Tannhäuser

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Tannhäuser: Poet and Legend.

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The nineteen Sprüche are composed to four different Töne and, with a few exceptions, develop four specific themes. The Sprüche are more realistic than the minnesongs, but some have allegorical implications. The scale of mood is greater, ranging from the genuine sorrow at the loss of Duke Friedrich to the broad humor of complaints about hard biscuits and salty meat. Structurally, however, they are less varied than the minnesongs, the rhyme schemes are in general simpler and the rhythms more regular. Frequent touches of irony and occasional parody characterize the Sprüche, except the last four, which are openly didactic.

The first of the Spruch cycles to be discussed (XII) does not have a theme which carries through all of its five poems. However, the first three are linked by a common symbol, that of the home. Since many lyric poets of the Middle High German period were penniless wanderers, it is not surprising that the theme of home ownership should appear with some frequency. One thinks immediately of Walther's sad complaint in his song which begins, "'Sit willekomen her wirt: dem gruoze muoz ich swigen," several verses of which are echoed in the first two Sprüche of this cycle. Herger, Spervogel, and Ulrich von Singenberg also treated the subject before Tannhäuser, and Friedrich von Sunnenberg, Der Meissner, Helleviur, and Der Unverzagte after him. The series begins by comparing the narrator's present situation with that of former times. Then he had fond relatives, and the most distinguished members of society enjoyed his company — then he was a property owner. But those who were once glad to see him now either greet him in a cursory manner or turn their backs on him. He has to give way to those who formerly had to yield to him. They who were once dependent on the generosity of others now have homes of their own, while he is no better off than he was twenty years before. His life is insecure, he has to find food and shelter with others. And anyone who thinks this is pleasant should try it.

The second Spruch continues in a similar vein. When things go badly for the narrator as he wanders from place to place, he thinks of Nürnberg and how nice it would be for him there. He would rather have enough there where he was known than have nothing among strangers — his audience may well

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believe that. But the singer admits that he has done some things which he now regrets, and he thinks he would be better off financially if he had been as wise before as he is at present. He wasn't sufficiently aware of his own weaknesses, and now has to suffer for it. This is why he almost never invites people to his home, and why he hears everyone say, "Be on your way, stranger!" He doesn't know whether or not they get pleasure out of treating him in this manner. Although the situation described here and in the preceding Spruch might seem to be a sad one, it does not ring true as a serious attempt to win sympathy. The ironical comments about having many relatives when one is rich and few guests when one has no house point to mock-pathos, as do the asides to the audience and the hints of prodigality and dissipation. Whether one considers it as wry humor, pathetic humor, or gallows humor, the intended effect was certainly comic. The reference to Nürnberg is used by some scholars as support for the theory that the poet originally came from there or from the surrounding area.

The home-symbolism and the ironic humor which appear in the background of the first two Sprüche dominate the third. Some naive persons have advised the singer to build himself a house, and he speculates as to who might be expected to assist with its construction. Imprudence and Sir Do-Nothing will show up at once, as well as a long-time acquaintance by the name of Never-Rich. Indigence and Indecision are loyal servants who will stand by him, as always. And he can assume that Sir Trouble and Sir Unready will be there, for they are his frequent companions. If his house is completed by this retinue, there surely will be snow falling down his neck from the rafters in winter. Tannhäuser uses his characteristic cataloguing technique together with allegory. All of the prospective helpers are closely associated with the narrator, and one should regard them not as exterior phenomena, but as traits of the narrator himself. These are the personal weaknesses to which he refers in the second Spruch of the cycle, the irresistible inner forces which fix his character. The humor is that of the ironic self-depreciation which Neidhart had made popular.56 Here, as elsewhere in Tannhäuser's verse, one can assume that accounts of the narrator's misfortunes are intended to be comical.

The personification of abstract concepts appeared early in the history of courtly song but at first they were limited in number and scope and went little beyond such figures as minne, saelde, meie, sumer, winter, and vrouwe werle. After Tannhäuser, however, this tendency became much stronger, perhaps as a result of his influence. At any rate, one can see the effect of this Spruch on

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56 Tannhäuser may have been familiar with Neidhart's stanza which tells of his troubles with the run-down fief of Reuenthal: Edmund Wiessner, ed., Die Lieder Neidharts, Altdutsche Textbibliothek, 44 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1955), p. 58.
several later poems.⁵⁷ As it appears in the manuscript, the Spruch is shorter by two lines than the others in the cycle. It seems likely that the lines dropped out in the process of transmission, probably from the middle of the poem. They may have listed additional helpers.

Tannhäuser's encyclopedic style is most pronounced in the fourth Spruch, which consists entirely of a list of rivers and their locations. The series begins with the Tiber and, with a few side excursions, describes a rough arc as it moves to the north and west past the Arno, Tronto, Po, and Isère to the Seine, then eastward to the Moselle, Rhine, and Neckar, northeast to the Elbe, back to the Meuse, east to the Neisse, south to the Váh, Tisza, and Moldau, and finally ends with the Danube at Vienna. The narrator thereupon invites anyone who might doubt his placement of the rivers to go and look for himself. One of them, the Tronto, is incorrectly located — it is said to flow by Pescara⁵⁸ — and another, the tuzer, has not been positively identified.⁵⁹ But, in general, the geography is sufficiently accurate for some scholars to assume that the Spruch gives the actual itinerary of a journey by the poet. It has been suggested that he took this circuitous route home to Vienna after returning to Italy from the crusade of 1228.⁶⁰

When one reads the Spruch, the question as to its purpose immediately comes to mind. There are two answers, which are not mutually exclusive. The first is that the song is simply a geography lesson in verse, comparable to the modern poem by means of which we recall the lengths of the months, “Thirty days hath September...” At a time when most people were illiterate, a great deal of information was rhymed, purely as an aid to the memory: charms, incantations, proverbs, riddles, even rules of table etiquette. In this instance, a rough map of Western and Central Europe could be constructed by humming through a tune. The earliest example of such a verse atlas is the Merigarto-fragment of the late eleventh century, which lists springs, streams, and lakes whose waters have great medicinal, even miraculous effects. The second possibility is that the Spruch

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⁵⁸ If one assumes with Oehlke, p. 70, that the pitschier of the manuscript refers to Pescara, the geography is incorrect. It is possible, however, that the author was thinking of Piceno, which is on the Tronto.

⁵⁹ The manuscript reads, “dieu tuzer gat viur rezen.” If this is not the poet’s own invention, the most plausible guess would be the Töss which flows past Rüti in Switzerland.

⁶⁰ Siebert, Der Dichter Tannhäuser, p. 23.
parodies those authors who try to impress their audiences by stressing the extent of their travels or by more subtle geographic name-dropping. Tannhäuser may have been thinking of Walter's poem which refers to the latter's wanderings throughout the empire from the Seine to the Mur and from the Po to the Trave.61 Or he may have had in mind the lines in which Walther praises his fellow Germans:

Von der Elbe unz an den Rin
und her wider unz an Ungerlant
mugen wol die besten sín,
die ich in der werlte hán erkant.62

It is interesting that the above verses — like Tannhäuser's Spruch — were composed in Vienna.

The last Spruch of the cycle is the most traditional in content. A wise man gives his son certain rules for behavior when he is at court. He is to avoid arrogant people and is to emulate and associate with those who are respected. Then he, too, will have praise and honor. He is not to remain where he sees evil being done, and is always to flee wanton debauchery. He is to drink in such moderation as to give no one offense. He is to speak well of women so that they may speak well of him. If he follows this advice, he will get along excellently with them. The didactic spirit which permeated the Middle Ages found expression in scores of similar codes of good conduct, and Tannhäuser's Spruch does not differ greatly from many others. However, once more there is a hint of his light irony, although one would need to have seen the original performance to be certain. The wise man does not set forth his precepts as a guide for life in general, but for behavior at court — which may lend them a somewhat calculating tone. And the advice to compliment ladies so that one may enjoy their good will could also have slyly mercenary implications.

The Ton for the Spruch cycle is simple and regular, consisting of ten iambic heptameter lines with feminine endings and the rhyme scheme: a b a b c c d d e e. Some, but not many of the Aufakte are lacking, and occasionally a dactyl replaces an iamb. Most of the lines are broken by a caesura after the first four feet. The rhyme scheme indicates that the stanza consists of Aufgesang and Abgesang, and the fact that two lines — probably either the c c or the d d couplet — could drop out implies that the first part of the Abgesang melody was repeated. A plausible reconstruction of the melodic pattern, therefore, would be: A A B B A. A late approximate date of composition, 1263—1268, has been assigned to the cycle because of the reference in the first Spruch to twenty years of homelessness.63 The assumption is that Tannhäuser was prosperous until after the death of Duke Friedrich.

63 Oehlke, p. 41.
The second of the Spruch cycles (XIII) uses the allegory of the sea of life as its theme. The sea is rough and dangerous, but its worst feature is that it drives one where it wills with no regard for one's own desires. The cycle begins with an idyllic picture of courtly life in the sunny south, in Apulia. Some knights are hunting in the fields with falcons, others in the forest with hounds. One group is out walking for recreation, another is riding about to see the sights. But the narrator has no share in such pleasures. There is no falconry or deer hunting for him. He wears no wreath of roses over the meadows and no one may expect to find him with fair maidens in the garden. For he is out on the sea.

The second Spruch of the cycle pictures the narrator as the eternal wanderer. Though he sings happy songs, his life is difficult. It is an aimless drifting from place to place as if he were driven before a storm. While aware that his shabby appearance offends people, he has to be concerned primarily with bare survival on land and sea. However, he knows that some day he inevitably will have to pay the innkeeper of this world his due. The sketch is essentially a description of Everyman at the mercy of a capricious fate, struggling day by day to save himself, but aware that in the end death must triumph.

The following Spruch is more personal and specific. The narrator asks rhetorically if anyone has suffered as much as he has from unwarranted confidence, and then tells of being for five days in a terrifying storm at sea off Crete in which he would have died had not God intervened. The waves broke the oars, the winds tore away the sails and nearly drove the ship on the rocks. The crew had never experienced such winds before, and their cries greatly oppressed the narrator. There was no escaping, one simply had to wait and endure. Although the language in the Spruch is realistic, still the first and last statements invite comparison to the sea of life.

In the fourth Spruch the narrator turns from a storm of the past to one of the present, and from an equivocal to a definitely light and ironical tone. Winds from Barbary are buffeting him as are others, simultaneously, from the direction of Turkey. And the waves are making him seasick. If this is a punishment for his sins, may God preserve him! His drinking water is cloudy, his biscuits are hard, the meat is too salty, and the wine is mouldy. And the odor which comes up from the bowels of the ship is no good companion for the journey — if he had his choice, he would prefer the fragrance of roses. Besides all this, it is difficult for him to be happy on a diet of peas and beans. If God wants to give him a reward, he would like to have better food and drink. The analogy to life, with its hardships, sins, punishments, and rewards is obvious.

The last Spruch of the cycle begins with an exclamation that the man who can ride wherever he pleases is indeed fortunate, and can scarcely appreciate the situation of one who must always wait for favorable winds. With this, Tannhäuser's urge to catalogue takes over and his narrator lists all the names of winds that he knows and, characteristically, at least one which he himself invented. He
concludes by saying that he wouldn’t know these names if he were ashore. He wishes he had never learned them, for he went to sea to serve God, not to become so familiar with winds. Construed in the light of the central allegory, this means that, although he set forth on the sea of life in the service of God, he was not prepared to encounter so many adverse forces.

The traditional interpretation of this Spruch cycle is that its stanzas make up a crusade song which tells of Tannhäuser’s personal experiences on a journey from Italy to Palestine in 1228.64 One may, of course, raise the objections that there is no mention of a crusade or of the Holy Land, that the descriptions of land and sea are generalized and literary,65 and that there is no more reason to assume a medieval Ich-Dichtung is autobiographical than that a modern song in the first person gives real incidents in the life of the author. On the other hand, it is probable that the cycle was influenced by crusade songs and that it parodied them to some extent. Heinrich von Rugge praises the crusading spirit in one of his songs and then tells of an evil man who believed it better to stay at home and pass the time pleasantly with the ladies66 — which is just what the narrator in Tannhäuser’s first Spruch wishes he had done. And when Walther says:

möht ich die lieben reise gevaren über sê,
so wolte ich denne singen wol, und niemer mèr ouwê,67

he may have inspired the irrepressible younger poet to send his narrator on such a journey and then have him sing “owe!” It is also perhaps significant that

64 Siebert, Der Dichter Tannhäuser, p. 18; Richard M. Meyer, Deutsche Charaktere (Berlin: Hofmann, 1897), p. 62; Günther Currle, “Die Kreuzlyrik Neidharts, Tannhäuserns und Freidanks und ihre Stellung in der mittelhochdeutschen Kreuzzugslyrik” (Diss. Tübingen, 1957), p. 72; Wolff, p. 363; Wolfgang Golther, Die deutsche Dichtung im Mittelalter (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1912), p. 385; de Boor, Die höfische Literatur, p. 370; and others. Siebert, Der Dichter Tannhäuser, p. 18, calls the crusade of 1228 the first definite fact that we know of Tannhäuser’s life. Lang, p. 121, and Bernhardt, p. 91, suggest that the work was composed later, perhaps in the forties. Wolfgang Mohr, “Tanhusers Kreuzlied,” DVJ, 34 (1960), 347-48, objects to all attempts to derive exact history from the Spruch cycle and maintains that it contains nothing which is necessarily an expression of personal experience. With regard to its essentially literary character, he says, “Topoi rücken das einmalig und zufällig Wirkliche in übergeordnete objektive Zusammenhänge, so daß man es nicht mehr als etwas Einmaliges, sondern als Zeichen für etwas Allgemeineres und Typisches nimmt. Und genau so will die Seesturmsstrophe Tanhusers verstanden sein.”

65 There are differing opinions concerning the nature of the descriptions in the cycle. Currle, pp. 72-73, believes that the verses were composed during the journey and not later, “denn der Eindruck des fürchterlichen Seesturms ist noch zu frisch.” De Boor, Die höfische Literatur, p. 374, also stresses the new spirit of realism in the work. Conversely, W. Mohr, p. 347, speaks of Scheinrealismus which is borrowed from the courtly novels of the early thirteenth century.


67 Lachmann, Die Gedichte Walthers von der Vogelweide, 125, 9-10.
another song of Walther tells of a mighty wind which causes pilgrims to lament.\textsuperscript{68} In contrast to the idealistic songs of Heinrich, Walther, and others, there was verse by several of Tannhäuser's contemporaries in which they were less than enthusiastic about journeys to the Holy Land. Freidank's \textit{Sprüche} concerning Acres bitterly attack its citizens, Christian as well as heathen, for their exploitation of the crusaders. He describes Palestine as a place "dā got noch man nie triuwe fand."\textsuperscript{69} The crusader Neidhart also is unhappy with his treatment by fellow Christians (the French) and is most anxious to return to Germany. The first stanza of his song is similar to Tannhäuser's first \textit{Spruch} in that both begin with a description of nature and end with a lament that the singer had to depart.\textsuperscript{70} Neidhart concludes his song by proclaiming that only a fool would want to stay through the summer. One should wait no longer, but sail back over the sea, for a man is best off at home in his own parish. Tannhäuser's ironic nature and his tendency toward parody might have been challenged either by the idealism of Walther or the scepticism of Neidhart. In any case, his cycle about the sea of life seems to have drawn from the traditional crusade song, with humorous effects. However, there is nothing in these \textit{Sprüche} which mark them as products of direct, rather than allegorical experience.

The \textit{Ton} of the \textit{Spruch} cycle is interesting because of its variations on a simple pattern. There are sixteen trimeter, tetramer, and hexameter verses with regularly alternating rhyme: 4a 3b 4a 3b 3c 3d 5c 3d 6e 6f 6e 6f 3g 3h 3g 6h. Half of the verses make up the \textit{Aufgesang}, half the \textit{Abgesang}, with the last four being a repetition of the \textit{Stollen}. The melodic structure, therefore, seems to have been: A A' B A". As can be seen, the three \textit{Stollen} are not quite alike. The first alternates tetrameters and trimeters, the second has only trimeters, while the last has three trimeters and a hexameter. However, since the tetrameters lack the \textit{Aufakt}, it would be easy for the same melody to fit them and the trimeters. For the hexameter in the third \textit{Stollen}, one might guess either that the normal melodic line was repeated or that it was replaced by the fourth line of the \textit{Abgesang}.

With one exception, the \textit{Sprüche} in the following cycle (XIV) deal with the singer's poverty or his search for a patron. Songs as these \textit{Gehrsprüche} were composed by most, perhaps all of the itinerant poets of the medieval period, and in general should be considered as advertisements for employment, rather than as mendicant verse. By Tannhäuser's day they had become recognized as belonging to a specific type of song, and thus, like the minnesong, were vulnerable to parody. The narrator begins by expressing the hope that God will take pity on him because he is not a lord,\textsuperscript{71} for that is why he gets none of the gold

\textsuperscript{70} Wiessner, pp. 24-26.  
\textsuperscript{71} Kluckhohn, p. 153n, cites this statement as an indication, though not proof, that Tannhäuser was not a nobleman.
which is sent up from Italy. The lords divide it while the poor stare in amazement, looking on woefully as the former have their pouches filled. From Thuringia, too, comes a good deal of wealth, that — on his word — he would never touch. As stupid as he is, he could find there one who would support him well, but he would rather stay poor than forsake the crown. He speaks highly of the king, although he does not know if he will be rewarded for it.

The political references in the Spruch are to one of the conflicts between the Hohenstaufens and the papacy. In 1245 Pope Innocent IV excommunicated Emperor Friedrich II and the following year supported the attempt of Landgrave Heinrich Raspe of Thuringia to supplant Friedrich’s son, Konrad IV, as king of Germany. With the aid of large sums of papal money, Heinrich was elected. But since only ecclesiastical electors were present at the voting, many of the German princes continued to recognize Konrad. Heinrich died in 1247 and his position as anti-king (Gegenkönig) was assumed by Count William of Holland. If one may judge from the praise which is given in Leich VI to the then deceased King Konrad, the poet may well have been rewarded for his refusal to join the king’s enemies. The Spruch was apparently composed in 1246.

Where politics dominates the first Spruch, art pervades the second. The narrator says that he should be at court, where his singing could be heard. However, he is troubled by the lack of good tunes. To the lady who gave him some, he would sing all sorts of courtly things. He would sing most sweetly of all beautiful ladies. He would sing of the heath, of leafy trees, and of May; of summertime and dancing; of the cold snow and rain and wind. He would sing of father, mother, and child. The narrator then asks who will help him, for he cannot find any melodies. Style and content combine very successfully to make the Spruch one of Tannhäuser’s most lyrical compositions. As employed here, his cataloguing technique creates a truly poetic impression as he repeats “Ich surge” six times and charms the imagination with familiar poetic themes. The last subject mentioned, however, is unusual, for no medieval secular song deals primarily with the relationship of father, mother, and child.

One cannot know, of course, whether or not the narrator’s complaint that he has run out of melodies reflected the situation of the author. As has already been indicated, it seems that Tannhäuser was not very inventive as a composer. The music to Leich IV consists of variations on a single theme, whereas a Leich usually has a series of different melodies. In addition, the relatively small number of Töne in Tannhäuser’s other Leiche suggest that few melodies were employed. The minnesingers were for the most part far less gifted as composers than as poets. A new tune was a prized acquisition and much of their music was borrowed from France and Provence. The hero of Ulrich’s Frauendienst recounts at some length an episode in which he received an Italian melody from a lady admirer.\textsuperscript{72} Moreover, he is careful to report the favorable reaction of the public to his own music.

\textsuperscript{72} Lachmann, \textit{Ulrich von Lichtenstein}, pp. 112-14.
In the following Spruch the narrator admits that beautiful women, fine wine, choice food, and two baths a week are consuming his property, but says that he can live without care as long as he still has something to mortgage. However, when he finally has to pay up, he will be in trouble and his pleasure will turn to distress. The women will become ugly when he has to leave them, and the good wine will sour as soon as he has nothing to pawn to get it. He then advises himself not to worry about the situation, for he doesn’t know any rich lords who will avert the hardships which threaten him. The traditional Gehserspruch is a plea from one who needs the bare necessities of life, the minimum of food, shelter, and clothing. Tannhäusler opposes this figure with the portrait of a self-acknowledged wastrel who is deliberately squandering his property with high living. For the most part, Tannhäusler scholarship takes it for granted that the song is autobiographical. This assumption is not necessarily valid. The poet may or may not have been a profligate, but he certainly was a professional humorist whose chief stock in trade was the parody of established literary conventions. An additional comic effect is achieved by the seeming incongruity of listing two baths a week with wine and women and by the statement that there is no reason to be concerned because no one is going to help him. The comment that the women will become ugly and the wine sour is, of course, a reference to Aesop’s philosophical fox.

The fourth Spruch of the cycle is more serious, and it is probably autobiographical. The narrator bewails the loss of the hero of Austria who had housed him so well. Now life is sad, for he is homeless and does not know where to turn. Who will take his patron’s place and, like him, provide for fools as well as proud guests. The narrator seeks blindly, for he has no idea where such a generous person may be found. If his patron were still living, he would never have to ride with the chill wind in his face and hear those with houses call out, “Oh my, wanderer, how do you get cold so quickly?” Friedrich II of Austria died in 1246 in a battle against the Hungarians at the Thaya River. The Spruch apparently was composed soon afterwards. The mood is sombre, but not without Tannhäuser’s characteristic irony: the narrator needs to find someone who will take care of a fool.73 There is also ironical humor in the question of the householders.

The fifth Spruch is closely connected with the preceding one. The narrator tells of what he had possessed — a beautiful house in Vienna, the fief of Leupoldsdorf near Luchsee, fine estates at Himberg — and prays that God may reward his departed benefactor. He wonders if he ever will again receive the income from these properties. No one should reproach him if he mourns the duke, for all of his joy has died with him. The narrator then asks himself where he is going to live and if he knows anyone who will help improve his difficult

73 Wolff, p. 355, maintains that the narrator includes himself among the “proud guests.” However, the phrase is significant only if one assumes that the narrator counts himself among the fools.
situation, which, alas, has continued for some time. The death of his patron, he says, was certainly a cause for grief. What is chiefly of interest in the Spruch is the detailed listing of the former property of the narrator, a bit of realism which is most unusual in Middle High German lyric verse. Medieval poets, especially lyric poets, composed largely in symbols, abstractions, and generalities, rather than in terms of specific phenomena. Walther, for all his ecstatic joy in at last receiving a fief, tells us neither of what it consists nor where it is, but only how he feel about it. Tannhäuser also lets us know what these possessions mean to his life, but for him they have an objective significance in themselves, quite aside from his sense of loss. The amount of property which Friedrich reportedly gave the narrator has been advanced as proof that Tannhäuser was a nobleman. The duke, it is said, would never have invested a nameless minstrel with such extensive holdings. One can, of course, not be at all sure of what the unpredictable Friedrich would have done, assuming that the account of the property was not fictional.

In the last Spruch of the cycle Tannhäuser returns to catalogues and comedy. The narrator’s steed moves too heavily and his pack horse too lightly, his servants have to go on foot. His house has no roof, his chamber no door, his cellar has fallen in, his kitchen has burned down, the cross beams of his barn have collapsed, and his hay is used up. No flour is milled, no bread is baked, no beer is brewed for him. His clothing is too thin, and no one needs envy or belittle his furnishings and equipment. This is neither autobiography nor a description of a specific scene, but a mock-pathetic picture of the dilemma of an impoverished nobleman on his dilapidated estate. It must have been a familiar situation in thirteenth-century Austria and one well suited to evoke laughter.

In this cycle Tannhäuser takes a traditional lyric theme, the singer’s need, and develops it in a variety of ways. In the first Spruch the singer is in want by his own choice, and thus demonstrates his loyalty to the king. In the second, the need is for melodies, and it serves as a pretext to list subjects for songs. The third parodies the Gebrspruch, while the fourth and fifth combine it with a dirge. The last Spruch exploits the comic potential of need. The Ton for these Sprüche is almost the same as for the preceding cycle. There are nine lines, instead of ten, and the final line rhymes with the last couplet: a b a b c c d d d. It seems likely that the same melody, slightly altered at the end, was used for both cycles.

The last Spruch cycle appears in the Jena Manuscript under the name “Der tanuser.” As has been stated, there is a difference of opinion as to whether or

74 De Boor, Die böbsche Literatur, p. 375, describes this characteristic of the poet well when he says with regard to this passage: “Das ist die bare Wirklichkeit ohne Beschönigung. Aber sie ist erlebt mit der dichterischen Beeindruckbarkeit eines Mannes, für den alles Erlebnis Abenteuer und der reale Vorgang plastisches Bild wird.”

75 Wolff, p. 355.
The objections to assigning it to Tannhäuser are based primarily on the religious content and the consistently serious mood. The chief evidence for its authenticity are the witness of the fourteenth-century scribe — who should know more about it than we — and the fact that certain elements of form and style are typical of Tannhäuser. Three characteristics of its form point to him: the length of the stanza, the rhyme scheme of the Aufgesang, and the long final line. The twenty-line Ton of the poem is considerably longer than most Töne of the period, including those of Tannhäuser in the Manesse Manuscript. However, he has two of sixteen lines there, and his stanzas as a whole are longer than those of the great majority of his contemporaries. The rhyme scheme of the Aufgesang, a b c d a b c d, is more important as a link to Tannhäuser. He liked to rhyme in series this way. One of his undisputed poems has the identical rhyme scheme in the Aufgesang and three others have similar ones: a b c a b c, a a b c d d b c, and a a b c d e b c d. This means that the Aufgesang rhyme of nearly one-half the poet’s unquestioned minnesongs and Sprüche resembles that of the Jena Ton. But the most distinctive structural element in this work is the long final line of the stanza, which is also the most characteristic element of Tannhäuser’s Töne. In all of his minnesongs the final line is longer than the others and in the Sprüche it is as long or longer. The element of style in the Jena work which especially reminds one of the Tannhäuser verse in the Manesse Manuscript is the use of catalogues.

Even though the content and mood of the work may on first reading seem foreign to Tannhäuser, they appear less so on closer examination. The first stanza begins with a nature introduction, as do three of his Leiche and three of his minnesongs. To be sure, the employment of a nature introduction was widespread, but few poets used it as frequently as did he. As concerns the chief theme of the cycle, the penitence of a sinner, one remembers that three of Tannhäuser’s other Sprüche allude rather pointedly to excesses in the narrator’s past and imply regret for them. The mood, too, though lacking Tannhäuser’s usual irony, has something of his cheerfulness and optimism: the soul is in no great danger, for God will certainly forgive. All in all, there is nothing which weighs strongly against Tannhäuser’s authorship and much that supports it.

The Jena work is commonly referred to as a penitent song. The singer depicts himself as a penitent, to be sure, but there is a question as to whether the four

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Footnotes:

76 Among those who accept the Jena Sprüche as genuine are Meyer, p. 65; Bernhardt, p. 102; and Alfred Rottauscher and Bernhard Paumgartner, Das Taghorn: Dichtungen und Melodien des bayrisch-österreichischen Minnesangs (Wien: Stephenson, 1922), I, p. 45. Those who doubt that Tannhäuser was the author include Siebert, Der Dichter Tannhäuser, p. 237; Karl Bartsch, Deutsche Liederdichter des zwölften bis vierzehnten Jahrhunderts, 4th ed. (Berlin: Behr, 1901), p. LXVIII; and Wolff, p. 366.

77 The average stanza length of Tannhäuser’s other Lied and Spruch Töne is 12.5 lines. A random check of 100 Töne by twelve of his contemporaries revealed an average stanza length of 8.94 lines. The average stanza length of the Töne of none of the twelve equalled that of Tannhäuser.
stanzas make up a single song or a cycle of separate Sprüche which have a common theme. The problem has to do with the original performances. When Tannhäuser sang these stanzas, did he sing all of them together and in a particular order, or might he have sung them individually at different times? One can only say that the stanzas are self-contained units and that the content of the last three in the manuscript requires no particular arrangement. In the case of the first, however, the position of the stanza is justified by the one-line nature introduction. The assumption here is that the work is a cycle of Sprüche which treat the same general subject, but have no specific relationship to each other.

The mood for the first Spruch is established by a reference to nature in the opening verse, just as the mood of a minnesong is set by the traditional nature introduction. It is a beautiful day, and the singer hopes that He who rules over the wonders of creation will so care for him that he may know bliss and may atone for his great guilt. He knows that God can help him to preserve his soul, recover from sin, and gain divine grace. There follows a series of prayers and the reasons behind them, which make up a catalogue of petitions. The singer asks for a constant spirit, a good end to his life, God's favor, a happy soul, a sweet death, and escape from hell. He prays that the Pure One grant his request so that he may share the highest joy and, when he leaves his family, may find friends who will welcome him joyfully to heaven, where he may be called a blissful servant of his Master. The frame of mind, reflecting God's beautiful day, is one of reverent confidence, and there is nothing to indicate that the singer's guilt is anything more than that shared by all humanity. The cataloguing effect is achieved particularly by the repetition of daz ich, daz es, daz mir, and daz mich. These appear eleven times and introduce fourteen subordinate clauses.

The prayers in the first Spruch are voiced indirectly as a thoughtful soliloquy. Those in the second are addressed to God directly, giving a stronger impression of immediacy. The singer laments that he has sinned all of his life and has very seldom felt remorse. He asks God for His mother's sake to grant him a sympathetic hearing. He believes that God's suffering on earth and His divinity will help him turn from his sins and atone for them during his lifetime. The singer prays that his will may be strengthened so that his soul may gain eternal bliss. He desires such an unchanging mind that the devil, who sets many snares for God's children, cannot lead him astray. In conclusion, he asks for God's aid that we all may be found without sin, according to His will. Although the singer refers to his own sins and repentance, the Spruch has throughout a general, almost congregational tone, which is underscored at the end by the shift to the first person plural. Once more there is no despair, but complete confidence in the availability of divine assistance. The cataloguing effect — not quite as pronounced as in the preceding Spruch — is again emphasized by the frequent repetition of the conjunction daz.

The following Spruch also makes a direct appeal. The singer prays that God, the source of all compassion, may preserve and waken him before the time of
judgment. He wants help to make himself right with Christ and to learn to love Him with all his heart. If this hope is fulfilled, he will be happy. If he has lost God's grace by breaking His commandment, he seeks full pardon because of the Trinity, the resurrection, God's love for His mother, and her supplication. He asks assistance not only for himself, that he may escape his sins, but for all who, in hope of heaven, wish to find God. There is a marked similarity to the previous stanza: God is addressed directly, reference is made to the intercession of Mary, and a personal appeal is broadened in the last verse to include all penitent humanity. The author calls attention to his cataloguing by his oft repeated durch, "because of."

The last Spruch in the cycle differs considerably from the others. It is not a prayer, but a sermon, and it begins as well as ends with the universal "us." To save us, God suffered pain and was hanged on a cross. His death averted that of the singer, who alas, easily forgets this great sacrifice. Nevertheless, God comes to console him when he calls. A pure maid bore a Child Who never sinned and now lives in heaven, and He takes there the best of those who have received His name in baptism. God well knows what the flesh will do if it grows old without baptism, and it is not good for the soul. God is the Highest, who rules over all things; He is the Father, the Son, and will become a lion, a sheep, a fire, a salvation, according to our individual deserts. Although the Spruch represents a different type of religious verse, it shares a number of elements with the others in the cycle. It cites the guilt both of the singer and humanity in general, mentions Mary, emphasizes the forgiving nature of divinity, and employs cataloguing to underscore a specific point — this time without the repetition of a particular word. The mood here, as in the preceding Sprüche, is marked by a thin curtain of solemnity which does not quite conceal a confident, even light-hearted optimism.

The overall impression which the cycle makes is certainly not that of personal confession and remorse. The singer is only a spokesman for his audience, and his sin and guilt are representative of theirs. Although the didacticism consists for the most part of very simple Christian doctrine, the poet is careful in each of the stanzas to present a theological aspect of the working of divine grace with which few laymen of that time or this would have been concerned. The singer never asks for God to direct his actions, but to direct his will, for only through our own volition can we be saved. If the Jena stanzas were indeed composed by Tannhäuser, they support the possibility that the poet was a cleric.

The Jena poem is as important for the melody to which it is written as for its own sake. Assuming that the work is Tannhäuser's, the melody is one of two by him which are extant. Its composition reinforces the impression made by the music of Leich IV and the examination of the verses of the other Leiche, which is that Tannhäuser always attempted to get maximum use of a melodic theme or phrase by repetition and variation. The music of the Abgesang shows an interesting re-use of motives and phrases from the Stollen and from the first
part of the *Abgesang* itself, fitted together in a mosaic-like pattern. The form of the entire song is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABCD</th>
<th>ABCD</th>
<th>EFG EFG' AG&quot;HI AG&quot;HJ.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stollen</td>
<td>Stollen</td>
<td>Abgesang</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The third phrase (C) ends with a descending fifth which reappears as the cadence of lines 11, 16, and 20 (G and the two appearances of G"). The whole of line 4 (D) is incorporated into the long closing line (J), making the closing quatrain begin and end like the *Stollen* melody, but using material from the *Abgesang* in the middle. The treatment of the material introduced in line 11 is quite ingenious (G, G', and G"'). Lines 11 and 14 (G and G') begin alike but end differently. G" (lines 16 and 20) begins with a new *Auftakt* and adds one ornamental note, but ends with the same cadence as G (line 11). The repeated sections reflect the poetic form, which uses a new meter and rhyme scheme for the verse triplet with which the *Abgesang* begins. The whole form resembles the structure of a *Leich*.78

His *Sprüche* reveal that Tannhäuser shared the strongly didactic tendency of his age. The first cycle begins with the narrator giving a simple account of his homelessness, unencumbered by any moralizing. In the second *Spruch*, however, he admits that his plight is partly his own fault, that he is suffering from his own mistakes. The third in the cycle develops this theme into allegory as he lists the traits which would build the house of his character. The fourth *Spruch* teaches geography as it parodies the songs of those who claim to have traveled widely. And the good advice of the last *Spruch*, which instructs in court etiquette, is not nullified by its somewhat ironic tone. A similar mixture of humor and didacticism permeates the second *Spruch* cycle, for what begins as a parody of crusade songs, ends as a picture of the life of Everyman, buffeted from place to place by the winds of fate. In the first *Spruch* of the third cycle the narrator reports on the political situation of the Empire, and in the second informs his hearers of the best subjects for song. In the next three he tells of the property he lost through his own extravagance, and thus presents by inference a picture of the transience of earthly possessions. The last *Spruch* of the series, with its description of the run-down estate, is a humorous sketch of the situation of an impoverished nobleman, but it is also an allegorical representation of the vanity and corruption of all worldly things. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the first three *Spruch* cycles, like the last, were composed primarily for moral or religious edification. What makes them didactic, perhaps at times without the intention of the author, is their humor and the spirit of their age. Humor exposes human failings to the objective scrutiny of reason, which is likely to

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draw general conclusions from specific behavior. And Tannhäuser's age was one which saw all individual phenomena and experience as symbols of universal creation and history.