Tannhäuser

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THE MEDIEVAL LEGEND

The Tannhäuser legend grew out of a ballad of unknown authorship which was composed shortly before or after the poet's death, probably in the decade from 1264 to 1274. The poem is one of a group of medieval works that treat fictional incidents in the lives of certain minnesingers. In the song, “Vom edlen Möringen,” the Ulysses-Penelope theme is transferred to Heinrich von Morungen, who returns home just in time to forestall the marriage of his wife to another poet, Gottfried von Neifen; in “Vom Brennenberger,” Reinmar von Brennenberg becomes the hero of the well-known story in which a lady is made to eat the heart of her dead lover; in “Der Welt Lohn,” Wirnt von Gravenberg is so disturbed by a meeting with Dame World that he gives up all worldly activity and goes on a crusade to strive for the salvation of his soul; Walther, Wolfram, and Reinmar von Zweter take part in the singers' contest in “Der Sängerkrieg auf der Wartburg”; and Neidhart appears as the central figure in a long series of amusing songs and dramatic sketches.

The best known version of “Das Lied von dem Tannhäuser” is a song of twenty-six four-line stanzas118 which tells of a knight who is living in Venus Mountain, surrounded by every pleasure, when he is overcome with remorse. He leaves and journeys to Pope Urban IV to obtain absolution, but is told that he will no sooner expiate his sin than will a dry staff in the pope's hand begin to grow. Sorrowfully he returns to the Venus Mountain, and three days later green leaves appear on the staff. Messengers are sent to look for the knight, but he cannot be found and the pope is damned. This first appeared in print in a Nürnberg broadside of 1515.

The great mass of scholarship which has attempted to show that the Tannhäuser ballad in its variant forms is the product of one or another folk tradi-

118 Subsequent references will be to Text D, John Meier, ed., Deutsche Volkslieder: Balladen (Berlin & Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1935), pp. 145-46. In a study of this version, Selma Hirsch, “Die älteste Gestalt der Ballade vom Tannhäuser,” Jahrbuch des Vereins für niederdeutsche Sprachforschung, 56-57 (1930-31), 194-204, states that it is the oldest of the variants, but that it consisted of only twelve stanzas in its original form and that the additional stanzas were included by a later poet. Her reasoning, based essentially on the belief that the “added stanzas” are either repetitious or introduce extraneous elements, is fallacious. Succinctness is a rather uncommon quality in Middle High German narrative verse. Meier includes a version of the ballad which appears in a manuscript of the mid-fifteenth century, but it is apparently not as old as that of the broadside.
tion\textsuperscript{119} has failed to consider fully the implications of the historical references in the poem. It speaks of an obscure pope who ruled for only three years and of a poet who is mentioned by no contemporary, is referred to in no official document, and is known only by a descriptive title which he assumes in several poems but which may not have been his real name. The two men were contemporaries and probably died within three or four years of each other.\textsuperscript{120} That the ballad should preserve their chronological relationship to each other indicates the following: that the legend was preceded by the ballad, that the original version was essentially the same as the Nürnberg broadside, and that it was the work of a thirteenth-century poet. He drew from the most obvious of sources, for everything he treats can be found in the songs of or in references to Walther von der Vogelweide.\textsuperscript{121} The first two stanzas of the ballad introduce the hero and the wonders of the Venus Mountain, a paradise of beautiful women and love which appears frequently in the writings of the late medieval and early modern period. The earliest reference in German literature to such a place is in Tristan, a work with which the author of the ballad may well have been familiar. In his famous literary review Gottfried links the realm of Venus to Walther.\textsuperscript{122}

After the introduction the narrative proper of the ballad begins abruptly with an argument between Tannhäuser and Venus. In the first five exchanges the speakers address each other by name the first three times, but not the following two. The altercation closely parallels that between Walther and Dame World in his song which begins: "Frö Welt, ir sult dem wirt sagen."\textsuperscript{123} Here, too, the first three exchanges, but not the last two, are introduced by the name of the adversary. Venus starts the argument in the ballad with a reminder of her affection: "Herr Danheiser, ir seyd mir lieb, daran solt ir mir gedencken!" Dame World uses a similar approach with Walther: "gedenke wie ich dirz erböt, waz ich dir dînes willen lie." Venus then brings up an oath with which

\textsuperscript{119} The most complete accounts of the literature on the Tannhäuser Ballad are contained in Philip Barto, Tannhäuser and the Mountain of Venus (New York: Oxford University Press, 1916) and Otto Löhmann, "Die Entstehung der Tannhäusergeschichte," Fabula, 3 (1960), 224-53.

\textsuperscript{120} Urban IV died in 1264. References to contemporary people and events in Tannhäuser's poems do not go beyond ca. 1265. He may have died in that year.

\textsuperscript{121} The discussion of Walther and the ballad is drawn largely from J. W. Thomas, "Walther von der Vogelweide and the Tannhäuser Ballad," Neophilologische Mitteilungen, 74 (1973), 340-47.

\textsuperscript{122} Ranke, II. 4801-15.

\textsuperscript{123} Lachmann, Die Gedichte Walther's von der Vogelweide, 100, 24-101, 22. Zander, p. 31, mentions the similarity between Walther's song and the 1515 version of the ballad, but does not suggest an influence of one on the other. Neither does Hermann Güntert, Kalypso (Halle: Niemeyer, 1919), although he suggests (p. 104) that the thirteenth-century version of the Tannhäuser legend may have had Dame World as the temptress, rather than Venus. So, too, does Golther, "Tannhäuser in Sage und Dichtung," p. 22.
her loved one is supposed to have bound himself to her: "Ir habt mir einen aydt geschworen," which recalls the obligation which Walther had incurred and paid: "mîn grôziu gülte ist abe geslagen." Dame World also alludes to a bond between herself and the poet when she tells Walther: "sô dû mir rehte widersagest, sô wirst dû niemer wol gemuot." In their replies, Tannhäuser denies and Walther renounces any obligations to their respective temptresses, but the latter persist. Venus says: "Herr Danheiser, wie reht ir nun? Ir solt bey mir beleyben," while her counterpart asserts: "Walther, dû zurnest âne nôt: dû solt bî mir bellben hie." In rejecting the offer of a beautiful woman for his own, Tannhäuser expresses a fear of eternal punishment: "So müst ich in der helle glut auch ewigklich verbrinnen," as does also Walther in a similar context: "dîn zart hät mich vil nâch betrogen." A fear of damnation is likewise implied in Walther's comment on his host: "swer ime iht sol, der mac wol sorgen," as well as in his statement that he would be happy to return, "wan deich fürhte dîne lâge, vor der sich nieman kan bewarn." In their next exchange Venus and Tannhäuser speak of the joys of love as symbolized in the former's red lips, which recalls Walther's remark about the affection of Dame World: "wand er vil süezer fröiden gît." And Tannhäuser's cry, "Was hilffet mich ewer roter mundt? Er ist mir gar unmere," expresses the same thought as Walther's more restrained "Frô Welt, ich hân ze vil gesogen: ich wil entwonen, des ist zît."

The strife between Tannhäuser and Venus reaches a climax when he calls her a she-devil and she objects to such abuse: "Ir seyt ein Teüffellinne!" "Herr Danheiser, was reht ir nun, das ir mich günnen schelten?" Walther too refers to the diabolical nature of his antagonist and vows to speak abusively of her from then on: "doch was der schanden alse vil, dô ich dîn hinder wart gewar, daz ich dich iemer schelten wil." In desperation Tannhäuser prays to Mary for aid: "Maria mutter, reyne maydt, nun hilfft mir von den weyben!" Walther's final words are also expressed as a prayer: "got gebe iu frowe, guote naht." In his Leich, however, he has a passage which resembles Tannhäuser's cry more closely. He speaks of Mary as "der reinen süezen maget," and entreats: "Maget und muoter, schouwe der kristenheite nôt, dû blüende gert Arônes." 124 Venus now agrees to let Tannhäuser go and asks a favor: "Her Danheiser, ir solt urlaub han, mein lob das sol ir preysen, wo ir do in dem landt umbfart." Dame World, in giving Walther leave to depart, also makes a request: "Sît ich dich niht erwenden mac, sô tuo doch ein dinc des ich ger: gedenke an manegen liechten tac." Both ladies are apparently inviting the poets to compose songs in their honor.

The last statement of Venus as Tannhäuser leaves, "Nembt urlaub von dem Greysen," has no connection with the preceding content and has evoked considerable speculation. It has been suggested that the reference is to dwarfs in the

124 Lachmann, 3, 28-4, 4.
mountain,125 to King Arthur,126 to the legendary Eckart,127 to the pope,128 to Wotan,129 and to old men in general.130 Assuming that the author of the ballad was familiar with Walther's song, the words are quite clear. The "Greyse" is the "wirt" to whom the poet has made a final payment and who has no further claim on him. Both terms were well known to medieval theology: St. Paul refers to the "old man" as the symbol of humanity's carnal nature, while there are many Biblical allusions to Satan as the lord, or "wirt," of this world. After the final remark by Venus, Tannhäuser leaves the mountain, "in iamer und in rewen," and determines to journey to Rome and seek readmission into the family of Christianity through the intercession of the pope. His goal is the same as that of Walther when the latter says: "Ich wil ze hereberge varn." Both wish to return to their spiritual home.

At this point the ballad becomes the story of a penitent sinner and Walther's "Frö Welt" comes to an end. However, several other poems by Walther may have supplied the subject matter for the second half of Tannhäuser's adventures. One song tells of a contrite sinner who hopes to atone for his transgressions and save his soul by going on a crusade.131 In another the singer declares that it is time for penitence, and prays that he may be made pure before his soul is lost.132 A third expresses the main theme of the ballad — that God will always forgive the repentant sinner — in the lines: "swen si [die Welt] nû habe verleitet, der schouwe sînen trôst: er wirt mit swacher buoze grözer sünde er­löst."133 Tannhäuser travels to Rome, but finds that the pope takes a most un-Christian attitude with respect to the forgiveness of sin. One thinks at once of Walther's attacks on the latter, such as: "sîn sîüner mordet hie und roubet dort, sîn hirte ist zeinem wolve im worden under sînen schâfen,"134 or "seht wie iuch der bâbest mit des tievels stricken seiter."135

The pope declares that the dry staff in his hand will send forth leaves before Tannhäuser will receive God's grace, whereupon the knight sadly departs, saying: "Maria mutter, reyne maydt, muss ich nun von dir scheyden?" Thus, for the second time, he addresses Mary in the words of Walther's Leich. When we remember the following designation in the Leich, "du blüende gert Arônes," the origin of the staff miracle in the ballad becomes apparent. Earlier Tannhäuser

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128 Elster, p. 9.
130 Fernand Desonay, "Der italienische Ursprung der Tannhäuser-Sage," Universitas, 3 (1948), 149-61.
131 Lachmann, 76, 22-78, 23.
132 Lachmann, 122, 24-123, 40.
133 Lachmann, 124, 39-40.
134 Lachmann, 33, 29-30.
135 Lachmann, 33, 2.

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prayed to Mary for aid, now he regrets being cut off from her, soon — in the form of the dry staff — she will send forth green leaves and thereby announce his salvation. Of course, the author might have got this symbol of Mary elsewhere, for it had appeared in German verse nearly two hundred years previously in the "Marienlied von Melk," but the fact that the designations of "pure maid" and "mother" appear in both works in connection with a blooming staff makes it seem likely that the ballad drew from the Leich. Tannhäuser returns to the mountain and Venus, who greets him affectionately. The idea of the return may have been suggested by the passage where Dame World invites Walther to come back "niuwan só dich der zit beträge," and the latter confesses that he would very much like to if he were not afraid of her snares.

It is a mistake to assume, as many critics have done, that the author of the ballad intended Tannhäuser to be damned at the end; the witness of Mary — the blooming staff — is unequivocal. However, a second sin has been committed and must be punished, and that is why Pope Urban is damned. He is the cause of the sin and receives the punishment which otherwise would have been Tannhäuser's. The logic here was as clear to an audience of the thirteenth century as was that of the vicarious atonement of Christ. In both instances there is an appeasing of divine justice by means of a substitute. However, the damnation of a pope is a serious matter, and some modern scholars have been reluctant to believe that a medieval poet would have given the ballad such a conclusion. They have

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136 The Tannhäuser ballad provides a transition in the evolution of the blooming staff as a literary device. The development begins, of course, with the account in the fourth chapter of the Book of Numbers. In the Middle Ages religious writers adopted it as a designation for Mary (virga Aaron florida). The Tannhäuser ballad employed it as a symbol of Mary and also of forgiveness. Later writers and legends — influenced by the ballad, but ignorant of the dual symbolism — used the blooming staff only as a sign of forgiveness. H. Holland, in Geschichte der altdutschen Dichtkunst in Bayern (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1862), pp. 508-10, tells of a rose-bearing staff in connection with the pardoning of a Herr von Schnewburg and refers to other legends in South Germany and Austria in which blossoming staffs appear. Viktor Junk, in Tannhäuser in Sage und Dichtung (München: Beck, 1911), pp. 17-18, gives an account of a Swedish water spirit whose salvation is made evident by a blooming staff. A heroic source of the motif is given by Haupt, pp. 315-22, who maintains that the Tannhäuser ballad was a product of heroic legend and that the staff was the spear which Dietrich threw at Wittich in the Vilcinsaga.

137 All of the scholars who have expressed an opinion on the matter have assumed that, in the earliest form of the ballad, Tannhäuser was damned. But folk interpretation, as indicated by changes in the ballad through oral transmission, has assessed the matter quite differently. The version which Heinrich Kornmann gives in Chapter 14 of his Mons Veneris: Frau Veneris Berg (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1614) says that Tannhäuser will remain in the Venus Mountain until Judgment Day and that God will then decide his fate. Later variants make it clear that Tannhäuser is redeemed.
considered the damnation to be a later addition, a product of the Reformation. But Walther proves that a thirteenth-century singer could suggest such a thing and once more supplies a possible inspiration for the ballad writer. When Pope Innocence III announced the excommunication of Otto IV, Walther reminded the pope of his proclamation during the coronation of the emperor and implied that the former was damned by his own words: "ir sprâchent 'swer dich segene, sî gesegent: swer dir fluoche, sî verfluochet mit fluoche volmezz." The appearance of Urban IV and Tannhäuser together in the ballad is convincing evidence that the work was composed, largely in its present form, by a thirteenth-century poet. The fame of Walther at that time was such that it is easier to believe that the unknown author of the ballad was familiar with his verse than that he was not. Therefore, when the ballad treats the same material in the same general manner as do songs by Walther, the assumption is that one was influenced by the other. To be sure, much of this material did not originate with Walther and the anonymous poet could have got it from other German or Latin sources. However, in none of these is the treatment so similar to that of the ballad as in Walther's poems. Indirectly, these poems provide the first German description of a Court of Venus. Directly, they supply the argument between hero and temptress, the identity of the "Greyse," the theme of the penitent pilgrim and the boundless mercy of God, the figure of the un-Christian pope, the symbol of the blooming staff, the idea of a return to the temptress, and the damnation of the pope.

Although the Tannhäuser ballad treats two historical, contemporaneous people and draws largely from poems which have a theological, rather than mythological background, it is quite possible that the composition of the poem was influenced to a limited extent by folklore. Certainly the motif of the relationship between a mortal and a divinity, the Ulysses-Calypso theme, was as popular then as later. There were doubtless many tales of men and fairies that may have colored the narrative, and the classical Venus may have been only a pseudonym for the German mountain spirit, Holda, or the goddess Freia. The author might also have been aware that, according to certain myths, the entrance into a realm of earth spirits was symbolic of death, and the return only a vain attempt to rejoin the living. And he certainly knew the broad implications of the sojourn in the mountain with regard to the conflict between Christianity and the pagan past. However, if the anonymous author of the ballad was typical of thirteenth-century writers, he was a sophisticated artist, strongly rooted in a Judeo-Christian culture, who composed for a refined and courtly audience which felt as remote from a primitive mythology as does the modern audience. As a basis for interpreting the work, mythology can safely be ignored.

138 Junk, p. 18; Barto, Tannhäuser and the Mountain of Venus, p. 103; Lohmann, p. 248;
139 Lachmann, 11, 13-15.
A second approach to an understanding of the author's intent is to assume that he identified Venus with her literary prototype, Walther's Dame World. The narrative then would present an allegorical conflict between Christianity and the pleasures (evils) of the flesh — certainly a topical theme. But difficulties immediately appear: thirteenth-century secular literature on the whole did not make this identification, and the true villain is not Venus, but the pope. Actually, at the time of the ballad's composition, Venus — when she was not the classical goddess — could be only one thing: minne. This is clear, especially in light of the famous Venus journey in Ulrich von Liechtenstein's Frauendienst. The story of the ballad is simply that the hero feels remorse because he has devoted himself exclusively to Venus (courtly love) and the pleasures of the Venus Mountain (the chivalric life) and turns to the Church for the remission of his sin. However, the Church leadership has so emphasized asceticism that it has forgotten a fundamental teaching of Christianity, that God has infinite capacity to forgive. The pope, therefore, becomes guilty not only of driving a repentant sinner away from the means of salvation, but also of excessive pride in presuming to limit the power of God.

The goal of the classical period of courtly verse — to find a harmonious balance in life between worldly and spiritual values — was never quite attained. And the asceticism advanced by the Church continually crept into the songs of the minnesingers to disturb their attempts to depict a life in which earthly joys did not interfere with the service of God. But Walther, for one, was wise enough to see that the values of chivalry were at variance with the religious doctrines advanced by the Church and said so in the well-known lines of his "Ich saz uf eime steine." As the ideals of chivalry faded during the thirteenth century, the religious emphasis on the ascetic life must have become ever stronger, particularly since the temporal power of the Church increased greatly in this period. The clash between the service of minne and the service of God is a basic element in the traditional crusade song, which may have been a model for the ballad with respect to the central conflict and also the theme of departure and return. Another genre which may have influenced its composition — either directly or through Walther — is the dawn song, with the alternating arguments between knight and lady as to whether the former should leave.

One of the most interesting questions which the ballad poses is that of the relationship of its hero to the minnesinger. And the answers which scholars present vary widely. Some of those who support the theory that the work evolved from a primitive myth maintain that the fictional Tannhäuser is not the same as the historical one. Others of this school say that they are identical, but that the legend had taken definite form before the minnesinger's time, and that his name was lent to the hero because of similarities between the two with respect

140 Güntert, p. 102, says: "In der Dichtung des deutschen Mittelalters sind Venus und Frou Werle identisch," but he would not be able to support this statement with examples from the thirteenth century.
to character or situation. Among the ones who assume that the ballad preceded
the legend there is a difference of opinion as to whether the work was composed
specifically about the minnesinger or whether he became the hero more or less
accidentally. Several even suggest that the ballad reflects incidents in Tannhäuser's
life. The theory has been advanced that Tannhäuser, after a life of debauchery,
was seized with remorse and actually made a pilgrimage to Rome, and that he
returned to his evil ways when refused absolution by the pope. Another
scholar develops this idea further and reconstructs the following chapter in
the life of the minnesinger as a source for the ballad. While on his crusade he
came into a remote region of Asia Minor, was there involved in a love affair
with a Mohammedan princess, and remained for a year or more. Satiety and
repentance led him back to the Church and he made a pilgrimage to Rome,
where he was rejected by the pope. An outcast from Christianity, he returned
to the Orient and his Mohammedan sweetheart and was never seen by Westerners
again. Since the hero not only neglected his holy mission as a crusader, but
even consorted at length with an enemy of Christianity, the hardness of the
pope's verdict was understandable. It is proposed that the name Frene, by which
the heroine is known in another version of the ballad, was the name of the princess
and that her court may have been in a castle on a mountain. A third scholar
suggests that the ballad grew out of a boast by the minnesinger that he had been
in the Venus Mountain and enjoyed the love of its queen; a fourth, that it is
an attack on the pope for having excommunicated Tannhäuser because of the
latter's anti-Roman political leanings.

More conservative scholarship restricts itself to Tannhäuser's works in seeking
to explain the connection between minnesinger and ballad. They portray a man
who demands a joyous affirmation of life, who describes merry dances, who
tells of his enjoyment of love's delights, and all in all reveals a livelier sensuousness
than do his contemporaries — who, however, in later songs, laments his fate
and blames himself for his grievous situation. Such a figure could readily become
a symbol for a way of life that an ascetic Church deplored and a suitable servant
and victim of a heathen goddess of love. For the pious he could be a notorious
representative of wantonness; for the more sympathetic, an example of a new
literary type: the noble sinner. In addition to the character of the narrator, Tannhäuser's
verse contains other elements which may be reflected in the ballad. His
Leiche and songs refer three times to Paris and Venus, and his name might well
occur to a poet who was seeking a contemporary figure as an associate of the
goddess. The beautiful girl of whom he sings and the love-making in the forest
could also have supplied the germ for the Tannhäuser-Venus relationship. The

141 Zander, p. 18, cites the seventeenth-century scholar, Melchior Goldast, as having made
this suggestion. It was also advanced by Bernhardt, p. 103.
142 Zander, p. 31.
143 Rottauscher, p. 45.
144 Erich Schmidt, "Tannhäuser in Sage und Dichtung," Nord und Süd, 63 (1892), 183.
many difficult tasks of the minne parodies, including the obtaining of the apple of Paris, may have inspired the seemingly impossible condition set by the pope for the salvation of the knight: that the staff should green. And the minne parodies might have been connected to the strife between the knight and minne-Venus at the beginning of the ballad, at least to the extent of giving a name to the hero.

An unusual feature of the ballad is the harsh and nondoctrinal position taken by the pope with regard to the penitent sinner. However, one does not need to look beyond Tannhäuser's works for an explanation of it. Urban IV followed the policy of his predecessors in attempting to destroy the power of the Hohenstaufens. He forbade under threat of excommunication the election of Konradin, the grandson of Emperor Friedrich II, to the throne of Germany, and excommunicated Friedrich's son, Manfred, offering Manfred's kingdom of Naples and Sicily to Count Charles of Anjou. The latter action in particular aroused anger throughout Germany. Although Tannhäuser's verse is much less political than is Walther's, still there is no question as to his Hohenstaufen sympathies. And the composer of the ballad, who was certainly no friend of the pope, may well have been aware of Tannhäuser's politics when he tells of the un-Christian treatment of his hero. Since it is above all the story of a penitent, the ballad especially calls to mind the Spruch cycle under Tannhäuser's name in the Jena Manuscript. The resemblances are, for the most part, quite general; both contain a confession of sin, emphasize the limitless power of God to forgive, and stress the role of Mary as an intermediary. However, one stanza of the ballad shows some verbal similarities to lines in the cycle.145 Those who believe the Jena Sprüche authentic assume that they influenced either the composition of the ballad or the choice of hero, while scholars who consider them spurious maintain that they were attributed to Tannhäuser because of the ballad. The penitent songs of later centuries which were ascribed to the minnesinger reveal the influence of both Jena Sprüche and ballad.

Probably not the least of the reasons why the minnesinger became connected with the ballad is his name, Tannhäuser: the forest-dweller. For forests are in mountains, and both are the homes of supernatural beings and enchanted courts like that of the Venus Mountain. The name Tannhäuser could summon up a host of dark and mysterious impressions for thirteenth-century listeners, and invite all sorts of allegorical interpretations. They knew tales of men who had been

145 Meier, p. 146:

Ach Babst, lieber herre mein,
Ich klag euch meine sünde [sic],
Die ich mein tag begangen hab,
Als ich euchs wil verkünde.

Holz, I, 75:
Ich kvnde dich herre myne klage.

Ich habe gesvndeget myne tage.
enticed into the forests and mountains by evil spirits and associated these regions with the mythological past. A Tannhäuser was certainly a proper companion for a heathen goddess, and the name might even have furnished the initial idea from which its author developed the ballad. The aptness of the name has caused some to look beyond the minnesinger in seeking the archetype of the ballad hero. One theory holds that Venus and her knight have nothing to do with either classical mythology or thirteenth-century history, but evolved from two figures of the Vilsicina saga: Fria and Wittich, whose name means “forest dweller,” or Tannhäuser, and who once lived in a mountain with dwarfs. Another conjecture is that in German mythology the name was a designation of a wind demon who sometimes left his forest home to visit the goddess of love. A third theory is that the name was derived from “Wotanhäuser,” and is connected with the mountain where Wotan and his wife Freya (goddess of love) dwelt. The knight, accordingly, was originally called “The Wotanhäuser” because he forsook Christianity to return to the heathen gods of the Germanic past. Such hypotheses are not tenable as they have been presented: as explanations of the origin of the ballad. But they may have a certain validity in explaining the manner in which the author reworked Walther’s material and the choice of a name for his hero.

Further proposals concerning the name of the hero of the ballad agree that it came from the minnesinger, but claim that the minnesinger was substituted for an earlier hero. One scholar maintains that a Flemish version is older and that the name of its hero, Daniel, was changed during the Reformation to Tannhäuser because of the latter’s opposition to the pope and the similarity in sound. A second critic compares the content of certain songs by Heinrich von Morungen and the character they portray with the ballad and suggests that he was the original hero, whom tradition had confused with a colleague.

Considering the many theories regarding the origins and sources of the Tannhäuser ballad, it is a little strange that there has been almost no speculation as to who the author might have been. The only suggestion made was advanced by a seventeenth-century scholar who believed that it was the minnesinger Tannhäuser himself. Modern critics have not taken this opinion seriously, and perhaps should not. It nevertheless has something in its favor. Although several contemporary scholars have recognized that the situation of the hero of the ballad is not as hopeless as was thought by those of the past century, criticism has completely ignored the ironic humor of the conclusion of the ballad. The

146 Haupt, p. 320.
147 Edm[und]. Veckenstedt, “Tannhäuser [sic], ein Dämon des Windes,” Das Magazin für die Literatur des In- und Auslandes, 111 (1887), 73-75.
149 Barto, Tannhäuser and the Mountain of Venus, p. 103.
151 Zander, p. 15.
hero has the best of everything, although he may not know it. He enjoys all
the physical pleasures which the Venus Mountain can offer without jeopardizing
his soul in the least, for no less a person than the pope has been damned in his
stead. Few besides Tannhäuser would have thought of such a solution. However,
the form of the ballad is unlike that of any poem ascribed to Tannhäuser and
weighs against his authorship.

The damnation of the pope was soon lost during the diffusion of the ballad
into folk mythology. The most tenacious element was the Venus Mountain,
and it was primarily through this that the ballad affected the writings of the
late medieval period. Although Gottfried's reference to the Venus Court was
considerably earlier, the location of the court in a mountain occurred first in
the ballad, and it can be assumed that, as far as Germany is concerned, the Venus
Mountain theme is a product of the ballad. The incidence in extant medieval
literature of the motif in its purest form has been recorded, and its significance
for the period would be relatively easy to evaluate if one were to ignore the
existence of similar motifs in Western literature. But there are many of these,
and one must consider the likelihood of interaction and interdependence as well
as the possibility that similar stories may have no historical connection with
each other. For wherever there are caves, there are reports of fantastic wealth
and splendid assemblages in them; where are myths of supernatural beings, there
are tales of human association with them. Equally universal is the idea of an
enchanted realm in which each physical desire is satisfied. Such a domain is the
paradise of amorous pleasure in the Celtic legend of Morgain la Fée, which has
been linked to the Tannhäuser Venus Mountain. Another is Avalon to which
the sorely wounded Arthur was borne, to dwell for ages with the beautiful elfin
ruler, Argante. A third is the fairy island to which the infant Lancelot was carried,
so that he might later serve its queen. Of particular interest with respect to the
Venus Mountain is the story of Thomas of Erceldoune who, according to a Middle
English poem and a Scottish ballad, was enticed by a queen of fairies into an
underground paradise. Thomas, like Tannhäuser, was a thirteenth-century poet,
and it has been maintained that poem and ballad were preceded by a Celtic legend
which was the source of the German song. A like claim has been made for
the Swan Knight legend, also of Celtic origin. This tells of a knight who
comes from a wondrous realm where every desire is fulfilled, marries the queen
of a troubled country to which he brings peace and stability, and abruptly returns
to his homeland. The chief elements — land of enjoyment, departure and un-
expected return, and association with a queen — appear in the Tannhäuser
ballad, although in a quite different context. Despite obvious similarities, it is

152 Especially throughout the books by Barto and Amman.
154 Alexander Kruppe, "Die Sage vom Tannhäuser," Mitteilungen der schlesischen Ge-
155 Barto, Tannhäuser and the Mountain of Venus, p. 71.
most unlikely that these legends had any more than a peripheral effect on the
composition of the Tannhäuser ballad because of the close parallels between it
and the well-known songs by Walther. It is also improbable that the Celtic
legends significantly affected the subsequent occurrence of the Venus Mountain
theme. For the popularity of the ballad was such as to indicate that its influence
was predominant here, and perhaps may even be traced in the development of
some allied motifs: the Melusine, Lorelei, and Undine material, and that dealing
with subterranean palaces where intruders fall into a long-lasting sleep.

Medieval writers describe the Venus Mountain and the life there in various
ways and from widely differing points of view. Some make it a den of iniquity
and continued orgy. Others depict an existence which is quite proper although
devoted entirely to pleasure, with music, story-telling, dancing, and other forms
of social entertainment. This is what appears in Heinric van Aken's verse novel
of the early fourteenth century, Margarete van Limburg, when Margarete's
brother, Heinrich, spends two years in the castle of Dame Venus during his many
adventures. A similar merry and innocent life is revealed in the second half of the
century in Meister Alswert's, "Der Tugenden Schatz," when a dwarf leads the
poet into the Venus Mountain and shows him the varied entertainment of its
inhabitants. Here, as well as in other verse tales of Alswert which tell of Queen
Venus, she is simply the embodiment of minne. The poet obviously knew Tann-
häuser's songs as well as the ballad: he employs to an exaggerated degree the
latter's cataloguing technique, describes from head to toe a lovely, curly-headed
blonde to whom he makes love on the edge of the forest, and uses many phrases
which are characteristic of Tannhäuser. A third narrative of the fourteenth
century, the Italian novel, Guerino (1391), by Andrea dei Magnabotti, has more
of the elements of the ballad, even though the heroine is called a sibyl rather
than Venus. Soon after Guerino enters the sibyl's mountain he sees an inscription
which says that whoever remains inside for more than a year must stay until
Judgment Day, and then be eternally damned. The many pleasures of the sub-
terranean realm and the charms of its queen — who is not only a prophetess, but
also a goddess of love — almost cause him to delay too long. But he discovers
the diabolical nature of the society in the mountain, leaves at the last moment,
and goes to the pope, from whom he receives absolution for having consorted
with a witch. Here, as in the ballad, one finds the pleasure palace in the
mountain, the evil temptress, remorse, the pope, and the escape from damnation.

There is little mention of the Venus Mountain in the extant literature of
the fourteenth century, but the references to it during the following two centuries
— about fifty in number — indicate that it was a popular subject for singers
and storytellers. One of the more important fifteenth-century treatments of the
subject matter of the ballad also chooses the Italian mountain of the sibyl as a
setting. This is a novel of education, La Salade (ca. 1440), which the Provençal
Antoine de la Sale wrote for the edification of his pupil, Jean d'Anjou, the
son of King René of Naples and Jerusalem. One of the stories which de la
Sale relates is of a trip that he took to the region of Monte della Sibilla where he learned the tale of a German knight who had remained in it almost to the end of the allotted year. He then tears himself away and, filled with guilt, hurries to Rome to obtain absolution. The pope delays his decision, and the knight's page, who has greatly enjoyed the life in the mountain, tells his master that they are about to be tried for heresy. Despairing of forgiveness and wanting to at least save his life, the knight returns to the sibyl queen. The pope regrets his hesitation and sends out messengers to tell the knight of his absolution, but it is too late and he cannot be found.\textsuperscript{156} Although the author does not mention the Guerino novel, he was certainly familiar with it. Additional features — the German hero, the failure of the pope to grant absolution, and the return to the magic realm — indicate that he also knew some form of the ballad. The works by Magnabotti and de la Salle were apparently the basis for a Czechish version which first appeared in the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{157}

A third witness to the existence of some sort of Tannhäuser legend in fifteenth-century Italy appears in an account in the \textit{De nobilitate et rusticitate dialogus} (ca. 1456) of the Zurich canon Felix Hemmerlin. The author claims that while he was in Bologna he saw a Swiss peasant who confessed to the pope that he and two German companions had lived with evil spirits in the mountains. At the end of a year, he had left, but the others had not been able to tear themselves away from the women there. Through the intercession of the canon, the peasant received absolution from a confessor designated by the pope.\textsuperscript{158}

At about the same time as Hemmerlin's dialogue, a German verse novel appeared which was set in the Venus Mountain. This was \textit{Die Mörin} (1453), by Hermann von Sachsenheim. While walking in the forest, the narrator is seized by the legendary Eckhart and a dwarf and carried into the wondrous land of Venus to answer charges that he has been inconsistent in love. The prosecutor is a Moorish girl, the defense attorney is Eckhart, and the judge is King Tannhäuser, a Frankish knight who had entered the realm some time before and had become the husband of Queen Venus. After a lengthy trial the narrator is permitted to return home. There are other elements in the novel beside the figures of Tannhäuser and Venus which recall the ballad. The debate between the Moorish girl and Eckhart reminds one of the argument between Tannhäuser and Venus, and there are several appeals to the Virgin Mary which resemble those in the ballad. There are also similarities in style and content to the works of the minnesinger: the

\textsuperscript{156} Beginning with Gaston Paris' essay on the Tannhäuser legend in his \textit{Legendes du moyen age} (Paris: Hachette, 1903), pp. 111-49, a school of thought has developed which maintains that the legend began in Italy and cites the works by Magnabotti and de la Salle as evidence. It includes Otto Denk, Fernand Desonay, Heinrich Dübi, Friedrich Kluge, Kristoffer Nyrop, and Marjatta Wis.


\textsuperscript{158} An account of Hemmerlin's report appears in Remy, p. 36.
nature introduction to the novel, the ironic humor which pervades it, and the baroque display of literary and geographic allusions. The eternal spring of the land of Venus and the pronounced minne parody of the joust in honor of Lady Infamy likewise are indications that Hermann was as familiar with the works of the poet as with the legend. In contrast to the heroine of the ballad, there is nothing diabolic in the character of Queen Venus.

It cannot be assumed, however, that the heroine of the Tannhäusler legend was gradually losing her witch-like nature, for in the same year the manuscript of Die Mörin was completed another appeared which shows her in the traditional role of evil seductress. It contains a mastersinger duet between Venus and Tannhäuser, who wants to leave her and return to the upper world. The argument follows that in the ballad for the most part, but has been expanded by the introduction of new material.¹⁵⁹ Later in the century a similar dramatic dialogue was recorded in which the role of Venus is assumed by Dame World, who, when convinced that Tannhäuser will leave her, recommends that he go to the Venus Mountain, the queen of which will receive him with open arms.¹⁶⁰ In the same manuscript as the mastersinger duet is a song, entitled "Tannhusers tagwise," in which the hero offers a morning prayer to Mary. He confesses the sin to which beautiful women have led him, recounts the events of Christ's passion as assurance that he will be forgiven, and proclaims his faith that Mary will help him escape the devil. There is no mention of Venus or a Venus Mountain, and only the appeal to Mary recalls the ballad. The "tagwise" was apparently inspired by the Sprüche attributed to Tannhäuser in the Jena Manuscript.

The wide variety of references to and treatments of the Venus Mountain motif during the fifteenth century show that a broad legend had developed which gave considerable latitude to poets in their interpretations of the characters and situations of the main figures. At the same time it is clear that the original ballad, with few, if any changes, enjoyed widespread popularity. In this respect a report by the Franciscan monk, Felix Faber, is important. In his Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae, Arabiae et Egypti Peregrinationem (1483), he tells of a Venus Mountain on Cyprus which, he maintains, is the original one from which all the others had received their names, including the mountain near Rome. With regard to the latter, he tells of what he calls a foolish rumor that the goddess was living inside with a retinue of men and women. He also relates of a song which apparently was sung by the people throughout Germany and dealt with a noble Swabian, named Tannhäuser, from the Tannhäuser

¹⁵⁹ This song and "Tanhusers tagwise" are included in Johann Georg Grässe, Der Tannhäuser und Ewige Jude, 2nd ed. (Dresden: Schönfeld, 1861), pp. 33-40 and Barto, Tannhäuser und the Mountain of Venus, pp. 224-30.
estate near Dünkelspüchel. He was said to have spent some time in the mountain with Venus before becoming penitent and going to the pope to confess. He was refused absolution, went back to the mountain, and was never seen again. He was supposed to be living there in sensual pleasure until Judgment Day.\footnote{Bibliothek des literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, 4 (1849), p. 221: “Unde de hoc carmen confictum habetur, quod manifeste a vulgo per Alemanniam canitur de quodam nobili Suevo, quem nominant Danhuser, de Danhusen villa prope Dünkelspüchel. Hunc fingunt ad tempus in monte cum Venere fuisset, et cum poenitentia ducrus Papae fuisse confessus, denegata fuit sibi absolutio, et sua regressus in montem nusquam comparuit, et in deliciis vivit, ut dicunt, usque ad diem judicii.” On the basis of Faber’s report, Reuschel, p. 659, theorizes that the historical Tannhäuser may have been shipwrecked at Cyprus and that his presence there, on the island of Venus Anadromene, may have given birth to a legend from which the ballad came. The assumption of a shipwreck is based on Tannhäuser’s Spruch about the winds at sea.\footnote{Barto, \textit{Tannhäuser and the Mountain of Venus}, p. 102, maintains that a Flemish version which appeared in 1544 gives the ballad in its oldest form. The hero’s name here is Daniel and was taken, Barto suggests (p. 145), from the protagonist of Stricker’s Arthurian epic, \textit{Daniel von dem blühenden Tal}. According to this theory, the hero has no connection with the minnesinger.\footnote{Uhl und, II (1866), 230.}} Faber’s designation of the rumor about a Venus Mountain as foolish is representative of many comments of the late fifteenth and the sixteenth century, for the Venus Mountain apparently had become something of a symbol of popular superstition. The chief satirists of the period — Sebastian Brant, Thomas Murner, and Johann Fischart — ridiculed the credulity of those who could believe in such a thing.

The appearance of the ballad in print in 1515 greatly contributed to its spread, and the many subsequent printings of the sixteenth century bear witness to its popularity. Some had a music score in addition to the text, and a few were accompanied by illustrations. Low German translations were made, one of which has received considerable critical attention.\footnote{Barto, \textit{Tannhäuser and the Mountain of Venus}, p. 102, maintains that a Flemish version which appeared in 1544 gives the ballad in its oldest form. The hero’s name here is Daniel and was taken, Barto suggests (p. 145), from the protagonist of Stricker’s Arthurian epic, \textit{Daniel von dem blühenden Tal}. According to this theory, the hero has no connection with the minnesinger.\footnote{Uhl und, II (1866), 230.}} The first scholar to pass judgment on the ballad did so soon after its publication. This was Johann Turmaier (Aventinus) who, in accordance with his predilection for finding significant places in history for legendary characters, identified its hero with a Gothic king, known to the Greeks as Thanauses, and did not mention the thirteenth-century minnesinger.\footnote{Barto, \textit{Tannhäuser and the Mountain of Venus}, p. 102, maintains that a Flemish version which appeared in 1544 gives the ballad in its oldest form. The hero’s name here is Daniel and was taken, Barto suggests (p. 145), from the protagonist of Stricker’s Arthurian epic, \textit{Daniel von dem blühenden Tal}. According to this theory, the hero has no connection with the minnesinger.\footnote{Uhl und, II (1866), 230.}} Since Turmaier referred to it as an old song, he apparently knew it before it was printed.

The Nürnberg broadside also may have caused Hans Sachs to become interested in the Tannhäuser material, for just two years after it appeared he wrote his Shrovetide play, “Das Hoffgesindt Veneris.” If so, he too must have been familiar with a general tradition, because the play contains nothing of the ballad except the Venus Mountain theme. As in \textit{Die Mörin}, “the faithful Eckhart” has an important role. Probably due to his activity as defense attorney for Hermann’s narrator, he has become a type character, the voice which warns against the
danger of associating with Venus. Eckhart follows the prologue on stage and cautions everyone that Queen Venus is coming and is intent on increasing the number of her retinue. Tannhäuser then appears and introduces himself as a famous Franconian knight who has been captured by Venus’ arrows. The other characters, one by one, defy her power, are warned vainly by Eckart, and fall victim to the goddess: knight, doctor, citizen, peasant, soldier, gambler, drinker, virgin, and married lady. At last Tannhäuser begs Venus to set him and the rest free. She refuses, saying that they will be subject to her as long as they live, and she commands the musician to start up the dance, in which all take part. At its conclusion she tells them of the wonderful life of many pleasures in the Venus Mountain and orders them to follow her there. There is nothing diabolic in the character of Venus, who represents only the pangs of love, or in the life in the Venus Mountain which she describes. The dance at the end of the play once more indicates that the verse of the minnesinger has influenced the development of the legend. It is quite likely that Hans Sachs based his work on a lost Shrovetide play which was performed in the early sixteenth century at Colmar in Alsace by a group from the village of Kiensheim.

“Das Hoffgesindt Veneris” is the only work by Hans Sachs which is based directly on the Tannhäuser legend, but several others mention it. Four Schwänke composed at mid-century (1545—1559) employ the Venus Mountain motif, and three of them reveal a new aspect of it. In “Der doctor im Venus perg” two Florentine painters tell a young doctor that they go every Whitsuntide to the Venus Mountain to enjoy themselves with the beautiful women there. When the doctor begs them to get him admitted too, they disguise themselves as a fabulous horse-like beast, carry him off at midnight, and throw him into the excrement of a public toilet. In “Das unhuelden pannen” a peasant who blames all of his troubles on witches is told by a travelling scholar how to get the better of them. The peasant tries his hand at magic, and stable boys, masquerading as witches, beat him severely. The scholar supported his claim to a knowledge of black art by saying that he had just come from the Venus Mountain. A maid in “Die sich unsichtbar haltende Magd” has been told by her employer how to make herself invisible, and she walks around nude during a party he is giving, playing tricks on the guests, who pretend they do not see her. A reference at the beginning of the tale to riding on a goat into the Venus Mountain and to the wondrous happenings to be seen there aroused the interest of the maid in magic. In a similar story, “Der pawren knecht mit der nebelkappen,” two vagabonds convince a peasant lad that an old hood they have brought from the Venus Mountain can make him invisible, and he gets a beating when he tries to avoid the innkeeper by means of it. They also spoke of strange events in the Venus

164 Eckhart is also associated with the Venus Mountain in Das deutsche Heldenbuch, which was written at about the same time as Die Mörin.
165 Wilhelm Creizenach, Geschichte des neueren Dramas, 2nd ed. (Halle: Niemeyer, 1923), III, 140.
Mountain and claimed to have learned magic there. The hero of the well-known play “Der fahrende Schüler im Paradeis” introduces himself as a man of unusual talents by saying that he not only has read much in books, but has also been in the Venus Mountain.

“Der doctor im Venus perg” depicts the Mountain as we have seen it before, as a place of beautiful women and sensual pleasure; presumably a locality of ill repute, since the doctor at first believes the strange steed to be the devil. In the three other Schwänke and the play, however, the eroticism usually connected with the Venus Mountain is lacking, and it has become a place of black art, a school for magicians. It has been suggested that this element of the Tannhäuser legend was borrowed from the Italian folklore surrounding a mountain north of Rome. The superstitions which were beginning to collect about the Brocken in the Harz Mountains may also have contributed something. Another development of the Venus Mountain myth in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries made it a place where treasures of gold and jewels were to be found. As such it became a convenient shield for thieves, who could offer stolen valuables for sale and say that they had been got from the Venus Mountain. A Nürnberg trial report of 1587 tells of one who vainly used this excuse for the possession of considerable money. Another account indicates that the alibi had been heard long before.

Although the Tannhäuser legend continued to be mentioned in passing, no other significant literary use of it was made in the sixteenth century. At the beginning of the seventeenth century it was discussed by the historian Melchior Goldast, who was the first to rediscover the medieval minnesong. He reported that the ballad was sung everywhere, and expressed the opinion that the minnesinger was the author and had composed it as a part of his pro-Hohenstaufen politics to discredit the pope. Goldast interprets the Venus Mountain of the ballad, not as the dwelling of a goddess, but simply as a house of ill repute.

More about the legend appeared a few years later in Heinrich Kornmann’s Mons Veneris, Fraw Veneris Berg (1614), which contains a collection of what classical and medieval writers have said about the goddess Venus and her court, as well as that which the author gathered himself on his many journeys. Among the latter accounts is one he heard in Asia Minor about a traveler who, attracted by the sound of music, finds a door in a mountain, enters, and sees a festive throng. Someone brings him wine, which he is afraid to drink. He pours it out and runs off with the cup. Two reports are of interest in that he connects the Italian sibyl and the Melusine legend with the Venus Mountain motif. The sibyl, so he has heard, lives in a mountain cave and changes once a week into a snake. A watch has been placed near the entrance to prevent people from

166 Reuschel, p. 657.
168 Zander, p. 18.
going in. Melusine, without the knowledge of her husband, changes every Saturday into a dragon. When he happens to find her in this form, she leaps out the window, flies three times around the castle, and disappears forever. Kornmann's other contemporary reports which have to do with the Tannhäuser legend include references to Venus caves in Switzerland and Sweden. He also quotes the ballad, but in a form which appears to have been deliberately altered. Instead of damning Urban IV at the end, it says that no priest should drive a sinner to despair, for his sins can be forgiven if he repents and does penance.\textsuperscript{169}

Although Kornmann attempted to completely exhaust his subject, there were doubtless many Venus Mountain stories being told at his time which he missed. One of them appears in a Latin letter of the year 1608 in which a physician writes of the visit of a boy to the Venus Mountain and of the latter's report on what he saw.\textsuperscript{170} The \textit{Mons Veneris} represents the high point in the history of the medieval Tannhäuser legend, and the interest in it gradually declined throughout the rest of the century. There were a few more printings of different versions of the ballad, a decreasing number of references to the Venus Mountain, and then almost complete silence, which was to continue a hundred years. The last significant developments before the lacuna were the appearance of a song which treated the material of the ballad in a monologue by the hero and the emergence in 1689 of a Danish variant.\textsuperscript{171}

The medieval Tannhäuser legend may have been influenced by German mythology, but its immediate source was a song composed about the time of the minnesinger's death, a ballad which drew heavily from several works by Walther. We cannot know how Tannhäuser happened to become its hero, but his evocative name, his emphasis on sensual joy, his expressions of regret for a prodigal life, and his anti-papal politics may have been contributing factors. As a legend grew out of the ballad, the pope was largely discarded and the figure of the penitent became dim, for it was the Venus Mountain which captured the popular imagination. This was a paradise of splendid courtly life, limitless wealth, and all sorts of sensual pleasures. For many it was simply a castle in the sky with no dangerous connotations; some thought of it, however, as a forbidden realm where those who entered might well lose their souls; others made it a school of black magic; some considered it primarily as a source of treasures. There are indications that the legend was colored by the works of the minnesinger. The carefree life in the Venus Mountain, the frequent references to dancing, the occasional detailed descriptions of feminine beauty, and the use of certain stylistic devices lead one to believe that some of those who made literary use of the legend were familiar with the works of the poet.

\textsuperscript{169} Heinrich Kornmann, \textit{Mons Veneris} (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1614), chapters 14, 16 and 27.
\textsuperscript{170} Otto Böckel, "Zur Sage vom Venusberg," \textit{Alemannia}, 13 (1885), 141-42.