

Women and the Perfect Hero: A Critical Re-reading of Heinrich von dem Türlîn's *Diu Crône*

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Heinrich von dem Türlîn wrote *Diu Crône*¹ (The Crown, the pinnacle of all adventures), at the end of the classical period of Middle High German (MHG) courtly literature. By the time Heinrich wrote *Diu Crône* (c. 1220 CE), the Arthurian tradition had become firmly established in the French and German vernacular, from Chrestien de Troyes to Hartmann von Aue, Wolfram von Eschenbach, and Gottfried von Straßburg. The backdrop of the Arthurian court and the framework of its stories and characters from different traditions were thus well known to Heinrich and would have been familiar to his audience. While *Diu Crône* is clearly beholden to the tradition of classical MHG Arthurian romances as well as to their French predecessors, it has been classified since the nineteenth century as one of the post-classical MHG Arthurian romances for a variety of structural and stylistic reasons. These post-classical romances are generally read in the shadow of the romances of the “Blütezeit”. Indeed, with 30,000 lines and a great abundance of recurring Arthurian dramatis personae, motifs and chains

¹ *Diu Crône von Heinrich von dem Türlîn*, ed. G. H. F. Scholl (Stuttgart, 1852). Heinrich wrote *Diu Crône* probably between 1220 and not later than 1240. My citations are taken from Scholl's edition. Translations into English are mine unless otherwise noted. The manuscript situation and provenance are discussed in Christopher Kolb, “Bruchstück aus der Aventure Krone“, *Germania* 31 (1886): 116. For manuscript descriptions and provenance see the foreword by Fritz Peter Knapp and Manuela Niesner, ed., *Heinrich von dem Türlîn, Die Krone (Verse 1-12281)*. Nach der Handschrift 2779 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek nach Vorarbeiten von Alfred Ebenbauer, Klaus Zatloukal und Horst P. Pütz (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), IX –XII. See Klaus Zatloukal, *Heinrich von dem Türlîn: Diu Krone. Ausgewählte Abbildungen zur gesamten handschriftlichen Überlieferung* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1982) for facsimile reproductions and manuscript comparison. See also Arno Menzel-Reuters, *Vröude Artusbild, Fortuna- und Gralkonzeption in der Crône des Heinrich von dem Türlîn als Verteidigung des höfischen Lebensideals* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1989), 4-7, for the state of manuscript investigations; for a thorough overview of secondary literature on *Diu Crône* see *ibidem*, 319-336.

of adventure, this story has been deemed an “interpretative challenge.”² Admittedly, there are many aspects of the romance that contribute to this interpretive challenge. *Diu Crone*, in contrast to earlier romances, does appear to be a long and perhaps rather rambling story of Gawein, preceded by a short childhood story of King Arthur. To date, numerous scholarly efforts have been made to overcome this challenge and determine the structural, content and qualitative shifts within this romance.³ These efforts have been largely unsuccessful in placing *Diu Crone* appropriately in the Arthurian canon because they do have not recognized the truly innovative quality of Heinrich’s narrative.

This innovation lies in the fact that the two narratives (of Arthur and of Gawein) are connected thematically and structurally through adventures that offer (to the modern interpreter) an unusual and comparatively impressive number of independent, actively helping women. These women are essential to both Arthur’s and Gawein’s survival, and they hold an unusual degree of prominence and centrality in the structure and meaning.⁴ The overarching presence in both the Arthur and Gawein narratives is the Goddess *Fortuna*, also named *Vrouwe Sælde*, who shares strong similarities with Vladimir Propp’s category of helper,⁵ but her functions go beyond this supporting category. Clearly, most prominently in the form of *Vrouwe Sælde* but also in the actions of other female figures, the helper women are essential to the structure and narrative plot. This significance has been duly noted; however, the scope of inquiry into this surprising number of active women has been traditionally limited with respect to the *Crone*. This

² Hartmann Bleumer, *Die Crône Heinrichs von dem Türlîn. Formerfahrung und Konzeption eines späten Artusromans* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997), 1.

³ See Albrecht Classen, “Introduction,” in *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages. An Anthology of Feminist Approaches to Middle High German Literature*, ed. idem (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991), i-xxi; Christopher Cormeau, *Wigalois und Diu Crône. Zwei Kapitel zur Gattungsgeschichte des nachklassischen Aventiurenromans* (Munich: Artemis, 1977); Andreas Daiber, *Bekannte Helden in neuen Gewändern? Intertextuelles Erzählen im Biterolf und Dietlieb sowie am Beispiel Keies und Gaweins im Lanzelet, Wigalois und der Crône* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1999); Lewis Jillings, *Diu Crône of Heinrich von dem Türlin: the Attempted Emancipation of Secular Narrative* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1980); Werner Schröder, “Zur Literaturverarbeitung durch Heinrich von dem Türlîn in einem Gawein-Roman Diu Crône,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 121/2 (1992): 131-174; Peter Stein, *Integration-Variation-Destruktion. Die ‘Crône’ Heinrichs von dem Türlin* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000); Neil Thomas, *Diu Crône and the medieval Arthurian Cycle* (Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2002); Annegret Wagner-Harken, *Märchenelemente und ihre Funktion in der ‘Crône’ Heinrichs von dem Türlîn. Ein Beitrag zur Unterscheidung zwischen ‘klassischer’ und ‘nachklassischer’ Artusepik*, *Deutsche Literatur von den Anfängen bis 1700*, 21 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995); Ulrich Wyss, “Heinrich von dem Türlîn: Diu Crône,” in *Mittelhochdeutsche Romane und Heldenepen*, ed. Horst Brunner (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1993), 271-292.

⁴ Nancy N. Zach, *The Portrayal of the Heroine in Chrétien de Troyes’s ‘Erec and Enide’, Gottfried von Strassburg’s ‘Tristan’, and ‘Flamenca,’* *Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik* 347 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1983), 17.

⁵ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd ed. (Austin: Indiana UP, 1970), 79.

limited scope is the result of a double “mis-interpretation” of Heinrich’s work in the history of its criticism and interpretation. First, as noted above, the *Crone* has been interpreted in the shadow of the romance “*exempla*” provided by Hartmann von Aue and Wolfram von Eschenbach. Second, modern interpretations of medieval were certainly influenced and shaped by some of the cultural perspectives that existed in nineteenth century Europe at the time of the inception of German medieval studies. Of particular interest to me here are the deep-seated reflections of ideals and possibilities in terms of female gender constructs.⁶ Nadine Bourdessoule formulates the ongoing need and effort to avoid these exclusionary practices:

Feminist critics are today rereading and analyzing medieval texts with a view to bring out another, or other, voices. Contained in the text but masked by more than a century of medieval studies that have either manipulated or overlooked the feminine presence, these voices express something that is not stated explicitly, and that therefore eludes philology and taxonomy.⁷

The tendency to understate the role of women produces a skewed understanding of medieval texts and of the societies that produced them. A slanted and incomplete view of women, pre-defined by a restricted analytical code is the result. Although Bourdessoule is referring specifically to French medieval texts, her statement can also be applied to the literary analysis of MHG texts. Obviously, interpretations of these texts have been influenced and shaped by the historical and cultural limitations of the construct *woman* in nineteenth century Europe, remaining from the time of their initial discovery and interpretation of these texts. A refocusing of the critical lens is necessary if we wish to gain a more integrated understanding of text and context, particularly in the example of the *Crone*, a work that seems to offer even modern critics a challenge. In this light I wish to examine the basic structural significance of women in *Diu Crône* as Heinrich introduces them in the story of Arthur’s youth, which precedes the Gawain story. Ultimately, a newly re-focused reading of this work may rehabilitate it for the Middle High German canon in a way that will offer a new view of Heinrich’s narrative innovations, a view that can only be found through a modern feminist lens. This lens will, in turn, help us penetrate the nineteenth-century

⁶ Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley, ed., *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings. Essays in Feminist Contextual Criticism* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1989); Classen, “Introduction;” Ingrid Bennewitz, “Frauenliteratur im Mittelalter oder feministische Mediävistik? Überlegungen zur Entwicklung der geschlechtergeschichtlichen Forschung in der germanistischen Mediävistik der deutschsprachigen Länder,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 112.3 (1993): 383-393; Thelma S. Fenster, ed., *Arthurian Women. A Casebook* (New York: Garland, 1996).

⁷ Nadine Bourdessoule, “‘Fine Words on Closed Ears’: Impertinent Women, Discordant Voices, Discourteous Words.” In *Reassessing the Heroine in Medieval French Literature*, ed. Kathy M. Krause (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2001), 123.

“film” that has prevented us from seeing some very sophisticated thirteenth-century discussions of gender.

Diu Crône is unique among Middle High German romances in its choice of Gawein as a protagonist. The choice of Gawein as protagonist of an Arthurian romance inevitably brings with it a change in plot development and a departure from the narrative elements and structure of previous MHG Arthurian romances, which exhibit the genre-defining bipartite structure of the hero's loss of and subsequent reintegration into the Arthurian court society. The major theme of the classical MHG courtly Arthurian romance is the personal development of one hero knight within the parameters of conduct set forth in courtly society. This hero needs to find a healthy balance of his individual needs and external knightly virtues, foremost the dominant virtue of *maze* ('balance'). The generic story sequence chronicles the hero's journey to such balance. First, the hero attains his personal goal and gains initial acceptance as a member of Arthurian society. The hero then commits a transgression against the knightly code, signalling that he has not yet internalized this code. The transgression results in the hero's exclusion from the Arthurian court; he then undergoes a lengthy process of personal redemption, outwardly visible as adventures, during which he must face his weakness. Once the hero shows that he has incorporated the true meaning of the knightly code into his psyche, he achieves reintegration into Arthurian courtly society. In other words, the narration of the social stress between a single hero's private behaviour at odds with society's behavioural code results in the expected generic bipartite structure, arguably present in all MHG Arthurian romances before *Diu Crône*.

Volker Mertens states that the motivation behind such a developmental narrative lies in Chrétien de Troyes' concept, "eine Problematik der höfischen Gesellschaft darzustellen und dem Hörer erfahrbar zu machen" ('to present a fault of courtly society to his audience and thus allow the audience to experience it').⁸ Hartmann von Aue's protagonists Erec and Iwein will serve as examples of such transgressions within the MHG tradition, presumably reflecting real issues of courtly society. Erec's transgression is *verligen* ('to stay in bed too long'), here an action resulting in 'neglect'; in this case the protagonist's obsessive attention to his wife to the exclusion of his courtly obligations. In contrast Iwein's transgression is "versitzen" 'to remain seated too long', here an action resulting in 'disregard'; the protagonist's fixation on combat and jousting to the detriment of attention to his marriage and his obligations as ruler. The premised behavioural weakness of the hero and the narration of his subsequent personal development then supply the structure of classical MHG Arthurian courtly romance.⁹

⁸ Volker Mertens, "Artus," in *Epische Stoffe des Mittelalters*, ed. idem and Ulrich Müller, (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1984), 295.

⁹ Silvia Ranawake, „*verligen* und *versitzen*: Das Versäumnis des Helden und die Sünde der Trägheit in den Artusromanen Hartmanns von Aue“, in *Chrétien de Troyes and the German*

The narrative structure is determined by the outward actions, which signify the internal learning process of the hero. The hero can reclaim his place in the knightly brotherhood at the Arthurian court only by overcoming the thematic weakness in his character and internalizing the true meaning of the knightly code.

The challenge to understanding the structure and the meaning of *Diu Crône*, then, lies first in the fact that Gawein cannot exhibit a comparable flaw as Erec's or Iwein's with similar far-reaching effects for him as an individual and for the society to which he belongs. The reason for this is that, in the Arthurian tradition of the time, Gawein is prefigured as the perfect and perfected knight and he is presented as such in *Diu Crône*.¹⁰ With this designation the narrative cannot logically revolve around Gawein's failing the knightly code and the tale of his subsequent internalization of that code. Furthermore, there can be no subsequent re-attainment of his place in this society, as he has never lost it. In this sense, *Diu Crône* cannot exhibit the expected bipartite structure centred on a knight's psychological and social development, nor can it revolve around a knight's ethical development. Gawein's perfection precludes a narrative about the tension between individual action and society's differing demands.

Alfred Ebenbauer makes exactly this point, when he states that choosing Gawein as hero must result in structural consequences. But he sees as alternative to a meaningful narration of the hero's personal development only a string of adventures without an overarching ethical program:

Wählt man Gawein zum Helden einer Geschichte, so ergeben sich sofort notwendige strukturelle Konsequenzen... Die Einbettung Gaweins in das traditionelle Schema des Artusromans wäre wirklich Zerfall und kann, da Gawein keine Geschichte hat wie Erec, Iwein, Lanzelot oder Parzival, nur zu einer "programmlosen" Abenteuerkette oder im besseren Fall...zur Gestaltung eines einzelnen besonderen Abenteuers führen.¹¹

(If one chooses Gawein to be the hero of a story structural consequences will result right away... To imbed Gawein into the traditional scheme of the Arthurian romance would truly be disintegration, and because Gawein does not have a story like Erec, Iwein, Lanzelot or Parzival this can only result in a series of non-programmatic adventures or at best to the development of one special adventure.)

Middle Ages. Papers from an International Symposium, ed. Martin H. Jones and Roy Wisbay (Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk: St. Edmundsbury Press, 1993), 19-35.

¹⁰ B. K. Ray (*The Character of Gawein*, London et al.: U of Dacca, 1926) traces the changing character attributed to Gawein from an early entirely positive inscription, a derivation of a pre-Christian sun deity, to deprecation in the French prose tradition and especially in the Middle English compilations. These later regional negative reinterpretations of Gawein occur after the writing of *Diu Crône*.

¹¹ Alfred Ebenbauer, *Fortuna und Artushof. Bemerkungen zum 'Sinn' der Krone Heinrichs von dem Türlin*, in *Österreichische Literatur zur Zeit der Babenberger. Vorträge der Lilienfelder Tagung 1976*, ed. idem et al. (Vienna: Halosar, 1977), 32.

Clearly, structural consequences are inevitable when Gawein is chosen as the protagonist of an Arthurian romance, but Ebenbauer's further point, that the result must be, and in *Diu Crône* is, a mere recounting of a string of adventures, devoid of programmatic intent needs to be examined further.¹² Heinrich certainly regales his listeners and readers with an overwhelming number of, often bizarre, adventures, but he also fills the resultant content vacuum with a thematic shift away from the developing individual knight and onto the Arthurian court itself. The survival of the Arthurian court becomes the main theme and this survival is guaranteed by extra-courtly women. This is a radical departure in the evolution of the MHG Arthurian romance. I choose to read this departure not as a necessary loss of narrative integrity of a post-classical Arthurian romance but as a deliberate shift toward a different prominent narrative element, the extra-courtly female helper figures.

In the prequel to the Gawein story, the account of Arthur's childhood, Heinrich announces that Arthur will die young. He also identifies Gawein as the heir apparent to Arthur, and thus it can be argued that Gawein's survival becomes the metaphor for the survival of the Arthurian court, which is the true focal point of the narrative. Cormeau¹³ states that the need both to safeguard the new Arthur and to guarantee the survival of his court becomes paramount. In the Gawein story there is the same shift in focus filled with the narrative of powerful, extra-courtly women figures and their efforts to protect Gawein and the court, both of which depend on these women for survival.

For Gawein to become an epic character rather than remain the traditional, perfect foil to the developing hero requires some changes in characterization. Pickering¹⁴ describes the figure of Gawein as one of the oldest in the Arthurian myth, a strong warrior and womanizer. Both characteristics are carried over into the classical MHG romances, even though here the womanizing aspect is by no means as developed as in the French sources or in later English versions and carries no narrative stigma. In *Diu Crône* we certainly meet Gawein, the strong warrior, but the womanizing aspect is not a major theme. By the end of the first half of the Gawein narrative, at line 13861, he is safely married to Amurfina, who is in her own right a powerful ruler over her own country. Yet unlike the heroes of other Arthurian romances, Gawein does not leave the Arthurian court to fulfill his role as co-ruler in his wife's domain, rather Amurfina becomes a part of the Arthurian court. With this move, the ever-present threat to the Arthurian court of losing Arthur's heir Gawein to marriage is neutralized. With a perfect Gawein safely married at the Arthurian court, yet without the responsibilities of an extra-courtly rulership, the thematic shift of focus to the survival of the Arthurian court is made possible.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ Cormeau, *Wigalois*, 10.

¹⁴ David Pickering, *A Dictionary of Folklore* (New York: Makays of Chatham, 1999), 118.

Arthur's Childhood: Establishing the Pattern of Female Helpers and Protectors

Any literary analysis, which diminishes or excludes the female presence in a text is more than mere illusion; it distorts the overall understanding of how the text is a product of its social, historical and cultural context. In the case of Arthurian literary criticism such exclusionary practices have long prevailed, and an incomplete, skewed picture of the texts within this genre has evolved. Ralf Simon describes the basic point of departure for the analysis of any medieval romance that “Die Gattung Arthusroman definiert sich in jeder Funktion aus der Perspektive des Helden”¹⁵ (‘The genre Arthurian romance is defined by the perspective of the hero’). This fundamental premise of the absolute centrality of the hero could of course be the reason for the pervasive bypassing of the analysis regarding the guardian women and their structural importance to *Diu Crône*. In an introduction to a study of Arthurian women Sharan Newman judges the level of exegesis of female figures in the Arthurian literature with alarm:

... up until this century the canon of Arthurian legend has marginalized or ejected women. I want to put them back where they belong. By abandoning the female, the story was diminished. The lack of serious studies of the feminine side of Camelot has meant that Arthur, Merlin, Lancelot, and the other knights have received a disproportionate amount of attention.¹⁶

This still holds true for *Crône* criticism to date, where the centrality of the theme and motif of female guardian and female helper continue to be overlooked. There is, of course, no question that Gawein is the hero of this romance, and as such, much scholarly attention has been paid to him. Yet a defining element of the Gawein story, as well as the initial Arthur story, is the number of essential women figures whose actions shape and define the structure and meaning of the romance. This structural element warrants much more scholarly attention, as the motif of the helping and protecting woman, with few notable exceptions,¹⁷ has been ignored, glossed over or made light of. The need to address these women and “put them back where they belong” into the discourse about the story is clear. Furthermore, the lack of a unified interpretation of *Diu Crône* has resulted precisely because of the failure to incorporate these female narrative elements into the overall analysis of the hero's activities, and by extension, those of the court, as well as the social ideals and criticism of courtly society in general.

There certainly exist many fine analyses and interpretations touching on aspects involving individual female figures. Yet these analyses stop short of considering a shift of structural and meaningful incorporation of these women into the poetological structure. As a case in point, I would like to examine two

¹⁵ Ralf Simon, *Einführung in die strukturalistische Poetik des mittelalterlichen Romans* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1990), 9.

¹⁶ Sharan Newman, “Foreword,” in *Arthurian Women. A Casebook*, ed. Thelma Fenster (New York: Garland, 1996), xiv.

¹⁷ Zach, *The Portrayal*; Wagner-Harken, *Märchenelemente*.

studies, divergent in method and time: Alfred Ebenbauer's article "Fortuna und Artushof"¹⁸ and Peter Stein's monograph *Integration-Variation-Destruktion*.¹⁹ Ebenbauer provides a synopsis of Gawein's action-filled journey to *Vrouwe Sælde*. He portrays Gawein as the active hero throughout this particular series of adventures by using active voice verbs to describe Gawein's involvement and success in these adventures. Ebenbauer²⁰ describes Gawein as actively overcoming the dangers facing him and actively taking possession of a skein of thread, the only thing that can lead the way to *Vrouwe Sælde*, and with it the protection of the Arthurian court, which she represents.

Ebenbauer focuses on the final outcome of this particular cluster of adventures rather than the actual process of getting through it. Later in his essay, Ebenbauer does note that Gawein had two helpers, but he acknowledges this important fact in passing. He mentions the female helper Siamerac in only one sentence, in which he also mentions a male helper, but he makes no qualitative distinction between Siamerac and the male helper, whose assistance is infinitely less critical. Ebenbauer's assertion that Gawein is the active creator of his success is only partially accurate, because it ignores the underlying essential help and advice given by Siamerac. By discounting this essential element of the story, Ebenbauer disregards a motif pattern in this narrative; his analysis perpetuates the traditional invisibility of women in Arthurian critical discourse.

A similar example of off-handedness toward women figures can be found in Peter Stein's monograph, even though Stein does give the female helper figures considerable attention. Although Stein looks at the women helpers with much greater scrutiny, he, too, fails to see the basic structural significance of Siamerac and other women helpers for Gawein's success and thus for the narrative as a whole. He even argues that there is no structural logic for any motivation for Siamerac or the other women helpers to give aid, and therefore there is no meaning to their acts.²¹ Yet Stein does attach such meaning to the assistance provided by the magician Gansguoter, uncle to Gawein's wife Amurfina, when he gives aid to Gawein and his three fellow knights Keiû, Lancelot, and Kalocreant, on their quest to retrieve the stolen jewels of protection for the Arthurian court. Stein asserts that Gansguoter gives aid because he is able to do so, because he wants to, and because that is what a friend does, as represented in the text:

*In wart gedienet harte wol
Und wirdeclîchen, als man sol,
An allen dingen,
Als er ez volbringen*

¹⁸ Ebenbauer, *Fortuna und Artushof*, 25-49.

¹⁹ Stein, *Integration-Variation-Destruktion: Die Crône Heinrichs von dem Tûrlîn innerhalb der Gattungsgeschichte des deutschen Artusromans*, (Bern: Lang, 2000).

²⁰ Ebenbauer, *Fortuna und Artushof*, 26-27.

²¹ Stein, *Integration*, 162 and 188.

*Mohte, und ez ouch gerne tete.
Sin gewerp mit vriundes bete (...)*

v. 27252-57

(They were served well and with honor, as it should be in all things, as well as he [Gansguoter] could accomplish it, and he did so gladly. He [Gawein's uncle] spoke as a friend...)

While Heinrich does indeed make this assertion, the same argument must be made for the women helpers, especially in light of the fact that many of them are in some way connected to the *Fortuna/Sælde* figure, and it is she who had been Arthur's foster parent and a close, personal protector from childhood on. *Fortuna/Sælde* is indeed the archetype of a motherly friend. It is *Vrouwe Sælde*, who in the Gawein story identifies Gawein as her chosen favorite, when he arrives at her castle Ordohoht; here she not only blesses Gawein, but also grants him protection as Arthur's successor, thus guaranteeing the continuation of the Arthurian court, just as she had done with Arthur. The helping women in the Gawein story are an amplification and development of the matrix of female mythological figures that form, protect, educate Arthur. They are benefactrices of Arthur, Arthur's successor Gawein, and of the Arthurian court society. Their intention is clear: to continue to protect and aid what they took part in creating. In the following section I will shift the discussion toward the women figures in *Diu Crône* to develop a more balanced understanding of this text.

The motif of the helping woman

My understanding of the motif, its inner content and structure and its function within the greater narrative is indebted to Frenzel's classical motif scholarship.²² 'Motif' is to be understood as a narrow narrative element with typical content and a formal scheme. The type and scheme however do not necessitate an inflexible, one-dimensional realization, but rather they constitute the basic pattern for variations. Although differing in meaning, these variations are recognizable versions of the basic form. The basic form 'aiding female' shows the following variations in *Diu Crône*: 'protective goddess', 'aiding woman', 'counseling woman', and 'prognosticating woman'. The situational specificity, the twist, which creates the tension necessary for a 'true motif', lies in the apposition of the directional activity: giving advice, aid, protection versus receiving advice, aid, and protection. The recipient of the action is the hero, which gives the motif a recognizable contour. In his analysis of folktale morphology Propp terms a similarly acting *dramatis personae* the helper. He describes the sphere of action of the helper as "liquidation of misfortune or lack; rescue from pursuit; the solution of difficult tasks."²³ *Fortuna/Vrouwe Sælde*'s actions overlap also with

²² Elisabeth Frenzel, *Motive der Weltliteratur. Ein Lexikon dichtungsgeschichtlicher Längsschnitte* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1992).

²³ Propp, *Morphology*, 79.

those of Propp's donor function "provision of the hero with a magical agent."²⁴ To reflect the particular narrative situation in *Diu Crône* I find an extended additional category useful, which I term the protectress. The narrative situations I am investigating have the following basic fairytale pattern:

- a need arises or a danger looms
- a hero needs outside intervention to alleviate this need, or danger
- a [woman] helper provides assistance or a thing needed
- a need is fulfilled or a dangerous situation is resolved.

Within this structure, I am interested in specific situational aspects in *Diu Crône*. I am posing the following questions:

- What is the nature of the need or danger?
- What is the qualitative content of the aiding-women motif?
- How does the narrator value the woman?
- What function does this woman have within the narrative?

Women creators and protectors in the story of Arthur's childhood

My analysis focuses on the Arthurian prequel because it is the key to reading the rest of the poem. Here the structure for the interpretation of both the Arthur and Gawain narratives are put in place, by introducing the structural element of the essential women.

Arthur's story follows the prologue (v. 1-160), in which Heinrich promises his readers a story about King Arthur. He announces that he will amend the already known glorious deeds of King Arthur with heretofore unknown facts about Arthur's childhood and youth. This proclamation of new material is of the utmost importance: it allows a paradigmatic shift.

*Uns ist dicke geseit
Von maneger hant vrümekeit,
Wie Artûs der küene begienc.
Wâ ez sich êrste anevienc,
Daz ist ein teil unkunt,
Ich will es aber zu dirre stunt
Ein teil machen kunder
Und wil iu doch dar under
Sîner tugende anengenge sagen,
Wie ez in sînen kinttage
Im allererste ergienge (...)*

v. 161-171

(We have often heard from many sources of King Arthur's deeds. But how it all began **is for the most part unknown**. I will now tell you that story, what happened to him during his early days of childhood. Emphasis mine.)

²⁴ Ibidem.

Arthur's childhood is an uncommon theme in Arthurian romances, yet Heinrich's mission statement expressly focuses on Arthur's first childhood experiences *Wie ez in sînen Kinttagen/Im aller êrste ergienge* (v.170-71). Arthur's story begins before his birth and then continues into his auspicious birth hour, the subsequent loss of his father and the resultant foster parenting of the Goddess *Fortuna/Vrouwe Sælde*. With this initial story, Heinrich positions the reader in a sphere of astrology and fate, but also of childhood, motherly protection, and development.

The prequel to the Gawein story establishes the pattern of helping women through which both stories are connected. The episodes of the Norns, *Fortuna/Vrouwe Sælde* and Queen Lemonê comprise the introductory childhood narrative. In these three episodes, the pattern of female power through the intervention and aid to the hero Arthur and his court is inaugurated. These episodes establish the wide narrative structural pattern of female protection and assistance over Arthur and his successor Gawein. The *Sælde* episode (v. 412-448) can be considered the blueprint for all later hero-female helper interactions, as it exhibits all structural elements under investigation. The child Arthur loses his father, and *Fortuna/Vrouwe Sælde* becomes his foster mother, who protects and guides him into adulthood. Here then is the basic structural pattern: a need arises – the hero needs outside intervention to alleviate his need; a woman helper intervenes and through her actions the need is alleviated. I will discuss the *Fortuna/Vrouwe Sælde* episode later in more detail.

The Norns

Arthur's time of birth and the resultant character traits, which are necessary for him to become the perfect ruler, are closely linked with the mythical Norns. Similar to the classical Fates, the Norns are the embodiment of the pan-European concept of fate, "...einer Schicksalsmacht, die in meist drei Gottheiten personifiziert wurde. ... die zentrale Gestalt der drei Nornen, die das Geschick der Götter und Menschen bestimmen."²⁵ In *Diu Crône*, the first active group of women we meet, who determine the future life of a hero, are these goddesses of fate. Here they are more than an abstract power; they are capable of influencing and directing the path and duration of human life; indeed, they create it.

Arthur is born in the month of May, the mythical time of rebirth in nature. In a beautiful lyrical passage based on the inventory of the well known topos, where the seasons of the year represent the stages of life, Heinrich interprets the meaning of Arthur's time of birth for his readers, stressing that it represents happiness, purity, joy, and goodness:

*Er wart in dem meien
Geboren, als daz buoch seit.*

²⁵ Peter Dinzelbacher, ed., *Sachwörterbuch der Mediävistik* (Stuttgart: Kröner), 733.

*Daz was ein gewonheit,
 Daz wir dâ bî erkanden,
 Daz er, âne der werlde schanden,
 Ie minre wûrde gemeilet,
 Als nû diu zît erteilet,
 Dar inne er geboern was,
 Wan danne bluomen unde gras
 Blüewent und entspringent,
 Dar zuo die herze ringent,
 Den her an vröuden gebrast,
 Und sie twanc kumbers last,
 Den gît er vröuden bilde.
 Daz bezeichent die milde,
 Der Artus pflac sîne zît,
 Wan uns der meie vröude gît
 Mêr danne alle mâne,
 Und tuot uns ouch âne
 Des herten winters twancsal;
 Swaz er der heide vindet val,
 Daz niuwet er und rîchet:
 Dâ von sich gelîchet
 Dem meien Artûses leben,
 Wan er kunde alsô geben.*

v. 260—285

(The book tells us, that he was born in the month of May. From this it is to be understood, that he was not burdened with the evil of the world, just as the time of the year, when he was born when the flowers bloom and the grass springs up, which the hearts so desire and burst with joy, when they overcome sorrow and receive happiness. This [May] signifies the kindness Arthur always showed, because May gives us more joy than any other month; it renews and enriches the gray heath and takes away the discomfort of the hard winter: this is how Arthur's life is like May, because he was able to give in a way, that many rejoiced in him.)

This passage describes the state of nature during May, the renewal of life forces after a long winter, and the association with people born during this time. Arthur himself is likened to the joys incumbent in the return of spring. He is described as a man *Ane der werlde schanden* ('not burdened with the evil of the world;' v. 264), perhaps without original sin, and possessing of *vröuden, milde* ('joy and kindness'). These attributes, ascribed to Arthur because of the auspicious time of his birth, are immediately recognizable as part of the courtly catalogue of virtues, whose attainment is a requirement for a perfect ruler, as epitomized by Arthur. The attribute *vröude* ('joy') is repeated three times and thus holds special significance. Mentzels-Reuter, for example, sees the attainment and per-

petuation of joy as the overarching structural and narrative theme of *Diu Crône*. In addition, Heinrich later describes an Arthur who is blessed already in his youth with good health, honor and good manners.

The Norns are introduced by their individual names and described by their individual actions, which impact Arthur's life. More important, we are given the reasoning for their actions, if not the motivation. The Norn Clotho endows Arthur with the ability to bring joy to the world, just like the month of May brings joy to people *Wan uns der meie vröude gît* (v. 276). But Heinrich tells us also that Clotho does not award this gift only for the purpose of increasing joy in the world. The ability to create joy is a prerequisite for the underlying reason for this gift. Heinrich asserts that Clotho wants Arthur to attain the greatest earthly renown, second to none. A note of competitiveness and pride rings through:

*... daz sîn wart vil maneger vrô.
Daz hâte im vrouwe Clôtô
Sô erteilet allen wîs,
Daz er werltlîchen prîs
Vor aller werlde triëge.*

v. 285 – 289

(...that many rejoiced in him. Vrouwe Clotho endowed him with this, so he would earn more worldly renown than anybody else.)

Clotho gives Arthur the ability to bring joy to the world and Lachesis [N.B.: Lachesis is Lachelis²⁶]. She endows him with a lengthy life span; she spins a long thread. Here two of the three goddesses of fate set an agenda: they choose Arthur to become the human with the greatest worldly fame:

*Ouch was vil gevüege
Vrouwe Lachelis dar an,
Daz sie den vadem lange span.*

v. 290 – 292

(Vrouwe Lachesis was also well disposed, she spun a long thread.)

However, the third Norn, Atropos, notices this very long thread of life. She chooses to not allow for this long thread to occur and cuts it short, thus causing the world unbearable sorrow with the death of Arthur, but also setting the stages for Arthur's successor, Gawein:

*Ich clage aber, daz Atropos
Disen vadem nicht verkôs
Und in sô schiere abe brach,
Dar an der werlt geschah*

²⁶ In the explanatory notes Scholl, *Diu Crône*, offers no indication of an error or a variant in the manuscripts.

(But I have to lament, that Atropos did not choose to leave this thread long, that she cut it suddenly and because of this caused the world much undescrivable grief.)

The length of Arthur's lifespan and his basic personality are prefigured by these three goddesses of fate. Even though the fundamental information is clothed in the archetypal figures of the mythical Norns, this opening to the narrative is highly significant for the structure and the meaning of *Diu Crône*. The basic conditions of Arthur's life are set by three women. The theme of Arthur's legacy and the continuation of the Arthurian court thus stand expressly at the beginning of the narrative. With the certainty of Arthur's death, the questions of the continuation and protection of the Arthurian court are the point of departure for Arthur's and Gawein's narrative and the fundamental task for helper and protectors is established.

The Norn episode fits the pattern of initial need partially; there is no need in the conventional sense. However, there is the benevolent intervention of a higher power that sets the premises so the story can unfold. It enables a yet unborn hero to excel in life. The situation is presented without stated motivation; one of the Fates, the Goddess Clotho, selects Arthur to become the most renowned person, and she creates the result she desires. No overt reason for this choice is given. Similarly, no overt reason is presented for *Fortuna/Vrouwe Sælde*'s decision to become foster mother to Arthur and protectress to him and his court. Indeed, no explicit reason needs to be given. Implied in the narration is the premise that Arthur is chosen by the Norns Clotho and Lachesis; he, and his successor Gawein, are favorites of the goddess *Fortuna/Sælde*, which carries a promise of special attention and protection.

Goddess *Fortuna/Vrouwe Sælde*

The defining woman figure in both the Arthur and Gawein story is the Goddess/Lady *Fortuna*. As mentioned previously Arthur's father Uterpendragon dies when Arthur is five years old. This death deprives the child of the person who was to have raised him:

*Er was niht sehs jâr alt,
Dô got nam in sînen gwalt
Sînen vater, der in ziehen solt (...)*

v. 314-316

(He was not yet six years old, when God took his father, who should have raised him.)

In terms of the above suggested structure of the helper episodes the following elements result: when the child loses his father, a great need arises. Arthur needs

a parental figure, a person, who protects and educates him, just as his father would and should have done. This is the more urgent as this is a child who, as an adult, will become the ruler of many; his upbringing will arguably affect the wellbeing of many. Heinrich describes in detail Arthur's deep lament at the loss of a father, who was in all accounts a virtuous and powerful ruler (v. 347 ff.). He would presumably also have been an effective parent, providing for his son valuable training and guidance to become a similarly renowned knight and ruler. Arthur's demeanor as he mourns the loss of his father shows his good character and his maturity at an early age, and thus the propensity to become a fine king. Luckily, the child's need is addressed: Filling in the vacant role of parental caretaker and protectress is *Vrouwe Sælde*. She successfully protects and raises the child Arthur. In addition, she extends her protection to Arthur's household and thus also becomes the protectress of Arthur's court, in essence securing its survival. With her role of foster parent and protector of the court *Sælde* is structured as a powerful figure who parallels Arthur's father in power and concern:

*Vrowe Sælde pflac des kindes
 Und ouch des ingesindes,
 Und behuote ez vor valschem mein,
 Als ez sît an im wol schein,
 Wie sie in hâte gezogen;
 Er was des gar unbetrogen;
 Si teilte im mit vlîze mit
 Der werlde wert heiles sît,
 Sô sie beste kunde:
 Daz schein an ir gunde
 Nach vunfzehen jâren;
 Dô diu vergangen wâren,
 Wart er ritter und nam wîp
 Und kêrte ouch guot und lîp
 An milte und an êre
 Als sîner tugende lêre
 Gewissez urkûnde gît.*

v. 412-428

(*Vrouwe Sælde* took care of the child and the members of his household, and protected him from all falseness, and later it was evident how she had raised him; he was upright/pure; as best as she could, she ardently imparted on him the behaviour, which benefits the world's well-being. After fifteen years, she looked on him with affection. After these years had passed, he became a knight, took a wife, and applied his wealth and body to kindness and honor, as the account of his virtue verifies.)

For fifteen years *Vrouwe Sælde* is active as Arthur's foster mother and she succeeds in guiding him toward adulthood, to becoming a knight, a husband, and the ruler of his inherited realm.

This first episode of Arthur's need and the aid extended to him establishes the basic structural pattern for subsequent women, who successfully aid the hero-in-need, first Arthur, and later, Gawein. The text narrates a crisis point and employs a female figure to overcome the impasse. Arthur loses his father and is left without guidance and protection, a situation, which is dangerous not only for him, but also for his lands and people. Arthur needs a parental figure for himself and a protector for his court. Although precocious for his age, the child Arthur needs appropriate protection and education to develop into the beneficial ruler he indeed becomes. *Vrouwe Sælde* is willing and able to fill this vacuum, raising Arthur according to his needs until those needs are met. It can be argued that Arthur and his court society and all it stands for were made possible by the active involvement of *Vrouwe Sælde*.

Heinrich also establishes an earlier protective relationship between *Vrouwe Sælde* and Uterpendragon, Arthur's father, when he tells us that *Sælde* had previously played an instrumental role in Uterpendragon's military successes (v. 383). Her further involvement with this family as foster mother to Arthur and protectress of the court is narrated as a matter of fact; Heinrich simply announces that after Uterpendragon's death, *Sælde* took care of the child and his household. Her involvement with Arthur is treated simply as the logical continuation of her previous aid to the father. Then and now she is successful. The fact that *Sælde* herself regards her fostering as a success is clear; Heinrich tells us that she feels affectionate toward Arthur even after fifteen years of parental guidance, when he has become an adult, and Heinrich describes this adult Arthur as a kind, honorable, and exemplary ruler. This is, writes Heinrich, because Arthur followed the teachings of *Sælde* and did what was best:

*Er wante sich zem besten,
Als ime vrouwe Sælde riet.*

v. 447-448

(He turned to what was best,
following the council of *Vrouwe Sælde*.)

In the short space of 97 lines (v. 314-411), Heinrich establishes the situational need: Arthur is an orphan; his father had been an outstanding ruler, whose death leaves a great void in the child's life, and this need is met in a short narrative of 144 lines (v. 412-456). Lastly, Heinrich's evaluation of *Sælde*'s effectiveness as foster parent is entirely positive. With this episode *Sælde* has been established not only as a major influence in Arthur's life, but also as Arthur's and his court's sole protectress. This protection will continue with Gawein. *Sælde*'s function sets up her role as guardian and benefactress to Arthur and his court.

The great narrative economy in the telling of Arthur's childhood crisis and its resolution is quite uncharacteristic of Heinrich's style. Its employment at this early point suggests that Heinrich attempted to establish certain parameters for the subsequent Gawein narrative, in which the discussed fundamental function of *Sælde* is the basic narrative structure and assertion. This structure continues into the central scene of *Diu Crône*, where it is developed particularly strong. In this scene Gawein, who is at this point in the narrative Arthur's successor, visits *Vrouwe Sælde* in her castle Ordohorht ('orderly garden'; the aspect of order in this name suggests a place where order resides and from whence it can be bestowed upon others) and there receives protection for the Arthurian court once more, this time in the form of a magical ring. This ring is a sign, a proxy of *Sælde*'s protection and its subsequent theft from the court is the catalyst for a great many adventures in the ultimately successful attempt to return it and the protection for which it stands to the Arthurian court.

Conclusion

In Arthur's childhood story, a short prequel to the main Gawein story, Heinrich von dem Türlin establishes the narrative structure for the independent helping women, which defines this MHG Arthurian romance. The pattern consists of an initial situation of danger to the hero, which he himself is unable to alleviate; this is followed by the appearance of an independent female who proceeds to assuage the danger or situation of need; the result for the hero is a re-established situation of safety and control. This pattern of female assistance is used time and again to secure the physical survival first of Arthur and then his successor Gawein and ultimately of the Arthurian court. The parameters for the hero narrative are formulated with the initial story of the Norns, the three fates, who impart the gift of life onto Arthur. This first story establishes that the child Arthur will be an orphan and as a result is in desperate need of a foster parent; it also creates the need for the physical protection of the entire court society. In the following story *Vrouwe Sælde* fulfills these needs, yet once Arthur reaches adulthood and the need for parental guidance and protection are no longer acute, *Vrouwe Sælde* retains her role of protectress; in the remainder of the narrative she watches over and secures Gawein, the heir to the Arthurian court. However, Heinrich also introduces his audience to a more ambivalent and complex view of women in the scene following the story of *Sælde*'s foster parentage. Here Arthur needs assistance in decorating the great hall of his castle for a great celebration and his sister-in-law, Queen Lenomîe von Alexandrîe, does indeed provide a lavish wall hanging into which are woven female figures from antiquity, Dido, Helen and Lavinia. However beautiful the wall-hanging is, the emblematic mentioning of these women in the description of this tapestry does also introduce the recurring theme of the negative destructive power of love into the narrative. These images also serve as the introduction to the negative examples of women within the Arthurian court, who stand in direct contrast to the positive

helping figures outside of the court and will be the subject of another study. Heinrich establishes the fundamental importance of helping and protecting extra-courtly women early on in his romance. This overarching narrative pattern of helping women constitutes a seismic shift away from the traditional sole significance of the hero and thus must be considered the key to an integrated reading of this romance. A larger poetological significance of this unique narrative pattern is the obligation for an inclusive far more positive and complex reading of its women, which helps us overcome old nineteenth-century patterns of interpretations and criticism and the gender bias inherent in them.

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Vorwort

Das vorliegende Heft von *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* vermittelt neuerlich die verschiedenen Ansätze und das unterschiedliche Quellenmaterial, welche sich in den Disziplinen der historischen Wissenschaften für eine Auseinandersetzung mit dem Alltag des Mittelalters sowie seiner Konstruktion und Repräsentation in der Überlieferung als relevant erweisen können. Zoran Ladić und Goran Budeč zeigen, wie im Kroatien der zweiten Hälfte des 12. Jahrhunderts kirchliche und adelige Gebietsansprüche recht allgemeine Auseinandersetzungen, Gewalttätigkeit und Mord hervorriefen und sich ein ermordeter und heilig gesprochener Bischof zum lokalen und regionalen Kultobjekt entwickeln konnte. Madelon Köhler-Busch analysiert Muster der Rolle der Frau in der *Crône* des Heinrich von dem Türlin (c. 1220). Aušra Baniulytė weist nach, wie im 17. Jahrhundert der auf Namensähnlichkeit beruhende Konnex zwischen einer litauischen und einer florentinischen Familie auch auf legendäre mittelalterliche Verbindungen zurückgeführt wurde und dadurch mithalf, die Mitglieder der litauischen Familie zu Repräsentanten einer modernen, europäischen Elite des Barock zu machen.

Gerhard Jaritz