

KING ROTHER

and His Bride



Quest and Counter-Quests



THOMAS KERTH

King Rother and His Bride

Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture

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Thomas Kerth



CAMDEN HOUSE

Rochester, New York

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First published 2010
by Camden House

Camden House is an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Inc.
668 Mt. Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620, USA
www.camden-house.com
and of Boydell & Brewer Limited
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK
www.boydellandbrewer.com

ISBN-13: 978-1-57113-436-3

ISBN-10: 1-57113-436-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kerth, Thomas.

King Rother and his bride : quest and counter-quests / Thomas Kerth.

p. cm. — (Studies in German literature, linguistics, and culture)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-57113-436-3 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-57113-436-0 (hardcover)

1. König Rother. 2. Courtship in literature. 3. Kings and rulers in literature.
4. Epic poetry, German — History and criticism. I. Title.

PT1551.K63K47 2010

831.'21—dc22

2009048039

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

This publication is printed on acid-free paper.

Printed in the United States of America.

For
George C. Schoolfield

Im Zeitstrome bleiben oben
Die Werke, die den Meister loben.
Wers umkehrt, ist Gesell; sein Werkchen trinkt
Des Stroms und sinkt.

—Klopstock

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Foreword

THE BRIDAL QUEST in its various forms is one of the major themes of international folklore and world literature. Individual treatments of this theme reflect varying cultural traditions, but their superficial differences reveal themselves to be mere variations on the same basic set of narrative structures and the same constellation of narrative motifs. The overwhelming majority of bridal quests are structured solely from the perspective of the wooer, and logically so, since in most cultures it is, at least officially, the male who initiates the courting ritual. The main conflict in the quest does not concern the willingness of the bride to accept the proposal of her wooer, but whether the prospective father-in-law deems the wooer of sufficient status to marry his daughter. The bride herself is almost always a relatively passive figure in these negotiations.

Bridal quests were particularly popular in German and Scandinavian literature of the twelfth century, both as episodes within larger narratives and as independent works. The German minstrel epics dating from the last half of that century are all structured as perilous bridal quests, in which the wooer, concealing his identity and true purpose through a series of successful ruses, defies the objections of the bride's father or guardian and abducts her with her consent. *König Rother* (King Rother), the earliest of the minstrel epics, differs from those to follow, in that the quest structure is doubled: Rother must win his bride a second time from her father, who has re-abducted her. Another exceptional feature of this text is the portrayal of Rother's (unnamed) bride, the daughter of King Constantin of Constantinople, who plays a much more active role in her own wooing than her counterparts in the other minstrel epics and, indeed, in bridal quests in general.

The purpose of the present study is to rebalance the traditional focus in scholarly studies on the male protagonists of *König Rother* and the rivalry between wooer and father, Rother and Constantin, by examining the portrayal of the female characters: Constantin's wife, his daughter, and, to a lesser extent, her lady-in-waiting, Herlint. Our analysis will demonstrate that the poet has also employed the normally male-oriented structure of the bridal quest as a means of elevating the narrative function of the bride from that of passive object, whose fate is determined exclusively by the outcome of the rivalry between wooer and father, to active subject. She undertakes her own wooing expedition, limited as it is by her circumstances, that is structured essentially as a parallel counter-quest for the groom. In the course of this counter-quest she displays her own

cunning through a series of both successful and unsuccessful ruses. This underscores her status as Rother's equal and demonstrates that they are destined for each other; they are, in modern parlance, soul mates. The quest structure additionally serves, in a consciously negative version, as the basis for Constantin's counter-quest to regain custody of his daughter after she has eloped with Rother and for Rother's second, doubled, quest to retrieve her from him. Initial elements of the bridal-quest structure can even be found in the events that lead up to the decision by the elderly spouses to enter the monastic life at the end of the epic.

The elevation of the bride to a subject of the action demands that the traditional analysis of the text based upon the bipolar conflict of status between wooer and father in the bridal quest be reconsidered to include a third point in a triangular competition to assert preeminence. As the text makes clear, no one is more concerned about her status than the bride herself: every action she takes in her counter-quest has as its goal the assessment of Rother's worthiness to be her groom, the very same consideration that led Rother to seek her as his bride. Their quests for each other intersect when wooer and bride meet face to face in secret for the first time and each is permitted to assess the qualities of the other without regard for the intermediating and negative figure of her father. From this moment they share a common purpose, and their separate quests merge. Our analysis will reassess the often debated issues of the intended bride's actions toward and the nature of her regard for Rother's alter ego, Dietrich, and whether the secret meeting between Rother and his intended bride constitutes an engagement ritual or is to be regarded as the marriage act itself.

King Rother represents the idealized and exemplary ruler of the West, and his union with the princess of Constantinople is often understood as symbolic of the translation of power from the ancient survivor of the Roman Empire in Byzantium to a new world order in Western Europe: according to the text, their grandson is Charlemagne, the first modern ruler to style himself emperor of Rome. The text contains numerous references to historical personages and places, as well as assertions that the work is not fiction, but history. In the course of this analysis we will address the historical and political subtext of the narrative: the portrayal of Rother and Constantin in light of contemporary views on kingship and the feudal compact; the historical figures that have been proposed as models for their respective characters; the negative representation of Constantinople both as a product of prejudice based on the experiences of western diplomats and Crusaders, as well as its function as a negative narrative space in the bridal-quest structure; the political and feudal implications of the relationship between Constantin and his queen; the portrayal of the Moslem rivals for world domination; the legitimacy of Rother's heir and the significance of his knighting; and the political implications of Rother's decision to abdicate and enter the monastic life.

Abbreviations

<i>ABäG</i>	<i>Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik</i>
<i>ATB</i>	Altdeutsche Textbibliothek
<i>DVjs</i>	<i>Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte</i>
<i>GAG</i>	Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik
<i>GRM</i>	<i>Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift</i>
<i>HRG</i>	<i>Handwörterbuch zur deutschen Rechtsgeschichte</i>
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>MGH</i>	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
<i>MTU</i>	Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen
<i>PBB</i>	<i>Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur</i>
<i>PBBH</i>	<i>Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur</i> (Halle)
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus sive bibliotheca universalis, integra, uniformis, commoda, æconomica, omnium SS. patrum, doctorum scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum</i>
<i>PSuQ</i>	Philologische Studien und Quellen
<i>ZfdA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur</i>
<i>ZfdPh</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie</i>
<i>WdF</i>	Wege der Forschung

1: Minstrels and Bridal Quests

*K*ÖNIG ROTHER IS THE EARLIEST of the works that comprise the genre traditionally designated as the minstrel epic, *Spielmannsepik*, anonymous verse narratives that were once believed to have been recited by a minstrel (Middle High German *spil[e]man*), either itinerant or resident, before a courtly audience.¹ Alone among contemporary epics of the twelfth century, these works show no hint of French influence, as do, for example, the classically inspired *Eneide* (Aeneas, ca. 1175–86) by Heinrich von Veldeke or Pfaffe Lamprecht's *Alexander* (ca. 1150), or Konrad's *Rolandslied* (Song of Roland, ca. 1170), a *chanson de geste*. They seem to have been an entirely indigenous development in German literature, based on folkloric tradition that "antedates the fashion of French romance" (Andersson 1987, 68).² The works generally included among the minstrel epics, in addition to *König Rother*, are *Orendel*, *St. Oswald*, *Salman und Morolf*, and, usually, *Herzog Ernst*.³ There is, however, no known documentary evidence to support the assertion that they were composed by minstrels, nor that there was, at the time of their composition, a distinct class or guild of minstrels who were regarded or who regarded themselves not merely as entertainers and reciters, but as composers of epics (Naumann 1924/77, 135–37). The validity of both the terms "minstrel" and "minstrel epic" in this context, and exactly what they mean, has been a subject of scholarly controversy ever since the term *Spielmann* was first used by Wilhelm Grimm — in his 1808 essay "Über die Entstehung der altdeutschen Poesie und ihr Verhältnis zu der nordischen" (Concerning the Emergence of Old German Poesy and Its Relationship to the Nordic) — to designate the reciter of such tales. While a detailed examination of the genre and its history lies beyond the scope of this study, a brief discussion of the *Spielmann* and the nature of his putative *Spielmannsepen* can serve as reminders of the issues involved for those familiar with the subject and inform those who are not.⁴

Grimm's *Spielmann* was meant to designate, contrary to the medieval meanings of the word — *spielmann*, *fahrender sänger*, *musikant*, *gauler* (minstrel, wandering poet, musician, mime)⁵ — not a low entertainer, but a preserver of the oral tradition of *Volks poesie* (poetry of a nation), as that concept was understood by J. G. Herder and the German Romantics: the "Produkte einer dichtenden Volksseele," products of the soul of a people as manifested in its poetry (Schmid-Cadalbert 1985, 15), as opposed to *Kunst poesie*, artistic works composed by individual poets. The example Grimm

gives of the “noble minstrel,”⁶ Volker the Fiddler from the *Nibelungenlied*, a fierce warrior of noble status also gifted with musical skills, makes it clear that Grimm was not thinking of those medieval itinerant entertainers who peddled their art for money.⁷ Grimm’s *Spielmann* was not himself a composer of songs, as, for example, the Celtic bard or the Germanic *skop* are assumed to have been, but their transmitter. It was left to subsequent literary historians to conflate these two types of singers of tales — transmitter and poet — then to merge them with the figure of the wandering minstrel.

Wilhelm Wackernagel was the first to suggest, in his literary history of 1848,⁸ that the minstrel himself was or could have been an epic poet; this merging of the two roles had been made possible by Ludwig Uhland’s logical observation that *Volkspoesie*, as the collective poetic expression of a people, can only be expressed by individuals, but individuals whose personal identity disappears within the general character of the people (Waremann 1951, 13n4; Bahr 1954/77, 303–13). In the fourth edition of his own literary history, which appeared after that of Wackernagel, G. G. Gervinus, who had previously regarded the wandering minstrels as the curators (*Pfleger*) of *Volkspoesie*, true to Grimm’s original view, changed his mind to agree with Wackernagel. According to this revised scholarly opinion, then, the minstrels are no longer merely disseminators of *Volkspoesie*; they can also be viewed as poets and composers of epics, “fahrend[e] Lohndichte[r], die die epische Kunst umhertrugen zu Burgen und Höfen,” wandering, paid poets, who spread epic art to castles and courts (Gervinus 1853, 1:192). Maurice O’C. Walshe gives a particularly vivid description of this nineteenth-century view of the *Spielmann*, which he himself rejected, that persisted well into the twentieth:

Who were the authors and retailers of such tales as these? The answer which used to be given was: *Spielleute* or gleemen; and such works as this were labelled *Spielmannsepen*. The existence of a numerous class of wandering minstrels and popular entertainers is well enough attested. In Latin they were called *mimi* or *ioculatores*, and from this latter word come the French term *jongleur* and the English *juggler*. Every fair and market, and doubtless every village inn near a main road, was liable to be visited by a host of travelling singers, dancers, bear-trainers, tightrope-walkers, fire and sword-swallowers and so on; not infrequently, it seems, they were invited to display their arts at the castle of the local bishop or count, though strictly speaking bishops and other clerics were forbidden to receive them. It would be strange if some reciters of tales of love and adventure were not to be found among this motley crew, and it therefore seemed natural enough to scholars to ascribe to them the composition and preservation of such carefree stories as *König Rother* and the like, and even of more serious tales in which the deeds of old Germanic heroes were narrated. (Walshe 1962, 63–64)

Walshe was, of course, not the first scholar to question whether or not such itinerant, often illiterate entertainers could be responsible for the composition of epics that demonstrate a relatively broad understanding of historical and, sometimes, theological material. It was particularly the latter that Hans Naumann found incongruous with the idea of the minstrel, that “liederliche[s] Gesindel” (licentious rabble, Naumann 1924/77, 141), which he characterized, in the main, as “musicians, dancers, vaulters, sleight-of-hand swindlers, conjurors, buffoons, fire-eaters, puppeteers, sword-swallowers, fencers, acrobats, tightrope-walkers, circus riders and animal-tamers; in short, all those performers whose artistry consisted of movement and gesture, rather than words, of mimicry rather than poetry” (author’s translation).⁹ For Naumann, the only possible composers of true literature were knights or clerics, and in the case of minstrel poesy, it must have been the latter: minstrel epics were composed not *by* the minstrels, but *for* them (Naumann 1924/77, 138–39.). Karl zur Nieden also recognized the difficulty of ascribing to the same mentality and social stratum the composition of works that would not only find resonance with merrymakers in the village square but also appeal to a courtly audience with more refined taste, and he theorized as to how a distinction between entertainers for mass consumption and those who sought to amuse a more select audience could have developed over time. Based on an examination of minstrel poetry and heroic poetry (*Heldendichtung*), the dissemination of both of which genres he attributed to the minstrel, as had other scholars before him, zur Nieden suggested a division of minstrels into three categories. First were the low *mimi* and *joculatores*, who performed their tricks before a general audience that included the nobility. His second category consists of the best among these low entertainers, who, having abandoned the itinerant life for positions as court poets and private tutors, revealed in their work a constant striving toward the courtly ideal; these poets composed *Heldendichtung*, as well as certain minstrel epics, *König Rother*, *Herzog Ernst*, and *Salman und Morolf*. The third category is made up of the best of the *mimi* in the Rhineland, who functioned as religious propagandists and composed the minstrel epics that are more religious in tone, *Orendel* and *St. Oswald* (zur Nieden 1930, 168).

Most scholars in the second half of the twentieth century also voiced dissatisfaction with the designation “minstrel epic” and sought to free these texts from the constraints implied by assigning their composition to minstrels. Helmut de Boor (1949/79, 238), for example, judiciously terms these texts “so-called” minstrel epics, while Walshe (1962, 53) eliminates the minstrel entirely and emphasizes their place in the literary chronology with the relatively non-committal “pre-courtly epics.” Where subject matter or treatment of themes would suggest that the author is a cleric, not a minstrel, Julius Schwietering (1931/57, 107) speaks of “volkstümliche Legende[n],” popular legends; de Boor (1949/79, 250),

of “Legendenromane,” legendary romances. Christian Schmid-Cadalbert would create a new genre altogether, the bridal-quest epic, that would include the texts traditionally designated as minstrel epics, minus *Herzog Ernst*, as well as some of the works currently assigned to heroic poetry, especially *Ortnit* (1985, 210–11). Walter Haug (1988, 179) notes that *Waltharius manu fortis* (Walter of the Strong Hand) and *Kudrun* could also be placed in this bridal-quest genre. Michael Curschmann (1964, 154–55) proposes a slight modification, “Spielmännische Dichtung,” poetry after the fashion of minstrels, that is meant to characterize only the provenance of the plot material and not make leveling assertions about unifying elements such as a style distinctive from other genres or the social status of the poets. However, “der stolze Spielmann” (the proud minstrel), with his roots in the proletariat *Volk*, still had his modern champion in the East German scholar Ewald Erb, who divides the texts into verse romances and legendary epics after the fashion of minstrels, “Spielmännische Versromane” and “Spielmännische Legendenepen” (1964, 2:753 and 780). Werner Hoffmann (1974, 33) objects not to the term “Spielmann” in the *Spielmannsepik*, but “Epik”; he would rather term them minstrel romances, a good idea that has not found scholarly support. It is Curschmann’s designation, a compromise that retains the idea of the minstrel who may have disseminated the work, but does not attribute authorship to him, that is now generally employed in histories of literature and other reference works. In truth, the designation of these texts as minstrel poetry, with its roots in nineteenth-century Romanticism and emerging German nationalism,¹⁰ is more a term of convenience for literary historians, a *passe-partout* (de Vries 1922/74, cxiii) that masks their differences, than a meaningful designation that implies specificity; indeed, it says very little about the character of these works as a group. Bearing these considerations in mind, it is simply a matter of convenience to retain the traditional designation, minstrel epic, in these deliberations, at the same time acknowledging that it is inadequate.

While it does seem logical to assume that at some point minstrels played a significant role in the development and dissemination of both *Spielmannsdichtung* and *Heldendichtung* in smaller narrative forms — songs, ballads, and so forth — during an oral phase preceding their textualization as full-length epic poems in book form, there is nothing to suggest that minstrels were instrumental in the transition from the oral tradition to the written format.¹¹ One can at best only speculate as to the actual nature of these transitional narratives, their literary quality and their structure, that doubtless existed between the heroic lays in the Germanic oral tradition, on the one hand, and the heroic epics in book format that one finds in the High Middle Ages, on the other.¹² Whether the minstrel can be termed a poet, as opposed to merely an oral transmitter of poetic material, however, may be simply a matter of semantics. One

could say that each oral performance, if it evidences the slightest variation from other oral performances, is in some ways a new creation, a new work of poetic art that reflects individual artistic decisions by the reciter. In oral performance, as Albert Lord has observed, the definition of “poet,” normally so easily established for written texts, is blurred:

We must eliminate from the word “performer” any notion that he is one who merely reproduces what some else or even he himself has composed. Our oral poet is a composer. Our singer of tales is a composer of tales. Singer, performer, composer, and poet are one under different aspects *but at the same time*. Singing, performing, composing are facets of the same act.¹³

The discrete artistic variations introduced by individual reciters at particular performances do not, however, affect the essential identity of a work, since its meaning lies not in the variations, but in the structure of the plot itself; in this sense the singer does not interpret the tale, but gives voice to that meaningful structure that remains constant in all variations (Haug 1988/95, 8).

The minstrel epics manifest similarities to both the courtly romance and the heroic epic but represent what Bahr and Curschmann (1984, 4:120) have termed a third stylistic mode. They are bound together by their common preference for certain specific narrative plots and structures, as well as common themes: piety, sagacity, bravery, feudal loyalty, and faithful love.¹⁴ They differ decidedly in tone from courtly narratives, which are almost exclusively based upon written sources; however, they cannot be precisely identified with the heroic epic, which also has its roots in the oral tradition, although they have clearly been influenced by it in particular instances. It has proven difficult to reach a scholarly consensus on a concise definition or even a meaningful description of the minstrel epic that goes beyond generalities. This is partly the result of the inability to agree upon which works beyond the core texts — *König Rother*, *Orendel*, *St. Oswald*, *Salman und Morolf* — actually make up the genre, and partly, the transmission of the core texts themselves. The minstrel epic emerges as a literary genre in the second half of the twelfth century, and the most important manuscript of *König Rother* dates from the end of that period. The earliest manuscripts of *Orendel*, *St. Oswald*, and *Salman und Morolf*, however, date only from the late fourteenth century, although these works are generally believed to have been composed ca. 1180, 1170, and 1160, respectively (Curschmann 1964, 125, 84 and 100). Their late date of transmission renders them suspect as evidence for conclusions as to the nature of the genre, since there is no way of determining what revision or reworking they may have undergone between their presumed textualization in the twelfth century and their known written form two centuries later. Indeed, Hoffmann (1974, 33), who detects

in *Orendel*, *St. Oswald*, and *Salman und Morolf*, as we now know them, a vulgarization he believes is meant to appeal to a less cultivated audience, has suggested that one should probably date them to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries, and not consider them together with the earlier texts at all.

For Gisela Vollmann-Profe the characteristic of the minstrel epics lies in the fact that they preserve the moment of transition from oral to written literary culture or, rather, the moment in which the encounter between these two forms of literary existence was still open and at the experimental stage. They are also related and comparable in the way they establish the conventions, in content and structure, for narrating the new kinds of experiences that resulted when Europeans first encountered the exotic East on a large scale.¹⁵ Much of their action takes place in a fictitious, fabulous Orient (Schneider 1943, 244) and is told in plots derived from Hellenistic and Byzantine traditions¹⁶ likely transmitted orally into the German-language territories by returning Crusaders, particularly following the Second Crusade (1147–49). Among these may well have been minstrels, as Erb (1964, 1²:764) suggests, who could later entertain their audiences at home with accounts of their adventures and military campaigns, of strange peoples and curious customs encountered there. This “wonderland of the East” proved an opportune location for their fairytale fantasies (Ehrismann 1922–35, 2¹:299). The plots from the Middle East, embellished with fabulous descriptions of oriental splendor, became the reservoir of a broader tradition of Eastern tales and legends (Gellinek 1968, 73); these soon merged with traditional elements from Germanic lore, sagas, fairytales, and myth to form new oral narratives that subsequently entered the written tradition through the minstrel epic.¹⁷

On the broadest thematic level the minstrel epic is characterized by the creation of a narrative world that integrates the East into the European experience by means of a symbolic and dangerous exploration of its geographical space by a prince who journeys there in order to win a bride. In that she, to some extent, may be said to represent the human face of this alien and exotic world, his triumph over the many obstacles to his goal and eventual success in winning her hand symbolizes the potential for Western dominance over a “feminized” East. This bridal quest is accomplished in two stages, an epic doubling different in each work, in which a first false or unsuccessful attempt is followed by a second, successful, one.¹⁸

Another defining characteristic of the minstrel epic is the intensity and excitement of the narrative persona’s engagement with the narration (Wareman 1951, 146). There is clearly a genuine desire on the part of the narrator to entertain the audience, even when addressing, for example, religious themes¹⁹ or the moral implications of fealty. Amusing the public was the minstrel’s profession (Wareman, 60), and the audience’s delight

at his strange, artistic, and interesting tales was doubtless important to their reception (Kokott 1978, 236). The narrator's efforts to engage the reader are manifested in a clear fascination with the details of clothing and food, a penchant for disguises and crafty deceptions (*liste*), for humor and hyperbole, and a penchant for the fantastic and the miraculous (Hoffmann 1974, 35). There is also a distinctly burlesque quality about them (Bahr 1954/77, 320).

On a stylistic level, the minstrel epic is characterized by the doubling or recycling of plot elements with but the slightest variation, sometimes with no variation at all,²⁰ a free hand with meter, and a lack of concern for pure rhyme. The language of the texts is somewhat cumbersome, massively focused on the description of objects, and at times even coarse, especially in *Salman und Morolf*. Typological numbers abound, and the narrator, with minor exceptions, relies on formulaic expressions for the description of characters, even when the formula contradicts what the character is doing at the time. Rhetorical devices are used sparingly, and when they occur, they usually follow the conventions (Schröder 1962, 12).²¹ Although these works certainly share common thematic, stylistic, and compositional features, their commonalities are not truly sufficient criteria by which to set them apart as a group from other contemporary texts that also set a high value on entertainment (Böckenholt 1971, 3).

It is precisely their stylistic features, which could be deemed primitive when compared to the great flowering of German literary culture around the year 1200, that led scholars to date all the minstrel epics to the twelfth century, even in those cases where they are only preserved in manuscripts from the late Middle Ages. But where their style led many to dismiss these texts as inferior when compared to the courtly and pre-courtly romances, all of which were derived from written sources, research into oral-formulaic theory makes it now seem likely that the formulaic expressions and repetitions, and the sheer liveliness of the narrative style in the minstrel epics, should be attributed to their recent roots in the oral tradition, since formulaic language is the hallmark of oral composition (Schreier-Hornung 1981, 58).²² These characteristics survived even after the texts were textualized in their fixed form. While this theory seems plausible, objections have been raised: the formulaic nature of a medieval text cannot necessarily be equated with the oral phase of the compositional process, since it is impossible to distinguish for certain exactly which formulaic expressions found therein represent a specifically oral formula (Curschmann 1979, 88). If this theory is accurate, however, the manuscript evidence would indicate that the minstrel epics coexisted alongside the written courtly romances for the next three centuries without losing their essentially oral stylistic character.

The most popular subject of the minstrel epic, and one which, as indicated above, can be viewed as one of its constituent elements (Frings

1940/77, 196), is the bridal quest, a theme found in some form or other in narrative traditions the world over.²³ Bridal-quest narratives, as “Denkstrukturen und Denkmodelle,” conceptual structures and conceptual models (Bräuer 1970, 82), vary from culture to culture and are characterized by details that reflect particular regional and social factors during a particular time, as well as the limitations of particular literary forms.²⁴ Concerning the textualization of bridal-quests in twelfth-century Germany, one can say that an older, but thematically limited, native tradition merged with a much broader, more modern tradition in world literature (Bahr and Curschmann 1984, 120). According to Theodor Frings, the traditional northern European model was a simple abduction of the bride (*Brautraub*), in which a wooer captures the object of his desire by force; the modern tradition, derived from the above-mentioned Hellenistic and Byzantine traditions, as well as Arabic tales, was a wooing expedition involving not violence, but guile (Frings 1940/77, 199–207). Underlying Frings’s theory, however, are preconceived notions concerning cultural stereotypes: wooing by means of force and abduction were essentially Germanic and reflected the “Einheit von Dichtung und Leben,” the unity of poesy and life, while wooing ruses and abduction ruses were Mediterranean and un-Germanic (*ungermanisch*, 205); moreover, his characterization of the traditional model is itself based upon rather specious evidence (Andersson 1987, 57–58).

Bornholdt (2005, 23–24) finds in Merovingian chronicles only one lengthy account of the abduction of a bride during a state of war and concludes: “Although bridal abduction was certainly a common practice in medieval Germanic societies, such abductions apparently did not interest medieval authors and did not lend themselves to a broader literary expansion” (40). One can say, at least, that Frings’s theory does indeed describe the form of the bridal quest as manifested in the minstrel epic, which contains elements of both abduction and wooing by means of ruses. His assumption, however, that guile became thematized only in the twelfth century is clearly incorrect, since it can be found already in the tale of Andarchius’s wooing of Ursus’s daughter in Gregory of Tours’s sixth-century *Historie Francorum* (Bornholdt 2005, 26–27).²⁵ One must conclude, with Claudia Bornholdt, that “the use of disguise and cunning as the means to win a bride in bridal-quest narrative is indigenous to north-western Europe, and it is not possible to isolate older stories in which the bride was won by force” (214).

One of the preeminent hallmarks of medieval literature, as opposed to modern literature, in which for the last 200 years innovation has been the norm (H. D. Zimmermann 1979, 35–41), is its schematic nature; this is particularly true for those texts rooted in the oral tradition, such as the bridal-quest epics (Schmid-Cadalbert 1985, 41 and 45). Although Jan de Vries (1921–22/77, 93) maintained that the genre is so multifaceted that

it is impossible to schematize its structural elements and nearly hopeless to attempt to reconstruct the vectors of influence within the seemingly desultory series of motifs that bind its members together, he and subsequent scholars have made valiant — and occasionally convincing — attempts to do so. Friedmar Geissler (1955, 1) distinguishes three different types of wooing expeditions in international folklore: a maiden is wooed by a man with the goal of marriage; a man is wooed by a maiden with the goal of marriage; and a man or a maiden woos the other with the goal of sexual union, the latter occurring only in tales from the Middle East and those based upon them.²⁶

In their study of Serbo-Croatian and Russian bridal quests, *Brautwerbung* (1947, 31–39), Frings and Max Braun made a distinction between the abduction as such and the quest, the latter being associated with the higher strata of society. They posited three types of abduction: abduction without consent or with only subsequent consent of the bride; abduction with consent of the bride; and abduction in the context of a raid. Where there is no bridal consent, an attempt is always made to rescue the bride from her abductor, which is successful if the rescuer is an enemy of the wooer (32). According to Frings and Braun, abduction with consent derives from the Middle-Eastern novella and occurs most often in Moslem bridal quests; unsuccessful rescue attempts are also usually based upon this oriental model. Hinrich Siefken (1967, 14–35) proposed an outline of the typical elements that can contribute to an abstract structuring of the episodes that narrate the sending and receiving of messengers in the minstrel epic and the heroic epic, a standard structure that can be augmented to include bridal-quest narratives. Siefken's model is based upon the geographical spaces in a text: (1) the first location: initiation and preparation; (2) the journey; (3) the second location: arrival, reception, and wooing; (4) the return journey: elopement or abduction; and (5) the first location: concluding festivities. Siefken's categories ignore the for him unnecessary distinction between abduction and quest, and offer an overarching model that encompasses both means of gaining a bride.

Typologically, Siefken discerns four varieties of quests in these narratives, which he divides into two main groups.

Bridal Quest

Simple Wooing (type A)	Perilous Wooing	
	Winning through Deeds (type B)	Abduction
	With Consent (type C)	Without Consent (type D)

The first group comprises the non-perilous variant, type A, which he defines as a simple wooing (*einfache Werbung*). In the simple wooing the suit of the wooer does not meet with resistance: “The hero, or, more

frequently, his proxy wooer approaches the father of the bride directly and negotiates the terms of the betrothal; a process that closely resembles historical marriage negotiations" (Bornholdt 2005, 13). The second group is a difficult or perilous wooing (*gefährliche Werbung*), which is further divided into two subgroups, in which the wooer gains the support of the bride with or without the consent of her family. In type B, winning through deeds (*Erwerbung durch Taten*), the wooer must pass a test or tests assigned by her family. Types C and D are grouped together, for they both entail the abduction of the bride. This abduction can be either type C, abduction with her consent (*Entführung mit Einverständnis*), the most popular medieval variant, or type D, abduction without her consent (*Entführung ohne Einverständnis*). Type D can be linked to type C when the bride's family re-abducts her. In type C, deception replaces the violence inherent in type D, which allows the narrator a great deal of freedom to use his imagination in concocting elaborate ruses. The ruses are generally of three varieties: they serve to allow the wooer access to the court of the bride's father, who opposes his daughter's marriage (*Aufnahmelist*); to allow him private access to the bride herself (*Werbungslist*); and to facilitate their elopement (*Entführungslist*). Bornholdt (2005, 12), who considers a broader group of quests than those contained solely in the minstrel epics, suggests that Siefken's categories should be augmented by a further type, the "unsuccessful wooing story,"²⁷ and that type C should be renamed "successful wooing by means of cunning."

Schmid-Cadalbert (1985, 69–70) views the structure of the simple wooing as linear, proceeding directly from the wooer's decision to woo to his eventual marriage: description of the ruler (*Herrscherbeschreibung*) → council scene (*Ratszene*) → description of the bride (*Beschreibung der Braut*) → wooing and betrothal (*Werbung und Vermählung*) → marriage (*Ehe*). There is no known work of Middle High German fiction in which the complete structure is based solely upon the model of the Simple Wooing, although it can typically be found in individual wooing episodes in chronicles.²⁸ *König Rother*, along with the other bridal quests among the minstrel epics, belongs to the more common variant of the perilous wooing, type C, which is also typical of wooing episodes within larger literary texts such as *Dietrichs Flucht* (Dietrich's Flight), *Wolfdietrich*, the *Nibelungenlied*, Eilhart's *Tristrant*, and Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*. The absence of the simple wooing as the structure for a complete work may well lie in the fact that it manifests no conflict between the wooer and the bride's father that inherently creates narrative tension in the text and arouses suspense in the audience. In the simple structure, the bride's father views the wooer's claim to his daughter as legitimate and does not regard it as a threat to his own status.

With regard to the perilous bridal quest, Schmid-Cadalbert (1985, 88) suggests that the plot is made up of specific fixed points (*Handlungsfixpunkte*): (1) a council scene; (2) the selection of the messengers and

their journey; (3) the promise of support by the wooer's men (only if the wooer himself makes the journey); (4) the landing of the wooer in a secret place (only if the wooer himself makes the journey); (5) the progress of the wooer from the secret place to the residence of the bride's father (only if the wooer himself makes the journey); (6) a chamber scene, where the wooer, his messengers, or an extraordinary helper meets with the bride; (7) abduction of the bride; (8) a battle between the wooer and the bride's father; (9) the return home with the bride; and (10) the wedding. Based on his examination of the minstrel epics, he breaks down these fixed points into the following schematic structure:

- A Initiation and preparation of the wooing
 - 1 Description of the ruler: residence, realm, personal characteristics
 - 2 Council scene: Namer, Knower, Wooer
 - 3 Obligation of assistance by loyal followers, enlistment and designation of messengers or helpers
- B Wooing journey
 - 1 Messengers' journey
 - a Messenger outwits the bride's father
 - b Messenger is taken prisoner by the bride's father; freed by the bride
 - c Messenger is taken prisoner by the bride's father
 - 2 Wooer's journey
 - a Wooer wins the bride by fulfilling tasks
 - b Wooer outwits the bride's father
 - c Wooer vanquishes the bride's father
- C Return with the bride and subsequent wedding
 - 1 Simple structure
 - a Return with the bride (part 1); pursuit by military force
 - b Battle with pursuers: reconciliation with or death of the bride's father
 - c Return with the bride (part 2)
 - d Wedding
 - 2 Doubled structure
 - a Return with the bride
 - b Wedding
 - c (Re)abduction of the bride
 - d Possible transferring of the bride to a rival suitor
 - e Wooer's journey and arrival in the bride's homeland
 - f Decisive battle
 - (i) reconciliation with the bride's father
 - (ii) possible slaying of the rival suitor
 - g Return with the bride
 - h Court celebration: rewarding of the loyal followers²⁹

While a schematized structural norm provides a framework for understanding the standard course of the narration within the genre as a whole, it says next to nothing about the quality of a particular text, nor does it define its meaning. Indeed, Schmid-Cadalbert's structure is essentially never found in its complete form in the written corpus of medieval German bridal quests, where one finds only variations on it (M. Schulz 2005, 249).³⁰ His model, however, can be viewed as representing the sum of narrative possibilities, although variation from it should not be construed as some sort of deficit or failure on the part of an individual poet (Deutsch 2003, 86). By comparing individual variations to the supra-individual matrix, however, one can come to an understanding of how a specific text conforms to or modifies the traditional prerequisites of the genre and to what extent its narrative elements are bound to those prerequisites or represent a moment of individual creativity, in that the poet consciously deviates from the norm (Schmid-Cadalbert 1985, 98).³¹ It is the variation that defines a particular poet's artistry. While *König Rother*, which takes the form of a doubled quest (S.-C. §A, B, C.2), does not violate structural norms in the sense of a systematic and purposeful disappointment of the horizon of expectations (Stock 2002, 102), the poet does indeed embellish his narration with structural doublings and variations that are his alone. Among the minstrel epics the successful re-abduction of the bride specifically by her father (S.-C. §C.2.c) takes place only in *König Rother*, and it is not present in any earlier Germanic bridal-quest narratives and chronicles (Bornholdt 2005, 141). Indeed, it is questionable whether or not it should be considered an essential part of the structure at all.

The doubling of individual episodes can occur in both the simple and perilous wooings, and the doubling of the entire quest structure itself, the subsequent loss and reacquisition of the bride — the quest structure a second time (Kuhn 1973/80, 22) — is a rare, but not uncommon, phenomenon in the international bridal-quest tradition and occurs twice in the minstrel epics. One must remember, however, that even if the doubling is present in the written texts as we know them, it is impossible to know for certain whether it was always so, whether the structure was already doubled during the oral phase of the development of the narrative or only at the time of its textualization. The moment of textualization affords ample opportunity to modify the oral version, for here one has essentially two choices: one can either take over the plot material as is, along with the orally transmitted linguistic elements and structure, or attempt to adapt the traditional material to fit current circumstances by altering the linguistic elements to meet the expectations of a lay culture accustomed to the linguistic norms of a written literary culture.³² In either case, the written text represents a narrative that never existed in exactly that same form in the oral tradition, and the

degree to which it retains the formulaic and structural elements characteristic of the oral tradition would depend on the use for which the written text was intended. The structural doubling, however, may not be merely, as was earlier believed,³³ an “Anschwellung” (swelling up) — to borrow Andreas Heusler’s term (1905/56, 30–37) — of the plot by the minstrels to extend the narrative and “hold the interest of the audience for a longer period” (Jackson 1960, 57) by simply giving them more of the same thing, nor is it a necessary by-product of its textualization. The *Rother* poet clearly understands the structure of the perilous bridal quest and intentionally employs it, or variations on its elements, not only for Rother’s initial quest, by messenger and then in person, but also for what amounts to the bride’s counter-quest for Rother, as well as for her father’s machinations to regain custody of her and Rother’s second journey to retrieve her from him.

Christian Kiening (1998, 212) summarizes the components that dominate in the perilous quest in terms of three overarching themes: the best man and the most beautiful woman belong together; their union obeys the rule of more or less radical exogamy; and the quest cannot be accomplished without difficulty. His emphasis on the significance of exogamy in these texts echoes the importance Siefken placed upon textual geography when constructing his structural model. Viktor Zhirmunskij (Schirmunski) has suggested that this requisite geographical separation of wooer from bride reflects an ancient element that goes back to the earliest phase of bridal-quest narratives in the oral tradition: societies organized according to patriarchal clans (*Gentilordnung*) placed a premium on exogamy, whereby a wooer seeks his bride from outside his own people, often by means of abduction with or without the woman’s consent (Schirmunski 1961, 41). There is, however, a theological reason for exogamy in these twelfth-century texts, one that does not require delving into folkloric tradition. It was the position of the church that marriage partners must not be related within seven degrees of kinship, that is, sharing common great-great-great-greatgrandparents, in order to avoid the impediment of incest, a ban no doubt very difficult to enforce, given the contemporary state of genealogical record-keeping for all but the higher nobility. What appears in the bridal quests as the motif of equality of birth and status, by which a ruler, as wooer, can find no partner of equal status in his own realm and must, therefore, seek a partner in the exotic East, may well derive from the incest impediment; so many possible partners in his homeland would have been otherwise forbidden to him that he has practically only two possibilities: seeking a foreign bride who cannot possibly be related to him or flouting canon law (M. Schulz 2005, 22). It was only with the Lateran Council of 1215, that is, after the textualization of at least *König Rother* and *Herzog Ernst*, that Pope Innocent III altered the official impediment of consanguinity to the fourth degree of kinship.

The notion of the exogamous bride of equal status adds not only a geographical dimension to the concept of narrative space but a geopolitical one as well. Through the motif of equal status the inherent (psychological) rivalry between wooer and bride's father becomes an international rivalry for supremacy: the wooer must convince the bride's father that he is of sufficient status to woo her. When the bride's father reclaims his daughter, as in *König Rother*, the doubled structure serves this thematic purpose: it comes into play when the wooer or his representative(s) have triumphed over the objections of the bride's father in the private realm, as defined by the mutual consent of wooer and bride, but her father has not publicly acknowledged the wooer's claim upon his daughter as legitimate (Schmid-Cadalbert, 1985, 64).³⁴ The requirement of the equal status of the bride implies, of course, an equality of status between the wooer and her father or guardian, from whom she derives her social rank. The requisites of exogamy and equal status result in the division of the narrative space into two discrete spheres of power, that of the wooer and that of the guardian, and the sea that separates them (Schmid-Cadalbert 1985, 83).

It is the voyage across the sea to a land in the East that distinguishes the bridal quest in the minstrel epic from all previous quests in the northern European tradition (Bornholdt 2005, 158). Although the sea clearly forms a geographical barrier between the rivals' spheres of influence and is a central motif in *König Rother* — the text contains eighteen changes of location (Gellinek 1968, 13–14) — it seems not to function as a third space in the narrative sense, but merely a space to be traversed between the main locations of the action, Bari and Constantinople.³⁵ This is also essentially true of the Munich *Oswald*, where the courtship messenger's sea journey is interrupted by island adventures, and in *Orendel*, by storms and a shipwreck; however, these events are more the excuse for narrator to indulge himself in literary flights of fantasy than significant structural elements. One must, however, qualify the assessment of the third space in *König Rother* by noting that during the second of his four journeys across the sea, Rother fathers a son, Pippin, upon his new bride. The brief statement of this fact, indeed, makes up the total narrative description of that journey (lines 2942–46). One could make the case that this is the exception to the narrative emptiness of the third space that proves the rule: Pippin's conception in the third space unites him to both realms, West and East, that of his father and of his mother. According to the text this Pippin is the father of Charlemagne, whose claim to imperial rank in the West brought him into conflict with the Byzantine emperors in Constantinople.

Notes

¹ For the general remarks in chapters 1 and 2 we rely upon the standard literary histories such as Gustav Ehrismann, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur bis*