No. 3

Dietrich of the Glezze/Gletze: The Belt

The narrative has been preserved in two Heidelberg manuscripts (Universitätsbibliothek, Cpg 341, early fourteenth century; Cpg 4, ca. 1466/1478), and in a copy of the older Heidelberg manuscript, formerly in the library of the Kalocsza Archbishops’ library, today in Geneva-Cologny, Bibliotheca Bodmeriana (orig. A1 XI; now Msc. 1). The poet identifies himself by way of brief references to a patron, Wilhelm, whose father was the administrator (bailiff, steward) of Weidenau in Silesia (today Vidnava in the Czech Republic, right on the border to Poland, almost straight south of Nysa). This Wilhelm died in 1296. Since his father was most likely assigned to his post not before 1266, the narrative can only have been composed sometime between 1270 and 1290. Dietrich identifies his origin as Glezze/Gletze on the southeastern slopes of the Glatt Schneeberg in Silesia, although his language hardly shows signs of the Silesian dialect. He seems to have had a command of Latin, and might even have been influenced by an ancient Greek source, the story of Cephalus and Procris, which underwent many adaptations and was even used by Ovid in his Metamorphoses (7. 655). Despite the reference to Brabant in the narrative, and despite the use of French loanwords, we know of no French source that Dietrich might have used for his own tale. But we know of an ancient Greek tale of Cephalus and Procris that reveals a number of significant parallels, although Dietrich borrowed only some elements and created an original tale after all: see Otto Richard Meyer, “Das Quellen-Verhältnis des ‘Borton’,” Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur 59 (1922): 36-46.

Edition:

Text:
I am called “The Belt” and should be known to honorable people, but unknown to evil people who should always suffer pain until the bitter end of their life because of their wrongdoing (5). This story ought to be read to a courtly audience which will be happy with me considering that they command so many virtues; after all, no one has to be reproached for his virtuous life (10).

Once upon a time there was a praiseworthy knight who possessed many courtly virtues. He was called Conrad and was well known in those days by knights and ladies (15). He spent much time together with the most noble people at court. He was very generous toward his friends and other people at court, and for this reason I would like to write about him (20). He pursued honorable goals, which gained him public respect: he strove hard through exercises to gain respect and ladies’ love. One could see him often (25) stabbing and hitting, shouting out on the open field, and participating in tournaments in order to establish public reputation. Indeed, he was a splendid knight (30).
He had married a woman who had inherited many virtues from her noble family. Whoever was familiar with her knew that he had never seen a more beautiful woman (35). Oh, what a pretty person she was, how wonderful her body, her head with its yellow hair, and her cheeks with the color of roses, and underneath white as lilies! I am really amazed (40) that her eyes are so bright: she has eyesight like an eagle. Her beautifully-shaped nose was neither too large nor too small. Below she had rose-colored lips (45). Blessed was the person to whom she granted a kiss. Her chin was white and round, her neck was shining so white that one could see the color of the red wine when the lady drank (50). Her teeth looked like ivory, and her tongue was like a golden stick. Her shoulders were well formed, and she had such noble hands and arms as one could only desire (55). Her heart was filled with virtues. Whoever looked into her eyes felt the pain of love. Her whole body was well-shaped and pleasing (60).

Below her belt there was a gemstone which was clear and translucent. This was a miracle. My heart, tell us and sing of this secret thing (65)! It is a true marvel. Her legs and feet were shaped as was proper for courtly ideals. She wore elegant shoes. The palace where she lived was illuminated at night as brightly as the day (70). Moreover, I do not want to refrain from telling you about her goodness. It was so sweet that, if she ever stepped into seawater (75), then the sea would have turned good because of her pure feet and her white legs. But let's keep quiet about her feet. If they could realize her goodness (80), both animals and birds would have humbled themselves, and both the mountain and the forest would have bowed before her. Whomever she granted her greeting would not experience any sadness for three days (85).

Her goodness made everyone happy. Whatever knight might be married to such a wife would be blessed. She commanded extraordinary virtues, and never before had another woman been born more chaste (90). She never displayed any angry behavior toward her husband.

Once, in the blissful month of May, when all the other birds sing happily together with the nightingale (95), this lady was lying in bed next to the honorable knight, whom she loved just as a wife should do. He held her by her chin (100) and kissed her on the lips. He said: “My heart tells me that you are loyal to me. So far I have gained knightly honor [only] in foreign countries (105). Yet I do not despair, and intend to participate in a tournament to earn your happy laughter, and to serve your pure virtues which you have fostered since your youth (110). I have traveled through many countries full of joy and gained acknowledgment. Only in this country no one says that I am bold (115). I am entirely forgotten here. For this reason I want to participate in a tournament only two miles from here, and I would like to travel there soon (120).”

The lady said: “Yes, my lord, I will happily be at your service, now and forever.” With this they concluded their exchange (125). The date for the tournament was set to be within two weeks. When these had passed—I am telling you—the knight prepared himself properly for the tournament (130). The lady blessed him, and he rode off.

When the bright day had reached noontime (135), the lady went into a garden for some comfort. Looking through the fence, she saw coming by on horseback a knight who was noble and attractive (140). His horse was fiery, and on his fist a goshawk [a bird of prey used for hunting] was sitting. With his other hand he held two greyhounds, truly shining specimens (145). He wore a belt which was richly decorated with gems. I tell you the truth. When he got clear sight of the lady, he felt a strong commotion (150). He fell so wildly in love that he almost lost his senses desiring her. He pressed the spurs into the horse and rushed toward the gate of the garden (155). When he reached it, he jumped off the horse and attached the horse’s bridle to a tree. The two greyhounds (160) he tied to two branches; then he happily went to a bush in the garden and placed the valuable goshawk onto it. The lady approached him (165) and welcomed him politely. She said: “The weather is rather hot, but you escaped the heat, by God. Please sit down (170) until the bright sunshine relents some of its heat.” She ordered a
maid to bring wine in a cup and offered it to the knight (175). He was half dead because of his love-longing. He drank in a well-mannered way and politely returned the cup with the wine to the brilliant miracle (180), to the wonderful lady. Love for her had badly wounded him deep in his heart. While they were waiting (185) until the intense heat began to fade, the beautiful hostess said: “Sir, I need to ask you, how do you dare (190) to stay here for so long? If my lord suddenly came here, you would irritate him (make him jealous) because he might wonder what you are doing here. But if you are part of his family through the bonds of blood (195), then it would seem to me quite appropriate that you remain sitting here. In that case I would know that it would be his wish that you enjoy a comfortable respite.”

The knight said to the lady (200); “Good lady, you glory of honor, I am a foreign guest here; I do not know the host.” Thereupon the lady responded: “Then you should ride off (205) and not stay here any longer.” The knight replied in good spirits: “Oh, you are the promise of love, dear lady, I cannot go away from here. Your love has (210) put me into tight bonds.” “She retorted: “Is this honorable when you think of how to diminish my honor? I really want (215) you to be quiet.”

The knight kept sitting there without saying a word. Then he raised his voice again: “Oh, you valuable vessel [of love], good lady, allow me to live. I will give you a goshawk (220) worth five hundred marks. Don’t be angry with me, a poor man; grant me, lady, what I am asking you for. Whatever can or should be able to fly (225), the goshawk [which I would give you as a gift] will catch.”

The lady answered: “I do not want to gain a hunting bird for my husband in this way.” “This grieves me,” (230) said the good knight; “please fulfill my wish. I have two greyhounds that are so good that there is not one animal here on earth (235) which, if hunted by them, would, irrespective of its speed and strength, be able to get away. I will give you these greyhounds immediately if you untie the bonds of love.” (240) The lady did not hesitate to reply: “For no dog would I throw away my honor and lower myself into shamefulness. No one will ever say (245) that a dog stole my honor. The words that you speak make me feel bitter.”

The knight answered: “My lady, you heart-breaker, you sunshine (250), you noble fruit of pure manners, take command of me. I will give you my good horse which, when bridled, strives toward chivalrous honors (255). A gem lies in its chest which empowers it with strength and speed. It is a perfect horse in every respect. Whoever rides this horse will never lose the victory (260). It will be yours, but, lady, fulfill my wish.” The lady replied intelligently: “You cannot win what you desire of me (265), I will not grant it to you. I will not sell my honor for a horse or its speed. A horse would not be enough to take my honor away.” (270)

Then the knight spoke again: “My lady, you who are the blood of May, the joy for anyone who looks at you, you are the strings of my sweet love, you are the doll of summer (275); you catch me, miserable man, whom you have wounded with thoughts of love. Have mercy, you rose-lipped beloved! I have a belt which is decorated with precious stones on both sides (280) and with golden rings. One can surely claim that there are fifty stones, or more (285), some of which were imported from Morocco—this is true and not a lie. The black people from India and the people from Cytia [perhaps Sri Lanka] (290) brought them from beyond the sea. There are twelve valuable chrysoberyls [green-dyed chalcedony], four onychites [a yellow alabaster], and three chrysolites [greenish-yellow olivine] embossed on both sides (295) of the belt. One stone came from Greece, which is known for its color. On the one side it has the color of clouds, and whoever wears it will notice (300) that he enjoys honor among knights. On the other side it is dark red and helps people out of many dangers (305), as I will explain to you. Whoever wears the belt onto which the stone is embossed will never lose honor and will always enjoy happiness (310); he will never be slain; he will never despair; he will always win the victory whenever he enters a fight. The stone helps
against fire and water (315). If you let me have my wish, lady, the belt will be yours, and so will my hawk, the horse, and the dogs: just heal my wounds (320)."

When the knight had finished his speech, the lady looked down. She turned pale and then red again because of the gifts that he offered her. She called her chambermaid (325) and said: "My dear, make sure that no one comes here by chance, for which I will be thankful. Take the hawk and the dogs right away (330) and care for them, and also take the horse." Then she said: "Honorable sir, (335), give me the valuable belt, the hawk, the horse, and the dogs (335), which now belong to me alone." This made the knight happy. The lady said quietly: "Now your wish (340) will be fulfilled, without any doubt, with secret love. I promise you this truly." The knight handed over the belt.

When the lady lay down, followed by the knight, the trees rustled (345), the roses laughed heartily, and the birds sang loudly about it (350). Through the joys of true love the knight was healed from all his pains. Many roses sprang up out of the spot of grass where one lover's arms greeted the other's body.

Once the game was over (355), both flowers and grass laughed happily. When the knight departed, the wonderful lady said: "Now you have gotten your wish fulfilled, but you have profited little from it (360). You should have rather refrained from it. You have lost the belt, and also the hawk, the greyhounds, and the fast horse. You are out of your mind (365) that you throw away your properties so foolishly for so little joy." The knight responded: "My lady, do not say so (370). What you consider a loss, I consider my good fortune. I have never experienced so much happiness, lady, as I have here with you. Now, lady, show me your love (375) and give me a kiss." The lady kissed him lovingly. Afterwards he departed full of sadness.

A servant had observed what had happened in the garden (380). He rode to his lord and revealed the grievous news to him. He said: "Lord, I want to tell you, and I must lament by God, that my lady cheated on you (385). She had a secret affair. When I observed her, I saw in the garden a happy knight who did with her what he enjoyed doing (390). She fulfilled all his wishes." The lord answered: "Oh God, I have lost my joy! I thought I had chosen a chaste wife, but now she has lost her chastity. She has cuckolded me. Because she has shamed me so much I will abandon this country for good; I have lost my honor." (400)

He pressed his spurs into the sides of his horse, turned around and rushed away toward Brabant. The lady immediately heard this news which saddened her deeply (405). She said: "My lord is right in denying me his grace. I will have to lament this. But while he is angry with me now, he will later change his mind." (410) The servant who had betrayed the lady was chased away in disgrace.

The lady stayed alone without her husband, that is true, without knowing (415) where he had gone. Whatever property she had under her control she managed well. She planned everything carefully. She was courageous and bold (420) and yet hardly twenty years of age. No one had anything [negative] to say about her comportment.

When the month of May strongly chased away the cold April and put on new leaves (425) and the forest turned green, the lady was filled with strong self-assuredness. She took five hundred marks but kept her plan secret. She said to herself: "My lord has kept a strong grudge (430) against me for a long time. I have to go traveling to look for him, my dear husband, because I have never loved anyone more than him." When the lady was ready for her journey (435), she took the hawk on her fist and the two greyhounds on leashes; she put on the belt, and her horse carried her joyfully (440). She left her home, accompanied by ten servants, and was in a good mood. When she reached a beautiful city, far away, the good lady (445) turned to an inn keeper who welcomed her politely. She thanked him, jumped off the horse (450), and entered the house as a noble guest. The host ordered wine for them, which they drank happily. The lady spoke secretly to her servants (455): "Now listen to me. Return home and
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protect my honor, keep everything that I own in good order, and be loyal, you noble men” (460). The servants said: “Good lady, whatever you want us to do we will be happy to carry out.” Then they returned home.

Now I want to tell you something (465). After four days had passed the lady went to the host, took him by his hand, and said: “Please keep it to yourself what I am going to tell you in secret (470). I am a knight, and not a woman, even though my body seems to be weak. I have much strength if I want to show it. I had many enemies (475) who threatened to overcome me. For this reason I put on this disguise and came into this foreign land. Here, take four hundred marks, don’t hoard them (480), and resolutely hire twelve strong men and get each one a good horse, armor and outfit. When I’ll have such an entourage, this will raise my good spirits quickly (485). Get me knightly clothing and splendid armor.” The host got everything for her, and even hired a jongleur (490).

What I am telling you is true. When the lady was properly dressed and had cut her hair she appeared in front of the host in man’s clothing (495). Oh, how it all fitted her so well! Then she left for Brabant. When she got there and arrived at a splendid castle, she ordered [her men] (500) to blow the trumpets, which echoed all over. The duke heard this noise and said to his servants: “Don’t be slow; I hear foreign guests (505) who would like to enter the castle, and I would like to welcome them as well. Take a look to see who they are.” A knight who had caught sight of the lady (510) said to the duke: “It is a shining knight with an excellent entourage.” The host answered: “Let him in: he will be welcome in my house (515) together with all his squires.”

They opened the gates to the castle and [the guests] came rushing in. The lady wore as her knightly dress a scarlet coat (520) with golden borders on all sides, embellished with a white feather; yet the belt that she wore (525) dazzled even more. A beautiful and lavish wreath adorned her uncovered hair. She would have withstood any comparison with other knights. The servants received the horses from the guests (530) and led them to the stables. The lady went up to the festive hall where the duke was sitting.

Her husband was also seated there eating. The lady was welcomed (535), but she appeared to be a knight. She was seated next to her husband, whom she recognized. He looked at her and said: “Sir, please tell me, what country are you from?” (540) She answered: “I come from Swabia.” Sir Conrad replied: “Please let me know your name.” The lady replied immediately: “Sir, I am called Henry.” (545) Thereupon Conrad said: “You and I are foreigners here, and we should strike up a strong friendship which will help us in our knightly endeavors.” (550) Sir Henry answered: “So be it, my dear fellow.” In this way they renewed their old pledge of loyalty.

When the table was taken away (555), the hunting boys were called up and everyone went on a hunt, as our source tells us truly. They started to chase a bear, but the dogs’ strength (560) began to fail in face of this wild animal. [At this moment] Sir Henry unleashed his two beautiful greyhounds, [and soon enough] the bear was overcome by the greyhounds’ biting (565). The bear did not resist for long because he was bitten to death by them. They tore off his skin. When the duke saw this miracle (570) he thought that the dogs were strong, and he offered five hundred marks in return for the greyhounds. They were so fast that nothing could survive (575) that they were allowed to hunt. Sir Henry said: “My lord, I do not want to sell these greyhounds.”

After the bear had been killed, they all rode out to another area (580) to go hunting with birds of prey, such as falcons, goshawks, and others. Sir Henry let fly his goshawk who killed forty birds. No other hunting bird there (585) was as good as he was. The duke was astonished [once again]. He offered many riches for the valuable goshawk, but Sir Henry said: “I do not wish (590) ever to give away my goshawk, as long as I live.”

Then they rode home with great noise. They were all lined up on the open plain (95), and I am going to tell you the reason [that is, they intended to have a race]. Sir Henry rode ahead of them all. The duke offered him heavy gold and land for the horse (600). Again Sir Henry said: “My lord, the horse is not for sale.”
Then the duke organized a tournament which was attended by many knights. There was also a proud Briton (605) whose armor shone in strong red colors, and so did his saddle cloth. His horse made leaps like a panther. He invited them all to joust with him, but no one dared (610) to break his lance against the good knight. When he noticed that, Sir Conrad jumped up in good spirits, put on his armor, and stepped into the stirrups. He took his lance in his hand (615) and took cover behind his shield. He rushed toward the Briton, but this was going to cause him mighty grief because the opponent pushed him off his horse. Sir Conrad had never experienced something so injurious (620).

When this news reached the court, and Henry heard it, he said: “I will without fail defeat the Briton today.” He was made ready quickly (625), when the duke rode up to him and said: “Dear Sir Henry, I beg you with all my might, allow the Briton to keep the knightly prize. You will be defeated by him (630); after all, he has unhorsed the best one we have here at court. He is strong, whereas you are not; you are not a match for him.” Sir Henry said: “My lord, (635), please do not be angry; whatever will happen to me today, I want to overcome the Briton.” His armor gleamed like glass, and he was also protected (640) by iron leggins, which consisted of tiny rings. His leg covers were of very good quality and red because of dragon’s blood. His sleeves were strong, decorated with gold (645). Around his hips he had wound a silk cloth. A light gleaming vest gave him a good appearance. His breastplate was covered with gems (650); his arms were protected by metal vambraces. He wore a helmet with an excellent decoration, covered with flowers the color of the month of May. He had an extraordinary sword (655) with a most unusual scabbard interlaced with gold.

Now let me tell you of the belt which protected him from all suffering (660). His vest over the armor was green, embellished with roses in gold color. In one hand he held a spear, and in the other a shield which had a rim of gold. In the middle there was painted a white lily (665). An artist craftsman had made the saddle blanket. The head cover for the horse was of gold, and the saddle blanket was green, embellished with brilliant roses in gold (670). Because of the precious rings the horse made a clinking noise. It pressed forward and began to jump. It neighed loudly when it heard the sound of trumpets (675). Thus Sir Henry reached the tournament field where the jousts began. Many trombones were blown. Sir Henry made a good knighthly appearance. The Briton did not linger any longer (680). Sir Henry broke his lance against him, and the Briton did the same against him. Both then yelled: “Get me another lance!” When the lances were brought (685), the warriors pressed their spurs into the horses and rushed toward each other full of wrath, but the Briton lost because Henry unhorsed him (690).

Afterwards the tournament began in full force, knights stabbing and fighting with each other. Wherever Sir Henry turned, everyone ran. The crowds of knights (695) yelled loudly: “Attack! Attack! Go for it!” Sir Henry turned with all his might, and the opposing group was completely defeated (700). With the help of luck, which is called fortune, Sir Henry won thirty horses. Everyone praised him loudly.

Not long afterwards (705) the duke organized a war campaign against a city. Sir Henry and Sir Conrad rode together to a guard post. Sir Conrad then asked Sir Henry (710) for the greyhounds and said: “If I would learn from you, my friend, that you would give me the greyhounds, or the goshawk or the horse (715), then the river of love would have flowed well toward me. If you grant me this wish, I’d thank you.” Sir Henry said: “My friend, you ask for this in vain (720): I will not give you either the greyhounds, the horse, or the bird of prey; your request will not be fulfilled; you ask improperly.” Sir Conrad said: “My friend, (725), please demonstrate all your trust. I will be your servant, and the chamber of my heart will house you with full love. Do not reject my request so harshly.” (730)

Then Sir Henry responded quickly: “My condition is as follows: If you are willing to do whatever I want, then I’ll give you the bird of prey.” Sir Conrad answered: “My friend (735), whatever you wish, it will be granted.” Sir
Henry said: “My desire is a small matter: I love men, I have never loved women (740). If you do whatever I wish, I'll gladly give you the greyhounds and the bird of prey. But this has to happen secretly.” Sir Conrad answered: “My friend, (745), I will have to lament this forever that you, wonderful knight, love men and not women.” Sir Henry responded: “My dear man, now pay attention what I am going to tell you (750). If you do what I want, I'll give you the bird of prey.” Sir Conrad said: “What is it that you want?” Sir Henry responded: “Listen, you have to lie down with me (755), then I will do all the wonderful things that I can imagine and think of, and especially what any man (760) usually does with his wife when he is lying next to her at night.” Sir Conrad answered right away: “I will suffer everything (765), and not refuse anything, whatever you desire from me. I want to and have to accept it all in return for the greyhounds and the bird of prey.”

With this they had reached an agreement (770). Sir Henry said to Sir Conrad: “Let us do it right here and now.” He instructed Sir Conrad to lie down on his back. But then Sir Henry said: “By God, (775) what a loser you are! Are you willing to turn into a heretic in exchange for the dogs and my goshawk? You are a man without virtues! I am your wife in marriage (780). In return for the goshawk and the greyhounds, for the fast horse and my valuable belt which gives me knightly spirit in war and jousts, (786) I kissed another knight and let him sleep with me, so that you would gain more honor in knighthood with the help of the weapons and the strength of the belt (790). Now you are very willing to turn into a heretic in order to win my goshawk, whereas you had left me alone at home. You have brought shame on yourself! The wrongdoing that I committed was human frailty (795), whereas it was a crime against Christianity what you would have done voluntarily. You are a corruptible man considering that you would have abandoned, just for two minuscule gifts, your honor. I tell you, I am furious about that.”

Sir Conrad said: “My wife, I submit myself to you. Please grant me forgiveness for my failure, my dear wife, you fruit of innocence.” She answered: “I will be happy to do that, and I will also learn what your wishes might be; let us bury our anger (810). My lord, you know well that bore the greatest guilt. Now take the goshawk, the horse, the belt, and the dogs, which will guarantee your victories for ever. (815) Immediately afterwards they happily journeyed home to Swabia. From then on they closely guarded their honor and good manners in a most pleasant way (820), and lived every day without any worries until the end of their lives, when they reached the age of hundred (825) without fail. This is certainly true.

Dietrich of Gleze has, with all his intellectual skills, created this poem for courtly people, and developed and structured it (830) as well as possible. Neither now nor ever after should anyone begrudge him this poetic composition, if he cannot create a better one. (835) Dietrich was always ready to serve ladies. He was always ready to praise the purity of beautiful ladies. Alas, this habit is not practiced much today (840). The world has turned topsy-turvy: people strive only for material goods; they do not care about love. All people think only of money (845), which undermines the value of love which one should have for ladies. This does not please me at all. Whenever a man receives a wound in the depth of his heart (850) because of sweet love, he will not get well again through gold or glitter, but only through lips shining like red roses and if these grant him a kiss (855). This is such a sweet gain that he will lose all his heavy burdens. Nothing in all the rich countries can be compared with a kiss from such red lips (860). Blessed be he who can earn such fortune. I would prefer women’s favor over silver and gold. No one can describe in words (865) the great joy which those receive from pure ladies who are in their service.
You men, I want to give you a lesson: you must honor ladies (870) and submit yourself to them because their red lips and their white cheeks liberate you from great pangs. All the pure ladies (875) will always be blessed. I am wishing them, from deep in my heart without fail and without hurt, that they will always be blessed.

William, a wooer of ladies and ever striving for virtues, (880) was responsible for may being composed. He never ignored any virtue. His father lived in Weidenau (Vidnava) where he was a high-ranking administrator. With this “The Belt” comes to an end (885). Grant your mercy, dear lady, to Punzinger, which will free him from his worries.