A Courtier’s Mirror
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Cultivating Elite Identity in Thomasin von Zerclaere’s Welscher Gast

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For Isabella and Antonia

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Introduction

Thomasin von Zerclaere’s Welscher Gast
and Its Images

This book examines the image cycle of the *Welscher Gast*, an illustrated epic-length didactic poem composed originally by the Italian cleric Thomasin von Zerclaere in 1215 for a German-speaking elite secular audience residing in the region that is today overlapped by northeastern Italy, Austria, and southeastern Germany. The poem was soon transmitted throughout southern Germany and remained popular for about three hundred years.

The *Welscher Gast* is an important text for our understanding of medieval German courtly culture. It is a compendium of ethical, moral, social, and intellectual knowledge for an aristocratic lay audience at a feudal court. The poem includes instruction on table manners, courtly love, self-representation and lordship, the seven liberal arts, giftgiving, justice, and other issues central to feudal society and courtly identity. Like the courtly epic, the *Welscher Gast* constructs an ideal aristocratic society in which knights and ladies are in pursuit of courtly love, social stability, and justice. Whereas the heroes of the courtly epic confront giants, dwarves, robbers, and errant knights, however, Thomasin’s stalwart courtier (*biderebe man*, “good man”) overcomes a wide variety of personified vices. Only by learning to recognize the vices and eschewing them can a knight, lady, or cleric become an exemplary courtier. Thomasin’s goal is to inspire the entire court to live an ethical life characterized by...
the four central courtly virtues: constancy (stete), justice (reht), moderation (maze), and generosity (milte).

In many ways, the Welscher Gast is paradigmatic for thirteenth-century courtly culture. The text, which explicitly addresses knights, ladies, and clerics, mirrors a historical and cultural context in which orality and literacy coexisted at court, vernacular literature was starting to be conceived as a written literature, and the aristocracy was concerned with developing a distinct courtly culture that would distinguish it from the lower classes. The Welscher Gast also bears testimony to the intersection of religious and secular spheres. Thomasin was a cleric whose knowledge of vernacular literature is established in his evocation of Arthurian and legendary heroes as models of exemplary behavior in part 2 of his poem. He is only one of several German poets who identifies himself, or can be identified, as working in the service of the church. Much research still needs to be done on how secular and religious society overlapped, but the Welscher Gast is clearly not unusual in its position as a clerical literary production for a secular audience.

Although in one sense paradigmatic for thirteenth-century elite society and its concerns, however, the Welscher Gast is also unique both in terms of its specific content and its conception as an illustrated epic-length didactic poem. It is one of the first vernacular didactic treatises to be composed in the German language and for a lay audience. Furthermore, it is the first extant poem in the German vernacular to be designed as an illustrated text from the start. The image cycle contains over one hundred illustrations that are integral to the poem's pedagogical purpose: the images visualize exempla, personify abstract concepts, and provide mnemonic aids enabling the viewer to more easily commit the instruction to memory. Text and image were conceived and created together.

The illustrated poem constructs an aristocratic courtly identity, but it is concerned also more broadly with ethical behavior and political order. It upholds the traditional estates of peasant, knight, and cleric, and maintains the importance of behaving properly according to one's God-ordained lot in life. Thomasin explicitly addresses the self-representative and performative nature of the medieval court, but also the interactions between lords and peasants, knights and ladies,
and the responsibility of liege lords to behave in good faith, justly, generously, and moderately towards those dependent on them. While its instructions and examples probably seemed archaic for an audience in the fifteenth or even the fourteenth century when towns were starting to compete for power with the rural courts, and a rising burgher class had established itself as literary patrons, the poem continued to be copied and circulated until around 1500. Twenty-five extant manuscripts bear testimony to the poem's popularity particularly throughout the southeast German-speaking region of Western Europe.

Little is known about the circumstances of these manuscripts’ production, but the few known patrons and historic records, such as book inventories, that establish ownership of manuscript redactions of the Welscher Gast suggest that a broad spectrum of elite society was interested in the poem. Some manuscripts were commissioned by urban burghers, while others were produced for upper or lesser (rural or urban) nobility; some were owned by secular households, others by ecclesiastical courts. The poem thus clearly spoke not only to the feudal secular court audience for which it was produced, but also found broader appeal among the elite secular and ecclesiastical society of the Middle Ages and late Middle Ages. Fifteenth-century audiences perhaps enjoyed the poem less for its pragmatic moral instruction than for its detailed descriptions of the archaic habits and concerns of a bygone era. Rather than see their own culture depicted in the poem, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century audiences may have regarded it as a window to an earlier aristocratic culture. For an upwardly noble aristocrat or wealthy burgher, the poem would have provided considerable entertainment as well as an affirming model of elite society to which to aspire. The illustrations, as this book will show, play a key role in constructing and affirming elite identity over the 250 years of the poem’s transmission.

The focus of the present volume is on the poem’s visual program and an examination of how it transformed over the course of the poem’s reception. Specifically, this study is concerned with what the visual presentation of the poem can tell us about the ways that the Welscher Gast was reconceived over the course of its transmission by audiences concerned with imagining themselves as members of an elite society. The poem was composed for the edification of a secular court audience and
focuses on a wide variety of issues including etiquette, courtship, lordship, education, and courtly ethics and virtues, presented in a manner that emphasizes practical implementation in the daily life of the courtier. Its thirteenth-century target audience was heavily concerned with developing an elite identity that distinguished it from nonnoble society, and the poem speaks specifically to that concern. Its images complement that project and help to modernize the text for a changing audience over time. The illustrated poem confirms that medieval society understood that social identity was malleable and that it was possible to fashion oneself according to a model or ideal. This self-conscious process of identity formation is what I mean when I use the term self-fashioning. The *Welscher Gast* bears testimony, on the one hand, to a sustained project of elite self-fashioning starting in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, and on the other, to changing social values over the course of the poem’s transmission. These social changes are reflected most clearly in the images.

This book is in two parts. Its core is this introduction and five chapters that provide contextual analysis and interpretation of the *Welscher Gast* and its illustrations. Each of the chapters addresses in turn a different aspect of elite secular identity and a different context of reception that informs the transitions that the images undergo. My thesis is that the illustrated poem participates in the construction of an elite secular identity for an audience that was concerned with distinguishing itself socially and emancipating itself from clerical society. The *Welscher Gast* was understood by its medieval audience as a source of affirmation and pragmatic instruction for the formation of this elite secular identity. As its audience shifts from rural ministerial family to urban burgher, so the staging of the poem also changes. Particularly the formatting and the images are revised and adapted to their audience’s specific cultural contexts. First composed for contemplation and reflection in the pursuit of self-knowledge, the *Welscher Gast* was revised as a reference book to be used on the one hand as a resource and on the other as a window into an aristocratic society that became increasingly archaic (but clearly no less desirable as a model) as the poem was transmitted. The Gotha redaction in particular, I claim, reframes this project of fashioning an elite secular identity in terms of fourteenth-century courtly culture. The image cycle
especially is redesigned and expanded to present the viewer with models of courtly behavior and to suggest specific categories of identity formation. Furthermore, changes in formatting reveal a fundamental shift in the manner in which the poem was read. Integral to the elite society that we find modeled in the pages of the Gotha manuscript are visual and verbal literacy, gender roles, and clearly differentiated indicators of social status (estate).

The first part of the book thus focuses primarily on the 1340 redaction of the illustrated text, Gotha Memb. I 120, which I view as a pivotal manuscript in the poem’s transmission. The Gotha manuscript is compared both to the oldest manuscript redaction from 1256, Heidelberg Cpg 389, as well as a fifteenth-century manuscript, Wolfenbüttel Cod. Guelf. 37.19 Aug. 2°. The Heidelberg manuscript is a crucial point of comparison because it is the oldest extant manuscript and is presumably closest to the original version. The Wolfenbüttel manuscript is similar to a group of later manuscript redactions and thus serves as representative of the text’s late medieval reception. The Gotha manuscript contains the most extensive version of the image cycle, as well as the first extant version of the unusual prose foreword that was appended to the poem in the late thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century. It is also the first complete redaction to contain an extensive indexing apparatus that enables the viewer to use the codex as a reference tool. As my study shows, the Gotha manuscript additionally bears testimony to a radical reworking of the image cycle and formatting. This revision that the text and its images in the Gotha redaction undergo establishes its fourteenth-century audience as members of an elite reading community, and reveals important information about that community’s reading practices. This manuscript is thus key not only for understanding the poem’s medieval reception but also for our understanding of specific subgroups that were part of medieval vernacular literate culture.

The second part of the book is comprised of four appendices. The first provides a catalogue of all extant manuscript redactions of the Welscher Gast. The second presents a synopsis of the poem as it appears in the Gotha manuscript. The extensive third appendix presents the illustrated pages of the Gotha manuscript. It contains a description of each illustration including transcriptions and translations of all
banderoles and labels, and reproductions of all of the illustrated folios, so that even scholars and students who are not familiar with Middle High German may have access to this important text and its remarkable visual program. The fourth appendix contains images from other manuscripts, including Heidelberg Cpg 389 and Wolfenbüttel Cod. Guelf. 37.19 Aug. 2°.

THE WELSCHER GAST AS A DIDACTIC PROJECT

In the thirteenth century, didactic literature in the German vernacular became widespread and was very popular as a source of edification and entertainment. For the modern reader its representation of medieval society provides a crucial point of comparison and contrast to other literary genres.

The breadth of didactic narrative forms and themes is similar in every western European medieval vernacular, but whereas didactic poems in French and Occitan proliferate already in the twelfth century, German vernacular didactic literature does not seem to appear until the thirteenth century. This thirteenth-century German corpus of didactic works intended for lay audiences includes a wide variety of genres and forms (epic-length poem, short narrative poem, poetic dialog, didactic lyric poetry, such as the Spruchdichtung, and so on) that address a broad spectrum of themes (love, conduct, etiquette, lordship, worldly vice, and so forth). While the Welscher Gast was the first didactic epic-length poem in the German vernacular, its popularity and the rapid production of other didactic texts in various poetic forms soon afterward bear testimony to a thriving cultural interest in the didactic form.

That said, in the vernacular tradition of the Middle Ages didactic literature as a genre was not considered completely distinct from literature proper. All vernacular literature was expected to entertain and provide edification, be poetic and persuasive. In the courtly romance, audiences receive instruction on proper courtly behavior, fashion, and language; social institutions such as marriage (e.g., Erec), or feudal and dynastic relationships (e.g., Willehalm); and specific areas of knowledge, such as hunting (e.g., Tristan). When it comes to fables, exempla,
and other shorter narrative forms, it is often impossible to draw clear boundaries between entertaining and didactic literature. In this sense, almost all medieval literature is didactic literature.

A categorical difference between didactic and literary texts was probably also not initially reflected in distinct forms of reception or composition. At the beginning of the thirteenth century didactic and nondidactic vernacular poems were likely presented in similar contexts to similar effect. They may have been performed in sections, read aloud, or sung at court, or their manuscripts may have been privately viewed by their wealthy patrons. Both the courtly romance and the Welscher Gast are episodic and lend themselves well to being delivered in sections, both are composed in four-beat rhymed couplets, and both are composed for the entertainment and edification of a court audience.

These important similarities aside, however, didactic literature is often overtly pragmatic and generally concerned with social interaction in the here and now. Medieval didactic texts, particularly conduct books, often provide models that are to be mimicked or eschewed; they frequently moralize, persuade, threaten, and cajole their reader or listener to behave in the manner prescribed. Because of its pragmatic and pedagogical intent, didactic literature offers us a rather different perspective of medieval culture than its “literary” counterparts. If we read didactic literature at face value, then we are often led to imagine an ill-mannered society prone to excessive displays of emotion and much in need of controlling and moralizing precepts. Indeed, in his seminal book The Civilizing Process, Norbert Elias drew on didactic texts on table manners and courtesy to argue that medieval society was particularly violent, primitive, and badly behaved. He regarded medieval didactic works as representative of accepted social conventions that remained unchanged until the Renaissance, when a notion of civilité emerged that was characterized by self-control and refined expression. Elias cites the German translation of the Disticha Catonis, a compendium of proverbial wisdom composed originally in Latin (third or fourth century AD), as well as other medieval books of table manners and courtesy to make his point that medieval culture naively perceived their environment in terms of the opposition between “good and bad.”10 The Renaissance treatises by Erasmus, Castiglione, and others,
by contrast, according to Elias, reflect an era in which people are more refined, self-controlled, and behave in a more nuanced and deliberate manner than in the Middle Ages.¹¹

However, as many scholars have shown, Elias’s reading of medieval texts as a literal representation of medieval society is problematic at best.¹² First, he focuses on a select group of texts that are hardly representational of medieval didactic literature. Were he to have examined a larger corpus of didactic material, Roberta L. Krueger points out, he might have concluded instead that “medieval moralists were intensely preoccupied with attempting to shape behavior.”¹³ Second, many scholars have taken issue with Elias’s assessment that medieval people had not yet developed the social competence to control themselves and their emotions.¹⁴ Indeed, thanks to the work of Barbara Rosenwein and others, it is now generally accepted that it is essential to learn to read and understand medieval descriptions of social behavior both in their broader historical and in their specific literary contexts. Different genres assume different social codes.¹⁵

In fact, despite its pragmatic intent, didactic literature does not offer us a true reflection of medieval behavior. As Krueger succinctly puts it, “competing clerical, chivalric, and bourgeois registers may clash in a single work.”¹⁶ Prescriptive rather than descriptive, the corpus of didactic works as a whole uses various lenses to refract notions about society and social behavior and thus provides the modern reader with diverse perspectives on medieval discourses of identity. Indeed, because of its pragmatic and pedagogical intent, didactic literature offers us a view of medieval culture sometimes complementary to and sometimes conflicting with its “literary” counterparts.

The Welscher Gast presents us with an image of an ideal medieval court society imagined by Thomasin to be deeply invested in the virtues of constancy, moderation, justice, generosity, and all the subvirtues that go along with them. He depicts an ethical secular society that is elite in appearance and behavior and has a clearly defined social and political role in maintaining social order. This is an imagined society, but because it is one that we encounter in the courtly epic as well, it must have represented a familiar and widespread secular ideal. In contrast to the courtly epic, however, Thomasin provides his audience with pragmatic guidelines on how to achieve this ideal.
Franz H. Bäuml once characterized the *Welscher Gast* as “excessively dreary in its unremitting moralizations, accompanied by a permanently raised didactic forefinger.” Indeed, from the modern perspective, much medieval didactic literature seems exceedingly tedious, and moreover often seems far from being innovative or progressive.

In contrast to Bäuml’s dire assessment of the poem, however, this study suggests that the *Welscher Gast* participated in a dynamic and constructive social process of identity formation for the class of ministerials in the German-speaking Middle Ages. In the thirteenth century the rise of the ministerials as a powerful political class is a specifically German phenomenon. The ministerials had a vested interest in establishing a noble identity and the *Welscher Gast*, the author of which was probably a ministerial himself, contributes in no small way to that project.

**VISUALITY IN THE WELSCHER GAST:**
**THOMASIN’S BILDE**

Whether composed orally or in writing, vernacular literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was composed in a historical context in which people communicated primarily by seeing, watching, and hearing each other. Medieval literature abounds with descriptions of ornate material objects, architecture, clothing, gesture, and ritual. These descriptions and the material world on which they are based are indicative of a medieval society that was visually attuned and in which images, objects, and performance played a dominant communicative and ritualistic role in both secular and religious spheres of interaction. Although verbal literacy was not widespread, and written culture was dominated by Latin and was the domain of the clerics, the medieval laity was visually literate: space, presence, and sensory stimuli were essential to social interaction in the secular world. Courtly society in particular was a visually oriented society, in which the choreography and representation of bodies and status was crucial for self-representation and identity. Medieval culture not only privileged sight and visual perception over other forms of reception and cognition but also gave rise to numerous discourses on visuality that may be found in the works of medieval secular poets, theologians, and scholastics alike.
In the literature of the thirteenth century, we find an increased self-conscious awareness of seeing and visibility as crucial aspects of self-representation. From the lengthy descriptions of clothing and ritual to the imagination of devices that enable seeing (the mirror atop Camille’s tomb in the *Eneasroman*; the magic column in *Parzival*) or cause invisibility (Siegfried’s hood in the *Nibelungenlied*), vernacular courtly literature abounds with plot developments that rely on visual representation and perception.

In the *Welscher Gast*, Thomasin confirms that there is nothing natural about lordship status. In order to be recognized as a lord, one must present oneself visually and visibly as a lord—one must perform one’s lordship. Thomasin dedicates a significant amount of his treatise not only to public behavior and appearance, including etiquette and comportment, but also to specific instructions for the public self-representation of ruling lords. Thomasin thus articulates much of what would have been apparent to medieval audiences of thirteenth-century literary texts: the visual is important, and courtiers had to learn to use and understand visual cues.

The *Welscher Gast* was created at a historical moment characterized by an interest in both pictorial and textual images. The thirteenth century was witness on the one hand to an explosion of visual narrative in the form of illustrated manuscripts, wall paintings, and panel paintings, and on the other the development of narrative modes and devices in vernacular literature and sermons that emphasized the visual, such as ekphrasis and exempla. The *Welscher Gast* is not a highly innovative poem, but its combination of textual and visual images is novel, and it participates significantly in this rising interest in the visual. Thomasin invites his listeners and readers either to ruminate on the text or to examine its images minutely, taking example from them and learning to behave accordingly. Above all the author expects his audience to see reflected in the text and illustrations both an identifiable image of itself and an idealized image of what it might become.

The *Welscher Gast* is a courtier’s mirror in the medieval sense that it provides an edifying model of ideal behavior to which its elite audience is expected to aspire. The mirror was a very popular medieval genre that became particularly prominent in the thirteenth century and retained its popularity until the sixteenth century, exactly the period dur-
ing which the _Welscher Gast_ was transmitted. As Horst Wenzel explains: “The literary mirror presents its viewer not with a reflection as would a mirror made of metal, but with a role model. It functions as a medium of perfection that transfers a prescriptive image to the outer and inner eye. It invokes sensory and imaginary seeing, and it combines the processes of recognizing Otherness, perceiving the self, watching, and practicing self-control.” Thomasin intended to reach a mixed courtly audience comprised of knights, ladies, clerics, and children, and he frames his instruction in diverse ways in order to enable this audience to “see” the possibilities of living an ethical and moral life.

While the poem makes use of a highly visual language, the illustrations are often extraordinarily textual. They rely on their inscriptions, or their explication in the poem, or the viewer’s ability to create a narrative that corresponds to or comments on the corresponding text. The two media overlap and intersect in complex ways, so that it becomes impossible and indeed undesirable to tease them apart.

W. J. T. Mitchell has called this kind of interplay in modern art and literature “imagetext.” This term recognizes that we are dealing with two different media, but it “designates composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine [them].” In the Middle Ages, however, images and text were not conceived as dichotomous media that might be combined, but rather as two ends of a single spectrum. In other words, to use Mitchell’s term, everything was an imagetext, but some things were more textual and others more imagistic. In the _Welscher Gast_, this kind of textual and pictorial visual coding of language was simply called _bilde_ (image). Michael Curschmann has referred to the relationship between text and image in vernacular medieval German culture as an “audiovisual poetic.” He writes: “irrespective of their own stylistic, iconographic, or intellectual traditions, texts and pictures work together in given instances to produce something larger than the sum of its parts.” “The most common mistake,” Curschmann adds, “is to define and interpret such relationships in terms of content—as though one medium were supposed to translate from the other.” The _Welscher Gast_ presents us with numerous examples of the ways in which this audiovisual poetic functioned in the Middle Ages. Chapters 2 through 5 of _A Courtier’s Mirror_ explore some of these examples to show that, while the imagetext was commonplace, it functioned on multiple levels to speak...
to different audiences. Through the visual strategies embedded in the poem and its illustrations, we become witnesses to the interplay between Latin and the vernacular, between theological and secular, between literary and didactic, and between the individual and community.

The poem is a highly pragmatic treatise in which Thomasin intends to “transmit current social norms to his readers and listeners in a manner that will allow them to practice them.” Thomasin’s pedagogical strategy for teaching his audience to behave ethically, correctly, and in a manner befitting its aristocratic status is derived, on the one hand, from his understanding of social categories and feudal hierarchy, and on the other, from his notion of how memory and imagination work, and his assumptions regarding the usefulness of images in the acquisition of knowledge. In a well-known passage he imagines different forms of reception for different audiences:

```plaintext
swer niht fürbaz chan vernemen,
der sol da bi ouch bilde nemen.

. . . . . . . . . .
von den gemalten bilden sint
der geboure unde daz chint
gefrewet ofte. swer niht enchan
versten, daz ein biderb man
an der schrift versten sol,
dem si mit den bilden wol.
der phaffe sehe die schrift an.
so sol der ungelerte man
die bilde sehen, sit im niht
die schrift zerchennen geschiht.
```

Whoever is unable to comprehend otherwise should learn by looking at images. . . . The peasant and the child are often pleased by painted pictures. Whoever cannot understand what a good man should understand from writing is well served by images. Just like the priest looks at words, thus should the unlearned man look at images, since writing does not reveal itself to him.

(1703–4, 1709–18; 1091–92, 1097–1106)
Thomasin refers here specifically to “painted pictures” (*gemalten bil-
den*), but throughout the poem he invokes the term *bilde* (image) much
more broadly to refer to role models, examples, descriptions, scenar-
ios, thoughts, memories, imagination, and dreams, as well as painted
pictures.31 The author uses numerous visual cues to help his listeners
to envision the text and remember its message. And he “illustrates” his
instruction by describing exemplary scenarios that would be familiar
to his readers and listeners, encouraging his audience to use their
imagination to create their own images, and instructing them to learn
from the living examples and role models that they see at court.

Thomasin clearly thought about the processes of reflection and
self-reflection, for he writes about it in the section of the poem that
deals with the education of children:

> er sol ouch haben den mût,
> merchen swaz der beste tút,
> wan diu frumen liute sint
> unde suhn sin spigel dem chint.
> daz chint an in ersehen sol
> waz ste ubel oder wol.
> siht er daz im mach gevallen,
> daz la niht von sinem müte vallen.
> siht er, daz in niht düncchet gût,
> daz bezzer er in sinem mût.

---

He [the child] should also have the presence of mind to pay
attention to everything the noblest person does, because noble
people are and should be a mirror for the child. The child should
see in them what is evil or good. If he sees something that pleases
him, let him not forget it. If he sees something that does not seem
good to him, then he ought to improve it in his mind.

(1229–38; 617–626)

Thomasin thus advises the young courtier to use what he or she sees
in order to create an ideal image in his or her mind’s eye to which to
aspire. Thomasin’s use of the mirror metaphor in the specific context
of self-improvement evokes the long tradition of philosophical, theological, and scholastic debate on the mirror as a metaphor for self-knowledge. But, typical for Thomasin, his particular interpretation of the mirror metaphor is pragmatic, simplified, and specific to his target audience. He invokes the mirror metaphor throughout the poem to emphasize the importance of seeing and learning by internalizing images. Thomasin’s use of this metaphor to visualize for his audience the pedagogical strategy of selecting or creating a visual role model is thus not only applicable to children but suggestive for his poem as a whole. The cycle of illustrations underlines this emphasis on visuality in important ways. Among others, it provides visual elaboration or commentary on the poem, envisions the scenarios described in the poem, personifies abstract concepts such as the vices and virtues, and provides mnemonic aids to the audience.

The illustrations of the Welscher Gast are thus one important component of the poem’s focus on visuality. The Welscher Gast is the first poem in the German vernacular to be designed as an illustrated text from the start. The oldest extant manuscript from 1256 contains over one hundred illustrations, and it is generally assumed that this entire cycle dates back to the composition of the poem. Adolf von Oechelhäuser, whose 1890 book was the first to examine the image cycle, suggested that Thomasin himself was responsible for its design, and most scholars agree. Regardless of their provenance, the images were considered integral to the poem throughout its transmission. Of the twenty-four extant manuscripts and fragments, at least eighteen are either illustrated or were intended to be illustrated. This is in fact one of the striking and unusual features of the Welscher Gast material: although many early vernacular manuscripts were illustrated, it is highly unusual to have a specific cycle of illustrations associated so closely with a text that text and image were transmitted together.

THE VISUAL PROGRAM

As this study shows, the poem and its images were often designed to work in tandem to create meaning on a number of levels. Numerous
images illustrate the courtly scenarios that Thomasin describes; others translate abstract notions into concrete ideas or interactions; some take issue with the text and present the viewer with an alternative perspective. Some illustrate a single line or two of the poem, others visualize the essence of longer passages. Many of the images are moralizing; some of them are humorous. One of the dominant themes is the battle between the virtues and the vices. This is the topic of the opening illustration in the Gotha codex, but it reappears in all of the manuscripts and throughout the visual program. A few images are systematic diagrams of medieval philosophical and theological worldviews.

Most of the illustrations depict figures interacting with personified vices and virtues. The personifications are identified by means of inscriptions, a necessary aid to identifying them as their visual representation is not consistent even within the same manuscript. The allegorical personifications interact with exemplary figures taken from medieval life (the lord, the judge, the lady), history (Caesar, Pliny), and mythology (Love). Whether personification or courtier, the figures are similar in appearance: they all wear fashionable contemporary clothing, and their interaction is portrayed by gestures and inscribed banderoles containing their utterances. The images are thus simultaneously allegorical, symbolic, and narrative. Often the banderoles provide the only means by which to connect the illustration to the text. Indeed, most of the images cannot be deciphered without reading the labels or the banderoles or both.

The illustrated manuscripts and fragments of the Welscher Gast offer us a unique opportunity to examine manuscript illustration diachronically, since the visual program varies in style and content but not in subject. Where revisions to the poem in the course of its transmission resulted in an improved rhyme scheme and in some cases abridged versions of the text, the content remained virtually unaltered throughout its transmission. The illustrations, however, changed in intriguing and significant ways as they were transmitted to refract or comment on their specific historical context and target audience.

In the earliest manuscripts the images have no frames or baselines so that the figures float freely, gesticulating with exaggerated hands and extended fingers. In the later manuscripts the illustrations are framed
and the figures are placed against backgrounds, or at least given baselines on which to stand. This variation may be partly if not wholly attributed to changes in artistic style. But there is also variation—in the banderoles that the illustrated figures hold, in their labels, in the constellation of figures, and in the representation of the personified vices and virtues—that cannot be explained by changes in style or aesthetic preferences. Instead, these changes suggest differing notions about how vernacular books, and specifically their illustrations, were expected to reflect on social expectations, stereotypes, and ideals. Furthermore, many of the decisions that artists made regarding format, such as whether to place the illustrations in the column of text or in the margin, and whether to orient the illustrations with the text or not, bear testimony to competing ideas about the relationship between word and image and demand different reading practices. The fluidity of the images over time suggests that the cycle was consciously and consistently reworked to satisfy new demands and criteria.

The images’ variation is thus not dependent on variation in the text but instead tells its own story. As a whole, the illustrations offer a point of entry into the poem, a bridge between the feudal society represented in the poem and the diverse audiences that enjoyed it. The specific realizations of the image cycle offer us windows into the literary cultures of the German Middle Ages. The illustrated poem thus not only presents us with a unique perspective on a German-speaking court society from 1215, when the poem was first composed and its illustrations first designed, but also reveals divergent notions of status and difference throughout the medieval period. The poem’s audience changed significantly over the three hundred years of the book’s popularity, but it was consistent in its desire to construct a distinct elite secular identity.

Relatively little work has been done on the images of the Welscher Gast, or even on the poem as a whole. A few scholars have examined individual illustrations in the manuscripts of the Welscher Gast comparatively. The work of Horst Wenzel deserves special mention here. In a series of essays, he has focused on the variation of individual illustrations in the course of the poem’s transmission. His recent book on visuality also draws heavily on examples from the Welscher Gast to make the argument that medieval images, like texts, were conceived with the
idea that the viewer was an integral part of them and not merely an external observer. Wenzel thus views the illustrated poem as a performative space into which the thirteenth-century reader/viewer enters and is intellectually and sensually fully engaged.

Wenzel has drawn analogies between the pictorial variation in the Welscher Gast and the mouvance or variance in medieval redactions of texts identified by Paul Zumthor and Bernard Cerquiglini respectively. For Zumthor, a medieval text’s mouvance testified to its proximity to the medieval voice, and its dependence on a performance situation to be actualized. For Cerquiglini, a text’s variance bears evidence of the dynamic and fluid nature of textual production in the Middle Ages. For both, textual variation implies that the notion of a text as a stable and fixed piece of writing is anachronistic for medieval literature, which is characterized by its instability or fluidity. For the modern scholar, the fluidity of the medieval text means that we are often confronted with variants: shortened versions, longer versions, extensions, and divergent interpretations. The work of both Zumthor and Cerquiglini spawned a vibrant debate across medieval studies—particularly in the context of the New Philology. Wenzel has argued that manuscript illustrations too are unstable and fluid. Their variation is particularly apparent in the manuscripts of the Welscher Gast in which the same image cycle is reproduced in numerous manuscripts over an extended period of time.

In his study of a single Welscher Gast illustration of a ship as a metaphor of lordship (fig. 31, ill. 48), Wenzel shows that, although the corresponding passage of the poem does not change significantly, the image, which appears in ten manuscript redactions, undergoes two or three revisions in the course of its transmission. These variants, he argues, not only speak to different iconographic influences but also suggest that diverse cultural notions of lordship are at stake. The illustration is changed in order to make the textual analogy of lordship to steering a ship accessible to different audiences. Wenzel thus shows that texts and their illustrations may change independently, and he offers a productive interpretive model for examining the images of the Welscher Gast. The variation that he identifies in individual illustrations, however, does not reflect a comprehensive reworking of the image cycle at any particular historical moment. As we will see throughout
this book, many illustrations in the cycle vary significantly over time. But the crucial changes made to individual illustrations do not all occur simultaneously. Indeed, whereas the text becomes fixed by the fourteenth century, the illustrations respond with more flexibility throughout the poem’s transmission to specific historical and cultural circumstances, and presumably also to specific requests by patrons.

The *Welscher Gast* illustrations must also have evoked (whether intentionally or not) different responses from their viewers over time. Whereas the artists of the oldest versions of the image cycle used mnemonic strategies to make memorable and often affect-inducing images that could be read on multiple levels, the artists of the younger versions of the illustrations sought more to provide images in which the viewer might see him- or herself reflected and find affirmation of his or her own elite identity. Later audiences were expected to identify with the illustrations. These changes were brought about in part by creating a narrative within individual illustrations but also by constructing social categories with which viewers could identify. Gender plays a role in this context. The sex of the personifications in the earliest manuscript generally corresponds to their grammatical gender, but in the later manuscripts the personifications become more independent of language and participate more fully in the discourse on social gender roles in which the poem also engages. For example, Lying (*diu luge*), a grammatically feminine vice, is personified in the 1256 Heidelberg and the Gotha redactions as a female figure (figs. 79 and 5, ill. 5), but in the Wolfenbüttel manuscript (fol. 10r), and other fifteenth-century redactions the same figure appears as a male courtier (figs. 96, 98). The corresponding passage in the poem depicts a young courtier lying about his association with a lady. The younger illustrations, therefore, ignore grammatical gender and present us with a more faithful representation of the scenario described in the poem. Indeed, whereas older versions of the illustrations are often highly textual in that they mimic the language and visualization strategies in the text, the younger illustrations reinterpret the poem for a late medieval audience that was perhaps more interested in social interaction, and more invested in reading the images as visual narratives that tell a story.

I will in this volume show that text and image in the *Welscher Gast* were conceived as variations of the visual coding necessary to make an
instructional treatise pedagogically effective for an elite secular audience. But the relationship between the text and its images changes as the illustrations are revised. This study thus examines how the illustrations of the Welscher Gast are altered over the course of its transmission to address the concerns and interests of its diverse and changing audiences. The illustrations reveal to us the ways in which medieval and late medieval audiences “read” the illustrated poem; the variation in the illustrations reflects changing relationships between text and image, which in turn offers us a window into developments in reading practices and audience expectations over the course of the poem’s transmission.

CHAPTER ORGANIZATION

Although I take the entire corpus of Welscher Gast manuscripts into consideration, as mentioned above, I focus in this study on the 1340 manuscript Gotha, Universitäts- und Forschungsbibliothek Erfurt/Gotha, Memb. I 120, and look for comparison primarily to the 1256 manuscript Heidelberg Universitätsbibliothek Cpg 389 and to a lesser extent the manuscript Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. 37.19 Aug. 2° from the first half of the fifteenth century. While the poem remains relatively stable in content, these three manuscripts represent three stages in the transmission of the images and contain three distinct variations of the image cycle. The images of the Heidelberg manuscript are highly performative and rely on a visually literate viewer to make associations beyond the text. The Wolfenbüttel manuscript depicts scenes of lively interaction between aristocratic figures that seem to draw on notions of dramatic performance most closely connected to modern notions of representation. The Gotha manuscript is pivotal both for the transmission of the Welscher Gast and for the history of the medieval book in general. It features the most significant changes in the image cycle, formatting, and organization, and its revisions are taken up in almost all of the later manuscripts. The Gotha redaction is furthermore a critical document for our understanding of the history of the vernacular book in general, as it bears evidence of a fundamental shift in medieval vernacular reading practices.

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One of the most significant changes to the poem in the Gotha manuscript is in its format and organization. Chapter 1 compares the Gotha manuscript with the 1256 Heidelberg redaction from the perspective of these formal revisions. The format and organization of medieval manuscripts are important visual indicators of the changing status and function of the vernacular book in medieval society. The Gotha redaction of the Welscher Gast is the first vernacular epic poem to contain a prose foreword. This foreword describes the poem’s organization, its subdivisions, and the topics that it addresses. It also contains an indexing apparatus that allows the viewer to locate specific sections or topics in the codex. I argue that these changes in format and presentation of the poem in the later manuscript enable, and indeed require, a viewer to read the text differently. The index and foreword frame the poem as an encyclopedic work that may be used as a resource by a social group eager to associate itself with the courtly society imagined in the pages of the Welscher Gast. The pedagogical purpose of the poem is thus realized in the Gotha manuscript by its formal transformation into a reference work.

Chapter 2 focuses on the illustrations and the question of how they were “read,” arguing that one of the catalysts for change in the visual program may have been the debates surrounding the transformation in models of seeing from an extramission model to an intromission model. Ideas about how vision works are closely related to notions about the relationship of the viewer to the image or object viewed. Thomasin addresses notions of seeing in the poem itself, but the illustrations reveal that the artists’ assumptions regarding the role of the viewer vis-à-vis the illustrations were often quite different from the poet’s and changed radically in the course of the poem’s transmission. The illustrations, which are originally associative and layered images that function on multiple levels to create meaning and present sites of contemplation are changed over time to emphasize narrative over other forms of illustration. The later manuscripts depict dramatic scenes performed by secular elite actors similar in appearance to the audience for whom they were created. The Gotha manuscript is again pivotal in this transformation.

Chapter 3 reveals that gender plays a complex but crucial role in the way in which courtly identity is constructed in the Welscher Gast.
Whereas Thomasin prescribes a specific notion of gender difference in his poem, this notion is not always reflected in the illustrations of the different redactions. Instead, each artist draws on a broad spectrum of associations—from grammatical gender to religious imagery to social stereotypes or conventions. While gender is a static category in the poem, the illustrations reveal it to be a heterogeneous, nuanced, and dynamic category of identification. The Gotha manuscript is in this regard too a crucial point of transition in which one sees grammatical gender giving way to cultural notions of gender in the illustrations.

The first part of chapter 4 examines the image cycle of the Gotha manuscript with particular attention to the way in which it represents social status, particularly nobility, and emphasizes courtly motifs. Like other luxurious fourteenth-century manuscripts, the Gotha codex harkens back to a literary ideal of courtly society that was developed in the courtly romance around 1200. The image cycle of the Gotha redaction suggests that this codex was part of a concerted effort to participate in a process of aristocratic self-fashioning. More specifically, the Gotha images reframe the text to construct an ideal for noble behavior that is explicitly based on the courtly ideal of love service. The likely historical context of the Gotha manuscript suggests that it represents the growing power and consciousness of elite identity among the lesser nobility in late medieval Germany. The second part of this chapter explores this broader cultural context surrounding the manuscript’s production and proposes that the manuscript represents a fourteenth-century form of literary appropriation by a ministerial family.

The concluding chapter makes the argument that the Welscher Gast, as a literary mirror, transforms from a site of contemplation and a source of self-recognition and self-knowledge to a mere reflection of the times. Later manuscript redactions no longer challenge the viewer or engage him or her in a project of improvement and identity formation. Instead the youngest redactions merely affirm their audience’s claim to elite status.

The remainder of this introduction provides background information about the poet, the cultural context of the poem’s composition, and its editorial history. These issues have generated most of the scholarship on Thomasin’s Welscher Gast, and it is therefore essential to address
them here, although they have little bearing on my analysis of the images. The meat of my project thus begins in chapter 1.

THE POET: THOMASIN VON ZERCLAERE

Many medieval authors neither name themselves nor provide us with specific details about their social, political, and intellectual environment. Thomasin, by contrast, not only introduces himself in the prologue by name, nationality, and origin, but also litters his text with biographical references that allow us to place him both temporally and spatially. Nonetheless, there is some controversy about him, particularly with respect to his position in the church and his relationship to the court of Wolfger, the Patriarch of Aquileia (ca. 1140–1218).

In the poem, Thomasin tells us that he is an Italian native speaker from Friuli (679–81; 69–71) and that he is writing the book in a language that is foreign to him (677–79; 67–69) for an audience of “brave knights and good women and wise clerics” (früme ritter und gute vrowen und wise pfaffen, 15349–50; 14695–96). He informs us that he has already written a book of courtesy (von der höfscheit,) in welhischen that deals, for example, with the topic of love (1785–90; 1173–78). This book has not come down to us. Since the term “welsch” can refer to any Romance language, there has been some debate as to which language Thomasin is referring. William F. Carroll has provided the most convincing analysis of the term as it appears in the Welscher Gast, suggesting that Thomasin uses it interchangeably to refer to Italian, Provençal, and French, depending on context, and that its specific meaning in any given context would have been clear to his immediate audience. That is, since Thomasin is Italian, the “welscher Gast” of the title presumably refers to an “Italian guest,” yet when Thomasin refers to German poets strewing “welsche” words throughout their German texts, he may be referring to the many French terms that German-speaking poets such as Wolfram and Gottfried used liberally in their descriptions of courtly culture. By contrast, the enigmatic book of courtesy might have been written in Provençal, the literary language of northern Italy. There was a steady stream of Provençal poets to northern Italy, and it is in Provençal

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that we find an established tradition of didactic vernacular poems on which Thomasin may have drawn.\textsuperscript{45}

The \textit{Welscher Gast} may be dated using an internal reference by Thomasin in which he bemoans the fact that Christ's grave has been lost for some twenty-eight years (12363–72; 11709–18). This is a reference to Saladin's conquest of Jerusalem in December 1187 and indicates that Thomasin composed the poem in 1215/16. He informs us that it took him ten months to complete his book (12932–36; 12278–82). Because, while he is writing the poem, Thomasin is not yet thirty years old (3047; 2445) he must have been born around 1186. Thomasin further informs us that he was present at one of the pope's calls to arms for the crusade (11835–40; 11183–88) and that he spent over eight weeks at the court of Otto IV in Rome when he was crowned emperor—this must have been in the summer of 1209.

Thomasin's references to his immediate environment place him at a court. He mentions that he has retreated from watching tournaments, from dances, and from interacting with ladies (12895–96; 12241–42, and 12973–74; 12319–20), to a secluded room where he is painstakingly writing his book, not for his own pleasure, but because he feels compelled to offer advice to the courtiers around him who are behaving inappropriately (12937–44; 12283–90). He draws a comparison between his current life at court and his secluded life at school (12910–11; 12256–57). This reference to his school days suggests that he was formally educated. Indeed, the poem reveals that Thomasin had broad knowledge of biblical and world history, politics, theological and philosophical thought, and courtly literature. He may have been educated at a university, but it is more likely that he received his education at a cathedral school.\textsuperscript{46} His particular interest and skill seem to lie in reframing scholastic and clerical thought in lay terms.

This sketch of the historical person Thomasin is derived from internal references in the text. There are, however, some external historical references that may be traced to our poet as well. There are several references to the family name Zerclaere (Cerchiari, Cerclara) in the city of Cividale in Friuli, Italy. Members of the family were merchants, shippers, and notaries and must have belonged to the urban upper classes.\textsuperscript{47} Two historical references may correspond specifically to our poet.\textsuperscript{48} One
is a document from 1217 in the Biblioteca Civica Cividale in Friuli, which contains a reference to a “Thomasinus canonicus Aquilegensis.” The second is an entry regarding the death of the church canon Thomasinus de Corclara that appears in the Necrologium Ecclesiae Aquileiense, in which deaths and the gifts from the deceased to the cathedral chapter of Aquileia are listed. The manuscript dates from about 1300 and lists Thomasinus’s death as May 11, but it does not list the year. If this is indeed a reference to our poet, then it indicates that he died as a canon, but it does not tell us where he held his office, nor does it reveal to which chapter he belonged. Given the content of the poem and its intellectual foundations, most scholars assume that our author Thomasin held a position in the church and may have been a canon.

Most scholars have further placed Thomasin at the court of Wolfger, the patriarch of Aquileia. Since we know more about Wolfger than we do about many of the thirteenth-century literary patrons, placing Thomasin at his court enables us to make certain assumptions about the person of Thomasin and the environment in which he lived. Wolfger was a powerful politician and diplomat and had made his mark as the bishop of Passau prior to taking over the position of patriarch in 1204 at the death of Pilgrim II. Among several important diplomatic tasks, Wolfger skillfully managed the negotiations for the release of Richard Lionheart who was captured and held hostage by his enemy Leopold V on his way back from the crusade. He was an important patron of the arts and supported the poets Walther von der Vogelweide, the now anonymous Nibelungenlied’s author, Albrecht von Johannsdorf, and the Italian scholar Boncompagno, among others. Scholars also assume that Thomasin was at Wolfger’s court for over ten years by the time he wrote his poem and that he was familiar with the work of Walther von der Vogelweide. The evidence cited for this is the following passage in Thomasin’s poem:

ia ist bi mir zehen iar
   ein man, und weiz doch niht für war,
   ob er si ubel oder gut
   und sprichet denn dûrh sinen übermût
   daz der papst si ein ubel man:
   seht, wie ich mich bewarn chan.
Indeed, there was a man here for ten years and I do not truly know whether he is wicked or good, but if he then exclaims in arrogance that the pope is an evil man, then watch how I will assert myself.

(11763–68; 11111–16)

Without naming Walther, Thomasin ostensibly cites him here as a negative example of someone who does not guard his tongue but instead makes foolish and hateful remarks about the pope.54

There remains, however, a lot of uncertainty about Thomasin’s position in the church, which chapter he might have been a member of, whether he lived in Aquileia or Cividale, and what his actual relationship to Wolfger (or Walther) might have been.55 Despite the uncertainties, it is apparent that his work was intended for the kind of German-speaking aristocratic audience that would have been present at Wolfger’s court, and would also have been found more generally in the bilingual region in and around Friuli during this period.56

THE POEM: ITS LITERARY CONTEXT, INFLUENCES, AND AUDIENCE

The literary and cultural context of the poem’s composition was rich and varied. There are numerous medieval didactic texts and traditions on which Thomasin may have drawn.57 In addition to the Latin literary traditions that seem to have formed a part of Thomasin’s education, he would have been influenced by Provençal and French literature. The Provençal literature included song but also didactic and religious poetry, including the moral compositions known as *ensenhamen*. These addressed topics such as ladies’ comportment, chivalry, and courtly love. From the end of the twelfth to the end of the thirteenth century there was much exposure in northern Italy to the Provençal poets.58 The French epics and romances were also well known across Europe, and they were widely translated and imitated.59

Predominant in the *Welscher Gast* is the catalog of vices and virtues, which became a popular topic for treatises in the thirteenth century.60
Virtues and vices were a ubiquitous topic in the clerical literature and religious sermons of the Middle Ages, and they were often personified in literature and the visual arts. Latin and Provençal didactic literature in particular made extensive use of personified virtues and vices. Thomasin thus had a broad spectrum of sources on which to draw. Specific sources that scholars have identified include Alan of Lille, Aristotle, Cicero, Boethius, Seneca, St. Augustine, Isidore of Seville, Ambrose of Milan, Pope Gregory I, the Bible, and others.61

While abundant influences may be detected, however, it is clear that Thomasin reinterpreted his sources, sometimes dramatically, to suit his own purposes.62 Indeed, no direct source for the poem has been identified. As Thomasin implies in his metaphor of the poet as a carpenter in the prologue to the poem, he used a variety of sources provided by others to construct his own unique text:

doch ist er ein güt zimber man,
der an sinem wârche chan
stein und holtz legen wol,
da erz von rehte legen sol.
daz ist untügende niht,
ob ouch mir lihte geschiht,
daß ich in mines getihte want
ein holtz, daz ein ander hant
gemæistert habe, lege mit dem list,
daß ez gelich den andern ist.

Indeed, it is a fine carpenter who is able to lay stone and wood well and properly in his work. It is not a vice if I perhaps place so skillfully in the wall of my poem a piece of wood that another hand has formed so that it is similar to the others.

(715–24; 105–14)

Thomasin also underlines the skill required to carefully construct such a text:

davon sprach ein wiser man
'swer gefüglichchen chan
setzen in sein getiht
ein rede, die er maht niht,
der hat also vil getan,
da zwifel nihtes niht an,
als der derz von erste vant:
der funt ist worden sein zehant.’

———

A wise man once said, “There is no doubt that whoever is able to incorporate into his poem a passage that he did not himself compose has done just as much as he who first created it. It immediately becomes his own creation.”

(725–32; 115–22)

In fact in composing his poem, Thomasin synthesized and interpreted much contemporary knowledge about aristocratic notions of conduct and social interaction, ethics, philosophy, and the liberal arts. The ideas contained in the Welscher Gast are thus not original, but instead represent a compendium and interpretation of conventional wisdom. Characteristic for Thomasin’s reworking of academic and scholastic ideas is his pragmatic approach, which renders his material accessible to a wide audience. The poem’s novelty lies in Thomasin’s instrumentalization of abstract notions of vice and virtue and his translation of morals and ethics into a secular courtly context.

THE EDITORIAL HISTORY AND MODERN RECEPTION
OF THE WELSCHER GAST

As a compendium of medieval courtly culture, the Welscher Gast is a crucial source for historians and an invaluable resource for medievalists. Given its cultural importance as the first vernacular didactic treatise in German and the first German vernacular illustrated text, it is surprising that this poem is relatively unknown outside the academic world of German-speaking medievalists. Even among interested students of medieval German literature, few have read the treatise in its entirety. To be sure, the text is not an easy read, nor does it have the poetic appeal of its romance contemporaries, such as Wolfram von Eschenbach’s Parzival and

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Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan*. But the poem’s lack of recognition in the broader medieval studies community may have more to do with the fact that it has, until recently, never been translated in its entirety into any modern European language.

The corpus of extant manuscripts and fragments indicate that, while the content of the poem did not change radically over the course of its transmission, it did undergo numerous revisions. The oldest version appears in only two manuscripts, the earliest extant redaction from 1256 (Heidelberg Cpg 389), and a later manuscript from 1450–70 (Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mscr. M 67). This later manuscript has been discussed in the scholarship primarily in terms of its “contamination,” that is, in terms of its deviance from the version of the poem in Heidelberg Cpg 389. The manuscript fragment Bibl. Jagiellorska, Berol. mgq 978 reveals that the poem was edited and revised by the late thirteenth century. More significantly, however, sometime before the Gotha manuscript’s compilation in 1340 a prose foreword was added, which provides a synopsis of the poem and functions as a table of contents. This prose foreword appears in most of the extant manuscripts that were compiled after 1340. The poem was later revised more thoroughly, in particular many passages were shortened or omitted, and variations of this revised redaction of the poem appear in the later manuscripts, including the Wolfenbüttel redaction. Understanding the specific differences between particular versions of the poem is important and useful, but is not the goal of this book. As background to studying the variation in the images, however, it is important to realize that there are different stages in the poem’s revision that have resulted in groups of manuscripts that are more or less related to one another. The oldest complete manuscript redaction contains the version of the poem that is least often represented in the extant manuscripts. This situation presents some fundamental problems for editors and translators, and indeed there is much controversy about which version and which lead manuscript one should use for a critical edition or a translation.

The poem was first edited by Heinrich Rückert in 1952. At that time Rückert knew of twelve manuscript redactions; he recognized that the poem had been revised, but he used as his lead manuscript Heidelberg Cpg 389, because it is the oldest one and therefore presumably, he
argued, most closely related to the text that Thomasin produced in 1215. Rücker's edition was reprinted in 1965 with an introduction by Friedrich Neumann, and although it is now out of print, scholars still rely on it as a primary source of the poem. In 1974 Friedrich Neumann and Ewald Vetter published a facsimile edition of the Heidelberg manuscript redaction, but this manuscript has recently been made available online by the Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg.

In 1984–88, Friedrich Wilhelm von Kries published a four-volume edition using the Gotha manuscript as his lead text. By then twenty-four manuscripts and fragments were known, and von Kries's edition builds on his earlier Textkritische Studien but compares all of the manuscripts and provides the textual variation in an extensive critical apparatus.64 Von Kries's edition incited much criticism from his German colleagues not only because it contains numerous mistakes, but precisely because von Kries had chosen Gotha Memb. I 120 as his lead manuscript. Joachim Bumke's particularly critical review concludes: “Only A [Heidelberg Cpg 389] retains the original wording of the poem; the rest of the entire manuscript transmission is based on a contaminated original. This means that manuscript A must be used as the basis of any critical edition.”65 Bumke's criticism is thus based on the notion that the oldest manuscript is closest to the author and therefore most authentic.66

Since the concerns of this study are not with reconstructing an original text but with examining the manuscript redactions in their historical contexts—particularly the Gotha manuscript—that is, with the production and reception of the manuscripts, I am not concerned with the question of which manuscript most closely approximates an author-penned original. From the perspective of manuscript studies, the Gotha manuscript is just as valid an object of study as is the Heidelberg manuscript. Indeed, as we will see, it significantly differs from its predecessor in important ways that are crucial for understanding the history of the book and fourteenth-century manuscript culture.

One of the most ambitious sections of the von Kries edition is his attempt to provide a critical edition of the image cycle. In volume 4, he reproduces the Gotha manuscript illustrations, and provides an apparatus that describes the variation in the images, labels, and banderoles.
in the other manuscript redactions. He also offers a description of the illustrations and identifies their corresponding textual passages. Unfortunately the illustrations are poor quality black and white reproductions, they have been removed from the context of the manuscript page, and there are numerous mistakes in his descriptions. It is therefore difficult to reconstruct the appearance of the Gotha manuscript using his edition, and, without examining the other versions oneself, it is impossible to reconstruct the iconographic variation. The von Kries edition is now out of print.

In 2002–3, Raffaele Disanto published a two-volume edition with a commentary in Italian, using the 1256 Heidelberg redaction as his lead manuscript. The first volume contains the illustrated folios of the Heidelberg manuscript with a description of each illustration. The second volume contains a critical edition of this oldest extant version of the poem. Disanto provides corrections of the Rückert edition, and includes line numbers from the edition by von Kries, so that the reader may compare the versions in the two editions. Except for the brief descriptions of the illustrations and the concordance, this edition has been largely superseded by the digital reproduction of Heidelberg Cpg 389 provided by the Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg.

Until 2010 there was no complete published translation of the poem. In 2004, Eva Willms published a translation of selected passages based on the Rückert edition of the Heidelberg manuscript. These excerpts give readers an impression of the poem and provide a useful basis for further study. Willms also included some images from the 1450–70 Dresden manuscript. In 2010, an English translation was finally published by Marion Gibbs and Winder McConnell. It uses the Rückert edition but adds the prose foreword from the von Kries edition. Although Gibbs and McConnell address the importance of the illustrations, they include only a single example and refer the reader to the online Heidelberg Cpg 389 redaction. It is my hope that scholars and students from the broader field of medieval studies will be able to use this translation in conjunction with my book in order to develop a better understanding of the poem and its illustrations.

The current study is not an attempt to replace the von Kries edition, nor does it aspire to replace the Heidelberg manuscript with the
Gotha manuscript as the focus of future scholarly work. My interest in the Gotha manuscript lies not in its positioning in a stemmatic dia-
gram, nor in establishing its primacy for future editions. Rather I am interested in viewing the manuscript in its historical context as a win-
dow into aristocratic interests and concerns in the first half of the four-
teenth century. The Gotha redaction lends itself well to such a study be-
cause it is a mixed manuscript that both looks back to earlier versions of
the illustrated poem and forward to a new context of reception. In
order to understand the unique quality of the Gotha manuscript, it is
necessary to compare it to other manuscript redactions. Indeed, the
manuscripts of the Welscher Gast offer us an excellent and rare opportu-
nity to examine the changing conception of the book and its readership
in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries.