Chapter 1

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Chess in Medieval German Literature: A Mirror of Social-Historical and Cultural, Religious, Ethical, and Moral Conditions[1]

Chess has intrigued people all over the world, and the game can actually look back to a very long history, wherever its origin actually might have been, whether in India, Persia, or Arabia.[2] In fact, chess is much more than just a game played by two people using a board to move pieces around fighting against each other until one side is defeated (checkmate). H. J. R. Murray formulated in his by now classic study *A History of Chess*:

> We must accordingly conclude that our European chess is a direct descendant of an Indian game played in the 7th century with substantially the same arrangement and method as in Europe five centuries later, the game having been adopted first by the Persians, then handed on by the Persians to the Muslim world, and finally borrowed from Islam by Christian Europe.[3]

[1] I would like to thank Christoph J. Steppich, Texas A&M University, for his critical reading and helpful suggestions. Sonja Musser Golladay was so kind to point out some remaining errors in my text. Not to forget, I am particularly grateful to Daniel E. O'Sullivan for his excellent achievements as editor.

[2] Hans and Siegfried Wichmann, *Schach: Ursprung und Wandlung der Spielfigur in 12 Jahrhunderten* (Munich: Callway, 1960).

[3] H. J. R. Murray, *A History of Chess* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 27. He adds later: "The game of chess was invented when some Hindu devised a game of war, and, finding the ashṭāpada board convenient for his purpose, adopted it as his field of battle." (42) See also Jenny Adams, *Power Play: The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Late Middle Ages*. The Middle

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Chess has always enjoyed a much higher cultural status than most other (board) games, serving in many ways as a reflection of culture, education, intelligence, political skills, virtues, vices, and so forth. David Shenk cites thirteenth-century ibn Khallikan as a witness of the infinite intellectual power, seductiveness, and significance of chess: "When Sissa had invented chess and produced it to King Shiram, the latter was filled with amazement and joy. He ordered that it should be preserved in the temples, and held it the best thing that he knew as a training in the art of war, a glory to religion and the world, and the foundation of all justice."[4]

Hardly any culture and any people exposed to this game has ever been able to resist the fascination, if not obsession with, exerted by chess, as the world of the European Middle Ages amply indicated from early on, and as the evidence from subsequent centuries confirms as well.[5] But in order to illustrate the extensive metaphorical, symbolic, political, and philosophical implications of the chess game throughout the ages, let me begin with a short discussion of a most powerful twentieth-century novella in which chess assumes central importance as an icon, a metaphor, and as a most complex symbol of how man can get caught in social, political, and ideological constraints and then faces the danger of breaking down in that system.

Shortly before committing suicide on February 22, 1942, the Austrian Jewish writer Stefan Zweig completed his *Schachnovelle* (Chess Novella), reflecting upon the impact the Nazis had on the lives of individual people, and drawing from the game of chess the inspiration to illustrate how a person could be destroyed by the machinations and abuses of a dictatorial system.[6] In the novella, a conservative young man who, in his role as a lawyer, administers the estates of members of the old Austrian monarchy and aristocracy, is appre-

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Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), focusing, however, primarily on late-medieval English literature.

4 David Shenk, *The Immortal Game: A History of Chess or How 32 Carved Pieces on a Board Illuminated Our Understanding of War, Art, Science, and the Human Brain* (New York, London, et al.: Doubleday, 2006), 13. See also Marilyn Yalom, *Birth of the Chess Queen: A History* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004)

5 See the comprehensive article on "Schachspiel" (game of chess) in Johann Heinrich Zedler's famous *Grosses vollstaendiges Universal-Lexicon Aller Wissenschafften und Kuenste*. Vol 34 (1742; Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1961–1964), 684–86. See also Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*. Vol. 8 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1898), 1956–68, for the terms "schach" to "schachzabel."

6 Stefan Zweig, *Schachnovelle*, ed. Brian Murdoch. Methuen's Twentieth Century Texts (London: Methuen, 1986), 3: "On one level, *Schachnovelle* is a tense and exciting narrative, but at the same time it challenges the reader to think about the nature of man's subjection to the tyranny of chance and time." See also the edition of the text in Stefan Zweig, *Meisternovellen* (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 1970), 349–402.

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hended by the Nazis and tortured by being kept all by himself for months without end in an almost sceptic hotel room with nothing to stimulate his mind. After more than half a year he happens to gain secretly possession of a chess book, and begins to learn all the moves and possible game strategies. Ultimately, however, he enters a stage of mental confusion, getting lost in more and more virtual chess games that he is schizophrenically playing against himself. The crisis really breaks out only later, once having been released from his cell and after having been treated by a medical doctor for his mentally disturbed mind. Getting involved in a real chess game against a world champion while fleeing the old world, he suddenly loses the connection to reality and gets very upset because his opponent is still playing the same game, whereas he has already moved into a very different one.

Whether we want to read Zweig's text as an expression of how traditional humanitarian values can get lost in a world of increased technical automation, as a protest against Nazi dictatorship, or fascism at large, or as an indication of man's infinite options, or lack thereof, to carve his life according to his own ideals and values, the author has basically presented the chess game as a symbol that requires ever new interpretations because of its infinite possibilities that the individual can pursue, though still limited by the chessboard and the rules according to which the pieces can move around.[7]

Indeed, chess is not necessarily harmless and simply a playful and enjoyable game, as many German and other writers have observed.[8] Instead, playing

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[7] Murdoch, "Introduction," 30–34; he emphasizes that "Chess as play helps human beings overcome the twin tyrannies of fate and time, and if it will outlast books, they too can also serve to pass time" (33). See also his study "Game, Image and Ambiguity in Zweig's *Schachnovelle*," *New German Studies* 11, 3 (1983): 171–89; Donald G. Daviau, "Stefan Zweig's *Schachnovelle*," *Monatshefte* 65 (1973): 370–84. Most recently, Kai Berkes, "Nihilistische Freude am 'Unmöglichen': Sebastian Haffners 'Geschichte eines Deutschen' und Stefan Zweigs 'Schachnovelle' wollen den 'Wahnsinn' begreifen," *Text und Wahrheit: Ergebnisse der Interdisziplinären Tagung Fakten und Fiktionen der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Mannheim, 28.–30. November 2002*, ed. Katja Bär (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2004), 153–66. For an application of the chess, or more generally the game symbolism, to medieval literature, see Albrecht Classen, "Erotik als Spiel, Spiel als Leben, Leben als Erotik: Komparatistische Überlegungen zur Literatur des europäischen Mittelalters," *Mediaevistik* 2 (1989): 7–42; id., "Minnesang als Spiel. Sinnkonstitution auf dem Schachbrett der Liebe," *Studi Medievali*, Serie Terza, XXXVI, 1 (1995): 211–39. See also the intriguing, ultimately however rather speculative, study by .Ursula Katzenmeier, *Das Schachspiel des Mittelalters als Struktu-rierungsprinzip der Erec-Romane*. Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universi-tätsverlag, 1989).

[8] *Porträt des Schachmeisters in Texten und Partien*, ed. Michael Ehn (Koblenz: H.-W. Fink, 1996); Jirí Veselý, "Das Schachspiel in der deutschsprachigen Literatur," *Deutsch-böhmische Literatur-beziehungen. Germano-Bohemica* (2004): 367–78; *Schachpartie durch Zeiten und Welten*, catalogue to the exhibit, ed. Hans and Barbara Holländer (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2005); for chess as a motif in paintings, see Marion Faber, *Das Schachspiel in der europäischen Malerei und*

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chess can have considerable implications for the player's life, both as a mirror and as a practicing field, and it also indicates the player's particular level of education, wisdom, and ability to cope in life according to his/her moves on the board.[9]

In European literature poets began to incorporate the chess game as a significant symbol of courtly society at least since the eleventh century—perhaps even the Romans might have played chess, though it seems more likely that the game entered Europe only by the sixth or seventh century via the Arabs on the Iberian Peninsula,[10] whereas the Roman *ludus latronum* employed rather different rules and had no pieces as in chess.[11] Particularly didactic and moral writers enjoyed referring to the chess game because it functioned particularly well for their purposes, such as in the case of the English *Moralitas de scaccario* (before the middle of the thirteenth century), whereas the clergy was generally forbidden to play chess.[12] With the help of the chess allegory one could address especially moral and ethical themes, such as we can observe in the satirical *Li jus des esqués* by Engreban d'Arras (ca. 1295). John of Wales' *Breviloquium de virtutibus antiquorum principum* (ca. 1260–1270) pushed the interest in chess as an allegory even further, which then deeply influenced many other clerical writers throughout the late Middle Ages.[13] One of the most

Graphik (1550–1750) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998); Gerhard Josten, *Schach auf Ölgemälden* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2006).

9 Modern authors, such as Ronan Benett (*Zugzwang: A Novel* [New York: Bloomsbury, 2007) and Mario Leoncini and Fabio Lotti (*Chi ha ucciso il campione del mondo?: scacchi e crimine* [Rome: Prisma, 2004]), have followed this tradition and continue to utilize the chess game as an excellent metaphor for life at large and society in specifics.

10 Wolfram Runkel, *Schach: Geschichte und Geschichten* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1995), 49–52.

11 Murray, *A History of Chess*, 394–96 (see note 3); Ferdinand Vetter, *Das Schachzabelbuch Kunrats von Ammenhausen, Mönchs und Leutpriesters zu Stein am Rhein. Nebst den Schachbüchern des Jakob von Cessole und des Jakob Mennel, ed. Ferdinand Vetter*. Bibliothek älterer Schriftwerke der deutschen Schweiz (Frauenfeld: J. Huber, 1892), XXIV.

12 Vetter, ed., *Das Schachzabelbuch*, XXXIII (see note 11).

13 Anežka Vidmanovà, "Die mittelalterliche Gesellschaft im Lichte des Schachspiels," *Soziale Ordnungen im Selbstverständnis des Mittelalters*, ed. Albert Zimmermann. Miscellanea Medievalia, 12, 1 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1979), 323–55 H. Petschar, "Das Schachspiel in der Literatur; Schachbücher, Schachallegorien," *Lexikon des Mittelalters*. Vol. VII (Munich: LexMa Verlag, 1995), 1428–30; Richard G. Eales, *The History of a Game* (London: Batsford, 1985); Raymond D. Keene, *Chess: An Illustrated History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990). There is a plethora of similar studies that don't need to be cited here all. For specific approaches to chess with a focus on its symbolic meaning for late-medieval society, see Heike Bierschwale, Oliver Plessow, "Schachbrett, Körper, Räderwerk: Verräumlichte Gesellschaftsmetaphorik im Spätmittelalter," *Raum und Konflikt: Zur symbolischen Konstituierung gesellschaftlicher Ordnung in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Christoph Dartmann, Marian Füssel, and Stefanie Rüther. Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme: Schriftenreihe des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496, 5 (Münster: Rhema, 2004), 59–81.

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famous books on chess was created in Spain by King Alfonso el Sabio (1221–1284), his *Libros de acedrex, dados e tablas*.[14] The history of chess literature, however, has continued ever since, whether we think of Marco Girolamo Vida's treatise *Scacchia Ludus* (1527), Eberhard Welper's *Das Zeit kurtzende Lust- und Spiel-Hauss* (1694), or F. D. Philidor's *Analyse du jeu des échecs* (1749, and many times thereafter, e.g., 1777).[15] Not surprisingly, many miniaturists also included scenes of chess games into the manuscripts, such as in the *Les vœux du Paon* by Jacques de Longuyon, Tournai, ca. 1350,[16] since they offered great opportunities to illustrate common aspects of life at court, which must have directly appealed to their patrons.

The author of the probably most influential and widely disseminated treatise on this game, the *Liber de moribus hominum et de officiis nobilium super ludo scaccorum* (ca. 1275), Jacobus de Cessolis, originated from the province of Asti in northern Italy. Documents confirm that he belonged to the Dominican monastery of Genua between 1317 and 1322. His fellow brothers encouraged him to compose his chess book as an allegory of human society, in contrast to the traditional astronomical, moral, and religious orientation in the previous works on the game of chess. It was supposed to serve as a valuable resource for preachers and teachers insofar as the individual pieces are assigned particularly representative functions, irrespective of their specific roles in the chess game, such as peasants, craftsmen, merchants, medical doctors, apothecaries, etc., all in the class of ordinary people below the nobility. Altogether Jacobus relates 150 examples, 78 of which pertain to the aristocracy. Primarily he drew his material from classical sources, thereby adding secular material to the repository of religious narratives and miracle accounts usually employed by preachers for their sermons. Remarkably, Jacobus refrains from offering satires of monks, and he hardly criticizes women, as was rather common in the

[14] For a useful introduction and survey, see the online encyclopedia article at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfonso_X_of_Castile and http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Alfonso_X_el_Sabio; (last accessed on March 15, 2011); for a text edition, see Alfonso el Sabio, *Libros de acedrex, dados e tablas: Das Schachzabelbuch König Alfons des Weisen*, ed. Arnald Steiger (Geneva and Zürich-Erlenbach: Droz and Rentsch, 1941). See also Sonja Musser Golladay's Ph.D. dissertation, "Los libros de acedrex dados e tablas: Historical, Artistic and Metaphysical Dimensions of Alfonso X's *Book of Games*" (University of Arizona, 2007).

[15] See also the pleasant study by Ulrich Schädler, *Globusspiel und Himmelsschach: Brett und Würfelspiele im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), 8–15.

[16] Today in the Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. G. 24, fol. 25v, see *Medieval Mastery: Book Illumination from Charlemagne to Charles the Bold: 800–1475*, ed. Lee Preedy and William Noel (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2002), 174.

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didactic literature of his time. Overall, the virtues triumph over the vices, which certainly contributed to the wide distribution and translation of his *Liber*.[17]

Apart from the earliest references to chess in the Latin *Ruodlieb* (second half of the eleventh century),[18] one of the best known German translators of Jacobus' s work were Heinrich von Beringen (ca. 1290–1300; 10,772 verses), Konrad von Ammenhausen (1337; 19, 336 verses), the Pfarrer zu dem Hechte (1355; ca. 6,700 verses), and Stephan von Dorpat (ca. 1357–1375; 5,886 verses), not counting several anonymous writers from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries. They stayed very close to the original because Jacobus had created a very clear structure and a compact narrative that made variations unnecessary, if not impossible.[19]

The present paper, acknowledging much previous work on the chess game in the Middle Ages, aims for a careful analysis of a selection of relevant, nevertheless heretofore mostly ignored passages in Middle High German literature where the protagonist either observes such a game, or participates in it, or utilizes a chessboard, if not the pieces, for other purposes, all of that clearly indicating the fundamental significance of chess also for medieval German culture at large.[20]

The extensive significance of the chess game finds a wonderful expression in Gottfried von Strassburg's famous *Tristan* (1205) where the young protagonist, having lost both his parents and growing up incognito to protect him against his father's enemy, Morgan, one day is allowed to visit a ship where Norwe-

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17 *Das Schachbuch des Jacobus de Cessolis: Codex Palatinus Latinus 961*. Codices e Vaticanis selecti quam simillime expressi iussu Ioannis Pauli PP II consilio et opera curatorum Bibliothecae Vaticanae, 74 (1458; Zürich: Belser Verlag, 1988).

18 Runkel, *Schach*, 59–62.

19 Anton Schwob, "Schachzabelbücher," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*. Zweite, völlig neu bearb. Aufl, ed. Kurt Ruh et al. Vol. 8, 2 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1991), 589–91. See also the contributions to *Chess and Allegory in the Middle Ages: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Olle Ferm and Volker Honemann (Stockholm: Runica et Mediaevalia, 2005). The role of the chess game in secular, i.e., German medieval literature, however, has not yet been adequately addressed. See, however, Wolfgang Dittmann, "Zur Erfindung des Schachspiels im 'Schachzabelbuch': Die erzählte Primär-Rezeption bei Konrad von Ammenhausen," *Erzählungen in Erzählungen: Phäonemene der Narration in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Harald Haferland and Michael Mecklenburg. Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur, 19 (Munich: Fink, 1996), 303–26. He emphasizes that for Konrad only the didactic function of the chess-game justified its acceptance for a cultured, ethically oriented society. For an art-historical approach, see Karl-S. Kramer, *Bauern, Handwerker und Bürger im Schachzabelbuch: Mittelalterliche Ständegliederung nach Jacobus de Cessolis* (Munich and Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1995).

20 Murray, *A History of Chess* (see note 3), offers a large selection of text excerpts from medieval literature, but he seems not to have known German examples, apart from Wolfram von Eschenbach's version of Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval*, *Parzival* (742) and a brief comment in a verse narrative, *Wittich vom Jordan*, by Rüdiger der Hünkhover (753).

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gian merchants offer a wide range of birds of prey for sale, which intrigues the young man more than anything else (2203ff.). Unfortunately, once he and his step-brothers all have received whatever bird they wanted, Tristan's eyes catch sight of a chessboard beautifully decorated and manufactured (2231–27).

Apparently being an extraordinary chess player himself, he immediately turns to the Norwegians and asks them in their own language, with which hardly anyone is familiar in that part of the world (2230–37), whether they know how to play that game (2230–32).[21] Astonished about his linguistic skills, they begin to realize his dazzling appearance, and one of them begins to play a round of chess with him (2243–47). No one from Tristan's companions, however, shows any interest in this entertainment, perhaps because they are not learned or cultured enough, and his step-father returns home, leaving only his tutor Curvenal with him who has to guard him (2254). The difference in education and sophistication between the young protagonist and the other members of the court could not find a better expression in this situation, whereas the merchants, possibly because they come from far away, quite curiously not only know how to play, they also realize something of Tristan's extraordinary character, considering his knowledge of languages, his learning, and his urbane qualities. They are actually more impressed about his whole comportment than about the chess game (2279–81), which they probably do not command as well as the young man in the first place.

Nevertheless, Tristan also coquets with numerous technical terms for chess playing never heard before (2289), and ultimately he has caught so much of their attention that they decide to kidnap him as a most valuable prize. Silently they lift the anchor and set the sails, and allow, if they are not forced to grant it, Tristan to win the chess game which entirely enraptures him, keeping him so busy that he notices nothing that is happening around him. However, this also involves his opponent, who is not part of the kidnapping scheme, so when they both finally get up, the ship is already far out into the open sea (2321). Only now does Tristan realize how much he has been deceived, and bitterly laments his sad destiny. He even goes so far as to curse the chess game: "owê wie wol

[21] Here quoted from: Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*. Nach dem Text von Friedrich Ranke neu herausgegeben, ins Neuhochdeutsche übersetzt, mit einem Stellenkommentar und einem Nachwort von Rüdiger Krüger (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980). For an English translation, see Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*. Translated entire for the first time. With the surviving fragments of the *Tristran* of Thomas. With an Introduction by A. T. Hatto (1960; London: Penguin, 2004). There is a whole library of *Tristan*-Studies, see, for example, *A Companion to Gottfried von Strassburg's "Tristan,"* ed. Will Hasty. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, NY, and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2003). Tristan's playing of chess, however, has not attracted much attention, perhaps because it seems to be a standard form of entertainment for members of the courtly world. See Lambertus Okken, *Kommentar zum Tristan-Roman Gottfrieds von Strassburg*. Vol. 1. Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur, 57 (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1984), 150–52.

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haete ich verborn / mîn veigez schâchzabelspil, / daz ie iemer hazzen wil!" (2592–94; alas, it would have been good if I had renounced my evil chess game which I want to hate from now on). But it is too late, and the merchants journey on, not knowing, of course, that soon enough, through God's intervention, they will be forced to release their captive, who then will have the chance to meet his uncle, King Marke.[22]

Curiously, although he displays many different skills at the new court and soon enough turns into the favorite of everyone because of his musical and linguistic abilities, and also his artistic skills in carving up the carcass of a hunted deer, as an example of his artistic powers, Tristan will never turn to the game of chess, either because he has learned his lesson and knows about the danger that this game might involve, or because he does not meet anyone who could match his mastery of playing chess, or, which would be an attractive speculation, because Tristan has turned away from simply playing chess and transformed into a piece on the metaphorical chessboard of life, operating with threatening forces, building support, moving around, attacking, defending himself, and ultimately winning the highest prize, the princess Isolde.[23]

If playing chess proves to be highly symbolic of Tristan's precarious existence, himself being nothing but a chess piece on the playing board of love—if we may use this metaphor for this end—despite all of his ardent efforts to control his own life and to manipulate his social environment, chess emerges in a very different context in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (ca. 1205). Here Parzival's friend, Gawan, at one point tries to engage in a sexual affair with lady Antikonîe, but he is perceived as an enemy and a threat to the kingdom's honor. While the couple is about to experience intimate pleasure, they are suddenly attacked by the ordinary people who suspect him to be a traitor and a danger to their country. When an old knight shouts out aloud, accusing Gawan of trying to rape Antikonîe, a whole swarm of irate men rushes up to him, forcing Gawan and his lady to retire into a tower because he has no weapons with him. But even there he seems to be helpless, until finally the queen finds a chessboard and hands it over to him. This serves him exceedingly well at least to defend himself successfully, until they are finally

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22 It is one of the last moments in Tristan's life where he does not keep control and lets his guard down. Subsequently, he is always in charge and manipulates everyone around him until, finally, love entraps him as well, at which moment he then gets confused and no longer knows how to continue with his life. Surprisingly, *Tristan*-scholarship has hardly paid attention to the rather significant motif of the chess game. Tomas Tomasek, *Gottfried von Straßburg* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2007), 76–77, mentions it, but does not provide any further comments.

23 Molly Robinson, "*Tristan*: A Story of Precarious Belonging," *Tristania* XVIII (1998): 1–16, though she does not address the concept of chess as such, she certainly highlights Tristan's lack of stability, his constant moves: "he is constantly displacing himself" (11).

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rescued from their predicament by Count Kyngrimursel, Antikonîe's cousin, who had pledged to Gawan absolute security as his host.[24]

The chessboard, and that is the only object that interests us here, is made out of stone, heavy, and large, and the pieces quickly prove to be quite effective tools in the hand of the lady: "ez wære künec oder roch, / daz warf si gein den vînden doch: / ez was grôz und swære. / man sagt von ir diu mære, / Swen dâ erreichte ir wurfes swanc, / der strûchte âne sînen danc" (Book 408, 29–30 – Book 409, 1–4; whether it was a king or a rook, she threw it against the enemies: each figure was large and heavy. People say about her that whoever was hit by a piece swung at him by her, fell down immediately). The chessboard itself is only described as extensive in its measure, with the contrasting colors elegantly inlaid (Book 408, 21), and the whole board strong enough to serve Gawan as a solid shield. The narrator also comments that the board was used heavily in this situation, ironically referring to the attacks with swords: "ûf disen vierecken schilt / was schâchzabels vil gespilt" (Book 408, 25–26; on this square shield many games of chess were played).

For Wolfram it is not the chess game by itself what matters; instead he resorts to this metaphor in order to describe facetiously courtly society which has turned its aggression inside and struggles against its own members.[25] Whereas before this chessboard was used for peaceful battle strategies in playfulness, now it serves the deadly serious purpose to protect the protagonist from his opponents' strikes at him. Insofar as Antikonîe transforms the chess pieces into projectiles with which she effectively strikes down one opponent after the other, we grasp how much Wolfram projected courtly society as a sham because backbiting, mutual criticism and aggression, distrust, and lack of confidence seem to dominate the court. Of course, the existence of a chess game in that tower to where Gawan and his lady have withdrawn in their desperation, struggling against people below their own class, characterized as ignoramuses or as sycophants, indicates that traditional courtly culture, specifically represented by the chess game, seems to have resorted to a remote tower room, and can now only be of use effectively if it is transformed into a military defense gadget. Ironically, the metaphorical pieces, most of which

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[24] For a broad discussion of Gawan's amatory adventures, see Martin Jones, "The Significance of the Gawan Story in *Parzival*," *A Companion to Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival*, ed. Will Hasty. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1999), 37–76; here 47–49. He assumes that Gawan's use of the chessboard signals the poet's criticism of his figure's overly anxious endeavor to embark on love making with Antikonîe. However, defending himself with the board also implies that all pieces on the board that are actually flying out of Antikonîe's hands against their crude opponents, hence all members of medieval society, are, so to speak, out of order, and chaos rules. See also the contribution to this volume by Jenny Adams.

[25] Renate Decke-Cornill, *Stellenkommentar zum III. Buch des 'Willehalm' Wolframs von Eschenbach*. Marburger Studien zur Germanistik, 7 (Marburg: Elwert, 1985), 190–92.

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would be nothing but pawns, here have turned against the queen and, if we may say so, the bishop (Gawan). Sexual passion, in other words, has created a topsy-turvy world in which the feudal order is turned upside down, and can be recovered only with greatest difficulties when Kingrimursel intervenes who needs Gawan for the duel to cleanse a stain on his own honor.

But it is not the chess game itself that attracts the hero's attention. Whenever he has just a little breathing room, he gazes at Antikonîe, whose body inspires ever more burning sexual desire in him (Book 409, 33–Book 410, 9).[26] Nevertheless, the board itself provides him with protection, and his adventure here seems to be just another move on the chessboard, metaphorically speaking, since the narrator specifically comments that many games used to be played on it, whereas "now it was badly hacked away."[27]

We can preliminarily conclude that the chess game is mentioned so commonly in medieval German courtly literature because it served so exceedingly well as a symbol of courtly society, its values, and ideals, but then also of its failures and possible breakdown.[28]

In the famous early fourteenth-century collection of Middle High German courtly poetry, the *Manesse Liederhandschrift*, Margrave Otto IV of Brandenburg (1266–1309) is shown playing chess with a lady. Both hold a piece in their hand which they have obviously won from each other, and yet both point with their finger toward the game, disputing, as it seems, either a strategy or arguing over the properness of a move.[29] Here, the intricacies of courtly love find their

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[26] Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*. Studienausgabe. Mittelhochdeutscher Text nach der sechsten Ausgabe von Karl Lachmann. Übersetzung von Peter Knecht. Einführung zum Text von Bernd Schirok (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1998). For an English translation, see Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. A. T. Hatto (London: Penguin, 1980). It does not seem to be case that, surprisingly to note, any Wolfram scholar has ever fully explored the symbolic meaning of the chessboard in Gawan's hands. For a discussion of Gawan's relationship with Antinonîe, see Herta Zutt, "Gawan und die Geschwister Antikonie und Vergulaht," *Gotes und der werlde hulde. Literatur in Mittelalter und Neuzeit. Festschrift für Heinz Rupp zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Rüdiger Schnell (Bern: Francke, 1989), 97–117. See also Petrus W. Tax, "Die Liebe zwischen Gawan und Antikonie im 8. Buch von Wolframs 'Parzival'. Politische und dynastische Hintergründe," *Festschrift für Herbert Kolb zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Klaus Matzel and Hans-Gert Roloff, together with Barbara Haupt and Hilkert Weddige (Bern and New York: Lang, 1989), 702–12. See also Christoph J. Steppich, "Zu Wolframs Vergleich der Antikonie mit der Markgräfin auf Burg Haidstein (*Pz.* 403,21–404,10)," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur Älteren Germanistik* 53 (2000): 187–30; here 204–06 and 223–24.

[27] Hatto's translation, 210 (see note 21).

[28] Nevertheless, scholarship seems not to have found it worth closer analysis. Joachim Bumke, *Höfische Kultur: Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), Vol. 1:304, offers only fleeting references.

[29] *Codex Manesse: Die Miniaturen der Großen Heidelberger Liederhandschrift*, ed. Ingo F. Walther, together with Gisela Siebert. 4th ed. (1988; Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1989), 12–13. For an online version, see http://www.tempora-nostra.de/tempora-nostra/manesse.php?id=203&tfl=6. This

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appropriate expression in the complexity of the chess game where both sides face each other on an equal level and struggle to win an advantage over the other, although only playfully, and ultimately, as we may assume, to achieve harmonious agreement despite the loss of one side to the other because of their love relationship.

The common reference to the chess game in medieval German literature easily confirms its significant cultural relevance for courtly society at large.[30] Not surprisingly, we also discover an exquisite illustration in the famous *Carmina Burana* (ca. 1220–1250) focusing on the chess game, accompanying, as to be suspected, an entire poem in medieval Latin dedicated to the game of chess and the basic rules to be followed (fol. 92r). The poet explicitly sings a song of praise on the chess game which he identifies as a noble game: "Qui uult egregium scachorum noscere ludum / Audiat. ut potui, carmina composui" (1–2; He who wants to learn the noble game of chess, listen to the song that I have composed as well as I could).[31] But he also warns his listeners that sometimes the small pieces, viz. the small people, can beat the big pieces, viz. the big people: "a dompnis minimi, domini rapiuntur ab himis: / Sic mixtim procerum, turba perit peditum" (31–32; the little one are beaten by the lords, the lords are beaten by the little ones; thus the group of nobles and the group of plain folks get lost)—a philosophical conclusion certainly influenced by Boethian thinking. Not surprisingly, many other medieval artists often refer to the symbolism of chess, which forces us to ponder more in depth what the literary statements might imply.[32]

These observations, however, also apply to most other medieval courtly societies, as Nicholas Orme confirms: "Chess had a higher status than other board games, because it was regarded as educational. Its pieces were seen as emblematic of society: king, queen, knights, judges, rooks (executive officers), and common folk, each having its own function and all being effective when working together. There were books explaining the method of play and expounding its relevance to the understanding of human affairs."[33]

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image seems to contradict slightly the findings by Jenny Adams in her contribution to this volume.

30 *Schach im abendländischen Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit : Alltagskultur, Spielspezifik, Hohe Literatur: Symposium der Initiativgruppe Königstein, Hamburg November 1999: Informationsmappe*, ed. Egbert Meissenburg (n. l.: n. p., 1999).

31 *Carmina Burana*. Texte und Übersetzungen. Mit den Miniaturen aus der Handschrift und einem Aufsatz von Peter und Dorothea Diemer, ed. Benedikt Konrad Vollmann. Bibliothek des Mittelalters, 13 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1987), No. 210, 658–62. The song seems to have been composed by the end of the eleventh century (1236).

32 Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 107, 109, 124–25.

33 Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 178.

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In fact, the fame of chess had made it into such a well-known item for courtly entertainment during the high Middle Ages that even fleeting references to "schâch" (check!) would have been immediately understood.[34] The famous poet of gnomic verses and erotic songs, Walther von der Vogelweide (fl. ca. 1190–1220), for instance, once expressed his great disgust with the way how the world had changed to the worse, with materialism and greed having taken over honor, hospitality, friendship, and all traditional ideals of courtly values: "diu meiste menige enruochet, wie sî erwirbet guot. / sol ichz alsô gewinnen, sô gâ slâfen, hôher muot" (No. 12, I, 3–4; 31, 15–16; "The mass of them [the majority of all people] don't care how they acquire worldly goods. / If I went after goods that way, then go to sleep, high-mindedness!").[35] In the subsequent stanza, "'Sît willekomen, herre wirt', dem gruoze muoz ich swîgen" (12, II; 31, 23), he explores how people are treating each other when they meet in the evening and someone needs a place to stay. Walther laments that hosts no longer observe any traditional values and mistreat foreigners and travelers: "wirt unde heim sint zwêne unschamelîche namen" (II, 3; 31, 25; "*Master, House*—there's no embarrassment in either name"). Instead, the relationships among people have become entirely commodified, and no one likes to welcome a stranger any longer: "gast unde schâch kumt selten âne haz" (II, 9; 31,31; "*Guest*, and *Check*!: these words are never heard without disgust"). In utter disappointment, Walther then turns to the emperor and appeals to him for help, which ultimately would also be of profit for himself: "herre, büezet mir des gastes, daz iu got des schâchez büeze" (II, 10, 32; "Lord, liberate me from being a guest, so that God may help you get out of that *Check*! position").

In essence, Walther seems to plead with Emperor Otto to help him secure a stable existence, or to provide him with a secured income, or an estate for his sustenance, but for our purposes it is significant that he reminds the emperor of his own political predicament, the details of which do not interest us here, but which put both on the same level of existential challenges. The artist Walther wants to be acknowledged as an equal with other high ranking persons at court because of his poetic accomplishments, hence the reference to the chess game in which, apparently, the emperor, as one of the pieces, is stuck in a dangerous situation, if not already a "Check."[36] Particularly because of the brief, hardly

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34 Jenny Adams, *Power Play* (see note 3).

35 Walther von der Vogelweide, *Leich, Lieder, Sangsprüche*. 14., völlig neubearbeitete Auflage der Ausgabe Karl Lachmanns mit Beiträgen von Thomas Bein und Horst Brunner, herausgegeben von Christoph Cormeau (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1996), 61; the English translation is taken from Walther von der Vogelweide, *The Single-Stanza Lyrics*, ed. and trans., with introduction and commentary by Frederick Goldin (New York and London: Routldege, 2003), 183.

36 Günther Schweikle, in: Walther von der Vogelweide, *Werke: Gesamtausgabe*. Vol. 1: *Spruchlyrik*. Mittelhochdeutsche / Neuhochdeutsche. Herausgegeben, übersetzt und kommentiert von Günther Schweikle (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994), 423–24.

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noticeable allusion to chess, we can assume with certainty that the metaphor was well known among the courtly audiences where the game itself obviously enjoyed considerable popularity.

Playing chess could also represent a ruler's intelligence and political foresight, as in the case of Charlemagne as portrayed by the Priest Konrad in his version of the *Chanson de Roland*, in his *Rolandslied* (ca. 1170). When the Muslim emissaries arrive at the emperor's court in order to appeal to his mercy and to strike a peace agreement with their ruler, they meet him while he is pondering a chess game: "si vunden den keiser zwâre / ob deme schâchzable" (681–82; they found the emperor, indeed, sitting at the chessboard).[37] We are not told whether the emperor is actually playing the chess game, but he appears like a divine figure controlling the moves of all of his pieces: "nieman ne was ime gelîch. / sîn antlizze was zierlîch" (691–92; no one was his equal. His face was beautiful).[38]

Although the narrator does not develop this reference any further, the context clearly indicates how much a worthy ruler of the stature of Charlemagne properly practices his diplomatic skills, his strategizing abilities, and his military planning with a chess game. As the example from Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Willehalm* (ca. 1218–1220) indicates, the chessboard could also serve as measure to calculate the actual number of enemies that one would face on the battle field (151, 1–6).[39]

In the anonymous late thirteenth-century *Reinfried von Braunschweig*, which at first focuses on the ideals of virtuous love, marriage, marital loyalty, and family, and in the second part takes the protagonist on most extensive travels through the world of the Orient, accompanied by his new-found friend, the Persian prince whom he respects quite irrespective of the difference in their

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37 *Das Rolandslied des Pfaffen Konrad*. Mittelhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch, ed., trans., and commentary by Dietrich Kartschoke (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1993).

38 In the adaptation by the mid-thirteenth-century author Der Stricker, *Karl der Große*, the emissaries encounter the same situation, with Charlemagne sitting at a table and playing chess, though here an opponent sits across from him who, though "only" a duke, also receives great respect: "dâ si den keiser vunden. / ob eime schâzabel was daz, / daz er mit Gêrolde saz, / dem herzogen von Swâben, / dem sîne tugende gâben / werdekeit mit lobes kraft" (1242–47; where they found the emperor. He sat at a chess game with Gerold, Duke of Swabia who was graced by his virtues to receive great praise). *Karl der Grosse von dem Stricker*, ed. Karl Bartsch. With an epilogue by Dieter Kartschoke. Deutsche Neudrucke. Reihe: Texte des Mittelalters (1857; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965). See also Dittmann, "Zur Erfindung des Schachspiels im 'Schachzabelbuch'," 323–24.

39 Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Willehalm*. Nach der Handschrift 857 der Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen. Middle High German Text, Trans., Commentary, ed. Joachim Heinzle. Bibliothek des Mittelalters, 9 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1991).

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religious beliefs,[40] we also hear, even if only so fleetingly, of the game of chess as an essential aspect of courtly entertainment.[41] In order to grasp the larger context, let us consider the description of the court festivities in detail:

Sorgen und ouch fröuden[42] blôz
wâren sî: nu was sô grôz
daz tanzen und daz springen,
daz sagen und daz singen,
der schal was grôz und was dâ klein.
sô wurfen jene dort den stein,
sô zugen dis schâhzabelspil.
sô schuzen jene zuo dem zil,
sô sach man dis dâ springen.
sô wolten jene ringen,
sô sach man wie dis spilten
ald mit den kugeln zilten.
sô seiten die von minne,
dis von guot gewinne
und aber die von ritterschaft. (2899–913)

[Free of all worries and concerns
they all were. They turned their attention
to dancing and leaping,
to telling stories and singing of songs.
The room was filled with great noise.
Some of them competed against each other in stone throwing,
others moved pieces on a chessboard.
Some practiced shooting with the arrow,
while others could be seen leaping.
Some enjoyed wrestling,
and some played games
or threw balls toward a goal.
A group of them told each other stories of love,
others talked about how to gain riches,
and others again about chivalry.]

Undoubtedly, chess was not the only form of entertainment, but it was also not the least one. In general, as this scene reflects, playing chess belonged to

40 Albrecht Classen, "Tolerance in the Middle Ages? The Good Heathens as Fellow Beings in the World of *Reinfried von Braunschweig*, Konrad von Würzburg's *Partonopier und Meliur*, and *Die Heideninne*," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 61 (2006): 183–223.

41 *Reinfried von Braunschweig*, ed. Karl Bartsch (1871; Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York: Georg Olms, 1997); for the most comprehensive recent critical study, see Wolfgang Achnitz, *Babylon und Jerusalem: Sinnkonstituierung im "Reinfried von Braunschweig" und im "Apollonius von Tyrland" Heinrichs von Neustadt"*. Hermaea. Germanistische Forschungen. Neue Folge, 98 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002). He does not, however, explore the meaning of the chess game in *Reinfried*.

42 The word "fröuden" (joys) here must be a mistake, considering the context.

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publicly recognized courtly culture, and it was as much enjoyed as physical activities or as courtly love songs. The courtly world appreciated both physical competitions and intellectual challenges, explorations of emotional issues and tales of chivalric adventures. Moreover, chess was a form of entertainment practiced both by knights and ladies, as the various manuscript illustrations and the textual examples indicate.

Most unexpectedly, in some courtly narratives we also come across the chessboard as an analogy for an architectural design of a checkered wall.[43] In *Herzog Ernst B* (ca. 1220), for instance, the protagonist, after having been forced by Emperor Otte to leave Germany and after having visited Constantinople on his way to the Holy Land, gets lost and suddenly arrives in the mystical country of Grippîa, the land of crane people. At that moment, however, their city is entirely deserted because they are on a warfare against the King of India. For Ernst and his companion Wetzel, who enter the castle alone, it seems to be like a wonderland, considering the unseen marvels of buildings, places, structures, and furnishings. They are particularly attracted by the castle and its incredible wall:

diu was harte tiure
von edelem marmelsteine.
die wâren algemeine
gel grüene und weitîn,
daz sie niht schœner mohte sîn,
swarz rôt und wîze:
dâ mite was sie ze flîze
geschâchzabelt und gefieret,
. . . (2216–23)

[it was most preciously made
out of marble stones.
They were all
yellow, green, and blue,
and they could not be more beautiful,
black, red, and white:
with these colors the was diligently
made like a chessboard, very orderly,[44]
. . .]

More allusions are not necessary for the audience to understand the imagery conveyed here. Although the Grippians are certainly not part of the traditional

43 Vetter, *Das Schachzabelbuch*, XXXVII–XXXVIII (see note 11).

44 Sowinski (127) translates the participle "geschâchzabelt" as 'like a mosaic,' which fits only generally, but ignores the specific cultural connotation of the chess game.

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courtly world, distanced from the West both through their hybridity as crane people and their lack of civil behavior toward outsiders,[45] their city, their courtly trappings, and particularly this reference to the chessboard intimately connects them, as it seems at first sight, with the Europeans. However, the reference to the chessboard appears only on the outside, and it might as well be nothing but a graphic design which the original architect did not perceive as a chessboard. However, the viewer, and in this case Duke Ernst and his companion Wetzel, understand it as such, which makes the entire set-up of the kingdom of Grippia even more uncanny, being so familiar to a courtly person through the external architectural features, and so unfamiliar, if not grotesque, in the practical experience with these hybrid creatures. The irony consists of their usage of the same symbolic language as traditional courtly society, but they are nevertheless cast as monstrous and dangerous to human civilization, which later leads to a brutal battle in which scores of Grippians are killed mercilessly.

The totally opposite situation is the case in Konrad von Würzburg's *Engelhard* (ca. 1270 or 1280) where the two protagonists, young men who have recently learned the ropes of courtly life and quickly practice the essential skills almost to perfection, also get engaged in playing chess:

> Swâ mite ein man ûf erden
> ze hove liep sol werden,
> daz kunden si wol trîben.
> lesen unde schrîben
> sach man si beide schône.
> in süezer stimme dône
> seitens unde sungen.
> si tanzten unde sprungen.
> si schuzzen ouch ze deme zil.
> schâchzabel unde seitenspil
> kundens ûzer mâzen wol. (747–57)[46]
>
> [Whatever skill here on earth
> can make a man much liked at court,
> they knew how to practice it well.

[45] For global perspectives on hybridity, see Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); for *Herzog Ernst*, see Albrecht Classen, "Medieval Travel into an Exotic Orient: The *Spielmannsepos Herzog Ernst* as a Travel into the Medieval Subconsciousness," *Lesarten. New Methodologies and Old Texts*, ed. Alexander Schwarz. Tausch, 2 (Frankfurt a. M., New York, and Paris: Lang, 1990), 103–24; id., "Multiculturalism in the German Middle Ages? The Rediscovery of a Modern Concept in the Past: The Case of *Herzog Ernst*," *Multiculturalism and Representation. Selected Essays*, ed. John Rieder, Larry E. Smith (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 198–219; See now also Rasma Lazda-Cavers, "Hybridity and Liminality in *Herzog Ernst*," *Daphnis* 33, 1–2 (2004): 79–96.

[46] Konrad von Würzburg, *Engelhard*, ed. Paul Gereke. 2nd ed. by Ingo Reiffenstein. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 17 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1963).

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They were both seen reading and writing
in a beautiful fashion.
with a sweet voice
they spoke and sang.
They danced and leaped.
They shot with arrows toward a goal.
Playing chess and string instruments
they knew exceedingly well.]

Konrad also employs the noun of 'chessboard' in an adverbial position in the verse narrative "*Das Turnier von Nantes* where a lord from Britanny displays a shield painted in the checkered colors of white and red, just like a chessboard: "blanc unde rôt schâchzabeleht / wart sîn glanzer schilt gesehen" (594–95).[47] Whereas playing chess, and also displaying the chessboard in a decorative manner by members of chivalry obviously meets full approval, those who employ this design for architectural purposes only and do not demonstrate the same value system represented by the chess game, such as the Grippians, are harshly condemned and deemed worthy for being killed in a brutal conflict.

The late twelfth-century didactic poet Herger referred to the chess game to illustrate the untrustworthiness and foolishness of some people, here represented by a wolf:

Ein wolf und ein witzic man
sazten schâchzabel an,
si wurden spilnde umbe guot
der wolf begonde sînen muot
Nâch sînem vater wenden.
dô kom ein wider dar gegân,
dô gap er beidiu roch umbe einen venden.[48]

[A wolf and a smart man
set up a chess game,
they intended to play for a prize.
The wolf began to turn his mind
to the manner practiced by his father.
When a ram appeared,
he gave away both his rooks for a pawn.]

The entire context addresses the problem of trusting foolish, treacherous, and dangerous people (the wolf), and the other stanzas illustrate this by referring to a wolf who is charged with taking care of the domestic animals but devours

47 Konrad von Würzburg, *Kleinere Dichtungen*, ed. Edward Schröder. With an epilogue by Ludwig Wolff. Vol. II: *Der Schwanritter, Das Turnier von Nantes* (1925; Dublin and Zürich: Weidmann, 1968).

48 *Des Minnesangs Frühling*, ed. Hugo Moser and Helmut Tervooren. Vol. I: *Texte*. 38th, revised ed. (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 1988), VII (Herger), No. III, stanza 2 (27, 20).

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them instead. Here, however, the wolf finds his powerful opponent in a smart man who sees through his opponent's evil nature and greed, and then utilizes this knowledge to outplay him in the chess game.

Not surprisingly, other didactic writers such as Hugo von Trimberg (ca. 1230–after 1313), also resorted to the imagery of the chess play in order to address fundamental concerns of their society, its value system, and the principles of morality, ethics, and vices and virtues.[49] In his *Renner* (ca. 25,000 verses) he deals with a vast array of topics, developing, so to speak, a panorama of human life. A number of times he also refers to the chess game either as a simile or symbol, or as a metaphor and analogy. Once, for instance, Hugo, very close to Walther von der Vogelweide's concern, laments about those people who know nothing about hospitality and treat everyone most miserly and aggressively.

First, however, Hugo comments that he had never been able to learn two things in life, that is, to share a table happily with someone whose heart is filled with wrath (5847–48), and to greet someone joyfully who had done something most painfully against him (5849–50). According to a book *Pilgerîn* which he cites fleetingly, there are many different types of hosts, and one of the worst would be he who uses bread pieces to play chess on a table: "Dâ man mit brôtes snitzen / Schâchzabel ziuhet über dem tische!" (5356–57). Adding to the facetious imagery, he remarks that it would be great, of course, if he then could capture a king (5358) or a rook (5859). If, however, he were then to win a "venden" (5360; pawn), he would not be able to satisfy his hunger. Courtly society requires general hospitality to be upheld, but those who would be "ûzen [. . .] wirt, dâ heime gast" (5362; outside a host, at home a guest) could not claim any honor and would deserve to be despised for their lack of courtly manners.

But Hugo went one step further and formulated global criticism of the failings of this world, emphasizing, for instance, the great advantage of carrying out dutifully one's work instead of pursuing nothing but leisure, whether on a regular free day or on a holiday: "Des ist vil bezzer guot arbeit / Denne schedelichiu müezikeit" (22531–32; good is much better work than hurtful [sinful] free time). Hardly anyone is still seriously thinking of God and prays to him (22534–36), although many do write about Him and create religious paintings. True love of the Godhead, however, seems to be rather rare, as the poet avers (22538–40). In a preliminary conclusion, Hugo then notes:

[49] For a recent introduction to Hugo, see Helmut Birkhan, *Geschichte der altdeutschen Literatur im Licht ausgewählter Texte*. Part VIII: *Lehrhafte Dichtung zwischen 1200 und 1300*. Edition Praesens Studienbücher, 17 (Vienna: Edition Praesens, 2005), 51–63.

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Disiu werlt ist als ein goukeltabel,
Wenn si hât als ein schâchzabel
Künige und dar zuo künigîn,
Roch, ritter, alten, vendelîn:
Des hât got wol sîn goukel spil
Mit uns, der ez rehte merken wil. (22541–46)

[This world is like a deceptive image,
because its has, like the chess game
kings and a queen,
rooks, knights, bishops, pawns:
In this way God plays a fool's game
with us, if you are able to notice that.]

He does not reject the traditional allegory of the chessboard as a symbol of human society, but he dismisses it in its illusionary character as much as he rejects the material world because God operates on this board according to His own will and does not allow anyone to control Him: "Der goukeler sprichet: 'Wider in die taschen', / Sô sprichet unser herre: 'Wider in die aschen, / Von der ir alle sît bekumen" (22547–49; the player says: 'off with you into the pocket,' and our Lord says: 'back into the ashes where you all have come from').[50]

In another context, Hugo refers to the devil as a master player on the chessboard of life. Those who submit to evil thoughts, inspired by the devil, will eventually be defeated by him in that game: "Dem tuot der tiufel ofte schâch / Und mattet sîner sêlden spîl, / Swenn er sich selber niht hüeten wil" (15690–92; the devil often puts him at check, and checkmates the game of his happiness, if he does not want to protect himself). On a more mundane level, the poet warns his readers of the deadly sin of gluttony, here cast in the allegorical figures of "her Frâz und her Slunt" (10178; Sir Devouring and Sir Gorging). Those who stay in their service for too long, will soon face the same destiny as the one who loses a game of chess: "Den mattet ir oder tuot im schâch!" (10180; You checkmate him or put him in check!).

Quite similar in his criticism of the deceptiveness of this world, Konrad von Würzburg, whom I have already mentioned above, also comments on the knightly education, which includes the chess game and playing string instruments, but then notes that those things do not prepare the individual for the concrete demands of this world. The protagonist in *Der Welt Lohn* quickly has to realize how little the external appearances mean, and that the truth lies behind, or underneath. One day, for instance, a most beautiful lady appears who would outshine both Venus and Pallas Athena (74), and who provides

[50] Jutta Goheen, *Mensch und Moral im Mittelalter: Geschichte und Fiktion in Hugo von Trimbergs 'Der Renner'* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990), 70–71.

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him with most delightful entertainment all day long. In the evening, however, when she leaves him and turns her back to him, he suddenly has to learn that even she consists of nothing but simple flesh that is rotting away. Worms, snakes, toads, and other creatures are already eating away at here, and so the protagonist quickly learns to understand the illusionary character of this world, whom she represents (217–38).

In his epimythion, the poet alerts his audience to see through the mask worn by all external things and to discard the illusion that would lead the individual only down to Hell: "Von Wirzeburc ich Cuonrât / gibe iu allen disen rât, / daz ir die werlt lâzet varn, / welt ir die sêle bewarn" (271–74; I, Konrad of Würzburg, give this advice to you all to let go off this world if you want to preserve the soul).

The protagonist, however, at first does everything expected from a young courtly nobleman: "man sach den vil geslahten / ûzerweltiu cleider tragen. / birsen, beizen unde jagen / kunde er wol und treip sîn vil, / schâchzabel unde seitenspil / daz was sîn kurzewîle" (24–29; one saw the extraordinary man wear most splendid clothing. He knew well to go hunting and falconing, and he practiced it often; playing chess and string instruments were his entertainment). Although none of these activities and preferences are condemned specifically, the moralistic writer still implies his opposition and admonishes his audience to abstain from all those things and entertainments that would blind them to the true dangers for the soul. In this sense playing chess, despite its intellectual challenges, represents sinful diversion and would mislead the person even further into sinfulness.

Other didactic writers, such as the somewhat earlier Italian-German poet Thomasin von Zerclaere, who was a canon in Aquileia (near Triest) and probably enjoyed close contacts with the German Patriarch of Aquileia, Wolfger von Erla (1204–1218), the patron of Walther von der Vogelweide,[51] also incorporated a reference to the chess game into his voluminous treatise, *Der welsche Gast* (The Italian Visitor), as an example of the need to learn certain rules in order to be able to play, or to operate individually on a more complex level within society.[52] Playing chess, in his perspective, represents highly developed skills, but skills that can be taught, meaning that the chess player

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51 Daniel Rocher, "Thomasin von Zerclære: ein Dichter . . . oder ein Propagandist im Auftrag?," *Wolfger von Erla: Bischof von Passau (1191–1204) und Patriarch von Aquileja (1204–1218) als Kirchenfürst und Literaturmäzen*, ed. Egon Boshof and Fritz Peter Knapp. Germanische Bibliothek. Neue Folge. 3. Reihe: Untersuchungen, 20 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1994), 325–43.

52 For an excellent introduction to Thomasin in English, see Michael Resler, "Thomasîn von Zerclære," *German Writers and Works of the High Middle Ages: 1170–1280*, ed. James Hardin and Will Hasty. Dictionary of Literary Biography, 138 (Detroit, Washington, DC, and London: Gale Research, 1994), 133–40.

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requires a teacher. However, everything that can be learned can also be improved, and one master teacher can always find his own master in this particular matter:

Swer wol schachzabel chan,
der vindet dar nach einen man,
der sin also vil chan oder mere.
ez ist dehein so chleine lere,
man mohte si lernen baz. (8883–87)[53]

[He who knows how to play chess well,
will find another man
who knows as much about it as he, or even more.
There is not even the smallest science
that could not be learned better.]

In other words, for Thomasin the game of chess proves to be an example of a sophisticated matter that requires in-depth learning, hence represents an outstanding object of advanced courtly culture. Of course, as these verses and the subsequent discussion illustrate, there would be nothing in this world that could not be improved, and every person would find his/her master in any area, which hence should teach the reader more humbleness and modesty. As the author emphasizes, extending the metaphor from the chess game to all aspects in life, nothing manmade could be regarded as truly superior because we do not even understand fully the smallest things in our earthen existence: "waz mach denn sin beliben / der grozen chuonste, die wir geschriben / haben, sit die chleiner / nimmer begriffet unser deheiner" (8889–92; what will remain of the great arts that we have written about since no one amongst us understands even the small things).

Although Thomasin refers to the chess game only fleetingly, it obviously proves to be of utmost significance for him and his audience since only the really learned would be capable of operating this game successfully, otherwise the metaphor would not work here.[54]

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[53] Here quoted from: Thomasin von Zerclaere, *Der welsche Gast*. Vol. 1: *Einleitung, Überlieferung, Text, die Varianten des Prosavorworts*, ed. F. W. von Kries. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 425 I (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1984). See alsoThomasin von Zerklaere, *Der welsche Gast secondo il Cod. Pal. Germ. 389, Heidelberg con le integrazioni di Heinrich Rückert e le varianti del Membr. I 120, Gotha (mit deutscher Einleitung)*, a cura di Raffaele Disanto. Quaderni di Hesperides. Serie Testi, 3 (Triest: Edizioni Parnaso, 2002).

[54] Christoph Huber, "*Der werlde ring* und *was man tuon und lassen schol*: Gattungskontinuität und Innovation in moraldidaktischen Summen: Thomasin von Zerklaere–Hugo von Trimberg–Heinrich Wittenwiler und andere," *Mittelalter und frühe Neuzeit: Übergänge, Umbrüche und Neuansätze*, ed. Walter Haug. Fortuna vitrea, 16 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999), 187–212. See also the contribution to this volume by Jenny Adams regarding subtle misogynistic approaches to the game of chess both in the Middle Ages and still today.

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He shares this perspective with a considerably later didactic Austrian poet, Heinrich der Teichner (fl. ca. 1350–1365, and later) who also incorporates the allegory of the chess game in one of his close to 800 rhymed stanzas, "Ye der man zu schafen hat" (no. 198).[55] At first he discusses the problem affecting those who enjoy much honor but also property, which means that they have to struggle much harder in striving for God's love and yet still maintain the proper balance in their relationship with secular society (3–5). Money, in other words, creates problems, and only solves few (6–8).[56] In fact, as Teichner sees it, a simple farmer might have an easier life, settled on his land and able to sleep well at night, than a wealthy man who would have to worry even at night what to do with all his money (9–16). The discussion then turns to the chess game, and the poet equates rulership with the conditions on the chessboard. Each player simply watches out how to make the best move: "wie er ziehen mug und geben" (20; how he might move and give). Lords, however, like the main pieces in the chess game, have to worry constantly about their own position in life: "also ist der herren spech / zu allen zeiten mit gevaer" (22–23; thus the lords have to worry all the time about danger). Those who only watch the game do not have a vested interest and remain calm, as is the case with the farmer, whereas the rich people and noblemen have to suffer from childhood on (31–33).

Chess could also serve as a metaphor of wooing, erotic embraces, and even love making, as we discover in Heinrich von Neustadt's (fl. early fourteenth century) version of the classical romance *Apollonius von Tyrland* (based on the late-antique *Apollonius of Tyre*).[57] Without exploring the wider context of this complex narrative that considerably expands the Latin model,[58] suffices here to focus on the relevant passage with its literary utilization of the chess game in

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55 For the most recent critical comments, see Albrecht Classen, "Heinrich der Teichner: The Didactic Poet as a Troublemaker, Whistle-Blower, and Social Rebel," *Mediaevalia et Humanistica*. New Series 32 (2007): 63–81; id., "Money, Power, Poverty, and Social Criticism in the Work of Heinrich der Teichner," to appear in *Studi medievali*.

56 Dieter Kartschoke, "Regina pecunia, dominus nummus, her phenning. Geld und Satire oder die Macht der Tradition," *Geld im Mittelalter*, ed. Klaus Grubmüller and Markus Stock (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 182–203; here 193–94.

57 Heinrichs von Neustadt 'Apollonius von Tyrland' nach der Gothaer Handschrift. 'Gottes Zukunft' und 'Visio Philiberti' nach der Heidelberger Handschrift, ed. S. Singer. 2nd ed. Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters, VII (1906; Dublin and Zürich: Weidmann, 1967). See now also *Leben und Abenteuer des großen Königs Apollonius von Tyrus zu Land und zur See: Ein Abenteuerroman von Heinrich von Neustadt verfaßt zu Wien um 1300 nach Gottes Geburt*. Übertragen mit allen Miniaturen der Wiener Handschrift C, mit Anmerkungen und einem Nachwort von Helmut Birkhan (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2001), 393–39; Achnitz, *Babylon und Jerusalem*, 229–421 (see note 41).

58 Elizabeth Archival, *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations. Including a text and translation of 'The Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri'* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991).

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order to reflect upon the common teasing, provoking, struggling for superiority, and yet tender and erotic relationship between man and woman:[59]

Sy hetten kurtzweyle vil.
Sy spilten schachzabel spil:
Der herre pegunde genenden,
Er zoch ainen venden,
Der sagte der kunigynne mat.
Was schadet das? deß wirt gut rat:
Uber ain kurtze zeyt syder
Sagt im di schone magt wider
Mat und das sine schach
Mer dann vierstunt dar nach. (18331–40)

[They had much entertainment.
They played chess with each other:
The man made a bold move,
he moved one of his pawns
with which he said 'check' to the queen.
What damage did that cause? Good advice was then needed:
In a short while in turn
the beautiful maid responded
with 'check' and 'checkmate
more than four times afterwards.]

In the world of wonders, however, where Apollonius has to operate most of the time, the chess game and its board also serves as an indicator of where the courtly and the monstrous intersect, similarly as in the much earlier *Herzog Ernst B*. At one point the protagonist comes across a couple of dwarf people—apparently a king and his queen, Piramort and Pliades—who also represent hybridity in that both make a stunning impression through their bodily beauty despite their small size, but they seem to belong to the race of centaurs, with their lower body parts in the shape of a horse and their skin gleaming in the color of ivory (8265–75). They are related to other monsters that Apollonius, here figuring under the name of Lonius, had fought against before, but they are engaged most busily in a game of chess and do not realize the protagonist's arrival until it is too late (8276–80).[60] Whereas the battle of the minds on the chessboard happens without violence since the players belong to

[59] Achnitz, *Babylon und Jerusalem*, 354, note 413, assumes that the chess metaphor also serves as a reflection upon the vicissitudes of fortune, which does not quite seem to fit the actual rules of that game with its emphasis on strategizing, power struggle, and metaphorical battles of the wits.

[60] This actually correlates them to Tristan in Gottfried's eponymous romance; both times playing chess can also have dangerous consequences because those involved lose the connection to reality and become victims of the game itself.

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the same race and are bonded together emotionally, that is, they are married to each other, they immediately fight against Apollonius, a representative of another race and an obvious enemy, with all their might. The king runs away, fetches a bow and arrows, while the monstrous queen hits him with her four legs, hurting him even in the groin, upon which he tosses her violently to the ground: "Wann es hett in geschlagen, / Das er niemand wolte sagen, / An ain haymlich statt" (8321–23; because she had hit him, what he did not want to tell anyone, at a secret spot).

After she has given him magical rings, he lets her go and is about to leave the place when he spots the chessboard (8371). The pieces prove to be so valuable to him that he takes them all with him, which causes an uproar in the nether world of the dwarves and monsters, all apparently deeply upset about this great loss. Moreover, they send in their worst weapons, dragons and other reptiles (8399), vipers and snakes (8401), and when the little king shouts out to his people that Apollonius has taken the pieces, a veritable fury breaks out: "'Er hatt da pey im meinen hort, / Das schachzabel gestaine, / Paide groß und klaine.' / Da war in allen auff in zoren" (8404–07; 'He has with him my treasure, the chessboard pieces, both the big and small ones.' This made them all very angry against him).

The subsequent battle proves to be the worst scenario the hero has ever experienced, with a dragon almost killing him, while the snakes and other creatures attach themselves to him, trying to drag him down and hold him back. However, with the help of a miracle root he regains his strength and ultimately defeats all his opponents. Unfortunately, as he notices too late once he has reached a river, in all the haste and struggle he lost one of the rooks, which griefs him considerably: "Das was im laid und zoren" (8490), although it does not really matter at the end. But the king of the dwarves apparently feels so badly hurt and robbed of his most precious treasure that he sends his entire army of dragons to capture Apollonius, though it is too late because he has already crossed the river and so left the world of wonders and monsters: "Ir land enhalb verflucht was, / Hie dißhalb was salig laub und graß" (8521–22; their country on this side was cursed, the other side was blessed with leaves and grass). The narrator then comments one more time about the significance of the chess pieces for the dwarf king: "Piramort dem was vil laid / Das er di staine hette verloren" (8528–29; Piramort was deeply grieved that he had lost the pieces).

The explanation for the magical importance of the chess game, the chessboard, and the pieces is not provided, except for several allusions to dark powers associated with them. It is, to be sure, the personal chess game from King Nebuchadnezzar's treasure, which could have a religious symbolism, although Heinrich von Neustadt hardly ever aims so high in his own

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hermeneutics.[61] Nevertheless, as King Nemrot of Romania relates to him, the chess pieces are of greatest value, unmatched by any treasure either in the possession of the Sultan of Egypt or the King of Arabia (8777–80). For that reason, the loss of the rook represents a great loss about which future generations will have to cry, as he states (8767), though we do not learn exactly what this all might mean. We can be certain, however, that the chess game symbolizes the key to the rule over the world, and its owner could aim high in his endeavor to achieve all of his (evil) goals. Insofar as the dwarves had played the game, and then reacted so vehemently about the loss of the pieces, we may deduce that they perceive them as something of enormous value, perhaps as the most far-reaching instruments to gain mastership over all people and creatures on earth. Those who control the chessboard, also control the entrance to the castle, or the court, and insofar as Apollonius has gained hold of the chess pieces from the two hybrid dwarf figures, he had also acquired, in a sense, the key to the magical kingdom, now doomed to perish, even though the set of pieces was incomplete at the end.

At first very similar, though in a different generic context, Gâwein, in Heinrich von dem Türlin's almost contemporary *Diu Crône* (ca. 1300), observes a dwarf playing chess with a maid when he enters a castle:

> Oben vor dem thurn saszen
> Ein getwerc vnd ein meit;
> Sie spieltent mit behendekeit
> Schochzabel vf einem brett.
> Gaweins sie wol war tet,
> Als man jn in geliesz.
> Mit groszem flijsze sie jne hiesz
> Jr da wilkomen sin.
> Darnach tet sie yme schijn,
> Das ir der grúsz von hertzen ging.: (18797–806)[62]

[Up in front of the tower sat a dwarf and a maiden playing chess with great skill. The latter saw Gawein as soon as he came in, gave him a most cordial welcome, and then showed him that it came from the heart.[63]]

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61 For the Biblical figure, see the excellent article by Emil G. Hirsch, Ira Maurice Price, Wilhelm Bacher, and Louis Ginzberg, "Nebuchadnezzar," *Jewish Encyclopedia* 2002, online at: http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=154&letter=N (last accessed on March 15, 2011).

62 Heinrich von dem Türlin, *Die Krone (Verse 12282–30042)*. Nach der Handschrift Cod. Pal. germ. 374 der Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg nach Vorarbeiten von Fritz Peter Knapp und Klaus Zatloukal, ed. Alfred Ebenbauer and Florian Kragl. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 118 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2005).

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The difference to the situation in *Apollonius* then grows exponentially with regard to the function and symbolism of the chess game because the protagonist is well taken care of, receiving new clothes, and then is even invited by the maid to play the same game with her, offering him most delightful entertainment in a truly courtly fashion (18815–21). In other words, playing a round of chess amounts to paying highest respect to a guest, who is honored with the challenge of demonstrating his intellectual skills not only at a tournament, in the presence of courtly society, but also in the virtual world of chess, which allows him to prove his worthiness and wit to a lady of the court.

There is no doubt that medieval German poets had a keen understanding of the most meaningful symbolic functions of the chess game and its pieces. The variety of allegorical applications of chess for the representation of courtly society at large, but then also of courtly love, cultural transgression, military strategies, meditation and wisdom, and so forth, was almost infinite, which signals that the chessboard and its pieces powerfully served these poets and writers as some of the most fascinating and far-reaching literary images to reflect upon fundamental ideals, values, principles, and concepts determining courtly society and its relationship both to the lower classes and also to God.

In fact, chess enjoyed such a popularity that terms such as 'check' or 'checkmate' could serve as convenient metaphors to reflect upon misfortune and the sudden change of a person's course in life, such as in Heinrich von Freiberg's continuation of Gottfried von Strasbourg's *Tristan* from the late thirteenth century: "allen iren vroweden mat / wart da gesaget sunder schach" (1560–61; all their joys were checkmated without anyone playing chess). But the very opposite could also be the case, so when the lovers attempt to avoid the persecution of the jealous husband, as we find it in the same romance: "inr des der kunic sprach / zu der kuneginne: 'da schach!' / 'da schach!' sprach die kunegin, / 'hie buz mit dem ritter min!' / 'aber schach!' sprach der kunic san" (4155–59; in that moment the king said to the queen: 'here check!' 'check against it!', said the queen, 'my knight makes you pay for it!' 'Again 'check!' said the king then."[64]

These most varied observations can find additional confirmation through the actual chess treatises in verse, a number of which have come down to us by

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63 *The Crown: A Tale of Sir Gawein and King Arthur's Court* by Heinrich von dem Türlin. Trans. and with an introd. by J. W. Thomas (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 212.

64 Heinrich von Freiberg, *Tristan und Isolde (Fortsetzung des Tristan-Romans Gottfrieds von Straßburg)*. Originaltext (nach der Florenzer Handschrift ms. B.R. 226) by Daniel Buschinger, trans. Wolfgang Spiewok. Wodan, 16 (Greifswald: Reineke-Verlag, 1993).

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identifiable translators of Jacobus de Cessolis's *Liber*, whereas others have been preserved only anonymously, and then those in prose (there are three different versions, from which one shorter copy or edition was produced later).[65] The large number of manuscript copies and of early printed incunabula demonstrates the impressive popularity of the game and its allegorical function, and hence of the moral, ethical, and philosophical exploration of the chess game metaphor and its allegorical function.

These chess treatises in verse and prose have been discussed repeatedly in previous scholarship, so it would not be necessary to reexamine them here in any detail, especially because it would detract from the central concern of this paper. But it might be worth to allow one of the prose translators to speak up in the conclusion of our own investigation:

> Das erst tail, darvmb daz schachtzabel sey funden. Daz erst cappittel des ersten tails ist, vnder welichem chünig daz spil funden sey. Daz erst capitel dez andern tails ist von dez chünig gestalt auf dem schachtzabel vnd von seinen siten, vnd was den chünig angehört. Daz ander von der chünigin, wie die sey gestalt, vnd auch von iren siten. Daz dritt ist von den alten vnd auch von iren siten. Daz vierd ist von den ritern vnd auch von iren siten vnd auch von iren ampten. Daz fünft ist von der gestalt der rochen, von iren siten vnd auch von iren ampten. Das erst capitel dez tritten tails ist von den pawläwten. Daz ander ist von den smiden. Daz tritt ist von den wollwürchern. Daz vird von den chawflawten vnd von den wechslern. Daz fünft ist von den ärzten vnd von den apatekern. Daz sechst ist von den leittgeben vnd von den gastgeben. Daz sibent von den amptlawten vnd von stetpflegern vnd von der gemain. Daz acht von guftern, spilern vnd lötern.[66]
>
> [The first part treats why the chess game was invented. The first chapter of the first part explains under what king the game was invented. The first chapter of the other part is about the king on the chessboard and of his manners, and what belongs to the king. The other chapter is about the queen, her appearance, and her customs. The third is about bishops and also about their manners. The fourth is about the knights and their customs and also about their offices. The fifth is about the figure of the rooks, their customs and also about their offices. The first chapter of the third part is about the builders. The other is about the blacksmiths. The third is about the wool workers. The fourth is about the merchants and the money lenders. The fifth is about the medical doctors and the apothecaries. The sixth is about the inn keepers and hospitality. The seventh is about estate managers and city administrators and the community. The eighth is about wasteful people, gamblers, and good-for-nothings.]

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65 Gerard F. Schmidt, ed. *Das Schachzabelbuch des Jacobus de Cessolis*, O.P. Texte des späten Mittelalters, 13 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1961), 8–10.

66 *Das Schachzabelbuch*, 25 (see note 11). The narrator curiously mixes concrete names of chess pieces with references to ordinary people and their professions.

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In other words, here we face a literary reflection of all of medieval society which is understood to operate on a board like the pieces of a chess game. There are rules and laws, and yet there is an infinitude of possible moves and combinations. Life, as described by the chess game, proves to be regulated and creative, constrained and flexible, it is a combination of strategies and moves, and each person finds himself or herself in a specific position where s/he can operate according to specific conditions and opportunities.

The plethora of references to the chess game in these medieval literary examples, however, has also indicated the much wider range of possible application of this extraordinary and timeless allegory. As Michael Camille confirms, "Chess was the perfect allegorical device because it articulated the playful tension and the often violent conflict inherent in the strategies of seduction that formed the medieval art of love. Associated with warfare, mathematics, and male rationality, the chessboard became a simulacrum of medieval society."[67] Indeed, we might say, in light of the evidence of medieval German literature, which certainly finds confirmation in other medieval and early-modern literatures, those who discussed the chess game and/or referred to it by way of allusion, allegory, symbolism, and metaphor, transformed the image of chess into a literary reflection of life in all of its complexities.[68]

Let's make a move with a piece, or life will result in a quick checkmate.

67 Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, 124 (see note 32).

68 Vetter, *Das Schachzabelbuch*, XLVIII–XLIX (see note 11).

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