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978-0-521-16920-2 - The Art of Narration in Wolfram's Parzival and Albrecht's

Jüngerer Titurel

Linda B. Parshall

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION

The late thirteenth-century poem, the *Jüngerer Titurel*, is an important monument in the post-classical phase of the Middle High German poetic tradition. Its considerable popularity and influence attest to the significance of this lengthy work for our understanding of developments in the courtly romance form. Although writing two generations after Wolfram von Eschenbach, the author poses as Wolfram, adopting not just Wolfram's name and subject matter but also much of his vocabulary and style, his mannerisms as a narrator, and even the few details of personal history that Wolfram betrays in his writings. Yet in spite of the imitation there is much in the formal structure, narrative technique, and insistent moralistic tone of the JT which identifies it as the product of a later era. The relationship between the JT and Wolfram's works is thus especially revealing not only of changes in the art of narration in the thirteenth century but of attitudes towards literature and its tradition.

The overwhelming success of the JT offers an interesting perspective on the literary reception of Wolfram, indeed on the history of literary reception and criticism in general.¹ For not only was the JT imitated repeatedly over the subsequent two centuries, but it was also already accepted as Wolfram's work before the end of the thirteenth century² and hailed in the fifteenth as 'das haubt ob teutschen puechen'.³ The author's impersonation was still accepted in the Romantic period when rekindled enthusiasm for the JT held it to be one of the greatest products of the German Middle Ages and the apex of Wolfram's career. This acclaim was finally dampened when Karl Lachmann identified it not as Wolfram's work but as the 'langweiliges, todtes, und geziertes Werk' of a follower.⁴ Lachmann's authority plunged the JT into a lasting disrepute from which it has only recently begun to recover.

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[More information](#)*Introduction*

The poem which stimulated all this attention remains, for both practical and aesthetic reasons, largely unfathomed, though substantial strides have been made over the last fifteen years. The JT's episodic plot is unusually involved and difficult to summarise. Basically, the tale is built on the tragic love story of Tschinotulander and Sigune, drawn mainly from the texts of Wolfram's *Titurel* fragments and *Parzival*. This central plot is framed by the history of the Gral, with Titurel's youth and the founding of Munt Salvasch serving as a preface, and an abbreviated version of Parzival's adventures as a conclusion. The JT's heavy reliance on Wolfram as a source for characters and plots as well as a model for style has been demonstrated.⁵ In addition there is considerable elaboration of plots and descriptions drawn from other poems, encyclopedias, bestiaries and so forth, along with decisive influence from the medieval rhetorical tradition.⁶

Study of the historical aspects of the JT is complicated by uncertainties concerning its author, date, and geographical provenance. The narrator initially identifies himself as Wolfram von Eschenbach and maintains this disguise until near the end of the work. Finally, in stanza 5883, he reveals himself as 'Albrecht', without reference to his earlier misrepresentation. In addition, seven so-called 'Hinweistropfen' have been inserted at two separate points in the text. These refer to the fact that the JT is not by Wolfram, though they do not actually name Albrecht.⁷

Various theories have been presented ascribing parts of the JT to Wolfram himself, to an unnamed second poet, and to a continuator named Albrecht. But it is now generally accepted that the entire JT is essentially the work of the single poet who names himself Albrecht. Scholars first sought to identify him as Albrecht von Scharfenberg, a poet mentioned by the fifteenth-century author Ulrich Füetrer in his *Buch der Abenteuer* as one of the greatest German poets,⁸ but equation of these two Albrechts remains unsubstantiated.⁹ It appears that the author of the JT will not be identified with any certainty

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[More information](#)*Introduction*

until further documents are uncovered. Thus we can only presume that the work is the sole surviving example from the pen of an otherwise unknown poet named Albrecht.

There is sounder evidence for dating the JT. Richard of Cornwall (died 1272) is named in stanza 2946 as still living, and this seems to provide a *terminus ante quem* for at least the first half of the poem. The only other internal evidence is an inserted reference stating that Wolfram has been dead for fifty years.¹⁰ A quotation from the JT in one of the sermons of Berthold von Regensburg (died 1272) has been cited as external evidence for a *terminus post quem*. However, Berthold's surviving sermons are later reworkings by his successors from notes and memory. Hence, this in isolation cannot be regarded as a reliable criterion.¹¹ The most persuasive theory is offered by Erich Petzet who uses the JT text and a fragmentary dedication poem extant in only one copy to substantiate his dating of 1270–5 for the poem's completion.¹² Although the precise relationship of this '*Verfasserfragment*' to the epic is unclear, it can reasonably be considered as Albrecht's work, probably written after most of the JT was complete. Petzet's argument can be summarised as follows: Albrecht's original patrons abandoned him late in the work (see JT 64 and 5767–8). He then wrote a short poem (the Heidelberg fragment) identifying himself as author of the JT and dedicating his work to Ludwig der Strenge (Ludwig II – 'duc loys et palatinus', VF 20), in hopes of winning him as a patron. This was done between the death of Richard of Cornwall (2 April 1272) and the election of Rudolf of Hapsburg (1 October 1273), during which period Ludwig was considered a possible successor to Richard's throne. Albrecht's appeal failed (JT 5883), and he finished the poem about 1275, presumably without support.¹³ This hypothesis has been convincingly supported by de Boor's recent work on Albrecht's original patrons.¹⁴

The JT's geographical provenance is likewise uncertain. It has traditionally been localised in Bavaria.¹⁵ However, more

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[More information](#)

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recently Walter Röll in a detailed analysis of JT manuscripts argues that the strong shadings of Middle German in Albrecht's language place the work further to the north, perhaps at Wittenberg.¹⁶ De Boor's proposal that Albrecht was born in Bavaria but then worked further north satisfies both views.¹⁷

A considerable number of extant manuscripts further attest to the popularity which the JT enjoyed throughout the later medieval and Renaissance periods. From a total of eleven complete manuscripts and forty-six fragments known to Wolf, two are placed in the late thirteenth century, twelve *ca.* 1300, thirty-two in the fourteenth century, and nine in the fifteenth. There is also an incunabulum version printed at Strasbourg in 1477.¹⁸

The JT's vast length, the number of manuscripts, and confusion over textual recension have posed major obstacles. The first modern printing was K. A. Hahn's 1842 publication of a manuscript in Heidelberg (Cod. Pal. Germ. 383), now not considered one of the best.¹⁹ In 1941 Werner Wolf undertook a full critical edition. Volumes 1 and 2 (1955; 1968) have appeared, but Wolf's edition was interrupted by his death which left the final volume including some 2000 stanzas in preparation. In spite of this, and in spite of the faults demonstrated by Röll, Wolf's edition is indispensable.²⁰ Its inaccuracies may render certain types of linguistic investigation difficult if not impossible. However, matters of content, literary sources, and narrative technique can readily be explored on the basis of Wolf's carefully prepared text and even, with caution, Hahn's transcription.

Conrad Borchling's *Preisschrift* of 1895 is the first major study of the JT and its relationship to the works of Wolfram von Eschenbach. Borchling examines the JT text in detail, concentrating on factual content and stylistic analysis, and convincingly shows that it is derived in large part from *Parzival*, *Willehalm*, and the *Titurel* fragments. Borchling's single-minded demonstration of the JT's dependence on Wolfram, however, led him to neglect many interesting

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[More information](#)*Introduction*

aspects of the work and to undervalue Albrecht's achievement. Some of this was made good in the following decades by other scholars, though in general the JT's reputation was still marred. Wolf's edition and his associated scholarly contributions thus represented a milestone in the reevaluation of Albrecht's work.²¹ Until recently, interest in the JT centred on textual and stylistic aspects, identification of sources or analysis of the poem's philosophical and religious content. Little was done to elucidate features such as narrative and descriptive technique, character portrayal, or depiction and motivation of action. With the appearance of Hanspeter Brode's comprehensive dissertation in 1966, however, Albrecht's poem was put to a broader kind of scrutiny and emerged clearly as a work needing to be examined on its own merits rather than as a poor reflection of Wolfram.²² Hedda Ragotzky's book on *Rezeptionsgeschichte* devotes a major chapter to Albrecht's impersonation of Wolfram and draws sound conclusions about the role of tradition in Middle High German poetry and specifically about the Wolfram 'Rollenbild'. Both she and Brode have made major strides towards a broader understanding of Albrecht's achievement, and their work is fundamental to the present study.²³

The recent move to reappraise Albrecht's JT is part of a general trend towards a broader perspective in medieval literary studies. The application to older literature of critical modes developed in the study of modern works has brought new insights and values to the field. The analysis of narrative technique is a case in point. A short time ago it was still necessary to argue the validity of this approach to medieval romance. But as Peter Haidu recently noted:

The news has perhaps begun to leak out beyond the purview of medievalism that these texts, far from being either naive, sentimental stories akin to fairy tales or rather heavy moralizing allegories, can instead be seen as confident, complex and most likely entirely self-conscious manipulations of the elements of fiction.²⁴

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The likelihood that a poet such as Wolfram von Eschenbach was consciously ironic, that he recognised and exploited distinctions among author, narrator, and reciter, or that within his tradition he commented on his tradition – these and related insights have opened up new interpretive vistas to current scholarship. Recent Wolfram studies have given credence to the notion of intentional fictionality within a traditional medieval framework, a perspective that can be extended to Albrecht as well. Although there is a tendency in this kind of approach to isolate the work from its historical context, the importance of tradition must maintain a central place here. Indeed, a quotient of self-consciousness may render the medieval poet's relationship to traditional forms more crucial as well as more complex. Certainly for Albrecht tradition was paramount, and for him it represented an inspiration, not a hindrance.

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[More information](#)

1. DESCRIPTIVE TECHNIQUE: THE STRUCTURE OF ENVIRONMENT

PARZIVAL AS A MODEL OF FORM

Defining an artist's relationship to the tradition in which he was working is certainly a primary objective in the study of medieval works of art. In courtly romances and epics we are often aided by direct references to sources, cited as part of the necessary 'validation' of a tale.¹ It is rare, however, to find a poet analysing his artistic relationship to his model or commenting on the goals of his own art.² Albrecht does both, discussing his debt to Wolfram's poems and elucidating his own poetic aspirations. His commentary – delivered in the guise of Wolfram von Eschenbach and more directly when Albrecht himself speaks out – expresses a consciousness of his place in an on-going tradition as both critic and creative artist. Thus Albrecht offers a particularly rich perspective on the understanding of innovation and tradition that obtained in late thirteenth-century German literature.

Our first glimpse of Albrecht's intention occurs in the JT prologue which echoes in content and vocabulary the prologues of Wolfram's *Parzival* and *Willehalm*. At the end of the prologue³ the narrator sets forth his objective:

86 Der von Provenzale und Flegetanis parlûre
 heidenisch von dem grale und franzoys tûnts kunt
 vil aventûre.
 daz wil ich diutsch, gan iz mir got, hie kunden.
 swaz Parzival da birget, daz wirt zu liehte braht an
 vakel zunden.

Here Albrecht's narrator, speaking as Wolfram, refers specifically to the story of *Parzival* and its sources, authenticating in the traditional way the tale he has undertaken. Through a metaphor of light (continuing the imagery of Wolfram's prologue), the narrator states his intention to clarify the obscurities in *Parzival*. Having identified himself and the objective of

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[More information](#)*Descriptive technique*

his work, he goes on to explain that public demand has brought him to this undertaking.

87 Ich bin so vil gevraget von edeler diet der mere,
daz michs durch not betraget, wer der edel, reine,
küsche waere,
der solcher selten vrucht da was der bernde.
immer selic hie si waren, und dort was si got selbe
selden wernde.

The relationship which the narrator here establishes with his public⁴ is quite uncharacteristic of Wolfram's poetry, indeed of earlier thirteenth-century works in general.⁵ There is no sense of an audience as an immediate presence, fictional or otherwise. The demand which he faces is rather an accumulated response made over time, much the sort of demand that brings a modern-day scholar to revise a previous work. Albrecht's Wolfram poses as an author of acknowledged stature and authority who sets out to fulfil the promise of his earlier career.

The very fact of Albrecht's enterprise as well as its popular success indicates a continued interest in the tale of Parzival and sustained admiration of Wolfram's poetic genius. Clearly there was an audience eager to know the full story of the Gral, and Albrecht did not regard himself as attempting a forgery but rather as the continuator of Wolfram's opus.⁶ Albrecht's sense of his own discipleship is most clearly expressed in the *Verfasserfragment* where he defends his impersonation and treats directly the challenges facing a follower. He draws an analogy between his literary ambition and the construction of a temple in Venice left unfinished at the death of its original builders.⁷ The episode offers a parable on the venerable nature of art and the individual artist's responsibility to his own artistic tradition.

VF 2 Venezaer vil riche ein tempel hant erbouwen.
von den, die meisterliche gestein kunden graben
und erhouwen,

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[More information](#)*Descriptive technique*

der nam den ende vil und muosten sterben:
 ir werc daz edel tiure liezen sie dar umbe niht
verderben.

VF 3 Ander sie da namen ze meister disem tempel.
 die muosten eben ramen. ir wage maez gaben sie
exempel
 uf elliu ort und worhten sam die erren.
 ist witze, swer daz minner lobt, swenn er hat
gebrechen an dem merren?⁸

Here Albrecht asserts his characteristically medieval view of the artist's purpose as the perpetuation of an established pattern. That the story of Titurel, Tschinotulander, and Sigune was left incomplete justifies his efforts, for Wolfram's art should not be lost to the world just because he died before finishing it (VF 4).

The choice of an architectural metaphor is revealing in several ways. First, the scope of Albrecht's undertaking was comparably immense. At the time of this dedication he had written over 5000 stanzas and had still to deal with large sections of material. Secondly, a temple is especially appropriate to the central image in the JT – the Gral temple, itself incomplete in the sense that its full story remained unfinished. Thirdly, the comparison with architecture suggests a concept of poetry as a monumental, formal construction, an attitude which is true to Albrecht's understanding of his art.⁹ For him the wholeness of a work of art is what allows it to stand on its own, apart from its creator. The importance of Wolfram's poetry demands its continuation even if by a lesser master (VF 10). For in Albrecht's view it is in the nature of art always to improve: 'Alle edliu kunst sich bezzert unde waehet' (VF 14, 3). Thus Albrecht sees his work as a further step towards an artistic ideal: 'kunst diu edel hoehste, dast rein getiht' (VF 14, 4). He did not suffer in the role of *Epigone!*¹⁰

In the text of the JT, Albrecht again considers the importance of totality and continuity in a literary creation. He is

