actions.\footnote{Hans-Jochen Schiewer, in seeing anger as a fundamental characteristic of Otto as narrative figure, comments that Heinrich reveals himself expert in playing on this affect, Heinrich, “der seine Intrigantenrolle perfekt spielt,” “mobilisiert zuerst den Zorn Ottos gegen Ernst (Der könic zornen began, V. 813), um ihn dann für seine Zwecke zu funktionalisieren und unüberlegtes herrscherliches Handeln scheinbar zu vermeiden (nu zorne niht so sere, V. 815),” (Hans-Jochen Schiewer, “Herzog Ernst und Graf Wetzel. Erzählen vom Hof im ‘Herzog Ernst,’” in \textit{Adel und Königum im mittelalterlichen Schwaben. Festschrift für Thomas Zotz zum 65. Geburtstag}, ed. Andreas Bihrer, Mathias Käible, and Heinz Krieg [Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2009], 274). Schiewer sees this behaviour positioned in opposition to that of Wetzel, who, in contrast to Heinrich, does not play with the affect of his lord in order to influence him, 277. As noted by Kai-Peter Ebel, “[d]ie Infamie von Heinrichs Intrige besteht nicht nur darin, daß sie Ernst mitsamt allen, die ihn politisch unterstützen, aus der Huld des Kaisers drängt, sondern vielmehr darin, daß sie die Mechanismen der Konfliktvermeidung ausschaltet” (The infamy of Heinrich’s scheme lies not only in the fact that it pushes Ernst and all who support him politically out of the emperor’s favour, but much more in the fact that it disables the mechanisms of conflict prevention. Ebel, “Huld im ‘Herzog Ernst B. Friedliche Konfliktbewältigung als Reichslegende,” in \textit{Frühmittelalterliche Studien} 34 (2000): 186-212; 199).}

This begins at the moment when Otto is first swayed by his perfidious nephew, at which time “der könic zornen began” (the king began to be angry, 813), and is advised by Heinrich to cool his rage (“nu zorne niht sô sere,” 815). Once Otto turns on Ernst in earnest, Queen Adelheit attributes the action to his anger (978). The accuracy of this attribution seems borne out when Adelheit’s entreaties on the duke’s behalf are rebuffed by the emperor “angrily enraged”
(“grimme zorneclîche,” 998), and the queen consequently feels compelled to warn her son that Otto is “greatly enraged” (zornet sêre, 1034). Shortly thereafter, the great princes of the realm also petition Otto for Ernst’s sake, they ask that the emperor respond without anger to their attempted mediation on Ernst’s behalf (1113, 1135), perhaps an indication of some awareness that the emperor is predisposed to such moods. Their caution proves well founded, for despite their pleas, the emperor indeed answers “in zorne unsiteclîche” (inordinately enraged, 1159). 465

This linkage of Otto and zorn continues throughout the Reichsteil of the poem. Ernst, before his attempted assassination of the emperor, laments that his king “bewart sînen zorn” (maintains his anger, 1224). In the aftermath of this attempt, it is Otto who instructs his lordly subjects that they ought, like him, to “wesen zorn” (become angry, 1414). To Otto, the loss of his men in battle before the walls of Regensburg is “leit unde zorn” (suffering and anger, 1514), and in the wake of the rage this loss awakens the great lord would gladly have avenged his anger on the townsfolk (1555-60). When the emperor and his army pillage Ernst’s lands, they do so “zorneclîche” (angrily, 1676) and in this manner follow through on avenging Otto’s anger (1686). Finally, when Otto at long last forgives his step-son, Otto does so by declaring his willingness to let his anger be (5956).

What purpose does anger serve in this tale? Taken collectively, these instances of the word zorn seem initially to imply a strongly negative association with the word. Otto is, of course, one of the hero’s primary antagonists, and it is by this angry lord that Ernst is driven from his own lands. This negative characterization of zorn even seems to be bolstered by the few instances in which the word is employed in reference to other characters. The word’s first

465 For an alternate reading of Otto’s response based in part on manuscript variance and editorial practice, see Kai-Peter Ebel, “Huld,” 198-9. Ebel suggests that the emperor’s anger may in fact be a reaction to a perceived power-play on the part of the princes.
appearance in the text is the “pain and anger” (“leit unde zorn,” 668) experienced by Heinrich in the diminished favour he receives at court following Ernst’s rise, and which leads directly to his slander of the poem’s protagonist.

Perhaps most damning of all is an instance in which the protagonist himself is said to act angrily: when Ernst approaches the door to the emperor’s own chamber, he does so “in zorne” (1269). What follows is a highly problematic and ethically ambiguously sequence in which the duke attempts to slay his emperor and succeeds in beheading the Pfalzgraf Heinrich.466

Yet throughout the narrative, zorn functions as more than a marker of the emperor’s tyranny and the occasional flaw of the hero. The appearance of anger in Herzog Ernst B cannot be read, or indeed separated, from the hierarchical socio-political context in which it manifests. Here, as elsewhere in the corpus of Middle High German Heroic Literature, the expression of anger is fundamental to the processes of honour and the conventions of dispute that operate within them.

5.1. The Language and Appearance of Anger

When we speak of anger in Middle High German, we are most commonly speaking of zorn. While zorn is not the exclusive representation for the cluster of affects, drives, and behaviours which we might label “angry,” it stands chief amongst a trio of words indicating negative, hostile emotion used throughout Middle High German literature, namely zorn, nît, and haz.467 All three

466 Following Markus Stock, the killing of Heinrich and attempted assassination of the emperor, with all its moral complications, marks a decisive turning point in the conflict, in as much as the lie that served as catalyst no longer matters. Stock, Kombinationssinn. Narrative Strukturexperimente im »Straßburger Alexander«, im »Herzog Ernst B« und im »König Rother« (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2002), 183-4.

467 To these might also be added the adjectival or adverbial “grim” and “gram,” which generally indicate negative or hostile intent.
indicate an excited state of hostility, and may at times seem nearly interchangeable. This is most frequently the case in the adverbial application of these terms to action, and above all with reference to zorn and nît. Following Klaus Grubmüller, we may discern in both nît and zorn “die Umsetzung der zornigen Erregung in kriegerisches Engagement, die Kanalisierung der Unbeherrschaft in Kampfskraft.”

Speaking in general terms, we may see a trend towards distinguishing between the terms regarding their immediacy and their temporal relationship to the insult or injury which first provokes them. Zorn here possesses the closest, most immediate relationship both to the provoking offense and to the retaliatory strike. What is more, Zorn seems to hold a greater measure of righteousness, to the extent that it may demonstrate some relationship to the wrath of God (“Zorn Gottes”). Beyond this, it is significant that zorn appears to be visible in a manner that nît and haz are not, and consequently it shall be primarily with the anger of zorn itself, rather than the enmity of hostility of nît and haz that we are here concerned.

Like grief, however, detailed descriptions of what, precisely, anger looks like, are relatively rare. In Middle High German epic, it is most commonly stated only that a given character >is< angry, >looks< angry or rages. In this, Herzog Ernst B functions as a representative example, for here the narrator scarcely bothers to mention the visible signs of anger at all. Rather, it is merely related that “der künic zorneclîhe (the king began to be angry, 813), or that he spoke “in grimme zorneclîhe” (angrily, in a rage, 998).

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469 Grubmüller notes both that nît seems to lack some of the positive characteristics of zorn in heroic epic, but that it also sees usage as a negative, serving as a translation for invidia and appearing frequently in reference to Cain’s murder of Abel. Grubmüller, “Historische Semantik,” 62-3.
When actions other than simple violence are described, they are frequently not too far removed from demonstrations of grief. Among the more common expressions is the tearing out of one’s hair or grabbing one’s beard. In other instances, angry characters may vocalize in the manner of “angry” beasts, roaring, for instance, like a bear, or to gnash their teeth. They may even find themselves so choked by rage that they are unable to speak. Elsewhere we find characters who flush, as when Prünhilt turns red in her anger, or who find themselves so tormented by anger that they are unable to sleep.

Yet for all the lack of specificity, anger, as grief, is almost always understood to be perceptible. As Hildegard Elisabeth Keller has written, in a medieval context, “Zorn tritt sichtbar, hörbar, atmosphärisch und taktil in Gestalt aggressiver Akte gegen Leib und Leben in Erscheinung.” It is thus that, in König Rother, Constantine’s queen is able to mark her husband’s anger with joy (die kunincgine sach gerne den zorn, 1172), and Dietrich speaks of

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470 da ward er aber so zornig daz er das har aus brach (he became so angry that he tore out his hair), Orntit, 377,4.
471 Der Kaiser erzurnte harte / mit üf gevangelm barte (pulling at his beard, the emperor greatly raged) Konrad, Rolandslied, 8771.
472 ienir der da gebunden lac, / der begunde bremin alse ein berre. König Rother, 1660; Dô Wate der vil grimme gefriesch des küniges tôt / er begunde limmen… /… / in und al die síne, die muoste man vil zornige vinden. Kudrun, 882.
473 Vor zorn her Egge niht mer sprach (because of his anger, Sir Egge spoke no more), Eckenlied, 48,1. Das Eckenlied, ed. Francis B. Brévart (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986).
474 Prünhilt diu schoene wart in zorne rôt (Prünhilt the beautiful became red in anger), NL, 465,3. Likewise: “…von zorne begunder roten, / vor ungemüte er nider saz” in the Straßburger Alexander, 996-7.

A comparison between the manifestations of grief in Middle High German literature with those noted by Stephen D. White in contemporary French literature reveals strikingly similar, and indeed, virtually identical forms. See White, “The Politics of Anger,” 135-6.

475 in zorne er âne slafen lac, / unz üf in schein der liehte tac. Willehalm, 137,1.
seldom having seen so many knights as bitterly enraged as he >perceives< Gunther and the Burgundians to be in the *Nibelungenlied*.\(^{477}\)

Consequently, as with grief, in reading *zorn* we may again understand the expression or display of rage to be a public, communicative act. This is true regardless of whether we understand *zorn* as the primary characteristic of a consciously crafted display, or an adverbial characterization of action: both as focus and as affect or manner, anger is communicative.

### 5.2. Reactive Anger

Perhaps the first and foremost characteristic of anger in Middle High German epic is that it is reactive. In almost all instances, the display of anger, like that of grief, broadcasts the perception of insult or injury, yet it is not identical, for at its core, anger is the drive to strike back when struck.\(^{478}\) Where grief is the experience of injury, anger reflects the drive to inflict injury in response. Anger flares up following the perception of damage, whether physical or psychic. This is apparent from the moment that *zorn* first appears in *Herzog Ernst B*, when it is reported of Count Heinrich that:

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wan man in ze hove niht vernam
sô wol alse dô vorn:
daz was im leit unde zorn
unde muote in und die sîne.
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\(^{477}\) “…wande ich in langen zîten nie gesehen hân / sô bitterlîch erzûrnet sô manegen ritter guot.” (…)for I have not seen so many good knights so bitterly enraged in a long time), *NL*, 1986,2-3.

\(^{478}\) Stephen D. White has made similar observations regarding the display of anger in Old French literature, where, he notes, “To display anger about an action publically is to construe the action as an injury, as a wrongful act causing harm, damage, or loss, as an offense against a person’s honor.” White, “Politics of Anger,” 140. The notion itself is, of course, very old indeed, and finds expression in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, II,2.: Let anger be [defined as] desire, accompanied by [mental and physical] distress, for apparent retaliation because of an apparent slight that was directed, without justification, against oneself or those near to one.” Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. George A. Kennedy, 2\(^{nd}\) edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
(...because [Heinrich] was not received at court so well as he had once been: that caused him suffering and anger and distressed both himself and his followers. *HEB*, 666-9)\(^{479}\)

The close connection between grief (the expression of injury) and anger (the manifestation of the desire to inflict injury in response), reappears throughout the narrative, and the combination of “leit unde zorn” in connection with distress (*müen*) is elsewhere attributed not only to Heinrich, but to the emperor Otto as well:

*...die innern heten daz üzer her*
*mit solhem jämér überladen*
daz der keiser den schaden
klagen sère sît began.
er häte mèr dan tüsent man
in dem sturme verlorn.
daz was im leit unde zorn
und muote in harte sère.

(Those within inflicted such misery upon those without that the emperor began to greatly lament the injury. He had lost more than a thousand men in the battle. That caused him suffering and anger, and distressed him enormously. *HEB*, 1508-15)

The passage is further bound to that referencing Heinrich by the inclusion of the verb *müen* (to distress) immediately following the appearance of “leit unde zorn.” As a result, the line between anger and grief is here not entirely clear. What is apparent in both instances is that anger and suffering appear as simultaneous and natural reactions to injury. As Thorsten W. D. Martini has observed, the formulation “demonstriert die Bindung des Zornaffekts an ein Empfinden erlittenen Unheils. Der Affekt erweist sich als Resultat subjektiver Ungerechtigkeit…”\(^{480}\) Where

\(^{479}\) Kai-Peter Ebel has also recognized the importance of this episode in establishing the importance of status competition within a political system built upon the personal ties of its ruling figures. He writes: “Es geht hier nicht um die persönliche Eitelkeit zweier Musterhöflinge, sondern im Gegenteil um ihren Stand in einem komplizierten Gefüge von Abhängigkeiten” (Here, the matter does not turn on the personal vanity of two model courtiers, but rather, in contrast, on their status within a complicated structure of dependencies, Ebel, “Huld,” 193. 

\(^{480}\) “…demonstrates the connection of the affect of anger to the perception of harm suffered. The affect manifests as a result of subjective injustice…” Thorsten W. D. Martini, *Facetten*, 141.
modern English favours the pairing “pain and suffering,” anger here assumes pride of place. In the honour economy of heroic epic, the connection between injury and the necessity of striking back makes the coupling a natural one.\textsuperscript{481} The relationship between the experience of pain and the expression of anger also explains the connection between the display of grief as a means to initiate or enable anger in allied persons.\textsuperscript{482}

It has already been observed that anger in Middle High German epic is an indication of hostility, and indeed, that this may seem to be the primary function of zorn in medieval narrative. As Jan-Dirk Müller has written, “zorn ist nicht Ursache, sondern Erscheinungsform des feindseligen Zustandes.”\textsuperscript{483} This is largely accurate, as are Müller’s revealing observations that zorn may indicate royal judgment and signify a damaged relationship, particularly between lord and vassal.\textsuperscript{484} Yet where Müller emphasizes the decoupling of affect and internalized feeling and, thereby, the coupling of attributed anger and action, he fails to sufficiently emphasize the inseparability of anger and judgment as essential elements of both the character and communicative value of zorn.

\textit{Zorn >is<} a state of hostility, but it is more than this, and more than merely the state appropriate to violent action. It indicates the intent or desire to strike as well as the belief that such a strike is warranted. This is the point in which action, intent, and emotion become blurred. In some of its more extreme expressions, as on the battlefield, many of the subtleties of anger may appear less obvious. In the \textit{Rolandslied}, where zorn colors so much of the battlefield action

\textsuperscript{481} Other instances of the pairing may be seen throughout the corpus. A few examples include the following: \textit{Alexanderlied}, 2050; \textit{Eneas}, 1739; \textit{Laurin}, 637; \textit{Virginal}, 531,1.

\textsuperscript{482} Returning to Stephen D. White and his observations regarding both historical practice and the \textit{chansons de geste}, we find that these sources too support the notion that “one way of making a man angry was to force him to take notice of he shameful injuries that he or his friends had suffered.” White, “Politics of Anger,” 148.

\textsuperscript{483} “zorn is not the cause, but rather the outward manifestation of a hostile situation,” Müller, \textit{Spielregeln}, 205.

\textsuperscript{484} Müller, \textit{Spielregeln}, 207.
dominating the narrative, this is the reactive anger of Roland when he responds “mit zorne” to the blows of King Zernubele upon his shield, and likewise the hostility of the heathen Margariz when he strikes at Olivir “mit nîde.” In the Nibelungenlied, it is the anger displayed by Hildebrant and Wolfhart in reaction to Volker’s insults, and it is the rage of Wate and Fruote when attacked by Hartmuot in Kudrun.

In such instances, anger is the emotion appropriate to the (re)action. Its display is not ritualized, though this does not mean that the presence of anger is not communicative beyond mere instinct. Anger characterizes the sword blows and lance thrusts as reactive to injury, but also imbues the performer with the affect of just action.

This is also true of less obvious instances. For instance, by way of illustration, Müller references Hagen’s attack on the priest in the Nibelungenlied, questioning why Hagen should be angry in attempting to push the priest under the water. For Müller, Hagen is angry not because he is reacting to anything in particular, but rather because “Hagens muot ist identisch mit dem, was alle an seiner Tat sehen können. Die Tat ‘ist’ zorn...” and commenting further that “Giselher dagegen reagiert auf das was er sieht [namely, Hagen attacking the priest].” Yet it is significant that in making his argument, Müller transposes the order of events: Hagen’s initial attack on the priest is not described as angry, rather it is only with Giselher’s “angry” reaction

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485 Konrad, Rolandslied, 5059.
486 Konrad, Rolandslied, 5067.
487 Nibelungenlied, 2273.
488 Kudrun, 1467-8.
489 “Hagen’s muot is identical to that, which all are able to see in his deed. The deed >is< zorn...” Müller, Spielregeln, 206.
490 “Hagen’s muot is identical to that, which all are able to see in his deed. The deed >is< zorn... Giselher, in contrast, reacts to that which he sees...” Müller, Spielregeln, 206.
that zorn is introduced.\textsuperscript{491} Hagen’s zornec mood is reactive both to the situation and, more importantly, to the judgment lain upon him by Giselher.

In such instances as these, when zorn manifests as the immediate reaction to injury and the relationship between the two parties is more or less clear, the important and intrinsic quality of judgment which accompanies and in many ways defines it may at times be obscured. Yet even on the battlefield, anger may be understood as the aspect of judge and executioner.

5.3. Anger and (the Loss of) Control

Some instances of anger, those tending toward excess, may seem to call into question the role of the display as calculated act within a system of status negotiation. Anger, as other emotions, may be both calculated and genuine, and both spontaneous and communicative. The conception of zorn as potentially overwhelming, as characterized by a lack of control, is in fact a large part what grants its display such power. Zorn, it turns out, may indeed be simultaneously cunning, communicative display and unrestrained explosion. The logic of anger, and the claims which underlie its expression, remain largely the same.

One example of such behaviour may be drawn from the Rolandslied. Early on in the narrative it is reported that Roland became enraged on the battlefield when his allies, Duke Naimes and the Bavarians, reach the city gates before him. Were he not held back from the deed, it is claimed that in his anger he would surely have slain his friends for the insult.\textsuperscript{492} This story is

\textsuperscript{491} Giselher der junge, zürnen erz began (Giselher the young began to be angry), \textit{NL}, 1576,3.
\textsuperscript{492} daz zurnete Ruolant, daz er die Beier vor ime vant, …

dar umbe wolt er si erslân,
related to Roland’s lord Karl by one of the hero’s rivals, and it is not intended to be a flattering portrayal. It may at first be tempting, then, to dismiss the details as exaggeration, if not outright slander. Yet Roland himself says nothing to contradict the account, and it is in fact wholly in keeping with his character.

As a warrior, Roland is naturally in competition with his peers for honour as scarce resource. When Duke Naimes and his Bavarians assume the forward position in advance of Roland, the paladin becomes enraged first because the men he believes to be his inferiors have presumed to advance into his rightful place. Such an action is understood either as a claim to superiority or a challenge to Roland’s claim. In reacting with anger and attempting to attack them, or at least expressing sufficient anger that such an attack is feared, Roland re-asserts his own status. He demonstrates his willingness to defend his position with force, an act which serves both the warrior’s immediate concerns and which may function as a warning to those who would challenge him in the future.

A more complicated and fully developed example of unrestrained anger and its underlying logic is to be found in the figure of Kudrun’s Wate, sometimes characterized as the only true berserker in the Norse mode to figure in Middle High German epic.493 In his outlines, Wate is not far removed from the Nibelungenlied’s Hagen. He is a trusted man and official of the court, a supremely loyal follower, and is accounted amongst the greatest of warriors. He is

\[
\text{wære ez nicht undervaren.}
\]
\[
\text{die getorsten ime wole gestaten,}
\]
\[
\text{die Beire wären sine gaten.}
\]

(It angered Roland that he found the Bavarians before him… He would have slain them over this, were it not prevented. They dared to stand up to him, the Bavarians were his equals.” Konrad, Rolandslied, 1111-27)

493 In the words of Ian Campbell, Wate’s characteristics are those of “an archetypical Nordic berserk.” Ian R. Campbell, Kudrun, 23.
uncomfortable in the presence of women, and his enduring attributes are age and grimness of character. Amongst the venerable man’s first actions in the poem is to become angry at the notion that two of his peers have put his name forward for a mission which is likely to result in his death. Yet it is in the storming of the Norman fortress near the poem’s climax that Wate’s anger comes fully into view. Here, when the Hegeling army is informed that the kidnapped Kudrun has been forced to wash the Norman laundry, Wate’s anger offers a stark contrast to the tears of his comrades:

Dô weinten alle mâge, die man dâ gesach.
Wate der vil alte zornicliche sprach:
"ir gebâret alle wîben vil gelîche,
ir enwizzet warumbe. já stêt ez helden niht lobelîche."
(Then all their kin to be seen there wept. Aged Wate spoke angrily: “You all behave much like women, you don’t know the reason – indeed, it ill befits heroes.” Kudrun, 1342)

This anger, so closely bound to the warrior’s enthusiasm for battle, continues when Wate charges into battle and “angrily” attacks the Norman prince Hartmuot. The uncontrolled, problematic nature of Wate’s zorn becomes apparent when, at Kudrun’s urging, his ally Herwic counsels that the old Warrior exercise restraint. Wate refuses to hold back, and when Herwic physically intervenes, Wate strikes at his own ally:

Wate sprach mit zorne: »her Herwîc, nu gêt hin!
solte ich nu frouwen volgen, war tête ich mînen sin?
solte ich sparn die vinde, daz tête ich ûf mich selben.
des volge ich iu nimmer. Hartmuot muoz sîner frevele engelden.«

Durch Kûdrûnen liebe zuo in beiden spranc
Herwîc der küene. der swerte vil erklane.

494 Wate sprach mit zorne: "swer dir daz hât geseit, / ob ich hiute sturbe, daz waere im niht ze leit,(Wate spoke with anger: “whoever told you that would not be bothered if I should die today, Kudrun, 242,1-2).

495 Kudrun, 1468,1.
Wate was erzürnet; er kunde daz wol leiden,
daz in strîte niemen in von sinen vinden torste scheiden.
Dô sluog er Herwîgen einen tiuren slac,
der dâ wolte scheiden, daz er vor im lac.
dar sprungen sine recken und hulfen im von dannen.
genomen wart dô Hartmuot vor Herwîge und vor allen sinen mannen.

(Wate spoke with anger: “Lord Herwic, get out of the way! What sense is there in it, that I should follow women? If I should spare the enemy, I would do myself harm. In this I shall never follow you, Hartmuot must pay for his crimes. For the love of Kudrun, bold Herwic sprang at the pair of them. Their swords rang. Wate was enraged: he could not suffer anyone to separate him from his foe in battle. Then he struck a costly blow against Herwic, who wished to separate him from his enemy, so that he lay before him. His warriors sprang up and helped him away. Hartmuot was captured before Herwic and all his men. *Kudrun*, 1491-3)⁴⁹⁶

Following this, Wate proceeds to begin a slaughter of the fortress’ inhabitants, storming from room to room until he at last locates Gërlint and the other maidens. *Zorn* appears repeatedly and prominently as the grim hero executes first the Norman queen, and then a Hegeling maiden who took a Norman lover in order to escape degradation: “Wate in sinem zorne dô dar nähr gie” (Wate in his anger then approached, 1520,2); “Er zurte harte sere, des wurden si gewar” (He burned with great anger, of this they were aware, 1521,1); “sîn zürnen was gar swaere; er sluoc der küniginne ab daz houbet” (His raging was extremely great; he struck off the queen’s head, 1523,4). This action receives neither sanction nor condemnation from the tale’s narrator. What comment there is regarding Wate’s actions comes from his own allies within the tale itself. First,

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⁴⁹⁶ Thorsten Martini reads this passage and that following as evidence for the manner in which the *Kudrun* narrative places the value systems of its characters (old versus young, heroic versus courtly) into opposition (*Facetten*, 332-5). On this same point, Kerstin Schmitt notes that the courtly Herwic cannot compete with the heroic Wate on the battlefield, and that this is one of several instances in which “als Inkarnation des heroischen Helden bildet [Wate] den maßgeblichen Orientierungspunkt, um den sich die anderen männlichen Figuren in nuancierten Abweichungen gruppieren” (as the incarnation of the heroic hero [Wate] provides the essential orientation point around which the other masculine characters group themselves in nuanced variations, Kerstin Schmitt, “Alte Kämpen – junge Ritter. Heroische Männlichkeitstwürfe in der ‘Kudrun’ in 7. Pöchlarner Heldenliedgespräch: Mittelhochdeutsche Heldendichtung ausserhalb des Nibelungen- und Dietrichkreises (Kudrun, Ortnit, Waltharius, Wolfdietriche) ed. Klaus Zatloukal [Wien: Fassbaender, 2003], 209). Note that elsewhere, Schmitt has cautioned against taking this too far, noting that the killing of Ludewic disqualifies Herwic as a truly courtly knight. Schmitt, *Poetik*, 258.
there is Kudrun, who asks Herwic to intervene on Hartmuot’s behalf, to Wate’s great disdain. Subsequently, after Wate has attacked Herwic and moves on to the infants in their cribs, he is again rebuked. This time it is Irolt who speaks against him, protesting that the Norman children had no part in the actions of their relatives, and should consequently be spared. Wate’s response reveals that neither his actions nor the mood in which they have been undertaken are unconsidered.

Dô sprach Wate der alte: »du hast kindes muot.
Die in der wiegen weinent, diuhte dich daz guot,
Daz ich si leben lieze? Solten die erwahsen,
Sô wolte ich in niht mère getrouwen danne einem wilden sahsen. «
(Then Wate the old said: “You have the disposition of a child. Do you think I ought to let those who cry in the cribs live? Should they grow up, I would trust them no more than a wild Saxon.” Kudrun, 1503)

Wate’s zorn and the violence accompanying it appear at once reasoned and out of control. Wate’s own words here explain much. In response to a criticism that Wate regards as naïve, the grim warrior calls Irolt’s attention to the infant’s tears, highlighting the connection between grief and vengeance. In Wate’s view, it is a certainty that the tears which the babies now weep would in time lead to violence against the Hegelings. In his defense, it is worth recalling that Wate’s prediction reflect precisely the situation in which the Hegelings found themselves: with the older generation wiped out by the Normans, Hilde and the leaders of the sippe were forced to wait until the children of the slain grew old enough to wield a sword. The slaughter of the Normans

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497 Kudrun, 1502.
498 Wate’s reasoning here, which Brian Murdoch describes as simple “pragmatism” (Brian Murdoch, The Germanic Hero: Politics and Pragmatism in Early Medieval Poetry [London: Hambledon Press,1996], 170) calls to mind the statement of Paul R. Hyams that in medieval Europe, “[p]otential avengers must often have been tempted to exceed the mean and pursue absolute vengeance, in order to preclude the risk of future retribution from the other side. This is the micropolitical equivalent of genocide, to kill the whole of the enemy’s family and thus leave nobody qualified to seek vengeance… Whether it actually occurred and whether it could be considered vengeance, legitimate or otherwise, may be debateable.” Paul R. Hyams, “Neither Unnatural nor Wholly Negative: The Future of Medieval Vengeance” in Vengeance in the Middle Ages: Emotion, Religion and Feud, ed. Susanna A. Throop and Paul R. Hyams (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 209. The recognition that the warrior’s actions reflect historical pragmatism and
that is taking place even as Irolt and Wate argue is the fruit of the Hegeling tears wept by their fathers’ graves on the Wülpensant.

Where Wate strikes at his allies who would hold him back, we might think of the old warrior’s introduction, in which he reveals himself to be keenly aware of status competition between himself and his closest allies. Wate’s anger, aggression, and seeming irrationality may be understood to provide the warrior with the same threat advantage accorded the unpredictable berserkers of Norse saga who he so closely resembles. His anger and seeming lack of control serve his own interests, and in the competition for honour, Wate’s unpredictability and limitless potential for violence and anger serve him well as individual in competition for the scarce resource of honour, even as his actions also serve to increase the advantage and security of his honour group.

This barely controlled yet calculated anger is much the same as that ascribed to the giants of König Rother, whose anger-as-violence represents an everpresent threat, well used by their clever lord in cultivating advantage over his adversaries. These giants, although subject to Rother’s will, seem from the start to be inherently angry. Their anger and the threat of violence hang about them at all times, even when chained. Yet despite the giants’ liminal status

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500 The connection between the giants of König Rother and Kudrun’s Wate goes beyond their overpowering violence and anger, and the possibility of a common origin or shared ancestry is suggested in part by the Dukus Horant narrative, closely related to both texts, in which one of the giants accompanying the protagonist is himself named ‘Wate.’

501 König Rother, 851.
between human and monster, their anger functions politically as the anger of a lord. It condemns and passes judgment, as when Asprian rages against Constantine’s treatment of his lord and of his lord’s messengers. Here the giant’s judgment and the threat of punishment cow Constantine into submission and prompt the ruler to feign drunkenness and apologize in the hopes of convincing the giant that his anger is “ane not.”

Elsewhere in König Rother as well, the expression of anger and the claim and exercise of status at the expense of another go hand in hand. Perhaps nowhere is this clearer than in the conflict between the giants and Duke Friedrich’s chamberlain over seating precedence in Constantine’s hall. Here, the chamberlain makes a counterclaim to the place of prominence that the giant Asprian has chosen for his lord. Reading the situation correctly, Asprian cautions the chamberlain against any display of anger, indicating clearly that any claim to superior status will be met with violence. This is precisely what results when the chamberlain falls into great anger, and Asprian responds in kind, bellowing like a bear. This barely contained anger on the part of the protagonist’s subordinates functions as an extension of the king’s power, and indeed, of his own judgment, but allows the ruler to avoid personally breaking with courtly convention. This, in turn, permits the narrative focus to remain on Rother’s list rather than his zorn.

502 Constantin zo ime sprach: / »herre, ir zornit ane not…« (Constantine said to him: “Lord, you are angry without cause…,” König Rother, 1015-6).

503 König Rother, 1627-37. As Evamaria Freienhofer has recently commented, in the first half of the narrative, “sobald die Sprache auf den Einsatz von Zorn und Gewalt kommt, fällt Rother quasi aus dem Text” (as soon as the speech shifts to the deployment of anger and violence, Rother seems to disappear from the text), Freienhofer, “Tabuisierung,” 98

504 König Rother, 1639; 1660.

In each of the preceding cases, it may be seen that even what may at first appear to be the least considered and most irrational displays of anger can at times be understood as significant performative actions in the service of important social and political functions. Zorn may rob the one feeling anger of his senses but this does not rob the display itself of sense or meaning.

This stands in contrast to some readings of “heroic” anger. Irmgard Gephart, for instance, has argued that while anger is the attribute that enables the warrior to enjoy individual success on the battlefield, this success comes at the cost of diminished social competence (and that leadership necessitates the control of anger with a corresponding reduction in martial ability). Such an evaluation may hold true for figures like the giants, or even for the paladin Roland and the hero Sivrit, yet, does not seem to adequately allow for figures like Wate and Hagen. For Wate and Hagen, knowledge of political affairs and their ability to read the language of gesture and emotion performance are as essential to their character and office as their zorn. Where such figures may be uncomfortable or have little time for the affairs of minne which so preoccupy more delicate heroes, we must understand them as supremely confident within heroic society, and may see that it is this very competence which brings them into conflict with their more courtly peers.

Anger may still be communicative and even performative without being controlled. Indeed, the loss of control, or the seeming loss of control may be a crucial aspect to anger’s

\[506\] Irmgard Gephart, “Der Zorn der Heroen. Heldenepische Formen der Wut im Nibelungenlied” in Das Mittelalter 14 no. 1 (2009): 41-9; 48-9. Regarding Roland, see the passage in which the hero is passed over as messenger because his lord Karl fears that his “angry words” might threaten the honour of those he addresses, Rolandslied, 1327-30.

communicative value. Anger, with its close relationship to violence, whether immediate and physical or eventual and psychic or social, has enormous power to awaken fear in its audience. If we follow Klaus Ridder in understanding fear in heroic epic as both a state and emotion inimical to the status of warrior and as the polar opposite of angry, we may appreciate in anger’s ability to generate fear the simultaneous ability to inflict harm on the status of others; to subordinate. In this, the close-knit relationships between anger, judgment, and status already begins to become clearer.

5.4. Anger and the Ruler

Anger is the prerogative of the ruler. The ruler’s position as social superior within the honour group means that, generally speaking, his right to pass judgment, his right to anger with his subordinates, is all but unquestioned. This is not to say that it is never problematic, but rather that outside very rare circumstances, it must be accepted by those targeted. The logic behind this, articulated by Richard E. Barton in reference to a French context but equally applicable to the German, was as follows: “if God, the ultimate source of authority in the universe, was known to

508 As Gerd Althoff has written: “Das scheinbar Unkontrollierte ist sehr zweckorientiert. Daher empfiehlt es sich wohl nicht, all die Drohungen, Provokationen und Beschimpfungen am Beginn mittelalterlicher Konflikte lediglich als unkontrollierte Gefühlsausbrüche unbeherrschter Krieger einzustufen, die sich in Stimmung brachten.” (The seemingly uncontrolled is extremely purposeful. It is therefore not advisable to categorize all the threats, provocations, and verbal abuse at the start of medieval conflicts as the uncontrolled emotional outbreaks of ungovernable warriors, which make themselves known.) “Empörung,” 272.

509 “In der Heldenepik begegnet als Leitemotion des von Krieg und Kampf erfüllten, herausgehobenen Menschen der anfallsartig auftretende Zorn. Die Kehrseite des Zorns ist die Angst, die jedoch als Befindlichkeit des Heroen nicht akzeptiert ist” (In heroic epic, paroxysmal anger appears as the primary emotion of those fulfilled by war and battle. The flipside of anger is fear, which is not accepted as an affect of the hero). Ridder, “Emotion und Reflexion,” 211.

510 Here again, the literatures of Medieval German and French vernaculars display marked similarities, particularly in relation to heroic epic and the chansons de geste. Following Stephen D. White: “Public displays of anger are almost always made by kings or other males whose noble status entitles them to express anger;” White, “The Politics of Anger,” 139.
have become righteously angry when his will was flouted, then kings and lords, also representing legitimate authority in the world, should have been able to grow righteously angry with those who flouted their will."

As observed by Gerd Althoff, in German lands during the twelfth century there emerged a marked tendency amongst chroniclers to emphasize the administration of justice and the role of just anger in praising rulers. The connection between anger and judgment is observable in the literature of this period as well. Anger frequently appears in connection with a ruler’s judgment, or impulse to judge. As example, one might look to König Rother, where Emperor Constantine’s words are troubled and his mood angry when he condemns Rother’s messengers to prison, ruing that he cannot immediately behead them all. Yet anger may also be the affect of a just rule, for it is explained in the same text Rother’s anger is feared by his immediate subordinates and his people alike. The Rolandslied, too, depicts an angry and just emperor sitting in judgment over his own loyal subjects, and, subsequently, the traitor Genelun.


513 König Rother, 324-43.

514 König Rother, 3272, 3305. Note that although his anger is feared, Rother’s anger itself makes but one appearance in the text, namely, after his bride is kidnapped. Evamaria Freienhofer breaks slightly with Althoff’s understanding
As with the duty to avenge, the duty to judge, to become angry, lies heavily upon the ruler, and rulers who fail in their anger may find themselves bereft of authority. As in so many facets of rulership, König Rother, and more specifically, the protagonist’s eastern foil Constantine, provide an instructive example. Here, following the conflict over seating precedence which erupts between Rother’s giant vassal, Witold, and the men of Constantine’s man, Duke Friedrich, Constantine’s princes turn to their sovereign for aid in avenging the insult inflicted on them. Despite the obvious and understandable expectations of his subjects, the emperor refuses to pursue the matter any further. This is to say, he refuses to become angry and pass judgment on Dietrich/Rother or his men. As the narrator reports: “Den zorn liez Constantin bestan.” The failure of the emperor to respond effectively to the disruption within his court, his willingness to leave off anger when anger is socially and politically demanded of him is at worst an act of overt cowardice, and at best a damning oversight. As Thomas Kerth has observed, it is at this moment that Constantine “forfeits his right to pass judgment on anyone who threatens [his vassals],” and consequently “forfeits his right to rule.”

Elsewhere, we find not only that judgment is angry, but that anger is actually synonymous with judgment. In such instances, anger stands in for judgment itself, and those who

of zorn and the ruler toward the end of the twelfth century, and argues that in this text, although power is expressed through anger, the ideal bearer of this anger is not the ruler himself, but a proxy under the ruler’s control. Freienhofer, “‘Tabuisierung,’” 103.

515 Rolandslied, 1154-60; 8771. In the latter case, note also the plea, immediately preceding this rage (see below).

516 König Rother, 1814.

seek relief from judgment beg for the stilling of their king’s anger.\textsuperscript{518} For a ruler, to pardon, and to cease being angry are one and the same.\textsuperscript{519} Similar equivalences between the release from anger and from judgment are to be found throughout the Middle High German epic corpus.

Anger does not need to be actualized as violence in order to achieve its aims as performative, yet, as the expression of anger may represent judgment, and as such, a claim to authority of one kind or another, anger without the >possibility< of actualization may indicate weakness or even tend toward the comic. The anger of Constantine in \textit{König Rother} consequently ceases to hold its power once a rival appears on the scene and publically demonstrates a lack of fear for the emperor’s anger. This effective denial of imperial authority carries the matter so far that Constantine’s own wife finds her husband’s rage a source of amusement.\textsuperscript{520} Anger in the absence of action only is reliant on its audience for its power.

Returning to the anger of the ruler with whom this chapter began, we unsurprisingly find in Otto one of the strongest representations of the angry ruler-judge. In \textit{Herzog Ernst B}, the emperor’s \textit{zorn} first manifests at that moment when Heinrich begins to convince his uncle of Ernst’s disloyal intent. Although initially resistant - Otto correctly believes that Ernst is being

\textsuperscript{518} See, for example, the plea on behalf of Genelun in Konrad’s \textit{Rolandslied}: ‘gestille, here, dinen zorn.’ Konrad, \textit{Rolandslied}, 8765.

\textsuperscript{519} Two examples among many others include Konrad von Würzburg’s \textit{Heinrich von Kempten}, where the emperor states: “ir sît unschuldic, hoere ich wol: / dâvon ich gerne lâzen sol / gegen iu den zorn mîn…” (“I hear well that you are innocent: therefore I will gladly abandon my anger against you,” Konrad von Würzburg, \textit{Heinrich von Kempten}, 720-3) and \textit{Kudrun}, where Queen Gerlint spares the titular heroine once the latter agrees to marry her son Hartmuot: Dô spach diu frouwe Gêrlint: \textit{vsö lieze ich mînen zorn…}, \textit{Kudrun}, 1286,1. This is in agreement with Victor Millet, who comments that \textit{zorn lâzen} is effectively the opposite of \textit{widersagen}. Victor Millet, “Zornige Helden?” in \textit{11. Pöchlaner Heldenliedgespräch: Mittelalterliche Heldenpik, Literatur der Leidenschaften}, ed. Johannes Keller, Florian Kragl (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2011), 144.

\textsuperscript{520} Die kunincgine sach gerne den zorn, daz der lewe was virloren.
sie lachete Constantine an.

(The queen saw the anger over the lion’s death gladly. She laughed at Constantine. \textit{König Rother}, 1172-4).
maligned through hostility and unseemly hatred — the emperor is finally brought around by two points of Heinrich’s argument. The first is the threat which Ernst poses to Otto’s honour, and the second is the grief which Heinrich expresses both for his own sorry state and at the prospect of Otto’s diminishment. It is the pairing of the two that finally overwhelms the monarch, and it is said:

Als der keiser daz vernam,
dô wart er im von herzen gram
durch diu lügenlichen maere.
er wände daz ez alsô waere
als im sin neve sagte.
vil übel ez im behagte
und wart vil trûric gemuot.
"nu lôn dir got, helt guot,
daz du besorgest mine nôt.
…"
Der kûnic zornen began.

(When the emperor heard that, then he became angry in his heart through the false tales. He believed that it was as his nephew told him, much evil befell him as a result, and his mood became very sad. “God reward you, good hero, that you should worry about my need…” The king began to rage. HEB, 797-813)

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521 ez ist durch nit âf in geleit / und durch vil ungefügen haz. HEB, 722-3.
522 Schiewer identifies the “unkontrollierten Zugang zum Ohr des Herrschers” (uncontrolled access to the ruler’s ear) as a key problem in the constellation of alliances and social bonds presented by the Herzog Ernst narrative. Schiewer, “Herzog Ernst und Graf Wetzel,” 279.
523 “wan solde iu, herre, missegân / an libe und an êre, / daz überwunde ich nimmer mêre,” (“should it damage your life and honour, lord, I would never get over it,” HEB, 766-9); “ir wizzet daz ir iuch beroubet / des libes und der êre” (“you know that you rob yourself of life and honour,” HEB, 782-3); “nu sult ir, keiser hêre, …iuwer êre bewarn…” (now, lord emperor, you must guard your honour,” HEB, 784-6). Note here that Martini also considers the threat to Otto’s êre is a crucial component both of Heinrich’s case and his suggested solution. See Martini, Facetten, 142f.
524 “Owê mir vil armen, / daz müeze got erbarmen” (“Alas, poor me, God must take pity,” HEB, 749-50); “ez gêt mir an daz herze mín” (“it strikes my heart,” HEB, 780).
Here again we start with the pairing of anger\textsuperscript{525} and grief,\textsuperscript{526} and which of the two is primary and which is secondary, if indeed the two are to be ranked at all in such a fashion, cannot be said with certainty. After having been awakened by Heinrich’s grief display, Otto’s anger condemns Ernst and comes in the context of seeking punishment and reprisal:

\begin{verbatim}
ez enwende mir der töt,
er wirt darumbe unfrö.
er enhet sich nie só hô
ich getribe ez wol wider
und gesetze in alsô nider
daz ich vor im in mínem riche
wol genese frideliche.
\end{verbatim}

(“Should death not prevent me, he shall not be glad of this. He will never raise himself so high that I cannot drive him thence and reduce him to such a state that I enjoy peace in my empire.” Herzog Ernst B, 806-12)

If Heinrich’s words are true, Otto must become angry, and must act against him. As Martini has correctly commented: “Ist Heinrich glaubhaft in seiner Lügenoffensive und kann er den Kaiser von der Bedrohung überzeugen, so muss dieser – zwangsläufig – mit Zorn als Korrektiv von Missständen und Medium herrscherlichen Behauptungswillens reagieren.”\textsuperscript{527}

\section*{5.5. Anger as Judgment}

Among the best illustrations of the close connection between rulership, judgment, and anger may be found in the \textit{Rolandslied}, where the emperor Karl holds counsel with his warriors. When these fall to squabbling, it is written:

\textsuperscript{525} \textit{gram} (indicating hostile feeling), \textit{HEB}, 798.
\textsuperscript{526} \textit{trûric gemuot}, \textit{HEB}, 803.
\textsuperscript{527} “If Heinrich is to be believed in his dishonest offensive, and if he can convince the emperor of the threat, then Otto must – per force – react with anger as the corrective of grievances and the medium of lordly assertion.” Martini, \textit{Facetten}, 142.
Der keiser zurnte harte.
mit gestreichtem barte,
mit ûf gewunden granen
hiez er die phacht vüre tragen.
‘ir stet mit unzüchten.
daz wil ich’, sprach er, ‘richten,
wirdet ez iuweht mêre.’

(The emperor became very angry. Stroking his beard and winding his whiskers, he commanded that the law be brought forth. “You are behaving improperly,” he said, “I will correct that if it continues.” Rolandslied, 1154-1160).

Here, Karl’s anger, the presence of the law, and his words all communicate judgment and power, both singly and in tandem.\textsuperscript{529}

Anger, all anger, is connected to judgment. In the same moment that anger expresses the desire to strike back in response to injure, it assigns a target for that strike. While this is especially true of heroic anger in Middle High German narrative, it forms a crucial component of anger in many other contexts as well. As Robert Solomon, following Aristotle, has noted, anger “is essentially a \textit{judgmental} emotion, a perception of an offence,” and consequently, that “[g]etting angry is an indictment (whether overtly or not).”\textsuperscript{530}

Again and again the Herzog Ernst B narrative sees the expression of anger bound up with the passing of judgment and the desire for or enactment of punishment. Adelheit recognizes this when she describes Otto’s divestment of her son’s lands as an act undertaken “durch dînen

\textsuperscript{528} Note here that the verb \textit{rihten}, to judge, carries legal weight and follows from the presence of the law.

\textsuperscript{529} The mention of Karl’s beard and the twirling of his whiskers, as it were, serve as a corporeal expression of his anger. This is true whether one sees the gesture as a direct expression of that anger, or, following Evamaria Heisler, understands the action as sign of the emperor’s willpower, his command over his own emotions, in as much as the ruler does \textit{not} fly into a rage. Evamaria Heisler, “Christusähnlicher Karl. Die Darstellung von Zorn und Trauer des Herrschers in der ‘Chanson der Roland’ und im ‘Rolandslied.’ Das Mittelalter 14 no. 1 (2009): 67-79; 78.

Ernst’s mother sees clearly that Otto’s zorn is indeed an imperial anger, which carries the same political weight as might be attributed to a judicial procedure. When Otto defends his actions to his wife and speaks angrily, he passes judgment upon her as well: “dar umbe ensult ir mich niht biten.”

The same pattern repeats when Ernst’s peers plead his case before the emperor, and here the quasi-juridical force of the emperor’s anger as condemnation becomes even clearer. The extraordinary manner in which the princes approach Otto speaks strongly of ritual. The princes first take mass, and then present themselves before the emperor, where they fall at his feet and plead for mercy toward the duke. Anxious that they too may be condemned, the princes ask from the outset that the emperor allow them to present their plea and to listen âne zorn (without anger, HEB, 1113). When Otto does indeed respond in anger, he spells out the condemnation from which it is inseparable. Immediately responding in a rage, Otto castigates the assembled

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531 “Through your [i.e. Otto’s] anger,” HEB 978.
532 Martini here sees in Otto’s zorn a manifestation not only of imperial anger, but of a paternal anger brought down upon the head of the son (Facetten, 144). This may well be true. In each case, the principle is the same, for as the father exercises much the same authority over his household that the king or emperor exercises over his kingdom and empire.
533 in grimme zorneclîche, HEB, 998
534 “you should not ask me for this,” HEB 1000.
535 ir bete sie an viengen, / daz se im vielen zuo den füezen (they began their plea, such that they fell at his feet, HEB, 1108-9).
537 dô sprach der künic alzehant / in zorne unsiteclîche, (then the king immediately spoke in unseemly anger, HEB, 1158-9).
princes for pleading improperly, and further informs them that anyone who loves the empire and wishes to maintain his friendship should leave off any such requests:

swer mich und daz rîche minnet,
der sol mich dirre bete erlân,
welle er mich ze friunde hân.

(“whoever loves me and the empire should spare me such a plea if he wishes to have me as a friend,” HEB, 1164-6)

Here and elsewhere, the language of punishment and retaliation go hand in hand with the expression of anger – “sol ich leben, ez wirt im leit” (“If I should live, it will cause him suffering,” HEB, 1170). As discussed in the previous chapter, the passage describes a highly problematic engagement with the princes, indicative of fundamental flaws within the government of the Reich. Otto does not respond to the grief expression of the princes (their plea and Fußfall) with sympathetic grief, but rather breaks with them through the expression of anger, labeling their request an offense. In so doing, Otto suggests the withdrawal of status and favour from the princes, he implies, by his failure to respond sympathetically to their emotion performance, that not only the lines of communication, but the bonds of honour may be broken between them. The threat is immediately effective: “Die fürsten ûf hôher muosen stân / und die bête durch vorhte lân” (The princes had to stand up and leave off their plea for fear, HEB, 1177-8).

Ernst’s own zorn only appears at the moment when at last all his entreaties have been rejected and the duke feels himself so wronged that he must break with, indeed, must kill, his lord and father in order to achieve justice. This is his judgment. Before launching upon the attempted assassination, before gaining the attribute zornec, Ernst makes a speech justifying the action he is about to undertake. Ernst and his followers suffer despite having done the empire no

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538 “ir bitet unbetelîche,” HEB, 1160.
wrong, and until this moment, the emperor’s injury was the duke’s own. Yet this has now changed, and Ernst must himself seek the emperor’s injury. Despite his innocence, Ernst stands under the judgment, the zorn, of the emperor, and it is an anger which Otto maintains without justification or mercy. It is only after the pronouncement of this injustice that Ernst rides to Speyer and springs in anger before the emperor’s door with sword in hand. The approval of Ernst’s plans by two of his own men is significant for the legitimation of his actions, though the legal validity does not extend beyond the community of the duke’s own honour group (in this moment represented only by Ernst and his two companions, but later, perhaps by default, confirmed by all those who fight alongside him). Equally significant is the fact that, although Ernst’s plan has been green-lit by his followers, the poem’s audience receives no advance notice of precisely what Ernst’s plan entails, namely, the assassination of both the emperor, and of Count Heinrich. As a result, Ernst’s attempted assassination occupies something of a middle ground between individual and collective action.

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540 HEB, 1200-25.
541 der herzoge balde hin spranc / in zorne für des riches tür, (the duke sprang swiftly in anger before the imperial door, HEB, 1268-9)
542 What exactly Ernst tells his men is unclear, as is the extent to which the decision is Ernst’s alone:

dô sie kâmen über Rîn,
dô sagete er den gesellen sîn
beide willen unde muot.
dô dûhte sie der rât guot
den er erfunden hâte.
(When they came across the Rhine, he told his companions both his mind and his desire, and they thought the plan he had invented good. HEB, 1253-7)

I read this to indicate first that Ernst shared the full details of his plan, which is to say, that he is riding to Speyer with the intention of killing Otto and Heinrich, and second, that the approval of his men (even if only a limited subsection of them) is crucial to the action which subsequently unfolds. In contrast, Markus Stock here suggests: “Die Tatsache, daß sich Ernst über diesen Schritt nicht mit seinen Ratgebern, auch nicht mit Wetzel, berät, könnte
5.6. Collective Anger

Expressions of collective anger on the battlefield are in some ways strikingly similar to individual expressions. Even when the immediacy of the blow is lacking, the retaliatory nature of anger persists. The above-mentioned anger of the Christians in their attack on the Heathens as described in the *Rolandslied* provides us with an example.\(^5\) Where earlier Christians have been described as joyful in the face of battle,\(^6\) here their anger speaks not to pleasure in the prospect of slaughter, but to their drive to avenge the injury inflicted on their honour group by the death of Roland and his men. That collective anger follows the same pattern as individual anger in representing the reactive vengeance drive may also be seen in the rage of the Burgundians in the *Nibelungenlied*, whose anger arises from Kriemhilt’s betrayal and the slaughter of their squires,\(^7\) and likewise in *Kudrun* as Wate’s men react in fury to the death of King Hetel.\(^8\) In

\(^5\) Dô náchte in der Kaiser.
Die haiden wâren in vraisen.
Christen mit zorne
Bestuonten si dâ vorne.
(When the emperor approached them, the heathens were terrified. The Christians with anger attacked those before them. Konrad, *Rolandslied*, 7056-9).

\(^6\) Jâ ne kan iu nieman gesagen / wie grôz fröude unter den christen was. (Indeed, no one can tell you what great joy there was amongst the Christians, Konrad, *Rolandslied*, 3988-9).

\(^7\) Anger is here ascribed to the Burgundians by Dietrich, who doubts his ability to protect Kriemhilt in the face of such anger:

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Wie sol ich iu gehelfen",     sprach her Dietrich,
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each case, collective anger is preceded by collective injury, and the anger accompanies the desire to make good the damage.

Individual and collective expressions of anger on the battlefield share their reactive character, they are indicative of judgment and readiness to punish. One point on which they may differ is their relationship to grief as a precursor to anger. An individual may or may not display grief before transitioning to anger. The display of grief is only necessary when the experience of injury and the need to seek vengeance require justification and legitimization, whether from the audience of the narrative or from the character’s allies within the narrative.

This arises because anger as both judgment and hostile intent is reactive: it requires an injury to which it reacts. The display of anger can itself function as injury, but it does not create the experience of shared injury that the expression of grief is capable of generating. As a result, when a ruler addresses his or her own honour group with anger, the reaction is likely to be fear or submission, rather than sympathetic anger. This differs from grief, which is communicative and may be transformed into anger. The generation of anger is a process. When collective anger occurs spontaneously, without a grief display, the ties binding the honour group together may be assumed to be tightly knit indeed.

Ez sint só sere erzûrnet die Guntheres man,
Daz ich an disen zîten gefrîden niemen enkan.”
(“How shall I help you, noble queen,” said Sir Dietrich, “I am concerned for myself! Gunther’s men are so greatly enraged that I cannot protect anyone at this time,” NL, 1984).

Shortly thereafter, Dietrich again describes the queen’s brothers and their warriors as “bitterlich erzûrnet” (bitterly enraged, NL, 1986,3).

546 Kudrun, 882.
Returning to *Herzog Ernst B*, we find a crucial passage following Ernst’s attempted assassination of the emperor. The assassination attempt, and the death of his nephew Heinrich, has effectively inverted the established order of the Reich, for the duke has not only bodily attacked his lord, in so doing, he has presumed to pronounce judgment upon the emperor. That such an act should itself bring forth anger in response is wholly unsurprising. Before an audience of the assembled princes, Otto again expresses an extreme emotion, though this time, as discussed previously, he prefaces his anger with grief and the princes are easily convinced to join their lord in passing judgment upon their ostensible peer. The progression from grief and injury to righteous anger is the appropriate pattern for establishing a legitimate feud, and may be understood both as a tactic chosen by the emperor (and here effectively employed) and as “right order” which arises from the existence of a legitimate grievance – in contrast to his earlier anger-without-grief, Otto has genuinely been injured and the honour of the empire impugned. When Otto tells his followers to become angry,\(^{547}\) the princes are immediately moved, and pass their own judgment in accordance with the sentiments of their lord:

\begin{verbatim}
dô verteilten si zehant
dô sie in muosen vêhen,
beide eigen unde lêhen,
dar zuo gar sîn erbe.
“swie man in verderbe,
des habet ir, here, michel reht,”
sprach dâ vil manic kneht.
“er hât verdienet wol die nôt.”
(Then they had to make war upon him, to share out his possessions, his fiefs, and indeed his inheritance. “However one harms him, Lord, in this you are entirely just,” said a great many of the men there, “he has well deserved suffering from you.” *HEB*, 1418-25)
\end{verbatim}

\(^{547}\) “lât iu wesen zorn,” *HEB*, 1414.
Through the ruler’s grief, the perception of injury is communicated to his followers, who subsequently do indeed become angry and in so doing simultaneously pass judgment upon Ernst and legitimize the sentence already levied on the duke by their lord, Otto.\footnote{Martini’s reading of this scene here stands quite close to my own. He comments: “Zorn fungiert in der anfänglichen Aufforderung an die Fürsten als Signal für die Sanktionsbereitschaft sowie als Stimmung, durch die eine Bestrafung möglich wird. Mit dem Appell, sich quasi in Zorn versetzen zu lassen, wird gleichzeitig eine gemeinsame Haltung erzeugt, die militärische Maßnahmen mobilisiert.” (Anger functions in the initial prompt to the princes as a signal for the readiness to sanction and the agreement through which punishment is made possible. With the appeal for the princes to effectively make themselves angry, a collective attitude is simultaneously generated, mobilizing military measures [against Ernst]… \textit{Facetten}, 151).}

Thorsten Martini attributes the princes’ response to the manner in which Otto conflates the assassination attempt with an attack on the princes as the central power-base of the empire. While this is certainly a substantial factor, it overlooks the significance of Otto’s expression of grief and the emphasis on his injuries. That which moves the princes to anger, and thereby to both legitimation of and participation in Otto’s violence, is a complex cluster of processes, whereby the emperor simultaneously establishes and requests confirmation of the bounds of his own honour group – including the princes but excluding Ernst -, details the injury which has been inflicted collectively on that honour group by the attack on his person and the murder of one of its members, seeks the legitimation of his planned action, and demands a commitment from the princes to participate in that planned action. The primary means through which Otto is represented as accomplishing this is through the call-and-response of emotion display. The expression of common anger requires the perception of common injury, frequently established within an honour group through a display of contagious grief. When it appears, through the indication of shared judgment, it indicates a common hostility and desire or demand for retribution.
5.7.  Anger and Status

It has been remarked by Richard Barton, in relation to contemporary French literature and historical chronicles, “that anger was an acceptable and viable method by which aristocrats signaled their displeasure with existing social and hierarchical relationships, that expressions of anger by lords who felt their authority to be challenged should be connected to the theological concept of zealous anger, and that such anger usually commenced a process by which these relationships were reconceived.”549 In Middle High German literature the display of emotion is also essential to the interactions of nobles, and anger, as a result of its connotations of judgment and status, is a primary means of both initiating and pursuing the negotiation of status within the political and social hierarchy.

Let us return momentarily to the Rolandslied episode wherein Roland is reported to have become enraged at his Bavarian allies and their leader when they excel him on the battlefield, reaching the city gates before he himself does. As a warrior, Roland is naturally in competition with his peers for honour as scarce resource. When Duke Naimes and his Bavarians assume the forward position in advance of Roland, the paladin becomes enraged first because the men he believes to be his inferiors have presumed to advance into his rightful place. Such an action is understood either as a claim to superiority or a challenge to Roland’s claim. In reacting with anger and attempting to attack them, or at least expressing sufficient anger that such an attack is feared, Roland re-asserts his own status. He demonstrates his willingness to defend his position with force, an act which serves both the warrior’s immediate concerns and which may function as a warning to those who would challenge him in the future. The injury that has been inflicted

549 Barton, “‘Zealous Anger’,” 166-7.
on him is the presumption of a rival in excelling him. If one of Roland’s rivals should succeed, it must per force rob Roland himself of honour or potential honour.

Again and again, in tale after tale, anger and status concerns appear together. This occurs both because of the extreme sensitivity to honour and status concerns already discussed, resulting in a plethora of perceived honour injuries driving the need to lash out in retaliation, and because of anger’s ability to express a status claim by its mere expression.

The connection between anger and the integrity, as well as the negotiation of status is amply apparent in the famous quarrel of the queens that lies near the heart of the Nibelungenlied. Here, zorn makes its first explicit appearance when the irreconcilable status claims of the two queens have been made clear, and Prünhilt refuses to back down from her belief that Sivrit is her bondsman. It is at this moment that Kriemhilt “vil sere zünen began,” stating “er ist tiwerr danne si / Gunther mîn bruoder, der vil edel man.” Kriemhilt’s anger here corresponds precisely with her words: it is she who occupies the superior rank by virtue of her marriage to the superior man. Prünhilt’s counter-claim that Sivrit is a mere bondsman registers as an insult and a threat to Kriemhilt’s perceived status. Kriemhilt’s anger is therefore a reflection of her drive to strike back in response to this insult, and serves as an indictment of Prünhilt for daring to rise against her. Prünhilt’s immediate response – “Du ziuhest dich ze hôhe” reveals that the Icelandic queen understands precisely what her rival’s anger is attempting to communicate.

550 See above, 97-8.
551 [she] began to be very angry… [she said] “he is more worthy than is my brother Gunther, the very noble man.” NL, 823,4; 824,203.
552 “You raise yourself too high,” NL, 826,1.
553 Ehrismann has suggested that the manifestation of anger here is not strategic, but rather purely emotional. Ehrismann, Nibelungenlied, 96. Here, as elsewhere, I see no inherent contradiction between the two.

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In the Nibelungenlied, the connection between anger and the negotiation of status also obtains between men. This is demonstrated, for example, by Sivrit’s first contact with the Burgundians. The hero’s claim to superior status, and his proclaimed intent to rule in Worms, quickly gives rise to anger amongst his would-be hosts. The Burgundian reluctance to acknowledge his claims in turn angers Sivrit, who takes offense at the very notion of challenge, and especially that anyone other than a king should presume to speak against him:

Daz zurnde harte sere  der helt von Niderlant.
Er sprach: “sich sol vermezzen     niht wider mich din hant.
Ich bin ein künec riche,     só bistu küneges man.
(That greatly angered the hero from the Netherlands. He said: “Do not presume to raise your hand against me. I am a mighty king, as you are a king’s man.” NL, 118,1-3)

Here, the expression of anger on both sides results both from and in a status claim. The discrepancy between the two positions inevitably threatens the honour of both parties, and the threat of violence looms large.

In Herzog Ernst B as well, we see from the first appearance of zorn that the emotion is closely bound to êre, and consequently to status and personal (political) integrity as well:

do gedâhte er waz er sagete,
dâ mite er imz gewande
und in alsô geschande,

554 dô wart in zûrnen bekant (then anger was known to them, NL, 111,4). Cf. Will Hasty, Art of Arms: Studies of Aggression and Dominance in Medieval German Court Poetry (Heidelberg: Winter, 2002), 104-6. Hasty ties Sivrit’s intent to rule and his desire for Kriemhilt as dual aspects of his conquest of Burgundian territory.

555 An alternate reading of this sequence, in which the conflict between Sivrit and the Burgundians is attributed not to status competition, but to two fundamentally conflicting modes of expression (heroic/courtly) is suggested by Albrecht Classen, who views this episode as an early manifestation of a progressive breakdown in communication that ultimate dooms all of the poem’s characters. Albrecht Classen, “What could the Burgundians have done to avoid the Catastrophe? The Breakdown of the Communicative Community in the Nibelungenlied,” Neophilologus 85 (2001): 563-587; 572. Will Hasty, in contrast, suggests that the necessity of determining the relative status of not only Sivrit and Gunther, but of Xanten and Worms, would have been foremost in the minds of the poem’s audience from the very moment of their introduction. Will Hasty, “From Battlefields to Bedchambers: Conquest in the Nibelungenlied” in A Companion to the Nibelungenlied, ed. Winder McConnell, (Rochester: Camden House, 1998), 81.
daz er im von herzen wurde gram,
wan man in ze hove niht vernam
só wol alse dó vorn:
daz was im leit unde zorn
unde muote in und die sîne.

(Then he thought on what he might say by which he might turn the emperor against [Ernst] and thereby disgrace him, so that [Otto] would be hostile to him in his heart, because [Heinrich] was not received at court so well as he had once been: that caused him suffering and anger and distressed both himself and his followers. *HEB, 662-9*)

Although Heinrich’s treachery is attributed to the devil’s influence,\(^{556}\) the diminished recognition accorded the Pfalzgraf by Otto, who is both his uncle and lord, suggests reasonable cause for distress absent supernatural intervention. It is notable that the poem does not speak of any formal withdrawal of favour, still less of office.\(^{557}\) Heinrich remains the Count Palatine of the Rhine (however often the emperor smiles upon his step-son). The insult to the count occurs when the rituals by which his status is confirmed, namely, the proper reception at court, cease to be performed with as much diligence as they had previously. That Heinrich should regard this change as significant is not unreasonable, for his followers are also troubled.\(^{558}\)

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\(^{556}\) *HEB, 650.*

\(^{557}\) Regarding the considerable importance of *Huld* (>favour<) in *Herzog Ernst B*, see Kai Peter Ebel, “Huld.” In a reading not inimical to the present one, Ebel characterizes the competitive political environment of *Herzog Ernst B* as a hierarchical structure whose fundamental element is not *ère*, but rather *Huld*, the favour of the ruler. The ruler’s *Huld* becomes the determinant of power and status by virtue of enabling proximity to the person of the ruler. When *Huld* is unjustly withdrawn, the mechanisms of order and conflict prevention are crippled, making crisis all but inevitable: “Die politische Einflußnahme hängt davon ab, ob man beim Herrscher Gehör findet” (Political influence is dependent upon whether one can gain the ruler’s ear, Ebel, “Huld,” 193.)

\(^{558}\) “…muote in und die sîne” (…distressed him and his followers, *HEB, 669*). The considerable significance of Heinrich’s people on the situation has also been observed by Martini, who writes: “Die politische Bedeutung von Heinrichs Zorn dokumentiert sich dabei darin, dass mit ihm auch dessen Gefolgsleute von der Degradiierung betroffen sind… Heinrich, vor seinen Leuten wiederum in der Position hierarchischer Superiorität, ist geradezu aufgefordert, sich und seinem Gefolge eine bessere Position zu verschaffen.” (The political meaning of Heinrich’s anger is manifest in the fact that his followers are also touched by his degradation… Heinrich, in the position of hierarchical superiority, is directly called upon to procure a better position for himself and his following. Martini, *Facetten*, 141). Cf. Schiewer, “Die Erosion seines Einflusses bei Otto geht auch einher mit materiellen Nachteilen und betrifft nicht nur seine Person, sondern auch seine Klientel… das heißt er ist nicht nur selbst, sondern auch als Patron betroffen, der die Erwartungen seiner Klienten nicht mehr erfüllen kann” (The erosion of his influence with Otto is accompanied by material disadvantages and touches not only his person, but also his clients… that is to say
the same honour group, especially those who stand subservient to the Pfalzgraf, any diminishment of the group’s leader is a diminishment of both the honour of the group as a whole and of the honour of each individual member. As is so often the case, this diminishment does not require a direct contradiction or a withdrawal of status. The refusal to recognize the status claims of the group’s leader are sufficient to render those claims invalid.

### 5.8. Gender and Anger

Both males and females display anger in Middle High German epic. Like grief, both the experience and visual manifestation of the emotion are common to both sexes, and are intimately tied to the perception of injury and the processes of dispute. If fewer instances in which the violent actions of women are described as angry or performed in a rage, this is less to do with a differing character or social role ascribed to feminine anger than with the general prohibition against female violence which obtains in heroic culture. When women do engage in violence or otherwise aggressive activity, their actions and demeanors are as likely as those of male warriors to be characterized as angry, and anger remains synonymous with the vengeance drive. Thus, in the *Nibelungenlied*, after Prünhilt has been struck by the spear in her contest against Sivrit and Gunther, we are told “zornec was ir muot.” Likewise, when the queen has been defeated by Gunther, she blushes red with anger. In both instances, Prünhilt suffers an injury and desires to strike back at Gunther. In the first instance, the anger informs her subsequent

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559 Their mood was angry. *NL*, 462.1.
560 Prünhilt diu schöene wart in zorne rôt (Prünhilt the beautiful became red in anger, *NL* 465.3).
actions in the contest. In the second, the queen’s own words prevent her from following through on the expressed emotion, but her flushed cheeks signal both the immediacy of the injury inflicted on her through her defeat and her recognition of the corresponding reduction in status (though the true extent of this reduction is not immediately apparent).

Further evidence for the manner in which the anger of female warriors resembles that of males may be found in the *Eneasroman* of Heinrich von Veldeke. Here, Kamille, one of Prünhilt’s few warrior peers, avenges the *zorn* engendered by the words of her opponent Tarcun on his body and strikes him dead.\(^{561}\) When Kamille herself is slain by Arras, her maiden Tarpide seeks revenge and rides against her enemy with anger.\(^{562}\)

The social functions of *zorn*, its ability to register injury, its role in initiating and pursuing status (re)negotiation, and its close connection with vengeance, do not differ significantly between the sexes. While heroic epic depicts a more highly restricted repertoire of socially acceptable actions in gaining vengeance and satisfaction, the function of anger displays within the honour economy and the process of dispute is strikingly similar. This is also true in as much as the anger of both males and females is equated directly with judgment and condemnation. Thus, when the *Nibelungenlied’s* Gunther believes that his sister has forgiven him for his part in the murder of her husband, he describes the pardon as a cessation of anger: “mîn swester lie den *zorn.*”\(^{563}\) The same usage is found in *Kudrun*, where Queen Gerlint, tricked into sparing the titular heroine from corporal punishment, also describes her pardon in terms of anger: »sô lieze ich mînen *zorn.«\(^{564}\)

\(^{561}\) sie rach selbe ir *zorn* (she herself avenged her anger, *Eneas*, 9008).

\(^{562}\) mit zorne engegen ime quam (she came against him with anger, *Eneas*, 9120).

\(^{563}\) “My sister has abandoned her anger,” *NL*, 1460,1.

\(^{564}\) “Thus I will abandon my anger,” *Kudrun*, 1286,1.
Although it is true that women are seen to weep in the *Nibelungenlied* and in heroic texts more generally, and that ladies’ tears often flow profusely when men engage in (angry) violence, it may go too far to claim that as anger is the affect of male warriors, grief is the affect of women. We may note, for instance, that neither Kudrun nor the *Nibelungenlied* lacks for the expression of anger or aggression by women. Nor does it seem that the expression of anger by women in heroic epic is any less morally ambiguous than that expressed by men. Both heroes and villains, regardless of sex, express their anger in just and righteous rage. Thus, although many of “wicked” Queen Gerlint’s actions in *Kudrun* are marked by anger, noble Kudrun herself also does not shy from displaying her anger.

The early thirteenth-century law recorded in the *Sachsenspiegel* provides a curious addendum to the understanding of women’s anger in the age of the *Nibelungenlied*. Following the *Sachsenspiegel*, save in rare instances, women did not have the right to initiate a legal suit without a *vormund* or guardian. In all of the oldest surviving manuals, the basis for this restriction is cited as having to do with the actions of one Calefurtia, who, due to anger, misbehaved before the empire (here meaning the person of the emperor) and thereby forfeited the right of self-representation for all women. It seems that the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* was the most immediate source for this attribution. Here, a “Carfania” is indeed mentioned as the reason

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565 As, for instance, Irmgard Gephart: “komplementär zur Aggressionslust der Männer werden im ‘Nibelungenlied’ den Frauen die Emotionen Angst und Trauer zugeschrieben” (as complement to the aggression of the men, in the *Nibelungenlied*, it is the emotions fear and grief that are ascribed to women). Irmgard Gephart, “Der Zorn der Heroen,” 49.

566 Gerlint: 1000,1; 1004,1; 1188,3-4; 1266,4; 1286,1. Kudrun: 1272,2; 1278,3; 1515,1; 1517,4.

567 It ne mach nen wif vorspreke sin noch ane vormunde klagen; dat verlos en allen Calefurtia, de vor deme rike missebarde vor torne, do er wille ane vorsprekene nicht ne muste vordgan (No woman may be a claimant nor make a complaint without a guardian; Calefurtia lost that right for all [women], she who in her anger misbehaved before the emperor, since she could not proceed with her desire without a guardian. *Sachsenspiegel* II 63 §1. *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Fontes Iuris Germanici Antiqui*, Nova Series, Tomi I Pars I: *Sachsenspiegel Landrecht*, ed. Karl August Eckhardt [Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1955]).
that women cannot be permitted to represent themselves in legal matters, but no mention is made of anger. Rather, the offending female is said to be *improbissima*, which may be read as “most rebellious,” “most wicked,” or “extremely shameless.” What, precisely, Calefurnia is meant to have done is not clear: what little classical mention there is of her emphasizes her shamelessness and her readiness to engage in lawsuits; her name is said to have become a byword for *calumnia*. One is consequently left to wonder how widespread the connection between the female capacity for anger and the necessity of the restraint placed upon them in legal matters may have been in the century following the composition of the *Nibelungenlied*, a work in which women are described as becoming angry over mere trifles, and yet also attributes the deaths of thousands to the anger of a single woman.

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568 …dum feminas prohibet pro aliis postulare. Et ratio quidem prohibendi, ne contra pudicitiam sexui congruentem alienis causis se immisceant, ne virilibus officiis fungantur mulieres: origo vero introducta est a Carfania improbissima femina, quae inverecunde postulans et magistratum inquietans causam dedit edicto (…while he forbids women to prosecute for others And indeed the reason for this prohibition is so that they do not meddle in the affairs of others contrary to the modesty of their sex, and so that women do not perform the duties of men. The true origin of this comes from an extremely shameless woman [named] Carfania, who by her immodesty and pestering the magistrate gave cause for this edict. *Corpus iuris civilis*, Dig. III 1 de postulando 1.5).

Some manuscripts of the late-thirteenth century *Schwabenspiegel* embellish the tale of Calefurnia to specify that in her outrage she exposed herself (specifically, her *hinderschamme*) to the king. That this version of the story may also have been known to the scribes of various *Sachsenspiegel* manuscripts is hinted at by the presence of a feather-duster or brush-like appendage appearing from Calefurnia’s hindquarters in some illuminations. “Kaefurna… diu vor dem Riche ze Rome also missebarte, unde in so grozzen zorn kam, daz si den kiunig beschalt, do ir wille niut fiur sich gie; und den kiunig die hinderscharme lie sehen” (Kaefurna, who so misbehaved before the emperor at Rome, and became so enraged, that she derided the king, since she could not have her way, and let the king see her rear end. *Schwabenspiegel*, ed. F. L. A. von Lassberg (Tübingen: Ludwig Friedrich Fues, 1840), 245. See also the discussion in Madeline H. Caviness and Charles G. Nelson, “Silent Witnesses, Absent Women, and the Law Courts in Medieval Germany,” in *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, ed. Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), esp. 56-9.


570 “…jâ ist es harte lîhte,     dar umbe zürnent diu wîp” (“indeed it is a very little thing over which women become angry,” *NL*, 866,4); “…nu richet ungefuoge     an uns diu küneginne ir zorn” (“Now the queen is relentlessly avenging her anger upon us,” *NL*, 2112,4).
5.9. The Stilling of Anger

For all that anger and judgment threaten violence and punishment, the appearance of zorn and other expressions of hostility are not universally followed by their actualization. In many instances, the expression of anger may be read as the opening gambit in a process of negotiation in which relationships and relative-status are called into question and redefined – a process that may or may not proceed to bloodshed. When it does not, the anger of one or both parties must be ameliorated. In heroic epic, where violence is to be averted, we find that anger is generally stilled through either the submission of one party or another, or the setting aside of the anger by the offended party, most commonly in response to a display of grief on the part of a member of the angry one’s own honour group or an otherwise affiliated person.571

For an example of the former, we might turn again to the Nibelungenlied, and to the conflict that threatens to erupt following Sivrit’s arrival in Worms and the proclamation of his intent to rule there. After the competing claims to superiority have led to expressions of anger on both sides, Gernot forbids his men from saying anything arrogant that might offend or cause injury to Sivrit, yet also informs Sivrit that he would profit little from violence.572 When this brings forth yet further provocation from the hero, Gernot at last succeeds in bringing the confrontation to a close. Despite the unresolved state of affairs which persists between Sivrit and

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571 Another affinity with French epic. According to White, “If an outburst of anger was a political act involving more than the onset of a physiological condition, the cooling of anger had a political dimension as well.” White, “Politics of Anger,” 149.

572 allen sînen degenen reden er verbôt / iht mit übermüete, des im wäre leit; (he forbade all his warrior to speak with arrogance, which might insult him, NL, 123,2-3); “…wir hetens lützel ëre…” (“we would have little honour of it…” NL, 124,3). William H. Jackson reads the drive to avoid violence as “characteristic of a strand that runs through the literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,” and ties this emphasis on restraint to the regulating impulse of the Landfrieden, adding that “[i]t is typical of a broader current that these gestures of restraint arise largely from the authority of rulers or military leaders.” Jackson, “Court Literature and Violence,” 267.
his hosts regarding their relative status, it is easy to see the immediate response of the Burgundians as submission to or acknowledgment of Sivrit’s claims:

Si muosen rede vermîden: daz was Gêrnôtes rât.

“Ir sult uns wesen willekomen”, sô sprach daz Uoten kint,
“mit iuern hergesellen, die mit iu komen sint.
 wir sullen iu gerne dienen, ich und die mâge mîn.”
dô hiez man den gesten scenken den Guntheres wîn.

Dô sprach der wirt des lands: “allez daz wir hân,
geruochet irs nâch êren, daz sî iu undertân,
und sî mit iu geteilet lip unde guot.”
dô wart der herre Sîvrit ein lützel sanfter gemuot.

(They had to leave off their talk: that was Gernot’s counsel. “You shall be welcome with us,” thus spoke Uote’s child, “with your battle companions, who have come with you. We will gladly serve you, I and my kin.” Then it was commanded that Gunther’s wine be given to the guests. Then the lord of the land said: “All that we have, if, according to honour, you desire it, is subject to you, and our men and possessions shall be shared with you. The lord Sivrit’s mood was then somewhat softened. NL, 125,4-127)

Certainly, the immediate stilling of Sivrit’s anger seems closely bound to the submissive actions of his hosts, even if they stop short of outright submission.

Turning to the second possibility for bringing anger to a peaceful end, both Willehalm and Kudrun contain examples demonstrating the power of displayed grief to quiet anger and avert the execution of a potentially lethal judgment. In the former, it is the tearful plea of Alize, her open weeping, and willingness to throw herself upon the floor at her uncles feet that prompt Willehalm to forgive his sister.573 In the latter, it is Kudrun’s weeping that prevents her mother Hilde from executing the Norman Hartmuot following his defeat and capture. With Kudrun’s

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573 Here again, we may turn to Althoff’s words regarding a favourite theme: Durch Fußfall ohne Worte konnte man etwa den König um eine Gunst oder ein Amt bitten; mit Fußfall und unter Tränen intervenierte man für andere” (through the Fußfall, one could plead with the king for patronage or office; it was with the Fußfall and in tears that one intervened for others), “Empörung, Tränen, Zerknirschung. Emotionen in der öffentlichen Kommunikation des Mittelalters,” in Spielregeln der Politik im Mittelalter. Kommunikation in Frieden und Fehde (Darmstadt: Primus, 1997), 268-9.
weeping and the abandonment of her mother’s anger, the display of grief proves capable of both opening and closing the vengeance loop.

In *Herzog Ernst B*, it is both submission and intervention that combine to alleviate the emperor’s anger against his long-exiled stepson. After a long absence from the text during Ernst’s eastern wanderings, *zorn* reappears when the duke reenters the political sphere of men. In Herzog Ernst B, it is both submission and intervention that combine to alleviate the emperor’s anger against his long-exiled stepson. After a long absence from the text during Ernst’s eastern wanderings, *zorn* reappears when the duke reenters the political sphere of men. Its final appearance is in the crucial moment when Otto at last, seemingly reluctantly, forgives Ernst. In order for this to be achieved, Ernst must first follow the advice of his mother, the queen in taking advantage (in disguise) of a general pardon offered by the emperor. The ritual accompanying this pardon requires that Ernst appear barefoot and fall at the emperor’s feet. This he does, though once his identity is revealed, Otto again becomes deeply upset. It is at this moment that a final intervention occurs as the princes step forward once again to plead on behalf of their former peer. In the end, Otto proclaims:

“nu ez iuch herren dunket guot
und ir sîn gnâde wellet hân,
sô wil ich mînen zorn lân

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574 The significance of Ernst’s period of absence, and the fact that his travels were undertaken under the auspices of a crusade (1814-5), is substantial. Following Kai-Peter Ebel, Ernst’s attempt to regain God’s favour and thereby to force the emperor to restore his own favour to his estranged stepson, represents an attempt to instrumentalize crusade propaganda as a means of restoring order. Ebel, ‘Huld,’ 201-2. This is in agreement with the observations of Monika Schulz who notes that the narrative’s positioning of the loser’s embarking on a crusade as a natural outcome of a feud between vassal and ruler is supported by ecclesiastical sources of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which suggest that a crusader enjoyed not merely the remission of sins, but the protection of the church, or at the very least a moratorium of hostilities. Schulz, “Âne rede,” 412-5.


576 Following Dörrich, the emphasis placed by the princes on their own role in constituting the empire (5947-5950) is significant both in establishing the efficacy of their plea and in furthering the re-establishment of right order within Otto’s lands. Dörrich, *Poetik*, 117. She notes further that “Das Versöhnungsritual am Schluß… restituiert somit nicht nur die Stellung Ernsts, sondern darüber hinausgehend auch die Handlungsgemeinschaft der wichtigsten Instanzen des Reiches…” (The ritual of reconciliation at the conclusion does not merely restore Ernst’s position, but rather in addition to this also restores the community of action of the empire’s most important authorities…” Dörrich, *Poetik*, 124).
The legal reconciliation between the two parties is thus framed as a release from anger. The *zorn* which Otto has expressed toward his son is at once indicative of a general state of hostility and of the doom, the judgment, which hangs over him. The absence or abatement of this anger is understood as forgiveness, or at the least as a cessation of hostility. Even in the absence of any further legalistic explication it may be seen that when anger appears, judgment is passed, when it dissipates, the sentence is withdrawn.

5.10. Conclusion

Ann Marie Rasmussen has identified two essential “notions” of anger in Middle High German literature, namely “the warrior’s habitus” and “zealous, divinely sanctioned anger.”577 The former of these refers not to “an inner psychological state in the modern sense,” but rather to something “cold” and “external,” which in its heroic form “accommodates immense capacity for battle.”578 The latter, with reference to the work of Robert C. Solomon, is understood as the assignment of >blame< and the passing of judgment. It is “a legal position,” and, “as such, it can also be construed as a kind of rationality, as a form of reason.” Anger in Middle High German heroic epic indeed fuses anger as a mode of action, as *Kampfzorn*, and as an act of judgment. What follows from this, and what has perhaps remained one of the least appreciated aspects of anger and its representation in the context of medieval literature, is that the expression of anger

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577 Rasmussen, “Emotions, Gender, and Lordship,” 181.
578 Rasmussen, “Emotions, Gender, and Lordship,” 180.
says something very specific about the relationship between the angry and the target of that anger. For anger is not merely an expression of hostility, as judgment, anger is also a status claim that immediately establishes a moral and/or political hierarchy between the affected parties.

Anger in the context of dispute appears as a judgment bearing quasi-juridical weight. Between members of an existing honour group, it may be understood either as a rift which requires healing through renegotiation, or as a tactic consciously employed in the attempt to bring about such renegotiation (the alternatives are not mutually exclusive). It may result from the non-reciprocation of grief, and its appearance out of sequence is understood as highly problematic amongst allies. It may be nullified or redirected through further expressions of grief. Finally, it may indeed at times be representative of a loss of control, a characteristic that is in fact intrinsic to its ability to reorder hierarchical relationships via the threat of violence or social sundering.

To express anger within the honour economy of Middle High German epic is to stake a status claim. To display zorn openly is to pass judgment upon the object of that zorn, and to pass judgment is to claim a particular sort of superiority. The superiority of the judge may be moral, social, or political, it may be innate and inalienable or it may be transitory and ephemeral, but it is superiority never the less. The angry judge condemns: “from my vantage I see that you have done something wrong.”

In its most extreme manifestation, judgment and sentence occur simultaneously in the moment of quasi-juridical execution, yet more commonly, anger is a starting point for status renegotiation. Within the honour economy, this condemnation and the commensurate status claim are understood as insult, and must be answered – particularly when the individual expressing anger is of ostensibly lower rank than the target of this anger. This answer may take the form of submission, a recognition that the anger was earned, but frequently it is reciprocated,
beginning an exchange which is likely to escalate rapidly into violence if one party or the other does not back down.
Conclusion

The mechanisms of feud practice and conflict resolution, the economy of honour, and the employment of performative emotion are everywhere to be found in Middle High German Heroic Epic. In order to read the representation of emotion in these narratives, it is necessary first, that these representations be contextualized within the context and progression of dispute, and second, to recognize the intrinsic relationship between both of these elements and the processes of honour which form the ultimate framework underlying identity and status within heroic society.

The principle of self-help amongst the nobility, and a set of semi- (but also, increasingly-) formalized practices, is evident throughout the medieval period. From the distant, Merovingian past, a period that notably seems to have furnished heroic epic, and the *Nibelungenlied* in particular, with so great a wealth of material, we might cite the much-celebrated feud of Sichar. From the high medieval period, contemporary to the recording of the narratives here under consideration, we may look not only to the example of the Tübinger feud, but to the codification of self-help as a right in Frederick II’s 1235 Landpeace of Mainz, significantly appended to the *Sachsenspeigel* for so many years afterwards. Finally, from the late-medieval period, which furnished heroic narrative with a lasting audience as manuscripts recording the tales continued to be produced, we see not only ever-increasing numbers of formal declarations of feud between nobles, but gain a glimpse of similar practices spread throughout all levels of medieval society.

These practices, alongside the practices of transforming conflict into narrative, suffuse Middle High German heroic epic, bringing with them a set of values and of narrative expectations. Traditional dispute practice provides narratives of conflict with an outline. Yet as in historical practice, these cultural traditions, the rules of conflict, do not strictly prescribe a predetermined course of action nor force the characters of the tale into a specific pattern of
behaviour. Rather, they underlie and guide the action, providing in the extensive repertoire of possible, circumstance-dependent actions a series of interlocking gears to be set into motion. The rules of conflict, of the feud, are an important subset of mechanisms within the larger machine of medieval authority and social control.

The relationship between the narrative of dispute and historical practice is a complex one, as practice no doubt informed the expectations of an audience even as the tales themselves served as models for ordering and understanding real conflict. In narrative, such conflicts, the rules according to which they are pursued and settled, serve to resolve issues of individual and group integrity, and, above all, to establish and confirm social hierarchies. The medium of exchange, the currency by which individuals are evaluated and groups bound to one another is honour. It is the honour economy that envelops all aspects of interaction and identity formation within the fictive courts of heroic epic.

Within this semi-regulated progression of dispute, at once driven by and serving to reinforce the honour economy of the court, it is the display of emotions that forms the most important and most potent means of communication. It is by the public display of tears that aid is sought, allegiance confirmed, and violence legitimized. Public anger serves to make or refute claims of status and superiority, it threatens, accompanies, and explains violence as reactive judgment and punishment.

It is on the semi-standardized, feud-like progression of conflict accompanying the principle of self-help, that we may recognize a core element of the narrative structure. This provides a progression of expected stages, a process. The manner in which the characters and the narrative itself move through these stages serves to create not only narrative tension and interest, but also speaks to the core issues and anxieties that motivate the story-telling act.
It is understood that the “historical” chronicles of medieval Europe do not necessarily reflect actual events; they are themselves literary creations. Often explicitly polemic, they reflect attempts to make sense of the world and its doings. Events are ordered and described in such a fashion that they become sensible, an inescapably human practice of both conscious and unconscious narrativization. Literature, in the more generally acknowledged form to which heroic poetry belongs, is several steps further removed from reality. Literature is more-or-less explicitly artificial, a fact unchanged by in-narrative claims to historical truth or reliance on known tradition. Yet heroic epic is not unfettered fantasy, and it not only utilizes, but is in fact reliant upon rules of interaction and communication recognizable to its audience.

The engagement with and adaptation of a traditional conflict progression offers heroic epic the possibility for what might be termed speculative thought experiments. The rules according to which the populations of these tales interact with one another form patterns structuring the characters’ actions and practices. The mechanisms of conflict resolution which function or fail according to the needs of the narrative. The whys and wherefores of this function or failure reveal the preoccupations and anxieties of the aristocratic groups producing, reproducing and receiving literature of this kind.

It is thus that we may see in Herzog Ernst B anxieties surrounding the relationship between exceptionally powerful individuals and their imperial overlords. Here, the significance of the empire itself as greatest good is given prominence. Where the emperor as individual is revealed to be a flawed individual, vulnerable to the wiles of his jealous and traitorous subject, the empire that his person embodies remains paramount and worthy of deference. In Herzog Ernst B, the mechanisms of social control and dispute resolution, whereby justice is sought and peace made or maintained, seem at first to falter under the weight of Heinrich’s treachery, yet at the narrative’s conclusion, it is precisely the rituals and social ties that constitute the empire as
sippe which serve to re-establish right order and reintegrate the protagonist into the political and familial hierarchy.

The Nibelungenlied, characteristically, presents a more complex case. Here, as disputes between individuals fracture and divide existing honour groups, the progression of dispute is retarded, perverted, and hindered, until ultimately the system itself collapses entirely and all within the social machine are crushed. This is particularly the case in the poem’s second half, following the death of Sivrit, when Kriemhilt marshals her powers and attempts repeatedly to set the gears of vengeance and of justice into motion, only to be thwarted time and again. The narrative’s progression invites a host of interpretations. The tale leaves the question open whether the catastrophe results from the failures of individuals or of their societies. It is impossible to say for certain whether the problem lies with misplaced priorities (where in the Northern tradition, Kriemhilt/Guðrun sides with her family against Etzel, the Nibelungenlied positions her on the side of her deceased husband against her closest kin), with the participation of ineligible players on the game board (as, for example, women attempting to pursue self-help), or possibly even with heroic culture itself.

Willehalm, meanwhile, takes a somewhat different approach. Here, the poem presents us with but a fragment of a larger narrative. Whether or not Wolfram himself reached the intended conclusion, the story of Alischanz and its aftermath is, like the various Dietrich epics, but one episode in a longer, larger tale. Willehalm provides the audience with one piece of the on-going conflict, yet contains within it multiple cycles of dispute, each of which has the potential to function as a microcosm of the overarching tale and the larger progression of action.

Of particular note to the present study is the sequence of events at Munleun, when the protagonist appears at the imperial court and seeks aid in defending his realm and seeking vengeance for the injury done to him by his wife’s family. Contextualized within the conflict
progression discussed earlier in this work, the episode follows the infliction of injury (including Willehalm’s defeat at Alischanz, the slaying of his kinsmen, and the siege of his wife in her castle), and prior to the seeking of vengeance. For the hero, this stage is therefore crucial, for the pursuit of vengeance and the restoration of the margrave’s honour status and integrity requires not only material aid, but also the approval and endorsement of his peers and of his lord. Yet in Wolfram’s hands, the scene becomes still more than this. Few sequences in the whole of the Middle High German corpus so succinctly or thoroughly engage with the full range and power of symbolic communication, nor so clearly reveal the intimate connection between the ritualized processes of interaction with the negotiation and confirmation of status. Few sequences in medieval German corpus show so clearly how epic literature can provide condensed and concentrated thought experiments on such interactive and ritualized processes of aristocratic status communication and negotiation. As such, the episode here provides us with an ideal opportunity for an extended exploration of the significance the findings of the preceding study offer in the examination of an episode drawn from medieval narrative.

**Putting the Pieces Together: Munleun Revisited**

The centrality of emotion and emotion display within *Willehalm’s* scenes at Munleun is undeniable: grief and anger saturate the narrative and extensively colour nearly every action described. This has not gone unremarked by modern academic audiences, and in recent scholarship, the earlier conception that the sequence served principally to illustrate the amelioration of the margrave’s excessive and above all uncourtly *zorn* through the *mâze*
introduced by Alize, has largely given over to discussion of the role that various emotions play in the ritualized interactions of the court. Particular significant in this respect is the work of Gerd Althoff, who tackled the scene in his essay, “Wolfram von Eschenbach und die Spielregeln der mittelalterlichen Gesellschaft.” By applying his notion of unwritten but recognized rules of conduct which obtained at the medieval court to Wolfram’s literary depictions of courtly interaction, Althoff suggested alternate readings of Willehalm’s conduct, namely, that the margrave’s behaviour was not merely excessive or uncourtly, but served a particular function within a particular context by alternately following or breaking the rules of engagement. In varying degrees the contributions by Lydia Miklautsch, Kathryn Starkey, Corinna Dörrich, and Elke Koch, all of which focus on symbolic communication and emotional display in the Munleun scene, have – as I do – taken Althoff’s re-evaluation as a starting point. While I will take all of them into account in my concluding reading, it is Koch’s excellent and wide ranging analysis of the relationship between grief and identity within the Willehalm narrative that stands closest to the present reading. Grief in Willehalm is multifaceted, serving as a means by which figures negotiate relationships, constitute communities through practices of


584 Elke Koch, Trauer und Identität. Inszenierungen von Emotionen in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006).
inclusion and exclusion, and strengthen the normative rules of the social order: it is codified as a performance of social bonding.\textsuperscript{585}

The Staging

After suffering great losses on the field of Alischanz and with his wife besieged in his fortress at Orange, Willehalm journeys to the royal court at Munleun in order to seek aid of his king, his family, and in particular of his sister the queen.

This scene is firmly entrenched within the customary dispute progression. The narrative’s protagonist has been attacked, his kinsmen slain, and his wife is now a veritable prisoner. The integrity of his standing and his honour has consequently been dealt a severe blow, which demands a response. Although the conflict seems to envelop all of heathendom on the one side and a considerable portion of Christendom on the other, it is fundamentally understood to be a personal conflict between Willehalm and his wife’s family. It’s origin lies in the damage done to the honour of Tibalt, first husband of Arabel, who has adopted the Christian name Giburc and married Willehalm. That the matter turns on honour is made explicit from the outset:

\begin{verbatim}
    ir man, der künic Tibalt, 
    minnen vlust an ir klagete. 
    ûz vreude in sorge jagete 
    mit kraft daz herze sînen lîp. 
    er klagete êre unde wîp, 
    dâ zuo bürge unde lant. 
\end{verbatim}

(Her husband, King Tibalt, lamented the loss of her love. His heart drove him powerfully from joy into sorrow. He lamented honour and wife, his fortresses and lands as well. \textit{Willehalm, 8,2-7}).

\textsuperscript{585} Koch, \textit{Trauer}, 156-8.
It is for this reason that the conflict begins. Once Tibalt has struck, Willehalm’s honour is damaged and he must respond. Following the expected progression of dispute, the next stages call for Willehalm to seek the aid of his affiliates, to express his grief to them, gain their support, and then transform that grief into anger and subsequently into action and vengeance, whereby the integrity of Willehalm and his honour group will be restored or enhanced.

This is certainly the expectation of Willehalm’s brother Ernalt, whom the margrave encounters on the road. Ernalt recognizes that the matter concerns the whole of Willehalm’s *sippe*, and volunteers to bring all that he can to Willehalm’s aid, wherever and whenever the margrave should desire it. Further, he informs Willehalm how he ought to continue, for he informs his brother that a great fest is taking place at Munleun, at which the king and Willehalm’s other kin will be in attendance. Ernalt tells Willehalm that he ought to journey there forthwith and lament his sorrows to all in order to gain yet further aid, which Ernalt is certain will be forthcoming. As a result, Willehalm, too, has high expectations:

Kumt mîn vrouwe, de küneginne, dar,
des möht ich helfe enpfâhen.
ir *solt daz niht versmâhen,
sine man den künec umbe mich:
den site hiez ich svesterlîch.
sol mîner mâge dar iht komen,
die erbarmet vlust, die ich hâ genom
und mîne bruoder, die dâ sint
(ich bin ouch Heimriches kint) –
wellent die mit triuwen sîn,
sô erbarmet si mîn scherpfêr pîn
und mîniu dürren herzesêr:

587 *Willehalm*, 121,8-9; 12-4.
588 *Willehalm*, 121,15-29.
(If my lady, the queen, should come there, I might receive help because of it. It should not be displeasing to her to intervene with her husband the king, I would call that conduct sisterly. Should my kin perhaps come there, the loss which I have received will move them to pity. And if my brothers who are there – I am also Heimrich’s child – wish to be loyal, they will thus pity my sharp pain and the desolate pain of my heart. \textit{Willehalm}, 122,14-25)

Yet the meeting at Munleun frustrates the margrave’s expectations considerably. Here, the expected conflict progression is frustrated when conflicting status claims emerge between Willehalm and his ostensible allies. A multi-stage negotiation of honour and status is initiated by powerful displays of emotion, which are marshalled against each other in turn. This negotiation is not separable from the larger conflict of which it is a part, and the events within it must be understood against the necessity of consolidating the honour group, even as the rapidly escalating sub-conflict exposes fault-lines in the unstable hierarchy of esteem within the French court.

The grief appropriate to the broadcasting of Willehalm’s injury, which ought to serve as a means of consolidating his \textit{sippe} and enabling the continuance of violence against Tibalt, is amply apparent. Long before his arrival, the hero carefully cultivates, broadcasts, enacts, and entirely embodies his grief. Here we find a demonstration of the fluid boundary between somatic spontaneity and considered performance. Willehalm, in his sorrow, refuses to bathe, remove his armour, to exchange a kiss, or to indulge in any hospitality offered beyond the minimum required for the maintenance of his life. In this manner, Willehalm cultivates his misery and becomes in essence a walking demonstration of his suffering. Yet the margrave’s grief manifests in other ways as well – somatic responses – \textit{signa naturalia} accompany the cultivated,

\footnote{zem jámer er sich pflihre, \textit{Willehalm}, 112,12.}
staged display throughout this sequence: his breast is sunken on the left side after he leaves his heart behind, when he beds down in the merchant’s home, he lies without sleep.\textsuperscript{590}

Such signs suffice to provide an initial, positive example of functional and contagious grief in the margrave’s encounter with Ernalt, who after recognizing his brother, takes on Willehalm’s grief as his own: when Ernalt learns of his brother’s losses, his heart’s pain rises and flows freely from his eyes, and an offer of aid immediately follows.\textsuperscript{591}

At Munleun, however, the progression grinds to a halt and new cycles of dispute and status negotiation emerge. Willehalm’s grief acquires an aggressive posture, for his actions and bearing violate the integrity of his lord’s court. By entering the protected space of the court in warrior’s raiment, and with the marks of battle still upon him, Willehalm demonstrates not only the depth of his own suffering, but demands acknowledgement that not merely his own integrity has been violated, but that of all who would call him dear. Yet the margrave’s performance does not achieve its desired result, and he is greeted with suspicion rather than sympathy and concern.\textsuperscript{592}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{590} Willehalm, 137,1.
\textsuperscript{591} Willehalm, 120,26-9.
\textsuperscript{592} The extraordinary nature of the performance, namely that anyone should enter such a courtly space armed outside the context of a tournament, is emphasized by the wonder with which the assembled masses and the ladies from their windows gaze at the new arrival, and the comment that such a knight could at least have employed a pack animal (127,14-23). Shortly after this, the point is further underlined by the report made to the king: “er zaeme in eime strie / michel baz denne an den tanz” (he would fit much better in a battle than in the dance, 128,18-9) and “ouch nimt uns wunder, wes er ger / daz er sô kampfliche ist komen (It also makes us wonder what he wants, that he comes here in so warlike a fashion, 128,24-5). This said, I agree with Dörrich that Willehalm’s removal of his helmet on the day of his first arrival, while waiting below the linden tree, is a clear indication that his intent is not wholly hostile. Dörrich, Poetik, 85. In Kathryn Starkey’s reading, Willehalm’s appearance, and above all his arms, are a calculated display communicating to King Loys that the margrave has withdrawn his loyalty. In this reading, Willehalm’s dishevelled appearance functions more as insult to the king and his court than as the marker of grief. Starkey, Reading, 59-63. For her part, Koch succinctly articulates Willehalm’s ritualized grief thus: “Nicht nur mit Worten, sondern mit seinem ganzen Körper trägt Willehalm sein Leid vor.” Koch, Trauer, 125.
\end{flushleft}
That the margrave is made to wait signals clearly, even before the repeated references to the anger which signals his perception of a further slight against his honour, that things have gone awry.593

When Willehalm lodges that night with a merchant, he is unable to sleep for his anger and grief. Both are indicative of a perceived injury, but also, against the expectation informed by the customary dispute progression, indicative of a disordered state of affairs within Willehalm’s honour group. This, in turn leads to further conflict. Having suffered one injury, Willehalm has sought the aid of his kin, only to receive another injury: the failure of his own extended honour group, the king and his retinue, to recognize him and to understand his performative grief denies Willehalm the status he believes himself to hold. Consequently, the margrave’s thoughts turn immediately to revenge on this new group of enemies:

"...geleb ich unz morgen vrvo,
ich sol in vüegen sölhe klage,
daz si immer mer von dem tage
dar nach ze sprechen hant genuoc,
kint diu noch muoter nie getruoc."
( “...should I live until tomorrow morning, I shall bring them cause to lament, such that children not yet born will ever more have something to talk about.” In anger, he lay without sleep, until the light of day shone upon him. Willehalm, 136,26-30)594

593 Dörrich has focused on Willehalm’s armament as an ambiguous sign, the true significance of which requires a fore-knowledge denied to his observers on his arrival, and positions this as the source of the conflict which arises at Munleun.. Dörrich, 82-7.

594 Driving the point home, Willehalm reiterates his intention to his host on the following morning:

“...durhs küneges swarte uf sinen bart
ditze swert sol durhverte gern:
des wil ich in vor den vürsten wern.
ich han von im smaehe und spot
nach miner vlüstebaeren not.
ich mac iu einem daz wol sagen. "

252
Although not a performance as such, Willehalm’s anger here proceeds from his grief, from his perception of injury. Although markedly somatic and internal (inasmuch as it prevents the margrave from sleeping) it is also accompanied by the verbal judgment he lays against those who have wronged him, along with a defined plan of action. This judgment bridges the space between the “jamers suom” which the margrave bears in his heart and the zorn that prevents him from sleeping. Significantly, in characterizing Willehalm’s longed-for vengeance itself as a klage, the passage telescopes the traditional process of grief, complaint, anger, action into a single moment. Artistically, this is the product of the epic’s literary activity, in which this process is at once actualized and brought to the brink of collapse through momentary condensation. Within the logic of the plot, it is, at the same time, indicative of the confused and overlapping political processes engendered by the improper, disordered reception offered to the margrave by the court.

That Willehalm’s anger is simultaneously the passing of judgement upon those whom he deems to have wronged him is further underlined when, on meeting the king at last, the margrave, like Hagen in aventiure XXIX of the Nibelungenlied, adopts the intimidating position of a judge:

(“this sword will eagerly split the king’s scalp down to his beard: I’ll perform this before the princes. I’ve had scorn and mockery from him following my terrible suffering. I can tell you that for one. Willehalm, 138,6-11)

To bring a lament, a klage, to his kinsmen was, of course, Willehalm’s intent from the start. To lament before or to a receptive party, i.e. a member of one’s honour group, is already to “inflict” grief upon them, for such grief is easily communicable within such social groupings. Willehalm here takes it a step further along the continuum, suggesting an alternate means by which he may bring those present to lament.

Many scholars have seen in this gesture a direct allusion to the Nibelungenlied, owing to the common setting of the scene – the would be judge positioned outside the hall, and the presence of a sword belonging to a murdered adversary. While it is clear that Wolfram knew some version of the Nibelungenlied and this reading is therefore not implausible, it is not necessary for the interpretation of Willehalm’s action. The passing of judgment upon his peers and his superiors, together with the slight the margrave has received, on top of the presence of an armed man within the king’s court are all sufficient to establish both a general mood and several specific visual markers of social
der marcrâve an den stunden,  
dez swert niht ab gebunden,  
*er zuct’ vür sich inz schôz  

(At that time the margrave jerked his sword, still bound to him, before him and into his lap. Willehalm, 141,6-7)

The position of Willehalm’s body is here brought in to accordance with his anger: both communicate a quasi-juridical judgment upon those whom he believes to have wronged him. Those present immediately recognize the threat he presents. Emboldened by the belief that his kin may yet aid him, Willehalm finally approaches the king and upbraids him and his retinue. The margrave’s four brothers recognize the knight, and true to Willehalm’s hopes, they rush to embrace him. The king, too, acknowledges Willehalm, despite the discourtesy with which he speaks. Yet the margrave’s sister, the queen, is unforthcoming.

As the scene progresses, Willehalm’s anger becomes more and more pronounced, and its presence becomes increasingly problematic. This occurs for two reasons. The first is that as


597 As observed by Mark Chinca, Willehalm’s actions are here surrounded by markers indicating a confluence of spontaneous action inspired by a heightened emotional state (his sleepless night, his desire to kill the king, his impatience) and calculated performance (his intention to wait for his relatives, his concern that he shall lose the hope of the nobles if he goes too far). Chinca, “Willehalm at Laon,” 92-3.

598 Willehalm, 141,8-10; 142,6. In this moment, the narrator’s comment that no one present was so high-born that they did not fear his wrath further underlines the connection between anger, judgment, and status. Willehalm, 141,1-7.

599 Willehalm, 144,27-30.

600 Kathryn Starkey here places considerable weight on Willehalm’s appearance (i.e. his refusal to bathe or take off his armour) and what he does >not< do upon arrival, and credits this as the crucial initial performative, rather than the display of emotion. She argues that “Willehalm’s arrival is a performative act that signals to the king his
the expression of anger accompanies judgment (and by extension threatens the imminent, physical actualization of that judgment through violence), and this judgment serves to suggest a hierarchical arrangement between the affected parties in which the angered individual exercises the >right< to judgment over the individual against whom the anger is expressed. This is the anger of the *ira regis* or *ira dei*, and it flows >down< the social or political hierarchy. When the "zonbaere man" stands before the king, he does so as one capable of condemning his ostensible lord, fully possessed of the right of judgment over a king, abstaining only for the sake of his mother: "Ich kund iuch wol beswaeren: / durh mine muoter laz ichz gar." When the king protests against the margrave’s accusations, he does so by claiming there is no cause for anger against him.

When the final break occurs, already hinted at, it is not the king, but his wife who calls Willehalm out on this seeming attempt to exceed his station: “mir ist lieber daz er warte her, / denne daz ich siner genaden ger.” In this moment the queen is represented as clearly perceiving what her husband will later argue: Willehalm’s demands, and his expression of anger, place him in a position to judge his superior and to dictate his actions. In this, the highest member of the honour group is threatened in his status. The queen’s response is delivered as his partner and as a shared possessor of that honour and status. She acts, or rather, does not act, in order to protect the honour of her husband and of herself. In so doing, she denies the status claim withdrawal of fealty” (*Reading*, 59). The content of this performative does not become apparent, however, until the hero is recognized at court (ibid., 61)

602 “I could well raise complaint against you, I leave off entirely for the sake of my mother,” *Willehalm*, 146,12-3.
603 *Willehalm*, 147,1-2.
604 “I would rather that he waits upon us here, than that I should seek his favour,” *Willehalm*, 147,9-10.
made by her brother, which has the additional effect, through her refusal to participate in
Willehalm’s grief, of erecting a division between the two: they are, for the moment, members not
of the same sippe or hierarchy, but rather rivals and potential enemies.

With his status claim rebuked, Willehalm again becomes angry – he is the “zorbaere
gast” when he rips the crown from his sister’s head and attempts to behead her. This is a
decisive moment, for from this point, all develops from the actions of the queen and Willehalm’s
actions in response.

605 Furious guest, Willehalm, 147,18.

606 The attitude and affect of the king prior to Willehalm’s assault upon the queen is a matter of some debate. Just
before the queen speaks, the king’s address to Willehalm includes the following statement:

“ir wizzet, al mîn lant,
swes ir drinne gert, daz ist getân.
ich mac gâbe und lêhen hân:
daz kêrt mit vuoge an iuweren gewin!”

(“You know, in all my land, whatever you desire, that shall be done. I have indeed grants and fiefs: that ought
rightly to work to your advantage!” Willehalm, 147,2-5).

Is this not precisely what the margrave has been seeking? Does the subsequent conflict represent a divergence from
amicable reconciliation and aid initiated by the queen, or Willehalm, or both? It is difficult to say. Among the varied
interpretations of this offer, several stand out. The first is that Loys is indeed cowed by Willehalm’s anger and, as
weak ruler, attempts to mitigate this anger by given ground. The second, favoured by Valentin Blaas (following, to
some extent, the interpretation of Joachim Heinzle), is that the offer is genuine and representative of the value
placed by the king upon his vassal, (Blaas, “Überlegungen,” 59-60); For Heinzle, it is clear that the king intends to
place the resources of the empire in at Willehalm’s disposal. The crucial issue is the meaning of mit vuoge (147,5):
Heinzle leaves the question open whether this is best read as indicating that Willehalm will profit from these
resources >by right< or that he will profit >if he uses these resouces rightly<. Joachim Heinzle, Stellenkommentar to
147,4f in Wolfram von Eschenbach, Willehalm, ed. Joachim Heinzle (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker,
2009),941. Third, we might follow Kathryn Starkey in placing the emphasis upon Loys’ possessions and his right
and power to bestow them, and therefore part of a strategy to maintain or bolster the existing hierarchy (Starkey,
“Androhung der Unordnung,” 333, 339). A fourth option is provided by Corinna Dörrich, who argues that Loys’
words are less an offer of help than customary greeting, a status she also attributes to the Burgundians when faced
with Sivrit’s aggression (Dörrich, Poetik des Rituals, 100). Blaas sees the queen’s statement what Willehalm should
more properly serve them as confirmation that Loys’ offer is a serious one, though I do not see how it precludes any
of the other possibilities – a serious criticism of a purely formal offer is far from unthinkable, for instance. The
question is an important one, for virtually all of the subsequent action depends upon the queen’s words and
Willehalm’s response. At stake is whether the king and queen’s views of Willehalm are in harmony at this point, or
whether it is only the queen who responds negatively to her brother’s arrival, and that the king responds rather to
Willehalm’s subsequent assault upon his wife. Although the queen certainly provides the stronger initial reaction
(129,18-130,2), it is clear that the king, too, is ill-disposed towards Willehalm even before the margrave expresses
his dissatisfaction. Where earlier, the king’s failure to greet the margrave may be attributed to a lack of recognition,
From this point forward, two aspects become clear: Willehalm’s expression of anger and his condemnation of his sister are profoundly intertwined, and the king’s reaction to Willehalm’s actions depend above all on the honour insult which Willehalm has inflicted upon him. This latter is caused both by the margrave’s actions against the queen and by the fact of his anger itself and the judgment it implies. Willehalm’s anger bids him to remain hostile to her, even after the rest of his family has volunteered their aid and sympathy. Zorn is the mark against the queen, and it ultimately falls to her daughter, Alize, to cool that anger. When Willehalm at last acquiesces and professes his willingness to forgive his sister, he will do so by telling Alize that he is ready to set aside his anger against her mother.

While at first the withholding of a proper greeting and the contempt with which the queen indicates that it would be more proper for Willehalm to serve his lord seem sufficient explanation for the margrave’s actions, the focus increasingly shifts to the expression of grief. As this occurs within the confirmed circle of Willehalm’s sippe, it is unsurprising to see that the customary progression of conflict resumes. Through grief, Willehalm broadcasts the nature of his

once the merchant Wimar has informed the palace occupants of the knight’s identity and Willehalm is openly received by at least some of those, it is clear that those present know precisely who stands before them, yet the king and his princes react with hostility to the margrave’s presence (139,16-141,2). Loys’ refusal to greet Willehalm may therefore be understood to be a product of the king’s hostility, and we may assume that the queen does not speak unilaterally. If King Loys’ offer of assistance is anything other than an ironic formality, it occurs under duress. Although the queen’s words serve to exacerbate the developing conflict, they do not create it. Rather, they force the margrave to engage on two fronts, dealing with the solidification of his own sippe on the one hand, and asserting his claim to status and right to aid within the larger imperial hierarchy on the other.

607 Willehalm, 152,28-30.
608 “ich wil ouch zorn gein ir bewarn,” Willehalm, 159,22.
609 As Elke Koch has observed, the expression of grief and the experience of leit is here revealed to be selective – although the details are as yet unknown, Willehalm’s sister understands her brother’s situation and reacts negatively. Koch, Trauer, 126-7.
injury and through grief receives confirmation of membership within the group and the readiness of that group to avenge the wrongs done to Willehalm and through him to the collective.

Despite the fact that it occurs within a divided sippe, and consequently in parallel with an on-going negotiation of status and relation, the consolidation of Willehalm’s family, and in particular his klage, is formulaic and consequently emphasizes the health of the unit by its unproblematic functionality. It is Willehalm’s father Heimrich, who best articulates the power invested in their shared grief:

»…
  dînen kumber wil ich leiden
  od dá von muoz mich scheiden
  grôz überlesteclîchiu nôt
  od ein sô stare gebot,
  daz die sêle vome lîbe nîmt.
(I wish to suffer your misery unless parted from it by great and overwhelming suffering or so strong a command that it takes the soul from the body. Willehalm, 150,3-7)

Addressing his other sons, Heimrich continues:

wâ nû, die von mir sint erborn?
  ditze laster habt mit mir rekorn!
  mîn sun ist gesuochet niht:
  ich bin, der des lasters giht.
  swaz im ze schaden ist getân,
  des wil ich mit im pfihte hân.
(Where are those born from me now? Take this disgrace upon yourselves along with me! This disgrace afflicts not [only] my son, I am the one afflicted. Whatever damage has been done to him, I will share with him. Willehalm, 150,21-26)

That the process has been completed, that the progression of dispute may continue, is indicated when Irmschart admonishes the warriors that it is now time for action, which is to say that their
grief must turn to anger. Those who now weep are confirmed in their collective identity and their common cause of vengeance. Vengeance must be pursued, for passivity in the face of insult suggests that the honour reduction incurred by that insult has been actualized.

With the greater portion of the sippe and their support confirmed, and one cycle complete, the margrave’s rage against his sister for her lack of support and sympathy returns. Where all the other members of his family share in his grief, his sister-withholds her tears and thus denies the bonds between herself and her brother. The (now) positive and receptive reaction of Willehalm’s relatives to his grief and the continuing refusal of both Willehalm’s sister and the larger court place two overlapping honour groups in opposition to one another, or at least calls the extent of their alignment into question. On the one hand there stands Willehalm’s sippe, and the other, the larger court comprised of their social peers and the rulers to whom they owe their loyalty. In between stands the margrave’s sister, and the apparent rift is delineated by the display of sympathetic grief or its absence.

The on-going conflict turns when Willehalm’s niece Alize intervenes, and a new component is introduced. Acting as a mediator between the two parties, Alize utilizes grief and an honour appeal to compel action. She does so not only through copious tears and pleading, but by employing that most potent of grief displays, the Fußfall. As generally in Middle High German literature, the performative gesture is successful, and so discomfits the margrave that he

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610 Willehalm, 152,1-27. Here it should also be noted that Irmschart’s willingness to take up arms personally, a notion transgressive not merely because of her sex, but also her age and status as matriarch, shames the males who are culturally obligated to commit the violence she threatens, as evidenced by Willehalm’s response to his mother. Irmschart, like her daughter, is acting in the interests of the collective honour she shares with her husband and sons. Willehalm, 161,11-23.
must beg his niece to rise and cease, promising that he shall do as she wishes and ameliorate his anger. 611

It is at this point that we arrive back at our starting point, when Irmschart elucidates the means by which her daughter may redeem herself:

«wirt nû niht von ir geklaget
diu düren herzebaeren sêr,
die durh Tibalden Terramêr
an dîne geslehte hät getân,
ir sol getrûwen nimmer man.
…«

(If she will not now lament the desolate heartborne pain done to your family by Terramer for Tibald’s sake, then she ought never again be trusted. Willehalm, 160,4-8)

The queen’s honour amongst her kin is therefore placed in the balance, dependent on a display of sympathy that will demonstrate her membership within the group and the strength of the ties between her and the other members of that group. When Willehalm and his sister meet again, the margrave emphasizes this same point: »…vrouwe, ez solt ouch iu sîn leit, / daz ich bin trûrens

611 Miklautsch here see primarily Willehalm’s fear of being shamed by the “exorbitanten Geste der Königstochter” (“waz touc helden sölh geschrei,” 251). This is undoubtedly the case, but the social inversion accomplished by the young maiden goes further than threatening shame. As in the Nibelungenlied and elsewhere, the Fußfall appears to be a fundamentally disordering act that is psychically troubling, even damaging to all who witness it. Koch, on the other hand, notes that both females, the young Alize and the aged Irmschart, play crucial roles in the reformulation of the sippe as community (Trauer, 138ff). Where the latter steps forward three times in her role as the establisher of norms, the former may be understood to shift the dynamics of interaction between Willehalm and his sister from the hierarchical to the familial. It is true that much turns on the female members of the honour group, and we may understand their actions to be informed by an enormous sensitivity to the honour concerns of that group: the recognition of the injury is accompanied by the drive to action in avenging it, while at the same time ensuring that the integrity of the group is maintained. This latter concern speaks both to the maintenance of the larger group’s honour and to the practical concern of not allowing new conflicts to arise, conflicts which could side-track the pursuit of vengeance or result in diminished support. Such concerns are not limited to Alize and Irmschart, for the queen’s worries about Willehalm’s endeavours and the vengeance he requires hinge in part on the potential damage to the (much) larger honour group of which she is queen and her family only a small part and on the unseemly, potentially dishonouring transgression which her brother commits by demanding aid of his lord and ostensible superior (her husband). That Wolfram ultimately places such great emphasis on the importance of familial relations, particularly in the face of a common, foreign enemy, along with the presence of a haughty queen, may help to contextualize the clustering of references to the Nibelungenlied which appear throughout this sequence.
It is at this, finally, that the queen relents and gives herself over to tears, and articulates the meaning of her grief thus: »mîne bruoder, die hie sîn, / gedenket, daz wir sîn ein lip!« Irmschart subsequently expands on this:

»trage wir triuwe under brust,
wir klagen unser gemeine vlust,
Heimris und ich, wir zwei«,
Sprach Irmschart von Pavei,
»mîne süne hie oder swâ si sint.
…«

(“If we bear loyalty in our breast, we lament our common injury, Heimrich and I, we two,” said Irmschart von Pavia, “[and also] my sons here or wherever they are.” Willehalm, 168,17-21)

In this manner, the bonds that bind the kinship group together are reaffirmed and the membership of each individual confirmed within it. The final proof comes shortly thereafter, when the queen fulfills Willehalm’s expectations and tearfully beseeches the aid of her husband on her brother’s behalf.

Yet as the king refuses himself to grieve, Willehalm remains excluded from the broader honour group. Twice at Munleun, Willehalm attempts to move the king and court through the performance of his grief. The first of these incorporates his refusal to remove his armour, combined with his abstinence from food and comfort, and his refusal of any kiss, and fails to generate the expected response. It is at which point the Margrave’s performance becomes one of zorn. His anger appears as a condemnation of those who should have responded sympathetically. By refusing to grieve alongside him, Loys and the court call into question the ties that exist between them and Willehalm. In presenting his zorn to the court, Willehalm forces a

612 “Lady, it should pain you as well that I am unrelieved of sadness…” Willehalm, 166,28-9.
613 “My brothers who are here, consider that we are one body!” Willehalm, 168,12-4.
renegotiation of those ties and that hierarchical relationship. His judgment and anger make a status claim even as they impugn the honour and status of those they are directed against. The margrave’s first attempt falters, and Willehalm explodes in anger. This anger is soothed by the grief first of his parents and male siblings, which assures Willehalm of his place within their honour group, legitimates his complaint, and promises their aid in seeking satisfaction, and second by the grief of Alize, who successfully pleads on her mother’s behalf. Finally, the grief expressed by Willehalm’s sister, the queen, confirms and solidifies the cohesion of the sippe in the face of the injury inflicted upon them.

Yet the king and the larger court remain cut off. On his second foray, Willehalm adopts a more traditional approach: he details for his lord the extent of his injury, and the manner in which that injury extends to his audience as well. The resemblance to the formulaic plea of Hetel in Kudrun is marked, though similarities with Otto’s words in the wake of Duke Ernst’s assassination attempt from Herzog Ernst B are also apparent. This is a renewed attempt to kick the machinery of vengeance into action. Willehalm begins by informing Loys, “ir sît selbe überriten!” emphasizing both the personal insult to the king, but also, through the ruler, the communal nature of the injury inflicted. Willehalm then recalls the service he has already done his lord, stating that he has spent his joy for the sake of Loys’ Roman crown. Next, Willehalm simultaneously evokes the family ties which bind the margrave and his king, reminds the king that his kinsmen have been slain, and places Loys at the head of the familial hierarchy by

614 This fact speaks not to the dependence of one narrative on the other (for which there is both insufficient evidence and resemblance), but rather to the formal or formulaic nature of the procedure represented.

615 “You yourself are attacked!” Willehalm, 177,27.

616 “ir roemischer krône… dar umbe ich vreude hân verzert,” (your Roman crown... for which I have spent my joy, Willehalm, 177,29-30).
emphasizing his role as patriarch, stating: “iuwerer kinde mâge sint verlorn.” From here, like Hetel, Willehalm enumerates the injuries inflicted upon him: pressed on all sides, his fortresses and cities have been captured, the fish in his rivers dead, his meadows and fields trampled under, his walls broken, and all his march is aflame. The margrave finally concludes by calling Loys’ honour into question, asking the king to “do that nobly which other kings have ever done.”

At the conclusion of this speech, Willehalm is clearly under the impression that his performative has been successful, and that tears like those wept earlier by his blood-relations, or like those that flowed from the eyes of Hetel’s advisors in Kudrun, are soon to follow. But this does not occur. King Loys makes it apparent that, from his perspective, the rift opened earlier between himself and his ostensible subordinate has yet to be healed. King Loys is clearly not ignorant of the implications of Willehalm’s anger, and to assent to the margrave’s request would be to acknowledge his status claims and his judgment. As ruler and the head of his honour group, he cannot permit Willehalm’s offense to stand. To do so would be to legitimize the margrave’s judgment and to accept the corresponding reduction in status (while simultaneously acknowledging the increase in Willehalm’s own). Yet, at the same time, he cannot refuse to fight the heathens who have invaded the lands of his subordinate (and brother-in-law), or he will be branded a coward. Loys concludes by stating that he will ask the advice of his counsellors.

In Willehalm’s eyes, the hesitation proves too great an insult, and the margrave once again lapses into anger, confirming the continued need for renegotiation: he springs onto the

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617 “the kinsmen of your children are lost,” Willehalm, 178,1.
618 Willehalm, 178,2-13.
619 tuot ellenthaften dem gelîch, als ander kûnege ie tâten! Willehalm, 178,30-179,1.
620 Willehalm, 181,26-30.
table, accuses his lord of being a poor heir to his father Karl and offers to return all the lands
granted him by his lord in previous days.621

Certainly, at this point, the continuing and reciprocal anger displays of the margrave and
his king have brought the pair to a stalemate. We may say with considerable certainty that in the
Munleun sequence the display of anger carries considerable political weight and plays a crucial
role in the negotiations that take place between Willehalm, his family, and their sovereign. That
the anger displayed by Willehalm is understood to be extreme may be gathered from the fact that
the narrator sees fit to comment on it.622 This does not, however, necessarily mean that the
expression of anger is illegitimate or even an irresponsible and/or negatively valued tactic in his
negotiations with Loys.623 We can recognize that Willehalm’s actions, and in particular his
visual and verbal performance of anger, correspond to similar performances of anger in other
texts. We can recognize further that public displays of anger, in particular, have a direct
relationship to status and the negotiation of a social hierarchy through the close connection
between anger and judgment. Wolfram’s depiction of the margrave’s interactions at Munleun
presupposes the audience’s competence in the symbolic language of gesture and emotion, yet

621 Willehalm, 179.4-13. For Valentin Blaas, this action is crucial evidence that Willehalm’s anger is indeed
illegitimate and out of control. Noting that “weder der König noch Lehnsherren konnten im Mittelalter einfach nur
Befehle erteilen. Wichtige Entscheidungen wurden immer erst im Kreise engster Vertrauter – häufig Verwandter –
besprochen. Konsensherstellung durch Beratung… war eine wesentliche Voraussetzung für mittelalterliche
Machtausübung. (“Neither the king nor feudal lords in the Middle Ages could just simply give orders. Important
decisions were always discussed amongst a circle of confidants, often relatives. The establishment of consensus
through counsel… was an essential prerequisite for the medieval exercise of power.” Blaas, “Überlegungen,” 63). In
taking offense at this and continuing to push his own will, Blaas argues that Willehalm “verstößt… gegen
Gepflogenheiten, wie sie für höfische Praxis angenommen wurden…[er] missachtet…ein weiteres Mal den Weg
einer institutionalisierten Lösung seines Anliegens, (“[Willehalm] violates the understood conventions of courtly
practice… for a second time [he] disregards an institutionalized path toward his objective.” Blaas, “Überlegungen,”
64).

622 Willehalm, 162.1-163.10.

623 Richard Barton’s reading of the epic Old French poem Raoul de Cambrai, for example, leads him to conclude
that the narrative depicts a “failure to realize that the process of renegotiation and mediation [achieved through the
expression of anger] had been successful,” rather than a direct criticism on the role of anger in the conflict between
the two primary figures, and that it is miscommunication, rather than uncontrolled emption, which leads to the
this leaves us with the question of the effectiveness and propriety of the hero’s actions. At the base level, we must ask whether or not Willehalm is successful, and why, or why not. Ultimately, the margrave does indeed gain assurances from King Loys that his request will be granted: Loys agrees to provide Willehalm with the aid that the margrave believes he is owed. However, we may also note that in the final event, this promise is made not to Willehalm directly, but rather to his father, Heimrich, who intervenes repeatedly on his son’s behalf. We may also note, as discussed above, that Loys may in fact have promised as much in his very first words to the hero. If so, we must read the entire episode as a circular distraction from Willehalm’s true purpose in which Willehalm’s family strives to bring their angry relative back to the very beginning, as it were.\footnote{624} Finally, we have the evidence of the narrator, who seems to feel it necessary to defend the margrave to his audience.

To begin with the final point, it is true that the narrator states that the hero “sîner zuht vergaz.”\footnote{625} Yet we must note that this occurs specifically in the context of his laying hands upon the queen:

Swenne ich nû rede gelerne,
Sô sol ich in bereden baz,
War umbe er sîner zuht vergaz,
Dô diu küneginne sô brogete,
Daz er si drume zogete.
(If I should learn to speak properly, I shall better defend him, why he forgot his good manners when he so mishandled the queen that he pulled her hence. Willehalm, 163,4-8)

\footnote{624} This is not far from the position advanced by Valentin Blass, who argues: “Da Willehalms Zorn… in Munleun ohne Legitimierung der dort versammelten Hofgesellschaft bleibt, kann dieser als “ungerecht” erachtet werden. Aus diesem Grunde verfehlt Willehalms Züren seine erhoffte Wirkung und verzögert die Verhandlungen mit dem König sowie die Wiederaufnahme des Heidenkampfes unnötig” (Since Willehalm’s anger at Munleun remains without legitimization from the society of the court there assembled, this [anger] can be deemed “wrongful.” For this reason, Willehalm’s anger does not achieve its hoped for effectiveness and unnecessarily delays the negotiations with the king and the resumption of the battle against the heathens), Blaas, “Überlegungen,” 57.

\footnote{625} Forgot his good manners, Willehalm, 163,6.
Here, it is Willehalm’s anger against his sister, not the king, which is criticized, and the narrator feels less call to defend the hero’s behaviour towards Loys. Even on this point, the remainder of Willehalm’s family side with him against his sister, the queen, with only Alize stepping in to smooth things over.

The queen’s anger\textsuperscript{626} is directed at her brother because of the threat that he represents to her own honour, that of her husband, and through him, the empire. The queen thus privileges the honour of her marriage pairing and that of the political entity of which she is co-head above that of her blood \textit{sippe} when the overlapping groups are brought into conflict. The performance of Willehalm’s grief and anger serve to demarcate the lines of conflict within the court, and by openly weeping, the margrave’s family demonstrates their allegiance to their injured kin. Along the fault lines, anger is displayed on both sides, initiating first a series of negotiations wherein through a combination of grief and anger the queen is brought back in to the blood \textit{sippe}, yet the larger honour group of the empire remains divided and Willehalm’s status within it uncertain. At this point, Wolfram’s privileging of first the blood \textit{sippe} and second the Christian community as extended honour group above the political unit of the empire is underlined. Willehalm indeed ultimately achieves what he wants from Loys, and this without ever backing down or leaving off his anger. In this respect, the status claim of the margrave stands and the emperor stands reduced, yet it is significant that the resolution is brought about not exclusively by the threat of violence implicit in Willehalm’s judgment of the king (and his occasional explicit vocalization of this threat), but by the influence of all the margrave’s kin. The grief of the queen and of Heimrich, in particular, combine with Willehalm’s anger to bring him victory. Indeed, it is Heimrich who

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{626} Willehalm himself labels her behaviour “\textit{zorn},” \textit{Willehalm}, 166,1.
\end{footnote}
makes the final argument, and here it is the emphasis on the emperor’s role as Christian and the danger to that sippe\textsuperscript{627} which finally convinces Loys to act for the sake of his own reputation.\textsuperscript{628}

In this manner, the margrave ultimately achieves his aim. Willehalm’s actions, drawn from a repertoire of customary practices, serve to delineate the problems within the court, to communicate who is on whose side, who honours feudal obligations and who does not. At the same time, while Willehalm’s anger functions as clear and readable signal, the status negotiations which it initiates do not run smoothly, but rather require further intervention from the margrave’s allies. The progression of the dispute at Munleun, and the changing, multi-faceted tactics employed by both Willehalm and his family, serve not merely to delineate the various powers and relative status positions at play within the imperial court, but also to highlight an ethical hierarchy of triuwe within the overlapping honour group.

It is a crucial element of the Willehalm narrative that it positions a great conflict, a war between faiths, between peoples, between kings, as above all a matter of familial and individual honour: it is personal. The same characterization of large-scale conflict, which might otherwise be termed war, is notable throughout the Middle High German heroic tradition, particularly in the Dietrich epics, in the Nibelungenlied, and in Kudrun. No conflict is so great that it cannot be understood as a question of honour and as a dispute over relative status. As a result, we find time and again that even at the largest scale, the same progression of the injury, the plea, the consolidation of ties through shared grief, the passing of judgment through anger, and the execution of that judgment upon the condemned.

\textsuperscript{627} des wirt diu kristenheit geschant / und der touf entêret, Willehalm, 182,26-7.
\textsuperscript{628} “mîn selbes pris,” Willehalm, 183,3.
Final Words

Middle High German heroic narratives present their audience with a remarkably consistent set of practices regarding conflict and communication. Approaching these texts from an anthropological perspective throws many of their common elements into stark relief. It is this intensification and condensation that may yield considerable benefit to our understanding of both the practices of high medieval honour culture as well as the role epic can play in responding to – and also contributing to shape – it. To be sure, this literary intensification and condensation works on various levels: As I attempted to show in the close reading of the Munleun scene, it can work by condensing regularized processes into one scene, thereby both laying bare the mechanisms of process disruption and resolution. Invariably, this intensification also works through the employment of one of the most basic, and most effective epic strategies: By bringing it down to the illustrative and concrete level of – both exemplary and/or exorbitant – interpersonal relations. Heroic poetry consistently structures its narratives of profound social and political disruption, like that of a society’s destruction (the Nibelungenlied) or of a divisive civil war (Herzog Ernst B), as interpersonal conflict, waged according to traditional rules of engagement fundamentally related to the preservation of personal integrity and social status (honour). In so doing, these epics are granted the freedom to experiment, to critique those human elements most disruptive to the social fabric, or even to cast doubt on the morality and efficacy of the “rules” themselves. Where the individuals and the societies of each narrative are bound by similar conventions, it is in the details of the characters let loose within them, the specifics of the motivating circumstances, and the communicative responses of the actors that the narratives problematize the anxieties which gave them birth, and which ultimate guide the epic tale toward a vision of resolution or disintegration.
It is not only my choice of corpus which places this experimentation squarely into the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with continuous transmission and, as can be assumed, continuous relevance throughout the later Middle Ages. Rather, it could be argued that the eruptive codification in writing of these texts from the later twelfth century onward point to the fact that aristocratic culture came to see these epic experimentations as a means to express and (self-)reflect processes of consensus-building and the foundational role emotions play for and in them.

These epic experiments are not free-form. They represent, produce, and reproduce systems of interaction informed by a particular conception of order, identity, and value. Fundamental to each is the understanding of honour, the external worth of the individual and of the communities of which that individual is a constituent. The need for the persistent maintenance of this symbolic capital, which is inseparable from both individual and collective integrity, occasions patterns of agonistic interaction. The codification of emotions as signs with heroic literature occurs on these patterns, with which they enjoy a symbiotic existence and from which they cannot be parted.
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