

## Experimentation with Tolerance in Thirteenth-Century German Romance: Rudolf von Ems's *Der guote Gêrhart*

Rudolf von Ems (ca. 1200-ca. 1254) belongs to one of those thirteenth-century poets who certainly deserve our full attention because of their extensive and varied works, but who have oddly remained in the shadow cast by the poets who flourished around 1200 (Hartmann von Aue, Gottfried von Straßburg, Wolfram von Eschenbach). He is known for his early courtly romance *Der guote Gêrhart* (ca. 1215), the religious narrative *Barlaam und Josaphat* (ca. 1225-1230), his *Alexanderroman* (ca. 1240), his courtly romance *Willhelm von Orlens* (ca. 1245), and his world chronicle, *Weltchronik* (ca. 1254). In the highly popular *Barlaam* we are confronted with the account of a young Indian prince who, once he has witnessed sickness, old age, and blindness, converts to Christianity, ultimately turns away from his own aristocratic lifestyle, and becomes a monk, very much in the vein of the ancient accounts of Gautama Buddha, from which Rudolf ultimately gained his inspiration, although he does not reveal that source or any intermediary.<sup>1</sup> In his *Alexander*, Rudolf retold, on the basis of the ancient *Historia de preliis* and the chronicle by Curtius Rufus, the ancient story of Alexander the Great, whereas the *Willhelm* represents a traditional courtly love romance involving the protagonist who originates from Brabant and the English princess Amelie. The *Weltchronicle* is what the title says, a world chronicle, which enjoyed enormous popularity (more than eighty manuscripts) and deeply influenced all subsequent accounts in the German language.<sup>2</sup>

We do not know much about Rudolf in biographical terms, which was not untypical of his time, but he revealed some details about himself through intra-literary allusions that allow us to determine his education, his familiarity with previous literary works, his historical training, and his career as a professional courtly author.<sup>3</sup> He was born into a noble family, von Ems, in Vorarlberg, today in western Austria, near the capital of Bregenz (Lake Constance district), but he was later in the service of the bishop of Constance.

Moreover, Rudolf composed the curious, highly unusual, but truly fascinating *Der guote Gêrhart* (ca. 1215) in which we encounter, for the first time in medieval literature at large, a merchant operating as the universally admired and glorified protagonist who never can do wrong

and proves to be an absolutely ideal character inspiring everyone he is getting into contact with through his ethics and religious devotion.<sup>4</sup> God loves him more than even the Emperor Otto I (actually Otto IV), which explains Gerhart's epithet of being 'the good one.'<sup>5</sup> When the emperor learns about this from an angel and then jealously visits the merchant to inquire about the reasons, he is told a whole life story filled with tragic confusions, shipwrecks, imprisonment, kidnapping, efforts to bail out prisoners, friendship across religious barriers, political turmoil, and accounts of the happy reunification of lovers.<sup>6</sup> Wherever we turn in the narrative, there is never anything wrong with Gerhart who shines forth through his ethical, moral, and religious ideals, who is open-minded, generous, supportive, and even tolerant, as we could say so.

The text has survived in only two manuscript, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 2699 (first half of the fourteenth century, and Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 2793 (ca. 1475).<sup>7</sup> But quantity is not always a good benchmark to evaluate a literary text from the past. Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Titurel* (ca. 1220), for instance, exists in only three fragments, and yet we regard it today as a brilliant piece of literature. The contemporary audience might not have recognized the true quality, or a poet composed a text that was too alien for his/her listeners/readers at that specific time. It is also possible that a text was very popular, but that the majority of manuscripts is lost today. At any rate, Rudolf's *Der guote Gêrhart* has not experienced a particular popularity during the Middle Ages, while modern scholars have responded with considerable interest to this romance because of the unusual framework of having a merchant surface as an ideal figure who becomes centrally instrumental for a Norwegian princess to find her long-lost fiancé, the English crown-prince, and to marry him. Gerhart manages this by first liberating the princess from her captivity in a Moroccan prison. Later, when he is about to marry her to his own son because the fiancé seems to have completely disappeared, the unexpected happens, and the prince arrives in Cologne at just the nick of time before the wedding has taken place. Gerhart's son, though with great regret, submits under his father's wish and allows the princess to join hands with her original lover.

Leaving this fascinating topic aside, we also need to keep in mind that Gerhart succeeds in buying the princess's freedom with the means of all of his merchandise at a high risk for his own business because the Moroccan castellan, certainly a Muslim, has offered him his friendship, and is only too happy to let the entire company of Christian captives go when he is

assured that in return he would receive all of Gerhart's mercantile goods. The entire episode in the Moroccan harbor lends itself surprisingly well for explorations of what transcultural experiences and perhaps even forms of toleration/tolerance might have meant for late medieval writers.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the romance also contains a significant social-political dimension pertaining to England, where chaos rules supreme at that time because the old king has passed away and his son, our prince, has disappeared without a trace. Competing aristocratic groups are almost set to engage in a civil war, just at the time when Gerhart appears with the freshly married couple in tow. The English nobles immediately recognize Gerhart as their liberator from Moroccan captivity,<sup>9</sup> they welcome him full of jubilation, and then decide to give him the crown of England because it would overcome their internecine strife. As flattering as this proves to be for Gerhart, he quickly rejects this honor and hands the crown on to the young prince, who thus continues with the dynastic line, and can establish peace and prosperity in the country once again, supported by the entire people.

Another intriguing phenomenon, alluded to only in passing but certainly worthy our particular attention, proves to be Gerhart's stupendous multilingual abilities. While originating from Cologne, so being a native low German speaker, he can easily converse with the Moroccan castellan and then with the Norwegian princess by relying on French. The other group of prisoners, who had accompanied the princess when their ship had been captured by the Muslims, only speaks English, but Gerhart easily handles that challenge as well, and thus proves to be a highly competent polyglot.<sup>10</sup>

Even structurally, Rudolf's romance reveals impressive features since there are several layers of narratives intertwined with each other. After the prologue, we hear Emperor Otto speak with his advisors, who soon enough also engages with Gerhart because he is most anxious to find out why God loves the other man more than himself, although he, the Emperor, had established the bishopric of Magdeburg in order to increase God's fame among his people and had ordered the erection of the mighty cathedral. This then shifts the narrative focus to Gerhart who relates to Otto his own life story, so we are facing here, most intriguingly, a narrative within a narrative.<sup>11</sup> Even though it mostly amounts to a biographical account, Gerhart's whole life and personal performances closely reflect the ideals of an outstanding, ethically high-minded person, especially a nobleman, during the Middle Ages, although the protagonist is a merchant, so the

romance can be identified as a literary version of a *Mirror for Princes*, a manual for young rulers teaching them the basics of ethical, moral, and religious behavior.<sup>12</sup>

These few comments should make it self-evident that this is a text determined by numerous fascinating motifs and topics, inviting a variety of critical readings that easily prove to be relevant even today. The personal bonds that connect Gerhart with the Moroccan castellan Stranmûr, for instance, constitute the closest to true friendship between two men across the religious divide that we might ever find in medieval literature—perhaps with some exceptional cases in Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (ca. 1351).<sup>13</sup> The protagonist’s economic background has also proven to be highly unusual and provocative for modern researchers, as the studies by Werner Wunderlich and then by Sonja Zöllner indicate.<sup>14</sup> But the last decade or so has not seen really new major efforts to engage with this wonderful text, as if no new angles or perspectives could be discovered.<sup>15</sup>

The focus of this entire text anthology rests on the question of how medieval and early modern writers perceived other religions, whether they accepted them, tolerated them, or were even willing to embrace them as parallel forms of faith. This issue finds rich material in Rudolf von Ems’s *Der guote Gêrhart*. In this context it deserves to be noticed that in contrast to this merchant story, his other works have survived in impressively large numbers of manuscripts, which clearly supports the claim that he was one of the most popular and influential poets of his time. One remarkable feature in Rudolf’s opus proves to be the specific strategy to convert heathens/Muslims through dialog and not through a crusade, and when that is not possible, the two sides simply part as friends, as in *Der guote Gêrhart*. All this might shed new light on the history of religious and cultural exchanges in the thirteenth century and allows us to draw on Rudolf’s romance as a significant voice in the large discourse on toleration/tolerance already in the pre-modern era.

The following excerpt sets in at the point in the narrative when the protagonist, who is telling all this to the Emperor Otto, leaves Cologne to go on an extensive mercantile journey throughout the Mediterranean world. On his way home, he suffers from near ship-wreck, but he arrives safely near a Moroccan port. Then we learn of the subsequent events with Gerhart and the Muslim castellan engaging with each other, and taking us to the time of departure from Morocco again, after the merchant has agreed to barter all of his goods for the freedom of the

Norwegian princess, her maids, and the English noblemen.

I thought to myself, 1160  
 that I would invest my good  
 on his behalf,  
 so that I might gain thereby  
 the chance according to old customs  
 that they would call him the Rich Gerhart 1165  
 and would not grudge him  
 to carry the name of my father,  
 who was called the Rich Gerhart  
 because of his wealth which he had acquired  
 in a worthy fashion throughout his life. 1170  
 I was prepared to trust my good fortune  
 and left to my son  
 a part of the goods, which he was supposed to have  
 and with which he might be able to live  
 like a wise man. 1175  
 I took then silver from him  
 which weighed 50,000 marks.  
 Whatever profitable goods there were available,  
 I took it with me as much as I deemed wise  
 to the markets in heathen lands. 1180  
 Once I had made up my mind,  
 I ordered to place provisions  
 in my ship enough for three years.  
 I had under my command  
 experienced and good sailors, 1185  
 who were familiar with the sea.  
 A scribe also came along

who kept an account of all goods  
and who performed without delay  
the seven daily prayers. 1190  
Once I was ready as I had intended  
for my voyage,  
just as my heart desired,  
I traveled with all my goods  
over the sea to Russia,<sup>16</sup> 1195  
to Livonia and Prussia,  
where I found many saber furs.  
From there I traveled to Samarkand,<sup>17</sup>  
to Damascus and Niniveh.<sup>18</sup>  
There I found plenty of merchandise, 1200  
such as many rich furs,  
more than anywhere else in the world.  
I purchased much of it  
because I fully realized  
that, once having come home, 1205  
I would double the amount  
of [the original] in silver and even more [thus gaining profit].  
Thereafter I embarked on my voyage across the sea  
and then decided to travel home again.  
My business had turned out in every respect 1210  
so well beyond all of my own expectations  
that I could not have had any further wish  
which I might think of  
or any other desire.  
My intentions had been so fully accomplished, 1215  
that, whatever I might have dreamed of,  
I could not have wished it better.

On my loyalty, I am telling you that.

Now I realized that my plan  
should be completed, 1220  
as I had originally intended.

At that very moment  
strong thunderstorms arose.

They drove us toward a[n unknown] destination  
with all their force and great strength 1225  
for twelve days and twelve nights.

during which we never enjoyed  
a calm of the storm or the reappearance of the sun.

We experienced much suffering.

The storm constantly caused us much pain. 1230

Then we reached, I am telling you,  
on the thirteenth day  
a mountain range which rose up to a high elevation.

It was so entirely unknown  
that there was no one among the men 1235  
who recognized it,  
or could have told me  
that he had ever seen it  
in all of his life.

It was the unknown wild world where we had arrived.<sup>19</sup> 1240

At that moment the weather improved.

After the long time of raging storms  
the day turned nice and clear.

We forgot, I honestly tell you,  
all the previous suffering. 1245

Nevertheless, we were greatly concerned  
because we were afraid of the strange land.

The waves had brought us  
to the harbor near the mountains.

Then I sent one sailor ahead 1250  
to climb the mountain, and I told him to take a look,  
whether he might espy somehow  
any farmed land.

He should then inform us about that.

This happened, the sailor 1255  
climbed on top of the mountain  
and wanted to see whether he could recognize  
any inhabited land.

He observed, lying below the mountain,  
a wide and pleasant plain, 1260  
beautifully settled, as he told us.

He said that he had never seen  
a land that had pleased him more.

As much as he had measured it with his eyes  
as to its length, width, and extension, 1265  
the land did not appear known to him,  
and he could not recognize  
where that region and the land  
in their width and length came to their end.

When he had reached the top of the mountain, 1270  
as I had asked him to do before,  
he discovered a city located below  
at the foot of the mountain next to the sea.

It seemed well fortified to him,  
with many splendid towers. 1275

The size of the city I would compare  
to the city of Cologne.<sup>20</sup>



The sea partly surrounded it;  
 on one and a half sides there was water,  
 a good harbor deep enough for ships. 1280  
 The castle's moats were filled with water.  
 The city was, indeed, well fortified,  
 against threats from enemies.  
 Three streets allowed to transport  
 merchandise from the countryside. 1285  
 On the fourth corner there was a gate  
 allowing merchandise to come in from heathendom [per ship].  
 The sailor observed exactly  
 how people came from the countryside  
 toward the city in large numbers, 1290  
 pulling many carts,  
 which aimed for the castle,  
 filled with much valuable merchandise.  
 He did not know where the many elephants  
 originated from. 1295  
 On the three other roads traveled  
 many mules, horses, and carts,  
 carrying such great merchandise,  
 coming from and going to the castle,  
 and this for great profit 1300  
 and he swore to me  
 that wherever he had traveled before,  
 he had never seen  
 such a huge market as he had observed there,  
 and never so many objects for sale. 1305  
 There was such a throng of people,  
 that he swore by God,

that he had never seen such a crowd.

Once the sailor had learned everything<sup>21</sup>  
 about the city, the area, and the land, 1310  
 he returned and told us  
 how it had turned out,  
 and what he had seen there.

Then we directed our ship toward that goal,  
 that is, toward the strong fortress. 1315

What the sailor had told me  
 about that city,

I found to be true,  
 and just as one could only wish for.

When I sailed into the fortified harbor, 1320

[I noticed that] the burghers were heathens  
 and yet so well mannered

that they gave me kind greetings;  
 with that they eased for me  
 many of my heartfelt worries, 1325  
 which had naturally occupied me deeply.

All that gave me some comfort.

Then I looked around everywhere  
 if I might find someone

to whom I might dare to entrust 1330

all my goods

and whose promise of peace might protect me.

Right then I saw a man,

who instilled confidence in me.<sup>22</sup>

He approached me in a princely manner. 1335

He was so manly in his appearance  
 that his impression made me believe

that I should ask for his protection.  
 Many worthy knights followed him  
 and also many squires. I hurried 1340  
 through the throng toward him  
 and wanted to present my request to him.

The noble and worthy knight  
 began to greet me right away  
 in heathen [Arabic] language, when he espied me. 1345  
 Once he had given me his greeting  
 I bowed before him, as one ought to respond to greetings,  
 but he realized and noticed clearly,  
 as the wise people mostly do,  
 that I could not understand his language. 1350

Then the prince spoke in a courtly fashion:  
 “Tell me, do you understand French!”  
 [Gerhart:] “Yes, lord, I know well  
 both the language and also the country [of France].”

[Prince:] “Then may you be greeted.” 1355  
 I said: “*Merci beaucoup*, Sir,”  
 feeling great joy in my heart.

Then the mighty prince said:  
 “Dear sir and guest, now tell me,  
 what has brought you to this country? 1360  
 Are you a Frenchman, or what?  
 What country are you coming from?”

Then I told him everything  
 that I was a merchant  
 from German lands far away. 1365  
 Then the lord asked me  
 what I was looking for in this country.

I answered him thereupon:

I have been told in truth<sup>23</sup>

that in this heathen land, 1370

there would be an annual market

at this time. I traveled then

with my merchandise to this land.

The most precious goods that I could have found

I have eagerly 1375

brought with me to this kingdom.”

When the lord heard that,

he immediately asked me

whether people called me a Christian

and whether I acknowledged 1380

baptism according to the Christian law.

I said that I was called according to God’s command

a Christian in the name of Christ.

Then the prince responded right away:

“Since you have arrived here at this time 1385

from such a great distance

in order to honor my overlord,

you will not be amiss in anything,

neither regards your personal needs nor your goods.

In the name of my overlord 1390

I will receive all your goods [for safekeeping].

Whoever might do any wrong to you,

will have done that wrong to me.

Whatever you want to sell

or what you might purchase, that will 1395

remain free of any tariff

in the name of my overlord’s honor.

Then I want to honor you even more  
because of your [long] journey.

Since you have expressed such great love for my overlord  
and wanted to visit the market,  
you will experience good fortune here  
without anyone begrudging you that.

I want to make on your behalf  
a harbor for all Christians, free of tariff. 1405

That is situated near by,  
it was given to me by my overlord as a fiefdom,  
whatever merchandise will be brought there,  
free of any toll, that shall from now on <sup>24</sup>  
be free according to my law. 1410

The worthy and noble king  
of Morocco has, with his own hand,  
given it to me as my own.  
In addition he granted me all this land.  
I have sworn on my oath: 1415  
whenever I will have a child,  
then that should also belong to time,  
and this by the same right as it belongs to me.

When the market begins,  
then all goods will be free of a toll, 1420  
a privilege for all Christians, and this because of you.

Now turn around and consider  
what lodging you would like to have.  
Once you will have tested one and found it to be good,  
it will be granted to you 1425  
without charge and any deposit  
as long as this market will last.

Be assured, whenever you desire anything,  
 turn to me without any hesitation,  
 by my truth, I will help you. 1430

I was happy about this arrangement.  
 I then gave to the lord  
 my grace and great thanks.  
 His support happily dispersed  
 whatever suffering I had ever experienced 1435

through terrifying conditions,  
 and this happened in that foreign land.

His squires took me  
 to where I chose an inn.

It was one that seemed appropriate to me,  
 which was praised above all the others  
 by the guests in town.

His squires recommended it to me  
 and thus fulfilled my heart's desire.

I inquired with them 1445  
 what the name might be  
 of the man who had treated me so kindly  
 to welcome me so well.

One of the squires informed me  
 that he was called Stranmûr. 1450

He was the territorial duke  
 and was the castellan of the castle.

[Gerhart continues:] He was so well mannered,  
 although he was a heathen,  
 that I am wishing him, to be sure, 1455  
 always the best in the name of God.

Now I praised God for the kindness

that he had turned my sorrow  
so fully into happiness  
and increased my joy 1460  
in such a blissful manner for one man,  
which I have never heard of before,  
except for that moment,  
when he informed me  
about his own rulership over the harbor 1465  
and that I was so fortunate to be freed  
from paying a toll, indeed.  
I gave great thanks to God  
who had bestowed that grace upon me.  
When I went to my private chamber, 1470  
the lord offered me many honors  
and upon his own friendship  
ordered that I should receive  
whatever I should ask for.  
As a sign of his good breeding he granted me even more, 1475  
more than what I would have requested from him,  
and this all through the loyalty of companionship.  
His dedication was new to me,<sup>25</sup>  
yet I begged him  
to approach me with the personal 'you'. 1480  
Thus he shared with me in lovely fellowship  
loyal company.  
One day he asked me,  
when we were together, to let him  
see the treasure of my merchandise. 1485  
I was pleased about it. I allowed him to examine it  
what I had brought with me for sale.

He looked at it carefully.

It all seemed valuable and wealthy to him,

[and said] that he had never seen

1490

anything in such splendor

anywhere in all heathen lands.

Then he turned to me

and said “Gerhart, I am telling you,

you have brought with you the greatest riches

1495

that have ever been in this country

owned by one single man.

No one in this country could pay for it

except for myself.

If you want, I will let you see

1500

the treasure of merchandise that I own.

If you like it, then we shall arrange

an exchange between us both.

I will honestly tell you

what kind of merchandise it is.

1505

If you were to take it to your land

you will nicely profit from it.

Here it is not worth anything, therefore I want to

exchange with you, if you are prepared to do so.

If you are not opposed to making a profit

1510

you might gain a lot from it.”

I said: “Wherever I can gain a profit

I will do entirely the same what anyone else would do

to gain properly acquired goods.”

[Stranmûr:] “This is a rightly acquired good.

1515

If it were as valuable for me as it will be for you

in your country, I would never receive



the appropriate amount of money for it from you.”

Now, I assumed that I would find

merchandise goods 1520

out of silver and gold.<sup>26</sup>

Then the host took me

to a private room.

I assumed to find there

great riches. 1525

But there were no wares in the room,

and yet it contained great wealth,

as I will inform you.

It was filled with goods and yet empty of goods,

stuffed with wealth and yet also with poverty, 1530

all well protected there.

I found there in a miserable shape

twelve manly and good knights

who were firmly tied with strong ropes,

and were lying there caught in iron shackles 1535

and suffered badly.

Always two were tied to a bar,

which was heavy, certainly not light,

and they were locked to them.

About thirty years old

was each in his youth. 1540

From the early childhood years of virtues

they had grown up in a manly fashion.

They displayed the first hair of a beard,

that had never been shaven.<sup>27</sup> 1545

Although they suffered deeply in their hearts

they were so lovely to look at

that the thought occurred to me,  
 that the universal desire for beauty must have been realized through them,  
 if only they could live in joyfulness. 1550

They were miserably robbed of that;  
 their hearts had lost all joy  
 through lamentable suffering and long sorrowing,  
 which heavily filled their minds.

Indeed, the room was 1555  
 devoid of goods, no doubt about that.

No goods had been placed in there  
 except for the pure worthiness,  
 shining forth from the noble knights  
 who were caught in that prison. 1560

My heart began to lament their suffering  
 and to share through the lament their burden,  
 which they suffered in such misery  
 and with such great heartfelt pain.

My heart's joy deflates [even] now 1565  
 when I am thinking of them.

Their lamenting and suffering will hurt me forever.

Then the host took me by his hand  
 and asked me to go forward,  
 since he wanted to let me see 1570  
 an [even] greater merchandise somewhere else.

I went with him  
 in apprehension. So I followed  
 in order to see it. He led me on  
 to another chamber. 1575

When we stepped into it,  
 I looked around [to find out]

how and when I was supposed to see  
the greatest merchant's treasure that he would offer me.  
There I found, in the same misery, 1580  
the same kind of sorrow,  
which reminded me of the others' suffering.  
The discovery was so painful for me  
and so lamentable  
that my heart could barely cope with it. 1585  
If I had ever enjoyed anything,  
the memory of it was at that moment completely removed from me.  
I saw twelve old lords  
sitting there, also caught in shackles,  
who had grown in their wisdom 1590  
to full maturity  
and were about sixty years of age.  
They had grey hair and looked pale.  
The hair on their heads and in the beards  
had turned grey. 1595  
They appeared to me as praiseworthy,  
as I could perceive it in their appearance.  
Then my heart began to tell me,  
that all their wishes would have been fulfilled  
if they did not suffer from heart-felt pain. 1600  
Their demeanor demonstrated that to me.  
Each two were bound  
in one shackle.  
Their miserable suffering  
I lamented even more than that by the young men, 1605  
since they should be honored  
because of their age, and this over the youth.

The bold virtues of young hearts  
 is often wounded,  
 but this easily changes. 1610  
 Youth overcomes  
 what makes old age grow weak.  
 Youth suffers many a pain  
 from which old age receives death.  
 For that reason their suffering 1615  
 caused my heart pain because of their age.  
 When I saw their lamentable suffering  
 and heard their heavy laments,  
 it hurt me deeply in my heart.  
 Then the host no longer tarried 1620  
 and I left together with him. We departed.  
 Then the noble man took me  
 away from the miserable crowd.  
 After I had observed their suffering,  
 the host did not spare me from more. 1625  
 Holding his hand I went further  
 into another room.  
 There I found sweet reward,  
 which delights a man's mind  
 in terms of love, joy, and goodness, 1630  
 which, regards to worthiness and bliss,  
 brings many delights of happiness,  
 which in turn provides the world at all times  
 with great joy in one's mind.  
 This treasure of all merchandise was in that land 1635  
 a brilliant mirror of good manners and good fortune,  
 a diamond of loyalty and goodness,

except that the gleaming of its light  
 was dimmed through great sorrow,  
 since it was often made wet 1640  
 through a rain which came from lament  
 in the heart, burdened with lament.

Then I looked around.  
 I saw sitting there noble ladies,  
 in total fifteen of them. 1645

That was the treasure of a merchandise  
 of which I had spoken.  
 They looked so pretty  
 that I will wonder forever  
 how God had granted them 1650  
 so much delight to them,  
 when he increased through His art  
 their bodily beauty.

They displayed wonderful manners  
 and womanly praise in their goodness, 1655  
 highly minded disposition  
 in ever-lasting constancy.

All that characterized those women  
 through their feminine delights,  
 not leaving anything to be desired for; 1660

They were a sweet living fruit  
 in their beauty and their feminine breeding,  
 marked by their goodness without a drop of gall.<sup>28</sup>

Of all those women  
 I want to mention one 1665  
 who was so noble and so pure  
 and in beauty superseded the others so much

that I can give her excellence the triumph  
 above all other beautiful women  
 with the crown of delight. 1670  
 The brilliance of her loving appearance<sup>29</sup>  
 carried in terms of beauty such a wreath  
 so that she was the triumph of female beauty.  
 Her delightfulness was more impressive  
 than that of all other women.<sup>30</sup> 1675  
 Because of her beauty I am giving the crown  
 to her body, her sweet worthiness.  
 To her beauty God had turned  
 all his loving effort.  
 Her lips were red, her neck was white, 1680  
 her cheeks glowed in the rosy color  
 of lilies and shone forth  
 in her bright skin.<sup>31</sup>  
 It was not marred by anything.  
 Her eyes were shining and bright, 1685  
 and her hair was blond and curly,  
 hanging down in a simple fashion.  
 Her lovely body  
 was slender and graceful.  
 This well born noble lady 1690  
 was perfect as one could just imagine  
 and was free of any false behavior.  
 When she had been born,  
 nothing had been missed in terms of beauty, goodness, and virtues.  
 She deserves to be praised 1695  
 as a worthy woman,  
 and in her body she was just perfect.

I became sad and happy  
 to have ever seen this good lady.  
 I felt sorry for her suffering  
 and also felt happy in my heart  
 to have seen her in her lovely appearance.

1700

Once this had happened  
 and I had looked properly at those women  
 and also at the poor knights  
 suffering in such great sorrow,  
 then Stranmûr, the worthy man,  
 took me away again.

1705

He said: "Have you seen all that well?"  
 I said: "Yes." [He:] "Now tell me  
 whether you want to purchase them." I said: "What?"

1710

[He:] "Have you not seen it?"  
 [I:] "I have not observed anything else  
 but a sorrowful crowd of people,  
 who lead a terrible life."

1715

[Stranmûr:] "These I want to offer them to you in exchange [for your goods]."  
 [I:] "What good would they do for me?" [Stranmûr:] "I am going to tell you that.  
 If I could profit from them,  
 as you might be able to do,  
 I would not so easily offer them to you.

1720

Whoever demands the right amount of ransom  
 will certainly be given  
 hundred thousand marks.

He could not have in his ship  
 a better merchandise,  
 if he lets them go after a contract has been signed.  
 If their home countries were closer by to me,

1725

I would have secured through them a huge ransom  
 in the amount of hundred thousand marks;  
 that's what I estimate them being worth." 1730

Then I asked him right away  
 how they had gotten into this situation.  
 He said: "I am going to tell you  
 how they came into my power in the first place.  
 Tell me, do you know England?" 1735

[Gerhart:] "Yes, I know it well."  
 [Stranmûr:] "The noble and outstanding knights  
 were born in that country."  
 [Gerhart:] "What had caused them to come here  
 into imprisonment in this country?" 1740

They traveled from their country  
 together with a hero,<sup>32</sup>  
 called Willehalm,  
 a young prince from England,  
 and went to the mighty Norway.<sup>33</sup> 1745

Its king handed over his daughter  
 to him as his fiancée.  
 This was the high-spirited princess  
 whom you were allowed to see,  
 together with fourteen ladies, 1750

and she was the fifteenth,  
 in whom God did not spare anything.  
 She is [King] Reinmund's daughter.  
 The storm drove her and her knights  
 into a harbor that belongs to me. 1755

Therefore they have rightly  
 to stay here until the time has come



as I will determine.

(I have that privilege from my overlord,  
as I have told you before.)

1760

If you want to purchase them from me,  
I will give them to you and assure you  
that they will pay double the amount of money as ransom  
which you will give me for them.

The purchase, however, cannot be in any other way:

1765

whatever I have seen in your ship  
as your merchandise  
you will have to give me as the price.

If the king is still alive,  
he will ransom you dearly his daughter;

1770

If he is not dead or ill,  
then King Reinmunt  
will not allow his dear child to perish.

Amongst those who are imprisoned with her  
there are a good number  
of noble and mighty princes.

1775

Instead of lying here a long time  
in such hardship,  
they will rather give you their property;

I know that this would be their desire.

1780

The wild and stormy waves and  
their complete ignorance of where they were pushed by the waves  
brought them into my shackles,  
and they are hidden here from their families.<sup>34</sup>

Now, their wealth and their country  
is more closely situated to you, and known to you.

1785

Therefore I offer them to you for purchase.

If you do not want to buy them from me,  
 I will still take your goods  
 as you wish to sell them 1790  
 and will happily keep the promise  
 that I had given you.”<sup>35</sup>

That proposition appeared very strange to me,  
 that he had perceived in me  
 a person with such an attitude,  
 believing that I would be so minded 1795  
 to hand over such great goods  
 for nothing but an illusion.

I said:”Lord, I will have to think about it well  
 until tomorrow morning.”

He answered: “That pleases me. Now do so.” 1800

With his permission I then left him.

My heart often advised me  
 to go take this or that approach.

At last it occurred to me  
 to ask God for advice, 1805

what I should do in this case,  
 so that He would send into my heart  
 according to His grace,

an understanding in my heart<sup>36</sup>  
 whether it would be pleasing to Him 1810

that I would release those poor people  
 from such misery.

My heart was burdened with these doubts  
 in the middle of the night,

wondering whether I should free them in the name of God 1815  
 and whether that would be in conformity with His commands.

In my heart I called upon God  
 until I fell asleep with the thought  
 whether it would be alms [coming from me]  
 or whether I should not do it. 1820  
 While I was lying there, tortured by doubts,  
 and yet was enjoying my sweet sleep,  
 an angel came and awoke me  
 (as it seemed to me). Then I woke up.  
 I would not want to say 1825  
 that my eyes saw him:  
 rather, my heart saw him in sleep.  
 When I learned that in my dream,  
 it seemed to me that he called me  
 and twice addressed me by name. 1830  
 “Gerhart, wake up, are you still asleep?  
 God is very angry with you  
 that you are such a wise person  
 and yet understand so little  
 of God’s true wisdom. 1835  
 You carry a doubt in your heart  
 which is contrary to your creator.  
 The sweet God, the pure Christ  
 has said with His own mouth,  
 when he was still seen with human eyes 1840  
 in the shape of a human being:  
 ‘What is being done to a poor person  
 is an act of kindness when it is being done for me,  
 you are going to do that for me, not for the poor man.  
 I am the poor one. Wherever you see a poor person, 1845  
 and when you do something good for him,

then you do something for me.’<sup>37</sup>

Because of this comforting solace  
you ought to live without doubt  
and be strong in your heart.

1850

You had a foolish thought  
when you thought that you had lost  
some of your goodness.

Now be resolved in your heart:

A good deed will never be lost  
which is being done in the name of God.

1855

In whatever country you will relieve  
the poor and give them comfort,  
that will be the reward for your heart.

If you do it in return for money, they will reward you,  
but if you do it for honor,  
you will be praised forever;

1860

but if you do it to meet God’s command,  
then be assured that God  
will give you as a reward  
the eternal crown.”

1865

When the angel had spoken those words  
I woke up from my sleep because of him  
and wanted to see him. But he was gone.

When I had woken up because of him  
I gave praise to God for the goodness,  
which He had sent into my mind  
out of His graciousness,

1870

so that I would properly recognize  
His great mercy  
in face of the sorrowful group.

1875

I said: "Very sweet Godhead,  
 You have told me enough.  
 I will always give you, sweet Godhead,  
 praise and honor." 1880  
 Then I got up from my bed.  
 I asked my scribe  
 on behalf of God and for myself  
 to read a mass. I listened to it  
 and requested that God's sweet blessing 1885  
 take care of the body and the soul  
 with His dear protection,  
 so that I could do the best possible thing  
 with my merchandise,  
 and that I would never 1890  
 misuse and waste it.  
 Once I had listened to the very end  
 of the good mass,  
 I left my lodging  
 and entrusted myself entirely to God. 1895  
 At that moment I encountered  
 Stranmûr of Castalgunt.<sup>38</sup>  
 He immediately greeted me  
 and said 'good morning,' 'have a good day.'  
 He laughed [happily] when he uttered the greeting. 1900  
 I thanked him for that.  
 Then he asked me this:  
 "Tell me, what is your decision?  
 What advice has your mind given to you?  
 Do not hide that from me; 1905  
 since I want to know through your words,

your final decision

which your mind has given to you.”

I said: “My dear lord,

what decision should I make?

1910

The purchase is too expensive;

and I do not know whether they [the prisoners]

would agree or not.

If it happens without their gratitude,

it will not be of any use to me, that’s true,

1915

and this purchase would not be worth a hair.

If you grant it to me

that you let me find out

what their intention might be,

then I will be able to let you know

1920

my mind and my decision,

and what my heart might desire.”

[Stranmûr:] “That pleases me, talk to them then,

I happily grant that to you.”

[Gerhart:] “Then they should profit from me

1925

and get unlocked

because I want to see them freed from the shackles

and properly find out their wishes.”

[Stranmûr:] “This will be granted to you on my behalf,

and know for sure, you can trust me in that,

1930

that I do not know anyone

anywhere in heathen lands

whom I would entrust them without shackles,

except alone to my overlord,

from whom I had received goods and honor.

1935

Now, I will let you see them,

freed and unfettered,  
 since I have found out  
 that you have a completely  
 loyal heart and command loyalty.” 1940  
 [Gerhart:] “My dear lord,  
 you give me too much praise.  
 I am not worthy of such praise,  
 except that your good breeding makes you  
 give me this honor, 1945  
 although I have not earned it.”  
 So I said to the lord.  
 Then he ordered his squires  
 to go with me to the lords;  
 he ordered to release them from their shackles. 1950  
 The worthy men were unlocked  
 from their shackles.  
 One here, the other there;  
 together they were let go  
 and allowed to walk freed from their locks. 1955  
 Then the squires left me  
 and went out of the room.  
 They kept a strong guard  
 outside of the door  
 to the room with the noble and highly minded men. 1960  
 Those had been, that is true,  
 imprisoned for more than a year,  
 and yet they had not been allowed  
 to look at each other.  
 That had been their greatest heart-felt lament 1965  
 in the prison all the time.

When they all had gotten together,  
 they shouted out such screams [of relief]  
 which will always remind me  
 of the great commiseration that I felt. 1970

They began to cry  
 both for love and also their suffering,  
 happy that they experienced the blessing  
 to see each other again,  
 which seemed a great gracefulness to them, 1975  
 so in all their suffering they were very happy.

When they lovingly  
 greeted each other altogether  
 demonstrating their love for each other,  
 I immediately greeted them in French. 1980

But they did not know that language as well  
 as I knew English. I could speak that language.  
 When they understood the words and me,  
 then the entire miserable group 1985  
 bowed before me.

They said: "Lord Father God,  
 now be praised that on Your command  
 someone has been sent to us very downtrodden people  
 someone from the Christian lands 1990  
 who knows our language.

May you be honored and your mouth,  
 the wisdom of which knows  
 the language and our tongue.  
 Dear lord, tell us on behalf of God, 1995

share with us miserable people, without mocking,  
 are you a Christian?" I said: "Yes."



They then welcomed me  
 so lovingly as I have  
 never been welcomed before. 2000  
 I joined their laments  
 and helped them all  
 to sustain the pain of their wounded hearts,  
 when I noticed their misery  
 and their heart-felt pain, 2005  
 which the suffering had caused them.  
     After I had sat there for a while,  
 I did not forget my words  
 and said: “Lords, your suffering  
 is worse for me than death. 2010  
 If I could end it,  
 it would surely be over.  
 I am grieved over your laments.  
 Now listen to what else I am going to tell you:  
 I want to let you know truly 2015  
 what my intentions are.  
 When I departed from my country  
 I had made up my mind  
 that I wanted to take with me great wealth  
 into the heathen world 2020  
 in order to make a good profit.  
 At that time I was determined  
 to take fifty thousand marks  
 from my treasure box<sup>39</sup>  
 and then traveled into heathendom. 2025  
 I have applied that silver  
 for such great purchases

that I dare say  
swearing by my baptism (faith)  
that no one before me has ever bought more. 2030  
I brought that with me into this country  
where I knew about the markets.<sup>40</sup>  
Now, the mighty castellan  
has, in a worthy fashion,  
welcomed and honored me. 2035  
He has thus increased toward me, his honor,  
in many different manners,  
his manly reputation.  
When I came into this country,  
he took me into his protection 2040  
and offered me many honors.  
Afterwards he begged me  
to let him take a look at  
my merchandise. He then noticed  
that it was very large. 2045  
Thereupon he began to ask me  
whether I would agree to an exchange  
with him and that I would take  
his merchandise. That's what he offered me.  
The merchandise is you 2050  
and my dear lady  
whom he allowed me to visit  
yesterday, when I also saw you.  
Now, I have a lower social status,<sup>41</sup>  
and am lacking in rank 2055  
as to purchase you by force.  
If, for instance, I were to help you

by freeing you from here,  
but you would then insult me  
and confront me with hostility, 2060  
such as telling me then  
that I had never suffered from you  
any ill, and that hence I should let you go,  
in that case I would rather keep my property  
before I would proceed 2065  
and attract your hatred through my loss.  
If you want to, however, I would risk  
for your sake everything that I have  
and will happily accept in your name  
both gain and loss 2070  
on the condition that you  
reimburse me for my loss.  
If I can be certain about that  
knowing that you will never  
turn against me, 2075  
then I would be happily prepared  
to ransom you here  
and lift the suffering from you.”  
The lords immediately jumped up,  
both the old and the young 2080  
and fell down before my feet.  
Everyone grabbed me  
and gave me much honor.  
With a sad voice<sup>42</sup>  
each lamented badly to me 2085  
uttering only: ‘oh dear, oh dear,  
help us, dear lord!

mercy is far away from us.  
 Bring to us mercy and solace,  
 so that we could get released 2090  
 from this great suffering.  
 We also beg you further  
 in the name of God who handed Himself  
 over to death in his human form,  
 let us recognize in you 2095  
 that you call yourself a Christian  
 in the name of pure baptism.  
 Help us to get away from heathendom  
 and to return again to Christianity!  
 Think of our heart-felt pain 2100  
 and lift from us our great suffering.  
 Through God and your grace,  
 in the name of all knights' worthiness,  
 have pity for our affliction 2105  
 and let us be forever  
 in the name of God in your servitude.<sup>43</sup>  
 Whatever pleases you,  
 we will all swear an oath to you  
 that we will double all your goods,  
 except for what our lady will do 2110  
 and her father who [separately] will ransom here from you  
 just as you will demand,  
 and if our lord is still alive,  
 he will give doubly pay you for his wife.<sup>44</sup>  
 It disturbed me and gave me grief 2115  
 that they were laying before me in such a woeful sorrow  
 for such a long time in lamenting manner

and displayed such great unhappiness.

I said: "My dear good lords,

stand up, in the name of God, you act

2120

differently than it behooves you

or as it seems appropriate to me.

You have behaved rather shamefully

laying on the ground for such a long time

before me and lamenting so badly;

2125

I gladly can do without it."

[The English nobles:] "Mercy, sir, suffering makes us do that.

Help us, we are dead without any joys.

Your very sweet consolation gives us solace!

We will be lost forever."

2130

[Gerhart:] "Let us go to my lady.

If it will be her will

that she wants to travel with me into my country

and will demonstrate through her loyalty

that it will be her true desire, her intention,

2135

to reimburse me for my goods,

if she can do so and if I request it,

then I have rightly come here

to risk everything

that I own for your sake."

2140

They all spoke in one voice:

"Good graciousness, sir, she will be very happy about it."

Then the knights went with me.

We turned to the ladies

toward the private chamber.

2145

They were very surprised

about how this miracle had happened

that they were to see the knights.

There I had to witness

with the knights and the ladies, 2150

after they had completed their greetings, much crying.

I clearly recognized

that their pitiful suffering

came from heart-felt pain.

Then an old lord took me 2155

by my hand, and I asked him

in what language my lady, blessed by good fortune,

had been raised.

[Gerhart:] “Does she speak French!” He said: “Yes.”

Then I greeted my lady in that way, 2160

as it seemed fitting to me,

trying to avoid misbehavior.

She was very thankful to me

in her womanly courtliness.

Her eyes were filled with tears. 2165

I then said to the knight:

“Lord, speak on my behalf.”

He responded: “No, the treasure of fortune  
adorns your soul.

After a wise flowering 2170

you have brought forth the fruit of fortune.

God was in a most kind mood,

when He granted to you human life

filled with such virtues.

You are so filled with pure wisdom, 2175

your mouth can speak for itself.”

Then I began to speak.

I said: "Lady, I am a man  
who must pursue the life of a merchant,  
I have always been bent on purchasing  
wherever I found affordable goods. 2180  
I have gained to some extent  
many goods through purchase:  
I have brought it here into this land.  
The castellan desires to acquire it 2185  
through offering you to me.  
He wants me to have you in exchange,  
if I give him everything what I own,  
and he wants to give me the knights,  
who endure a miserable life here. 2190  
But now this purchase  
is somewhat too costly for me,  
if you were to be my payment.  
A piece of cloth or silk  
I might trade more easily, 2195  
where I might find it at a good price,  
instead of such great lordship.  
If I now had so much wealth  
in goods that I might be able  
to take you away from here, 2200  
and you would then, dear lady,  
reimburse me my goods,  
I would ransom you immediately.  
The kingdom of England  
is located so near to my home country, 2205  
if you do not mind,  
I will keep you surely

in such good manner  
 that it will never seem to you a misbehavior  
 until they will learn 2210  
 and think about it how to find out  
 whether the young prince of England  
 is still alive or not,  
 who is engaged with you.”

The lady got up from her chair 2215  
 and wanted to kneel before me,  
 but I objected to that.  
 I approached her  
 and begged her in the name of her virtues  
 to let that go and not do that. 2220

Thereupon her eyes filled with tears.  
 She knew how to beg  
 in such an innocent [child-like] and pure way  
 that I recognized well at her manners  
 how much she had placed very serious thoughts 2225  
 on her request.

This I clearly noticed in her.  
 Although being very young, she had the wisdom of an older person<sup>45</sup>:  
 [Erene:]<sup>46</sup> “Mercy, sweet pure man,  
 allow me to profit from the fact 2230  
 that a woman gave birth to you.

Be so kind and show grace  
 to me on behalf of all worthy women.  
 On your graciousness, you most fortunate man,  
 allow me to lament my worries to you 2235  
 on behalf of the most holy maid  
 who is the mirror for all women.<sup>47</sup>



She delivered the most holy Christ,  
 the emperor of all emperors,  
 and to whom the angel announced [the miracle]. 2240  
 The virginal mother without original sin,  
 was still virgin after the birth,  
 just as she had been before.  
 The sun's gleam shines forth in strong force  
 because of her virginity. 2245  
 The flower of virginity  
 remained with her in complete splendor.  
 As much as the highest beams of the sun  
 elevated her to a mother-virgin,  
 as little did she ever lose the name of a virgin, 2250  
 this glorious queen of heaven.  
 To her I extend my heart very much,  
 dear man, for you,  
 so that you keep in mind that I carry  
 her name, 2255  
 since I am known as a virgin,  
 as it is the case with the other ladies here.  
 Now allow us to become your children!  
 Dear father, dear solace,  
 redeem us from suffering. 2260  
 Mercy, sir, since you represent  
 the Christian fulfillment,  
 honor Christ's name with us  
 in a divine, praiseworthy manner  
 and through the strength of the pure baptism. 2265  
 Free us from heathendom,  
 since God has sent you here.

I will travel with you to your country,  
and whatever you want I also want.

My father will happily ransom me, 2270  
for which I will vouch.

And I know in truth,  
if the prince of England is still alive<sup>48</sup>  
and knows of me also as living,  
that he will not let me wait for long, 2275  
if he is still in good health.<sup>49</sup>

But if they are all dead,  
who were supposed to protect me from danger,  
then there is still God, who will give you a reward  
for all the grace that you will grant to me. 2280

Help me to return to Christianity  
in the name of God, and let it be a grief to you  
that I am suffering such great pain  
without any fault;  
and have also pity for the noble ladies here. 2285

Oh dear, if I will never see again  
my father, friends, or the Christian lands,  
then God would have put His shackles  
in wrath on me  
in sorrowful suffering!” 2290

The women all cried heavily,  
their delightful eyes wetted  
the God-given pure meadow of May,  
which was blooming in the colors of roses and lilies  
on their cheeks. 2295

The sparkling delight, the bliss of happiness  
poured its heart-felt dew,

which came from their hearts' sorrow.

Their lamenting hearts were deprived of all joy.

Their laments, a darkness of clouds, 2300  
covered their delightful sunshine,

the beauty of which was yet so intense

that in the summertime

it came through after all.

Rain came falling from the clouds, 2305

which fell onto the wonderful eyes

in such an intensity that a part of the beauty

that had shone forth before was gone.

Their crying was so sweet

that both the mouth and the eyes 2310

invited me to take a bath in them without being invited.

Their childlike shedding of tears forced me

to join their crying.

My will merged so much with theirs

that I was happily ready to do, 2315

whatever the good woman asked me for.

Her crying penetrated into my heart;

her female request conquered me

so that I could not reject anything

which her red lips uttered 2320

since I observed through the good women

that her lamentable sorrow

seriously came from deep in her soul.

When she addressed her request to me,

she was serious, there was no doubt about it. 2325

Her sweet request was an order for me

to take her deep grief

with laments into my heart.

I then clearly noticed the struggling;

fear, sorrow, lamentations, and misery

2330

often teach wise words,

where deep wisdom finds a small treasure

in the right thoughts.

Childish words disappear,<sup>50</sup>

where sorrow and heartfelt grief

2335

are constantly present.

I learned that through my lady

in cumbersome fashion

so that I have to say, as I noticed:

my lady formulated already in her blossoming youth

2340

an old wisdom.

In her young childhood she would have been denied

such meaningful wisdom,

but because she experienced such frightful sorrow,

she had learned through her suffering.

2345

Know this from these wise words,

that she understood how to beg me intensively

through her such wise breeding.

I said: "Dear good lady,

have joyful confidence,

2350

let your lamentable sorrow go.

Since I can change your great pain

with my goods,

it will not be kept away

from you or spared any longer.

2355

Lucky I am that all those goods ever have come to me,

so that I can chase away your sorrow

and so also your suffering.

Now, I want to purchase with my goods

all your grief,

2360

and will beg God to grant me

what I will ask Him to do for me

so that I can actually achieve that goal.

May God bring it about

that I will not be without success.

2365

Now, let me request from you truly

that you will reimburse me then,

for that what I will spend for you,

in likewise fashion

on your behalf.”

2370

This brightened up her soul.

The knights and the good ladies

cried out for joy

so much that I felt

great pity in my heart.

2375

The noble but poor people

received so much comfort through my consolation

that I freed their hearts

from great lamentable sorrow,

because I gave them my solace.

2380

Then I left them behind

and went where I found the castellan.

The well-bred man

greeted me friendly and politely.

He said: “Now, what do you think? Tell me

2385

whether this purchase pleases you well.”

I said: “Yes, my lord, truly.

I will be happy to carry out that purchase  
 [on the conditions] as I am going to specify to you.” [Stranmûr:] “Then tell me, how?”  
 [Gerhart:] “Aren’t here not any of their goods?” [of the prisoners] 2390  
 [Stranmûr:] “Yes, they are so well kept  
 that not one penny was hidden in the ground.”  
 [Gerhart:] “So I would like to achieve for the good people  
 if you grant it so,  
 that they receive all their goods again 2395  
 and can prepare for their voyage  
 their ship as it had been before,  
 and that none of their property stays behind,  
 neither small nor large,  
 and that everything will be handed over 2400  
 into their possession,  
 and that you give me all the food  
 necessary as provisions.  
 If you agree to that  
 and are willing to do so, as I have detailed it, 2405  
 then I will leave behind  
 what I have brought here with me,  
 and then the contract can be agreed on.”  
 Then the worthy castellan  
 proved his honor to me out of his desire [to acquire my goods].<sup>51</sup> 2410  
 He said, demonstrating his courtly manners:  
 “That will all be made ready.  
 You have negotiated well.  
 I will do whatever you request from me;  
 then the purchase will be completed.” 2415  
 I received from his hands  
 the miserable hostages<sup>52</sup>

and he took over my goods,  
 which I turned over to the castellan.  
 A reliable guarantee bound us together, 2420  
 confirming this purchase.  
 The contract specified  
 that he had to be trustworthy.  
 Then he took over all my property  
 and I received the prisoners. 2425  
 He called together many of the people  
 in the city to his court.  
 The [former prisoners] came with me, as he had ordered it,  
 filled with joy, to the palace  
 where the seat of the government was. 2430  
 He turned them over to me.<sup>53</sup>  
 Whatever property had been taken from them,  
 he ordered it to be returned to them.  
 There was reconciliation amongst all sides,  
 which naturally instilled strong feelings 2435  
 in me and many other people.  
 Mixed into the joy there was much lamenting.  
 The joy pushed away a part of the sorrow,  
 which had been the origin of the heart-felt pain  
 and the strong suffering. 2440

They received without delay  
 what property they had brought  
 to that country when they had arrived from across the sea.  
 This gain resulting from the purchase  
 pleased the castellan mightily. 2445  
 He ordered to unload my ship  
 and to load [the former prisoners'] ship.

He compensated them for their losses  
in terms of physical goods, but not in terms of their suffering.

He commanded that all my property  
be carried off. 2450

He arranged that sand and stones  
would be brought to me as a load  
so that my ship would sail uprightly  
without leaning when being on the sea. 2455

The wise knight Stranmûr  
ordered provisions to be provided for me and the entire group,  
that is fresh new provisions,  
which was all brought to the ship.

He also arranged that we received enough  
food for the voyage, 2460  
so that we would not, if we were driven,  
as is often the custom of wild waves,  
into a foreign country,  
then run out of food, 2465  
and hence might perish.

We ought to have good food  
in great plenty.

All this the highly worthy lord arranged.

Truly, to me it seemed  
that I was a blessed man. 2470

Then I led my lady,  
her maids, and the knights [to the ship].  
There was much happiness to be observed  
and much joyfulness, 2475  
because the miserable imprisonment  
had been overcome in a good way.



The heathens also cried  
 out of love for the wonderful ladies,  
 pitying them for their long suffering; 2480  
 whoever saw their tearful eyes  
 had to lament their sorrows;  
 and their friendly laughter  
 made all people feel  
 very joyful. 2485

Whoever saw what demeanor the lady displayed  
 being happy and enjoying a happy life,  
 had to acknowledge that himself.  
 Even if he did not experience joy because of that,  
 he felt joy because of her beauty. 2490

Whenever she was to smile out of happiness,  
 as she was supposed to do,  
 then her rose-colored lips  
 sent joy to those who were unhappy,  
 and those who looked at her happily, 2495  
 gave her high praise.

For the night we stayed there.  
 For the guests a bath was prepared  
 and they washed themselves.  
 My goodness, how lovely 2500  
 did the guests look afterwards!  
 When I saw that, I forgot all my losses  
 which I had suffered because of them.  
 Once they had received new clothes,  
 then my lady, a flower of pure virtues 2505  
 carried the crown of all desires  
 in bright beautiful colors.

Both the old and the young knights  
displayed accordingly great beauty. 2510  
What one expects from youth,  
that is to display fully their beauty,  
one could perceive now in the physical appearance  
of those who demonstrated fresh chivalry  
through their youth and strength.  
This was visible through their bodily presence. 2515  
Beautiful, impressive, white, and gray  
were the old knights,  
displaying their good demeanor.  
The women's beauty was so amazing,  
except that my lady was the most charming 2520  
in praiseworthy honor,  
yet the other women did not lack  
in charming beauty,  
all wearing the crown of praise and admiration.<sup>54</sup>

Early the next morning 2525  
I prepared myself  
since I wanted to depart from there.  
I prayed that the ladies  
and the knights<sup>55</sup> be protected  
by God's blessing,<sup>56</sup> 2530  
since they had never heard  
the true word of God  
during their imprisonment.  
After mass we went back  
and sat down happily. 2535  
At that moment the honorable  
Stranmûr, who was the castellan there, arrived,

who demonstrated much kindness to me  
 at the table,  
 where many knights and squires were sitting. 2540  
 He displayed his good breeding.  
 To the knights and the ladies  
 the loyal and trustworthy man raised  
 his cup to greet them all  
 and saluted everyone, 2545  
 for which I had to wish him all the best  
 as it befitted me in accordance to my breeding.  
 When the meal had been completed,  
 we said good-bye and prepared for the voyage.  
 [Stranmûr:] “I want to entrust you, dear Gerhart, 2550  
 to the care of your God,  
 may He protect your life.  
 But if there might be anyone more powerful,  
 then His help may be there for your assistance.  
     My dear God Jupiter 2555  
 shall provide you with a blissful journey.  
 May Pallas and Juno  
 make you joyfully happy;  
 to Mohammed and Mercurius,  
 and to Thetis and Neptune, 2560  
 who command the waters,  
 may your journey homewards,  
 along with the group of guests, be entrusted.<sup>57</sup>  
 Through just a little good fortune on the sea  
 may he help you, through his powers, 2565  
 Aeolus, the god of winds  
 that you and your people

will succeed in everything  
by means of favorable winds  
and that the journey will turn out well.” 2570  
Those were the words of the castellan.  
Immediately I bowed before him.  
He then gave me his blessing.  
Then he said again:  
“Let me assure you once again 2575  
that I want to honor the entire Christianity  
on your behalf,  
since God has placed so much blessing on you  
in this world,  
that your body and your life 2580  
must always be honored.  
My heart is wishing you that.”  
Then he began to cry out of sorrow [to see me leave],  
and we both cried, he and I,  
because we had to part from each other. 2585  
Because of this sorrow  
we experienced painful loyalty.  
Thereafter we departed.  
He was pleased about the purchase,  
and I was also happy about the exchange. 2590  
He believed to have made a profit,  
and I also thought the same  
believing that my profit would not be lost,  
but the reward depends on God’s grace  
according to His great mercy 2595  
and according to my needs.  
We both were sure that we had not been cheated.

Soon the sails were hoisted  
in the harbor.

Thus we left from there 2600  
very happy along the way.

We took good care of ourselves  
and defended ourselves against the devil.

Soon, a strong wind from our back  
rose on the sea. 2605

Let me tell you honestly,  
we could not be happier about it,  
just as I had desired it,  
driving us forward most swiftly.

The son of the pure maid, [Christ], 2610  
gave us good company and a delightful journey,  
and He protected us from danger.

The person who has trust in Him  
will never experience bad fortune.

Now, His sweet support guaranteed for us 2615  
a fortunate journey.

1. Albrecht Classen, "Kulturelle und religiöse Kontakte zwischen dem christlichen Europa und dem buddhistischen Indien während des Mittelalters: Rudolfs von Ems *Barlaam und Josaphat* im europäischen Kontext," *Fabula* 41.3/4 (2000): 203-28.
2. Joachim Bumke, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im hohen Mittelalter* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1990), 235-37, 244-45, 250-51, 394-95, et passim, offers good summaries of each text and briefly outlines the relevant context.
3. Mike Malm, "Rudolf von Ems," *Deutsches Literatur-Lexikon: Das Mittelalter*, ed. Wolfgang Achnitz. Vol. 5: *Epik (Vers – Strophe – Prosa) und Kleinformen* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 393-408.
4. Wolfgang Walliczek, "Rudolf von Ems," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*. 2nd, completely rev. and expanded ed. by Kurt Ruh et al. Vol. 8 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), col. 322-345.
5. Rudolf von Ems, *Der guote Gêrhart*, ed. John A. Asher. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 56 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1962).
6. *An English Translation of Rudolf von Ems's Der guote Gêrhart* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2016). Here I expand a little on Rudolf's biography and then draw from my own translation, selecting the relevant passage where the idea of toleration emerges so impressively.
7. <http://www.handschriftencensus.de/2744> (last accessed on April 22, 2019).
8. Albrecht Classen, "Medieval Transculturality in the Mediterranean from a Literary-Historical Perspective: The Case of Rudolf von Ems's *Der guote Gêrhart* (ca. 1220-ca. 1250)," *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 5.1 (2018): 133-60 (online at: <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/jtms.2018.5.issue-1/jtms-2018-0006/jtms-2018-0006.pdf>).
9. For parallel cases in Aragon, see Jarbel Rodriguez, *Captives and Their Saviors in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007); see also James W. Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain: The Order of Merced on the Christian-Islamic Frontier*. The Middle Ages (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).
10. Albrecht Classen, "Multilingualism in the Middle Ages: Theoretical and Historical Reflections: An Introduction," *Multilingualism in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: Communication and Miscommunication in the Premodern World*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 17 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 1-46.

11. See the contributions to *Erzählungen in Erzählungen: Phänomene der Narration in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Harald Haferland and Michael Mecklenburg. *Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur*, 19 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1996). Rudolf's *Der guote Gêrhart*, however, is never mentioned here.

12. Cristian Bratu, "Mirrors for Princes (Western)," *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms – Methods – Trends*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Vol. 3 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 1921-49.

13. Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. with an intro. and notes by G. R. McWilliam. Sec. ed. (1972; London: Penguin, 1995). See, for instance, the stories Day 1:2 and Day 10:9. For the topic of friendship, see the contributions to *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: Explorations of a Fundamental Ethical Discourse*, ed. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 6 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010).

14. Werner Wunderlich, *Der ritterliche Kaufmann: literatursoziologische Studien zu Rudolf von Ems' "Der guote Gerhart"*. *Scriptor Hochschulschriften: Literaturwissenschaft*, 7 (Kronberg/Ts: Scriptor, 1975); Sonja Zöllner, *Kaiser, Kaufmann und die Macht des Geldes: Gerhard Unmaze von Köln als Finanzier der Reichspolitik und der "Gute Gerhard" des Rudolf von Ems*. *Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur*, 16 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1993).

15. For two exceptions, see now Meinolf Schumacher, "Toleranz, Kaufmannsgeist und Heiligkeit im Kulturkontakt mit den 'Heiden'. Die mittelhochdeutsche Erzählung "Der guote Gêrhart" von Rudolf von Ems," *Zeitschrift für interkulturelle Germanistik* 1.1 (2010): 49-58; Classen, "Medieval Transculturality in the Mediterranean" (2018).

16. Gerhart hence took the route down the Rhine to the North Sea, around Denmark and then across the Baltic Sea to reach the Russian harbors, then those in the Baltic countries. Perhaps a little more than other thirteenth-century romances, Rudolf explored spatial dimensions somewhat more concretely, but we can easily recognize that ultimately his geographic concept remains fuzzy and irrelevant for the narrative's development. For the 'spatial turn' in medieval literature, see Albrecht Classen, "The Innovative Perception of Space (Europe) in Late Medieval German Literature" (2016).

17. This is an ancient city in the southern part of modern-day Uzbekistan, located on the fabled Silk Route connecting Europe with China already in the Middle Ages. Samarkand is east of Turkmenistan, north of Afghanistan, and northwest of Dushanbe, the capital of Turkmenistan. There is no logical explanation how Gerhart reached that land after his time spent in the Baltic countries, but Samarkand simply served as an iconic city of Oriental wealth and incredible trading opportunities.

18. Like Damascus, Niniveh was also traditionally one of the famous Middle Eastern cities where European merchants could make huge profits in trading with Asian partners, and this

since antiquity. This ancient Assyrian city is today located in northern modern-day Iraq on the eastern bank of the Tigris river.

19. This is the topical reference to the unknown world, a typical feature in most travel literature throughout times. The poet might have drawn from the anonymous *Herzog Ernst* (ms. B ca. 1220) where a storm also drives the protagonist away from the main course taking him from Constantinople to the Holy Land. *Herzog Ernst*, ed. and trans. Bernhard Sowiński (1970).

20. The poet makes a sudden switch here, from the report by the sailor to the report by Gerhart himself.

21. The words “marnen” and “schifman” are used interchangeably here.

22. The poet regularly emphasizes the significance of the gaze when a person recognizes in a crowd of people one outstanding individual. Emperor Otto was thus able to identify the Good Gerhart immediately, standing amidst the crowd of esteemed Cologne citizens. This phenomenon is called “kalokagathia,” implying a direct correlation between the external, physical appearance and the spiritual, moral, and ethical virtues. Félix Bourriot, *Kalos kagathos – kalokagathia* (1995). For the opposite dimension, the external ugliness, see Paul Michel, “*Formosa deformitas*” (1970).

23. This seems to be rather made up by Gerhart since he had not even the faintest idea what country he had reached after the twelve days of a raging storm.

24. The formulation here is most difficult; the poet indicates that there will be a change of his previous politics on tariff, lifting it entirely for Christian merchants.

25. The poet is mostly playing with the assonance and alliteration of the two words: “triuwe” (loyalty) and “niuwe” (new).

26. Gerhart is preparing the emperor, hence us as the audience, for the shock that is waiting for us regarding the true nature of the ‘merchandise.’

27. It is clear that the poet wants to emphasize their youth, having outgrown their puberty, as indicated by the first showing of a beard. This undermines the previous mentioning of their age of 30, but medieval literature is never fully concerned with realistic and logical consistency.

28. It is difficult to render this cascading praise of womanhood into ordinary English. The poet relies here on a long rhetorical tradition of excessive praise, which might be hard to swallow for us today.

29. The poet refers specifically to the brilliance of her skin color.

30. Insofar as Rudolf delighted in playing with excessive descriptors, he was forced to repeat himself constantly. There is no good way of rendering all this in ordinary English without being highly repetitive.



31. The poet uses both words for ‘cheeks,’ “hiufel” and “wengelîn” without helping us understand what the difference might be.

32. Again the text has the archaic phrase “wîgande” for hero, a word normally used only in early medieval heroic poetry.

33. Some scholars, such as Zöller, *Kaiser, Kaufmann und die Macht des Geldes* (1993), have suggested that the scribe had mistaken ‘Navarra’ in Spain with ‘Norway,’ but there is no firm proof for that idea, except that it seems unrealistic to assume that the ship with the princess and her companions had come so far off the course and gotten into the eastern Mediterranean after they had left Norway. This would presume, however, that Rudolf truly intended to project a realistic historical-geographical world view or was actually informed enough about the situation in the western Mediterranean to understand where Morocco and Navarra were located. Further, it seems unlikely that a scribe would have confused his original source so badly to copy down ‘Norway’ instead of Navarra. If we consider how unclear Rudolf proves to be also with respect to England in the latter half of the romance, we may conclude that geography was simply not his strongest ability when he composed his romance. However, throughout medieval literature, spatial precision and correctness never mattered much, so Rudolf does not differ remarkably in that regard compared to his contemporaries.

34. There is an unintentional irony here since Gerhart reached Morocco the same way, driven by the mighty storm, arriving in a foreign country where he did not want to make a stop on his way home. Hence, Stranmûr could apply exactly the same laws and confiscate all of Gerhart’s property. However, he appears as a merchant and is not a member of the nobility. Nevertheless, if the castellan were truly looking for ways to increase his wealth, he could treat him the same way as he treats his aristocratic prisoners. Yet, he is also economically minded and wants to attract other Christian merchants to his own harbor, whom he has promised freedom from paying tax on their goods. Within the literary context, of course, such inquiries regarding consistency would be inappropriate.

35. Stranmûr hence assures him that he still could carry out his ordinary merchant activities and would not have to fear anything from him if he were not interested in the offered deal, the exchange of the merchandise for the prisoners.

36. This is a typical form of repetition which Rudolf enjoys applying. I can only try to render this passage as meaningfully as possible.

37. Both the Old Testament (*Psalms*) and the New Testament contain numerous passages Rudolf could have drawn from for this theological statement. For instance, Prov. 14:31 “Anyone who oppresses the poor is insulting God who made them. To help the poor is to honor God.” Or: Mat. 25:40 “And I, the King, will tell them, ‘When you did it to these my brothers you were doing it to me!’” Or: Mat 25:45 “And I will answer, ‘When you refused to help the least of these my brothers, you were refusing help to me.’” Mat. 25:46 “And they shall go away into eternal punishment; but the righteous into everlasting life. Or: 1 Tim. 6:18 “Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give happily to those in need, always

being ready to share with others whatever God has given them.”

38. We learn here for the first time Stranmûr’s full name.

39. Literally: from an arc, like Noah’s Arc, but it can only mean a ‘container,’ ‘vessel,’ or ‘chest’ in the present context.

40. The original has ‘markets’ in the singular, but from the subsequent text we know that Gerhart traveled far and wide.

41. Literally: “Now I am in part too weak for you.”

42. The text has “lêre,” meaning ‘teaching,’ ‘instruction,’ maybe also ‘command’ or ‘arrangement,’ but none of those words would fit in the current context.

43. While the editor of this text, John A. Asher, placed a comma here, a period makes more sense, followed by the beginning of a new sentence.

44. Their lord is the English prince Willehalm, who was lost on the sea and had disappeared while they were driven by the storm to the Moroccan harbor, as we will learn later. The English lords refer here to Willehalm’s ‘wife,’ though she is only his fiancée at this point.

45. Literally: her youth spoke up through old wisdom.

46. Erene is the name of the Norwegian princess, as we’ll learn only later.

47. The entire following section is very difficult to render into a logical English since the implied causality is simply not given there, since the poet has the princess make a series of statements that are not related to any request on her part.

48. Since Willhelam is only a young man at that point, not even knighted and certainly not yet crowned king of England, I refer to him consistently as ‘prince’ here.

49. This is one of the many repetitions which characterize this text. In a straight prose translation I would have simply struck this line.

50. Whereas before ‘childish’ underscored the lady’s innocence, purity, and virginity, now it implies the opposite, that is, foolishness, immaturity, etc.

51. It is not clear whether the poet simply added the word ‘gir’ (greed) to rhyme on the indirect personal pronoun ‘mir’ (to me), or whether he actually intended to criticize the castellan for his materialistic interests. I tend to reject the latter position in light of the high praise which Gerhart has given him before. The poet probably wanted to say simply: The castellan desired to demonstrate his good breeding by honoring the merchant.

52. Literally: guests from abroad.

53. The text does not quite make sense, unless I misunderstand the syntax, since he first refers to people in the city at large, and now we are supposed to assume that those are the former prisoners. It seems best to create separate sentences and to assume that each one talks about different people.

54. Possibly the poet wanted to say that the princess was the one who wore the crown of praise, but the syntactical structure obfuscates a clear interpretation.

55. The term 'degne' or 'degene' (sword) is a synecdoche, or pars pro toto (a part representing the whole), for 'knight.'

56. That is, he asked his clerk to read a mass for them.

57. Rudolf had obviously no clear understanding of the Islamic religion and naively mixes, very much like his predecessors and his contemporaries, names of ancient Greek gods with the name of the Prophet Mohammed.