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STERLING-HELLENBRAND (Alexandra), « “Wan bî den liuten ist sô guot”. Courtly Literature and Configuring Community at the *Haus zur Kunkel* in Fourteenth-Century Konstanz »

RÉSUMÉ – A knight needs community, says Hartmann von Aue’s Erec, “because it is so good to be amongst people.” This essay examines Erec’s prescription through the in the 14th-century murals of Wolfram von Eschenbach’s Parzival at the Haus zur Kunkel in the southern German city of Konstanz. The murals present elements of Parzival in a program that configures courtly literature to articulate the aspirations of a community seeking to integrate courtly models in a fluidly dynamic patrician environment.

MOTS-CLÉS – medieval German literature, courtly literature, medieval culture, Arthurian iconography, medieval urban culture

ABSTRACT – Un chevalier a besoin de la communauté, dit l’Erec de Hartmann von Aue, “parce qu’il est si bon d’être parmi les gens”. Le présent essai examine ce précepte à travers les peintures murales du XIVe siècle du Parzival de Wolfram von Eschenbach au Haus zur Kunkel, à Constance, qui présentent des éléments du Parzival dans un programme utilisant la littérature courtoise pour articuler les aspirations d’une communauté cherchant à intégrer des modèles de cour dans un environnement patricien mouvant.

KEYWORDS – littérature allemande médiévale, littérature courtoise, culture médiévale, iconographie arthurienne, culture urbaine médiévale

## “WAN BÎ DEN LIUTEN IST SÔ GUOT”

### Courtly Literature and Configuring Community at the *Haus zur Kunkel* in Fourteenth-Century Konstanz

Community, both functional and dysfunctional, lies at the heart of medieval German courtly literature. The communities of the *Nibelungenlied*, for example, disintegrate spectacularly and the king of the Huns can only grieve the devastation wrought by the conflict as the poem comes to a close. In contrast to the epic, as we might expect, romance shows itself much more interested in finding harmonious solutions to conflicts that threaten to rend the social fabric. Writing the first Arthurian romance in German, Hartmann von Aue offers a disarmingly simple formulation of community's importance in *Erec*, when the eponymous hero speaks to the knight Mabonagrín during the *Joie de la court* episode. After Erec has won their duel, the defeated Mabonagrín has a chance to tell his story. Erec wonders at Mabonagrín's rash promise to his lady, swearing to do whatever she desired, which in turn compelled him to withdraw from society to the garden at her subsequent command. How, he wonders, could a knight retreat from the world as Mabonagrín did, because a knight needs a community in order to perform chivalric acts as part of it; one should choose to engage with the world, in Erec's words, 'because it is so good to be amongst people'. ('wan bî den liuten ist sô guot').<sup>1</sup> Erec's statement reveals one of the key underlying themes that certainly finds varied expression throughout Hartmann's entire oeuvre, particularly in his Arthurian romances. In fact, one could argue that the question of what it looks like to 'be among people' is actually a fundamental theme of German courtly literature as well.

What does it look like to be among people ('bî den liuten') and how does one affirm that it is as good as Erec suggests, at least in comparison

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1 Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*, ed. and trans. by Cyril Edwards (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014) l. 9493. Line references for this edition will appear hereafter in the text.

to the kind of disruptive life that Mabonagrín had fallen into? In this essay, I want to consider one particular way in which German literature seems to shape, reflect, and inspire models of community – literally. In its etymology from the Latin *con* (together) and *figurare* (to shape), the verb ‘configure’ encapsulates that creative activity: to fashion or shape, to combine or arrange, possibly using a model or pattern to do so.<sup>2</sup> In the following, I want to focus on the application of the courtly Arthurian past to shape to communities emerging in new urban settings. I will take a brief look at the model Hartmann provides in *Erec* provides before turning to Wolfram von Eschenbach’s Grail romance *Parzival* and the configurations that emerge as subsequent poets or artists interpret and adapt the model. Not only does Wolfram’s narrative itself explore themes of building and maintaining community at several courts that encompass the known world (Grail world, the Arthurian world, the East). The transmission of *Parzival* in text and image suggests that it was one of the most popular German texts from the early thirteenth century.<sup>3</sup> *Parzival*’s rich history in illustration is accompanied by equally robust scholarship on the relationships between text and image, particularly in illustrated manuscripts. *Parzival*, like other romances and romance figures, found its way into other media as well, from wall tapestries to murals.<sup>4</sup> In his contribution to Heinze’s recent *Wolfram von Eschenbach*.

2 ‘configure, v.’ in *OED Online* <<https://www-oed-com.proxy006.nclive.org/view/Entry/38830?redirectedFrom=configure#eid>> [accessed 22 December 2021].

3 See, for example, Liselotte Saurma-Jeltsch, ‘Zum Wandel der Erzählweise am Beispiel der illustrierten deutschen “Parzival”-Handschriften’, in *Wolfram-Studien XII. Probleme der Parzival-Philologie. Marburger Kolloquium 1990*, ed. by Joachim Heinze, L. Peter Johnson, and Gisela Vollmann-Profe (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1992) pp. 124–52. Evelyn Meyer offers a comprehensive bibliography as well as a detailed discussion of text-image relationships with respect to five depictions of the famous ‘Blutstropfenszene’ in book V of *Parzival*, where the knight is entranced by three drops of blood in the snow that remind him of his beloved Condwiramurs. Meyer suggests that the illuminators offer a more nuanced interpretation of the text than previously thought. See Evelyn Meyer, ‘Der Maler konnte oder wollte nicht lesen – oder vielleicht doch? Die Text-Bild-Bezüge der Blutstropfenepisode in den illustrierten Parzival Handschriften’, in *Geschichten sehen, Bilder hören. Bildprogramme im Mittelalter. Akten der Tagung Bamberg 2013*, ed. by Andrea Schindler and Evelyn Meyer, Series Bamberger interdisziplinäre Mittelalterstudien, Zentrum für Mittelalterstudien der Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2015) pp. 191–214.

4 See Bernd Schirok, ‘Überlieferung’, in *Wolfram von Eschenbach. Ein Handbuch*, ed. by Joachim Heinze (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2011) pp. 308–65, pictorial representations particularly pp. 352–61. Loomis, Schirok, and others describe the Parzival murals in the

*Ein Handbuch*, Schirok offers a concise but comprehensive overview of these various representations from the Braunschweig Gawan tapestry to various mural cycles.

I will focus here on one of these mural cycles, namely the images of *Parzival* that appear at the Haus zur Kunkel, commonly known as the ‘Distaff House’, in the southern German city of Konstanz. These fourteenth-century murals are some of the earliest images of *Parzival* that also appear in a much different cultural, social, economic, and architectural environment than the earlier murals of medieval German romance, the ones we find of Hartmann’s *Iwein* at Rodeneck and Schmalkalden. Indeed, the murals in Konstanz present elements of Wolfram’s *Parzival* as part of a larger program that uniquely configures older literature and courtly conventions, shaping it and re-imagining it in physical space at the Haus zur Kunkel. I would like first to elucidate the context that sets the tone from Hartmann’s *Erec* and then apply the foundation it sets to the murals, done more than a century later, both in their immediate architectural setting and in their broader cultural environment. Ultimately, I suggest that the murals articulate the aspirations of an emerging community in Konstanz that sought to find space for courtly models in a fluidly dynamic patrician environment.

#### FROM *EREC* TO *PARZIVAL*: COMMUNITY AS FOUNDATION

It is useful to return to *Erec* to examine the context in which Hartmann articulates the foundational significance of community in German courtly literature. After their duel, Erec asks the outcast Mabonagrín how he could possibly have occupied his time, living so long apart from

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house of wealthy patrician Johannes Saffran in Lübeck from 1323–39. See Roger Loomis and Laura A. H. Loomis, *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art* (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus Reprint, 1975). Schirok summarizes this scholarship in his essay ‘Die Parzivaldarstellungen in (ehemals) Lübeck, Braunschweig und Konstanz’, in *Wolfram-Studien*, XII, ed. by Joachim Heinzle et. al., pp. 172–90. Norbert Ott also provides an overview in Ott, ‘Geglückte Minne-Aventiure. Zur Szenenauswahl literarischer Bildzeugnisse im Mittelalter. Die Beispiele des Rodenecker Iwein, des Runkelsteiner Tristan, des Braunschweiger Gawan- und des Frankfurter Wilhelm von-Orlens-Teppichs’, in *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft*, ed. by Hans-Dieter Mück and Ulrich Müller, 2 (1982–83), 1–20.

the rest of the world (9469–72). Furthermore, Erec continues, it would be better for the lady to be among other women after all these years apart (9487–89). And then, Erec expresses what perhaps is Hartmann's simple yet profound message in this romance:

wie ir mugt beliben,  
 ein alsô wætlîcher man,  
 wie mich des niht verwundern kan,  
 Wan bî den liuten ist sô guot  
 I cannot cease to wonder  
 how you could remain, despite this,  
 so pleasing a man,  
 for it is so good to be amongst people. (Hartmann *Erec*; trans. 9487–93)

The challenge of the *Joie de la court* is the final test for Erec, as he engages in single combat with Mabonagrin whose isolated situation in the garden recalls Erec's *verligen*, the activity (or lack thereof) that propelled Erec and Enite on their journey in the first place.<sup>5</sup> Mabonagrin's rash promise to do whatever his lover asked leads to social rupture after they retire to the garden. At Brandigan, Erec finds eighty mourning ladies whose knights have lost challenges to Mabonagrin; the knights are dead and the ladies have remained separated from the rest of society. Mabonagrin's constant challenge immobilizes the community. The warning is clear. Those who isolate themselves, who go on a path alone, who selfishly keep themselves separate, pull at the social fabric and threaten to tear it. Mabonagrin's plight allows Erec to show that he has grown through his own trials, that he now understands his responsibility to the community around him and to those who look to him for leadership. Thus, he can bring Mabonagrin back into the courtly fold.<sup>6</sup> The locus amoenus of the *joie de la court* offers hollow beauty, an egocentric anti-community that subverts the social order because it serves no greater good.<sup>7</sup>

5 At the beginning of the romance, Erec had spent too much time in the arms of his wife and had neglected his responsibilities at court. Enite, in turn, had neglected her duty to remind Erec of those responsibilities.

6 Indeed, Mabonagrin speaks of winning a 'lossless disgrace' (trans. Edwards 9640) at Erec's hand. 'Today is the end of my troubles', he says. (trans. Edwards 9634–45). Erec has liberated Mabonagrin; Enite does the same for Mabonagrin's lady.

7 It is no coincidence that Mabonagrin's lady is Enite's cousin; both women must learn a similar lesson in the romance. Both initially cause their knights to withdraw from court, through a selfish command (Mabonagrin's lady) or through failure to communicate the

The message of Hartmann’s *Erec* is unequivocal: being among people is important. In his *Parzival*, Wolfram von Eschenbach amplifies and expands Hartmann’s message in an expansive narrative that ranges across the known world. Wolfram reveals multiple communities in conflict and distress, foremost among them the wounded community at Munsalvaesche, for which Parzival provides healing and deliverance, when he returns Anfortas to health.<sup>8</sup> Of primary importance to Wolfram is the interrelatedness of the human race, exemplified by the compassion of the question Parzival must ask his uncle: ‘Uncle, what ails you?’ (œheim, waz wirret dier? 795,29) The close relationship of Parzival to Anfortas, like that of Gawain to Arthur – each knight is his respective king’s sister-son – further reinforces the connections and the relationships that will knit a healthy community together. More than a century later, we find this message of community translated onto the walls of a wealthy fourteenth-century residence in the southern German city of Konstanz at the Haus zur Kunkel. Given the popularity of Wolfram’s romance, it comes as no surprise to find scenes from *Parzival* so prominently. However, as the murals were created at a time of social and cultural transition, I suggest that their inclusion of *Parzival* reveals the shape of a dynamic community that lives at a discursive intersection where the message succinctly articulated by Erec and compassionately spoken by Parzival – living, acting, being among people (real or imagined) – resonates in a unique visual context.

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discontent caused by neglect of duties (Enite). As a result, both women must learn to realign their priorities to benefit the communal (and the greater) good.

- 8 What Parzival does for the Grail world, Gawain accomplishes for the Arthurian court, where he can re-establish courtly norms at the *Schastel marveile*. See Joachim Bumke, ‘Die Geschlechterbeziehungen in den Gawanbüchern von Wolframs *Parzival*’, in *Mittelalterliches Schauspiel. Festschrift für Hansjürgen Linke zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. by Ulrich Mehler and Anton Touber (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994) pp. 105–22. Gawain – to whom Wolfram dedicates a full third of his narrative – clearly thrives among people, something Parzival learns. Marianne Wynn observes that Gawain seems to inhabit a world ‘alive with people, lived in, built upon and essentially gregarious’. Wynn contrasts Gawain’s adventures with the encounters that Parzival has with solitary individuals in deserted landscapes. Marianne Wynn, ‘Parzival and Gâwân: Hero and Counterpart,’ in *Perceval/Parzival: A Casebook*, ed. by Arthur Groos and Norris J. Lacy (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 175–98 (p. 189).

PARZIVAL AT THE HAUS ZUR KUNKEL:  
COMMUNITY IN TRANSITION<sup>9</sup>

The city of Konstanz is located on the shore of Lake Constance (Bodensee) and belongs to a larger geographic and cultural region that includes Zürich and Basel. By the late thirteenth century, the Bodensee region had become an area of flourishing commerce, textile production and trade. A thriving urban center like its regional neighbors Basel and Zürich, Konstanz experienced an architectural boom in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; indeed, evidence suggests that several hundred buildings were constructed in the city between the middle of the thirteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth century. At that time, Konstanz also became a center of both sacred and secular fresco painting, an art form that had a long tradition in the Bodensee region, particularly in the residences of wealthy patricians.<sup>10</sup> Art historians herald the early fourteenth century paintings of the Dominikanerkirche as the rise of Gothic painting in the Bodensee region; this new art form proliferates in wall decorations and murals as well as the manuscript illustrations such as those of the Weingarten Manuscript (*Weingartner Liederhandschrift*) from Konstanz and the Codex Manesse from Zürich.<sup>11</sup> Many painted rooms in late-medieval cities like Basel and Zurich attest growing affluence, comprising mainly representative rooms, gathering spaces, banquet halls. Not surprisingly, a number of strikingly decorated houses survive in Konstanz as well.<sup>12</sup>

9 This research is also summarized in a forthcoming chapter of the Routledge volume *The Arthurian World*. See Alexandra Sterling-Hellenbrand, 'Minding the Gaps: Topology and Gender in the Remediation of Medieval German Arthurian Romance', in *The Arthurian World*, ed. by Victoria Coldham-Fussell, Miriam Edlich-Muth, and Renée Ward (London: Routledge, forthcoming 2022).

10 See Elisabeth von Gleichenstein, 'Wandmalerei in Konstanz. Aspekte zur Kunstgeschichte und zur Ausstattung des Stadthauses', in *Ritter- Heilige-Fabelwesen. Wandmalerei in Konstanz von der Gotik bis zur Renaissance*, Konstanzer Museumsjournal (Städtische Museen: Konstanz, 1988), pp. 21–32 (p. 21).

11 Von Gleichenstein notes that Heinrich II von Klingenberg was the bishop of Konstanz from 1293-1316, under whose governance many buildings were decorated – both secular and sacred. See 'Wandmalerei', p. 22.

12 Edith Wenzel documents the same phenomenon in Zurich. See Edith Wenzel, 'Mittelalterliche Wandmalereien in Zurich', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 116.3

The unassuming Haus zur Kunkel stands near the Münsterplatz at house number 5, possibly painted at the same time as the aforementioned Dominikanerkirche according to Elisabeth von Gleichenstein.<sup>13</sup> The patron was probably one of two church canons, possibly Konrad von Überlingen of Bischofszell or Kero von Tübingen of St. Johann, who had owned the house in succession until 1316. Some suggest, most notably Werner Wunderlich and Bernd Schirok, based on dendochronological data, that the house was sold, torn down and rebuilt around this time. Thus, the earliest date for the murals could be 1319/1320.<sup>14</sup> A conservative estimate locates the construction of the house in the first third of the fourteenth century, and this remains the general consensus.

At the Haus zur Kunkel, the murals can be found on three floors.<sup>15</sup> Two mural cycles were discovered in the nineteenth century, one in the mid 1970's; the latter is on the ground floor of the entry and displays images of virtues and vices in five medallions. A series of images, or the Love-Slave medallions, dealing with the so-called wiles of women ('Weiberlisten'), was discovered in the mid-1800's on the uppermost floor; these were destroyed during late nineteenth century renovations and exist only in a series of pencil reproductions. The middle floor prominently displays two single images: one would seem to recall Samson or David's fight with the lion, the other an allegory of the five senses. For Saurma-Jeltsch, the royal figure draws upon the iconography of King David, and it also seems to bear a close resemblance to the figure of Heinrich VI from the Weingarten manuscript.<sup>16</sup> It is, however, the

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(1997), 417–26. Unlike Basel and Zürich, however, Konstanz was long overlooked after the 16th century. That could be why, as Schmidt notes (19), it survived WWII intact (like Regensburg, Bamberg and Lübeck). Leo Schmidt, 'Konstanzer Wohnarchitektur des Mittelalters', *Ritter- Heilige-Fabelwesen*, pp. 9-20, p. 19.

13 Von Gleichenstein, p. 22.

14 Schirok, 'Die Parzivaldarstellungen', note 47 on p. 186. See also Werner Wunderlich, 'The Parzival frescoes in the "Distaff-House" in Constance', *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft*, vol. 11 (1999), pp. 383–412; and Werner Wunderlich, *Weibsbilder al fresco. Kulturgeschichtlicher Hintergrund und literarische Tradition der Wandbilder im Konstanzer Haus 'Zur Kunkel'* (Stadler: Konstanz, 1996).

15 The murals can be viewed in the digital image database Farbdiaarchiv Mitteleuropäische Wand- und Deckenmalerei, Stuckdekorationen und Raumaussstellungen at the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in Munich. <<https://www.zi.fotothek.org/>> [accessed 12 December 2021].

16 Liselotte Saurma-Jeltsch, 'Profan oder sakral? Zur Interpretation mittelalterlicher Wandmalerei im städtischen Kontext', in *Literatur und Wandmalerei I. Erscheinungsformen*

two painted walls on the building's middle floor that attract the most attention: the north wall with the images of the weavers and the south wall opposite depicting knightly and courtly activities. The unusual murals of the weaving women led to the designation of the building as the Haus zur Kunkel, or 'the Distaff House' as the word 'Kunkel' is a common term for spindle in the Alemannic region where Konstanz is located.<sup>17</sup> While the weavers attracted the most interest, early scholarship did note the courtly character of the images on the south wall; in 1988, Bernd Schirok identified the images as depicting scenes from the first six books of Wolfram's *Parzival*. Not only do these scenes offer the only extant mural depictions of *Parzival*, but they also represent some of the oldest pictorial versions of Wolfram's Grail romance apart from manuscript illustrations. For this reason, scholars like Wunderlich consider the frescoes in Konstanz to be of 'rare value' for art history as for the reception of Wolfram's *Parzival* over time.<sup>18</sup>

### THE PARZIVAL MURALS

The *Parzival* frescoes comprise three panels, just about 60cm high, that represent what appear to be generally sequential scenes from books 3 through 6 of Wolfram's *Parzival*. In the first panel, the clearest images are the first and the last, with fragments leading viewers to derive the scenes from the familiar story those scenes seem to represent.<sup>19</sup> The story begins at the far left with Parzival's birth and the last frame on the right seems to depict his encounter with Jeschute. Into the intervening scenes, we must read Parzival's life in the forest and his departure from his

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*höfischer Kultur und ihre Träger im Mittelalter. Freiburger Colloquium 1998*, ed. by Eckart Conrad Lutz, Johann Thali and René Wetzels (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2002), pp. 283–328, p. 311.

17 Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, digitalisierte Fassung im Wörterbuchnetz des Trier Center for Digital Humanities, version 01/21, <https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB> [accessed on 22 December 2021]. See also Wunderlich, 'Distaff', p. 385.

18 Wunderlich, 'Distaff', p. 386.

19 The description here follows Wunderlich, 'Distaff-House', and Schirok, 'Die Parzivaldarstellungen'.

mother; perhaps after the encounter with Jeschute, he meets his cousin Sigune, though this cannot be clearly determined, as a number of the images on the wall display significant damage. The first image of the second panel seems to show Parzival putting on the red armor for which he dueled and killed Ither; therefore, the viewer must assume that Ither dies from the first panel to the second. Next, Parzival is welcomed at Arthur’s court, subsequently by Gurnemanz and then by Condwiramurs. Wunderlich assumes that there were additional pictures that originally followed these images, but they no longer exist because of a door that was built later. The third panel begins with Condwiramurs and Parzival together in his sleeping chamber at Pelrapiere, followed by the duel of Parzival and Clamide before the gates of that same city. There seem to be at least a couple of images that depict Parzival leaving Pelrapiere; at least, this is suggested with the depiction of a city tower and several figures meant to represent the inhabitants. Parzival then reaches the Grail castle. And finally there is a scene that Schirok and Wunderlich both agree should show Sigune perched on a limb in the linden tree, where she meets Parzival after he has had to depart the Grail community after his first visit without asking the all-important question.

For Schirok, the illustrated text remains narratively intact and coherent with identifiable scenes from the text, even if the murals bear no indication of names.<sup>20</sup> Viewed from left to right, horizontally in each register, the panels seem to offer a chronological narrative; the vertical narrative appears more topical.<sup>21</sup> In general, the murals seem to highlight Parzival’s socially unacceptable behavior: the scene with Jeschute visually mirrors the scene of his birth at the opposite end of the line. Each scene shows us a lady reclining on a bed with the young boy close by: Herzeloide faces to the right in the direction we will read, and the child is a baby held by another female figure; Jeschute faces to the left in the direction we have come, and the older boy at her side is the one who has not grown up enough to know that he should not take anything from a lady without her consent. In the next register, if we follow the story, we know that Parzival can only wear the red armor in the second panel because he has killed Ither to get it. Essentially, we accompany Parzival on a process of maturation as he leaves his mother,

20 Schirok, ‘Die Parzivaldarstellungen’, p.188.

21 Saurma-Jeltsch, ‘Profan oder sakral’, p. 313.

becomes a young knight, marries and we assume he moves on toward the Grail castle. In other words, we see the results of his poor choices (the encounter with Jeschute or the donning of the red armor); however, Parzival is not shown in the act of making those choices nor are Parzival's transgressions portrayed in any specific way.

Furthermore, if this is *Parzival*, we certainly miss the Grail quest that only begins after the scenes here end. Ott sees this as representative of a harmonizing trend ('Tendenz zur Harmonisierung') in the interpretation of the original narrative, an evident desire to elide conflict, to brush over societal contradictions.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Parzival is finally the Grail knight who unites both the religious element and the secular. In the end, while Parzival's quest leads to exile from the courtly world on his search for the Grail, that quest does after all lead to the restoration of the community at Munsalvaesche. Parzival's exile from the Arthurian court and from Munsalvaesche is temporary and he does return.<sup>23</sup> In this way, the figure of Parzival on the walls at the Haus zur Kunkel may communicate the desire to reinforce a certain social-cultural status quo, while hinting at Parzival's role in God's divine plan.<sup>24</sup> Ächtler sees each of the three registers as a different level of Parzival's development: naïve youth, courtly education, acceptance into the Arthurian company of the Round Table.<sup>25</sup> Any discrepancy in the pictorial sequence with respect to Wolfram's original clearly shows that the artist's aim was 'not so much to

22 Norbert Ott, 'Zur Ikonographie des Parzival-Stoffs in Frankreich und Deutschland. Struktur und Gebrauchssituation von Handschriftenillustrationen und Bildzeugnis', in *Wolfram-Studien*, XII, pp. 108–23 (p.118).

23 See Evelyn Meyer, 'Reading Parzival 's Quest for the Grail as a Unique Exile Experience', in *Weltanschauliche Orientierungsversuche im Exil/New Orientations of World View in Exile*, ed. by Reinhard Andress with Evelyn Meyer and Greg Divers, *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur Germanistik* 76 (Amsterdam, New York, NY: Rodopi, 2010) pp. 45–59 (p. 58).

24 Will Hasty, 'Bounds of Imagination: Grail Questing and Chivalric Colonizing in Wolfram von Eschenbach's "Parzival"', in *The Grail, the Quest and the World of Arthur*, ed. by Norris Lacy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 48–61 (p. 60).

25 See Norman Ächtler, 'Der Ritter im Gottesdienst: Parzivals ikonographische Einbindung in die Heilsgeschichte. Die Parzival-Fresken in Konstanz müssen neu gelesen werden', *Euphorion*, 101, 3 (2007), pp. 273–99 (p. 286). Ächtler applies this portrayal to that of a saint's life, suggesting that the depiction of Parzival here demonstrates a process whereby God's favor becomes progressively evident, as the hero's life reveals a divine plan. (294) Ächtler's interpretation thus gives considerable weight to the figure of Parzival. This has to do with what Arthur Groos calls Parzival's constructability. See Arthur Groos and Norris J. Lacy, 'Introduction', *Perceval/Parzival: A Casebook*, ed. by Arthur Groos and Norris J. Lacy (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1–42, p. 20.

illustrate the text word for word but still to maintain a clear reference to the narrative'.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, this *Parzival* has also been adapted and adopted into the stories of the patrons.<sup>27</sup> An interesting insertion of contemporary heraldic devices and emblems in the third picture of the second panel, for example, seems to connect the patron of the murals with local secular and clerical aristocracy.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the murals present a visual narrative that adapts Wolfram's *Parzival* into a new story that hints at the possible upwardly bound, potentially socially mobile aspirations of its patrons.

## THE WEAVERS

As its name shows, however, the Haus zur Kunkel is best known for the images opposite the *Parzival* scenes: the murals of the weavers whose work gives the house its name.<sup>29</sup> The weavers are in twenty-one square (59x57cm) images that show women active in the production and weaving of linen (images 1–11) and then weaving silk (12–17) and then the last

26 For those who expect 'all' of *Parzival*, there is a comparison to the other murals at Rodenegg (Iwein) and at Runkelstein (Tristan) where scholars of literature so desperately have wanted to see favorite works in their entirety. James Rushing notes this feature in the early scholarship of the Iwein murals at both Rodenegg and Schmalkalden as well. For Wunderlich, the narrative epic dealing with the adventures from the first part of *Parzival*'s life are transformed in the murals to form an independent and closed cycle. See Wunderlich, 'Distaff', p. 410. See also James Rushing, *Images of Adventure: Yvain in the Visual Arts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

27 Randles similarly talks about heraldry in the Wienhausen tapestries in this context, for example. She suggests that heraldic depictions in the embroideries 'participate in and frame these visual narratives in order to reinterpret and represent the Tristan legend and its relationship with the societies which created them'. See Sarah Randles, 'Heraldic Imagery in the Embroidered Tristan Narratives', in *Arthurian Literature XXXII*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and David F. Johnson (Boydell & Brewer, D. S. Brewer, 2015), pp. 155–86 (p. 186).

28 According to the Zurich heraldry list, the escutcheon with horns curled to the left is known as belonging to the Tann family but also to other families and resembles the coat of arms of the imperial ministry that administered the duchy of Swabia. However, the seal of Heinrich von Tann dated 1335 and 1354 also shows the horns curled to the right as in the Kunkel frescoes. This is the lineage of Canon Heinrich I (1233–1248), Konrad von Tegerfelden's successor to the bishop's throne. See Wunderlich, 'Distaff', p. 399.

29 The north wall of the weavers is ca. 300x450cm. I am using the description here that Wunderlich gives in *Weibsbilder*, pp. 51–66.

row (images 18–21) shows activities that might appropriately be done at the end of the day: a woman reading at prayer, two women combing hair, a woman reclining by a stove. According to Saurma-Jeltsch, it is not surprising that these images recall in form and in concept images found in the Weingarten manuscript, which also originated in Konstanz. These frescos of the weavers are considered the earliest images of work in the trades.<sup>30</sup> Like Wunderlich, many scholars interpret them against a historical background of daily life and work, custom and idiom. Of course, one cannot determine how closely the weavers depict the reality of life in the Haus zur Kunkel or how exactly they may reflect actual working conditions in Konstanz – though they certainly show women doing the actual work of weaving.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, as Saurma-Jeltsch points out, the images unmistakably portray noble ladies at ‘work’ in their garments of costly reds and greens, with their head coverings and jewelry, wearing their fine shoes. These women could be the visual sisters of the ladies we find in the Manesse manuscript.<sup>32</sup> We find a complement to the aristocratic overtones of these images in the written text that frames each individual square, describing each activity. Image 10 shows two figures: a woman at the loom and a child, kneeling by the loom winding the loose yarn around the shuttle. The text reads: DAS KIND SPVLET ICH KA WEBE (‘The child spools, I can weave’).<sup>33</sup> The text explains what we see as the image shows us how the work is done from preparing and carding the raw material to spinning and spooling the yarn, from cutting the cloth to sewing purses and belts, from the daily prayer that should accompany work to the well-earned restorative bath when tasks are done. In this way, the murals at the Haus zur Kunkel follow the custom of combining both text and image with inscriptions, as we see in a number of other examples such as the horizontal bands that separate the rows of images in the tapestry known as Wienhausen I. The Wienhausen tapestries date from the first half of the fourteenth century and are thus roughly contemporary with the murals at the Haus zur Kunkel.<sup>34</sup> The explicit combination of text and image suggests that, whether the recipients were readers or whether

30 Von Gleichenstein, ‘Wandmalerei’, p.23.

31 Wunderlich, *Weibsbilder*, p. 71.

32 Saurma-Jeltsch, ‘Profan oder sakral’, p. 299.

33 Wunderlich, *Weibsbilder*, p. 59.

34 Randles dates Wienhausen I after 1320, Wienhausen II from around 1330, and Wienhausen III from 1360. See Randles, ‘Embroidered Tristan Narratives’, p. 158ff.

they were merely acquainted with the texts depicted on the walls before them, they are expected to have a framework into which to place the visual text. This would hold for both the weavers, where there is literally text to be read, and *Parzival*, where the text must be read exclusively through its images. In either case, the combination of text and image ensures that the perspective of the viewer remains a doubled one.<sup>35</sup>

### THE PROGRAM

Several painters were at work over a period of time to produce this surfeit of images; in fact, some see at least three distinct painters at work throughout the house. Von Gleichenstein, for example, sees a ‘weaker hand’ at work in the *Parzival* frescoes in comparison with the weavers; this is how she explains that the figures of the weavers recall the style of the Weingarten manuscript, while the medallions of virtues and vices display a lively elegance in their gestures that recall the Manesse illuminations.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, while the weavers and the *Parzival* mural may not perhaps have been done by the same painter, their form and structure suggest to Ächtler that they were intended to be ‘read’ together.<sup>37</sup> In addition, most recent studies seems to agree that the patrons would have taken the older murals into consideration with each addition such that any program could have remained at least consistent.<sup>38</sup> They are also located opposite one another, even though in the nineteenth century a wall would have divided this room into two separate chamber, according to Wunderlich. That wall is now no longer there. For that reason, both series of images (those from *Parzival* and the weavers) occupy the same space, enabling modern viewers to juxtapose the two murals and consider them together as part of a related program.

Wunderlich suggests that we could see the weavers and the courtly women as reciprocal images, demonstrating appropriate models of

35 Schirok, ‘Die Parzivaldarstellungen’, p. 190.

36 Von Gleichenstein, ‘Wandmalerei’, p. 25.

37 Ächtler, ‘Der Ritter im Gottesdienst’, p. 276.

38 Saurma-Jeltsch, ‘Profan oder sakral’, p. 296.

femininity. On the one hand, we have ‘the female type of the diligent, dexterous and pious woman from an urban world’ who is then to be compared with famous female figures from a celebrated and popular epic tale who embody love and fidelity, beauty and courtly manners’.<sup>39</sup> The patron and the residents of the ‘Distaff-House’ would have seen would thus have used the various murals as a mechanism for self-affirmation. The mural images would illustrate ‘not only individual but also collective views of the world, and values in the world’. The images offer a spectrum of attitudes and activities – ‘bourgeois work, knightly customs and religious morality’ – that can serve both the clergy and others to demonstrate and reinforce behavioral norms.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, the murals may be differently complementary, for the weavers do not portray women at work to earn a living. Rather they are involved in a virtuous occupation that demonstrates diligence as opposed to laziness. As noted earlier, if one considers their dress and their posture, the weaving women are placed equal in status with those noble women depicted in the *Manesse* or *Weingarten* manuscripts.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the weavers connect the act of weaving and the act of writing, drawing on well-known metaphors, and the murals elevate both activities to the same level.<sup>42</sup> In this sense, one could perhaps consider these images together in relation to a more traditional didactic ‘canon’ which may promote both classical and Christian ideals of the active and the contemplative life.<sup>43</sup> This might take the frescoes of the house as a whole into account – the murals may function thus as a visual book of virtues, as it were, or a conduct manual ‘written’ in metaphors that were perhaps standard currency for the time and the place (particularly Konstanz). Ächtler also sees a potential need on the part of the church to appropriate secular images for theological purposes, especially since the murals were likely commissioned by a clerical patron.<sup>44</sup> This visual manual demands a discerning reader, able to participate in a version of what art historian E.H. Gombrich calls the ‘beholder’s share’: what we read into images can depend on our ability to ‘recognize in them things or images we

39 Wunderlich, ‘Distaff’, p. 411.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 412.

41 Saurma-Jeltsch, ‘Profan oder sakral’, p. 299.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 303.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 305–309.

44 Ächtler, ‘Der Ritter im Gottesdienst’, p. 298.

find stored in our minds.’<sup>45</sup> The courtly framework outlines the norms, aspirations and values of a society that admires the heroes of the past in its attempt to accommodate the rapidly changing present.

CONCLUSION:  
COURTLY LITERATURE AND THE CONTOURS  
OF URBAN IDENTITY

The murals at the Haus zur Kunkel, particularly the weavers and the scenes from *Parzival*, invest fourteenth century images with the allusive authority of past courtly communities for a new present. Weavers – or figures who engage in weaving – have made appearance in courtly literature, for example. In the juxtaposition of the courtly world of *Parzival* and the weavers, one may also find a resonance of Hartmann’s *Iwein* as well. Like Erec, Iwein must repair broken relationships and sundered communities. This this is most evident when he comes upon the workhouse where three hundred women are imprisoned.<sup>46</sup> The women are engaged in the kind of activities we see depicted at the Haus zur Kunkel: they weave, they embroider, and they sew. Those who cannot weave or embroider do other tasks: they sort and wind thread, they beat the flax or scrape or comb it, they spin. As the women later tell Iwein, they are a tribute paid to the lord of the castle. They work their hands to the bone, as it were, in stark contrast to the lord of the castle who sits with his wife in a beautiful and comfortable chamber listening to their accomplished young daughter read aloud. As is the case in the garden of Brandigan, the separation here is inappropriate: women should not remain isolated from men, groups should not be isolated from other social peers, work should not be exploited, because otherwise the whole cannot function properly.

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45 See E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion. A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), p. 195.

46 Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein. Text und Übersetzung*, trans. by Thomas Cramer, Text der siebenten Ausgabe von G. F. Benecke, K. Lachmann und L. Wolff. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001) I. 6185–230.

In fourteenth-century Konstanz, the message may be that the values are the same though the world has changed. The weavers and the noblewomen now share the same space, literally and figuratively. On the one hand, the murals at the Haus zur Kunkel show how much the religious community enjoyed courtly literature and culture. The wealthy patricians, the new up-and-coming social classes, did as well; however, they required a new visual vocabulary to represent themselves and thus adapted the courtly lexicon to write themselves into new narratives. As Nina Rowe has recently shown, the urban laity in particular did the same in illuminated World Chronicle manuscripts, where they ‘claim center stage and aim high, telling the legends of the past in their own words’ and celebrate their own progress in the process.<sup>47</sup> Wunderlich suggests that the Parzival sequences in combinations with the weavers served to elevate the role of women in the lives of the men around them; the murals depict women as mother (Herzeloide), object of misguided love service (Jeschute), queen (Guinevere), wife (Condwiramurs), priestess (Sigune) – and as skilled, industrious, and pious craftswomen (Weavers). Parzival, suggests Wunderlich, proves his nobility and his masculinity (‘männliche Würde’) through his various interactions with these women.<sup>48</sup> One might imagine that the male clerics who resided in this house could perhaps have felt similarly validated by these images from the secular world. They could depict the positive attributes of a world whose values they might want to emulate while simultaneously preserving their space apart – and relegating potentially wily women to the painting on the wall.

The murals at the Haus zur Kunkel thereby infuse an urban patrician environment with the courtly attributes desired by patrons who could thereby ennoble themselves, in deed and in image if not in name or in title. Muriel Whitaker comments generally about the ‘richly decorated

<sup>47</sup> Nina Rowe, *The Illuminated World Chronicle. Tales from the Late Medieval City* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2020), p. 11. Rowe’s wide-ranging analysis focuses on the production the World Chronicle manuscripts in the Bavarian and Austrian regions between 1330 and 1430. She gives a nuanced sense of the growing urban centers at this time, inhabited by increasingly wealthy burghers whose contemporary lives are written into the older stories that the chronicles tell. Rowe’s analysis of these manuscripts broadens our understanding of the cultural transitions which also shape the Haus zur Kunkel; it is particularly interesting to note the prominent figure of Neoma (Adam’s daughter or Adam’s descendent) as the inventor of spinning and weaving (p. 26ff.)

<sup>48</sup> Wunderlich, *Weibsbilder*, p. 103.

consumer goods’ that show rising affluence in Gothic Europe between thirteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>49</sup> Many of these goods featured courtly motifs. At this time, we also see the rising affluence reflected in the proliferation of courtly motifs and narratives on walls, whether as murals such as the Parzival murals in the homes of wealthy patricians from Lübeck to Konstanz and Zürich or as sumptuous tapestries in religious houses (Wienhausen or Braunschweig). Secular wall paintings also decorated rooms in wealthy Jewish homes in the fourteenth century, as Shatzmiller reveals in his study of ‘The Decorated Home of the Rabbi of Zurich’.<sup>50</sup> This affluence is also evident in the wall paintings and frescoes we find in the urban homes around the Bodensee region as well.<sup>51</sup> Urban image cycles seem eclectic in their choice of images. They draw from religious imagery, as Walz shows in the correlations between images in the Konstanz Dominikanerkirche and various residences.<sup>52</sup> As they sought familiar images from religious narratives, fourteenth-century patrons continued to draw on a well of imagery from familiar courtly narratives as well, though the murals in residences (non-ecclesiastical settings) may seem not as complex.<sup>53</sup> Meckseper sees here the tendency in city homes to prefer single images (like the medallions or the image of King David in the Haus zur Kunkel) that can be seen as perhaps complete in themselves. Images in city homes have a more static and symbolic function, for Meckseper, as opposed to the more dynamic narrative one might encounter in the older fortresses in less populated areas. Nevertheless, the adaptations we find on the walls of the Distaff House show us tantalizing dislocations of ‘preexisting story material’

49 Whitaker 108. These goods feature courtly motifs ‘drawn from literary sources: the Castle of Love, the Fountain of Youth, the capture of the unicorn, hunting with hawk and hound, dalliance in a garden, and favorite Arthurian scenes.’ (Whitaker 109)

50 Joseph Shatzmiller, *Cultural Exchange. Jews, Christians, and Art in the Medieval Marketplace* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 69. Schatzmiller and others also note the Neidhart murals found in the apartments at Tuchlauben 19 in Vienna also in the home of a Jewish merchant. Edith Wenzel also discusses the Brunnngasse 8 in Zürich in ‘Mittelalterliche Wandmalereien’.

51 Both manuscript illustrations and wall paintings were emerging from similar artistic environments. See Anne Dunlop, *Painted Palaces. The Rise of Secular Art in Renaissance Italy* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009) p. 87.

52 See Alfred Walz, *Die mittelalterlichen Wandgemälde der ehemaligen Dominikanerkirche in Konstanz: ikonographische und stilistische Untersuchungen* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989).

53 See Cord Meckseper, ‘Wandmalerei im funktionalen Zusammenhang ihres architektonisch-räumlichen Orts’, in *Literatur und Wandmalerei I*, pp. 255–82, p. 268.

similar to other fourteenth-century images of Iwein in the Freiburg Malter tapestry, on a French ivory casket, or the scenes from Tristan on an elegant embroidered slipper.<sup>54</sup> In this, the Haus zur Kunkel represents a model of multifunctionality inasmuch as the images were designed for changing recipients ('wechselnde Rezipienten').<sup>55</sup> The Parzival in Konstanz, like Iwein and Gawain and Tristan elsewhere, has become part of another narrative, related but different. We find a similar effect in the murals (from around 1400) at the Italian castle of Runkelstein, located outside of Bozen (Bolzano), not all that far from Rodenegg.<sup>56</sup>

As we look at them now, the murals demonstrate an intersection of courtly culture and literature that still issues an invitation to conversation. We may never know how the inhabitants of these homes lived with their beautifully decorated walls or what they thought of them. Indeed, the murals at Rodenegg or Schmalkalden or Konstanz, to say nothing of Lübeck and Zürich, were uncovered comparatively recently, between the mid to late nineteenth century and the latter half of the twentieth century. The murals remain tantalizing fragments on several levels. The murals display fragmentary episodes, graphically spliced together, of the narratives they represent. In addition, the paintings themselves only survive into the present as physical fragments, whose sometimes poor further obscures their narratives. Finally, as the murals clearly select from and adapt the literary traditions of the courtly past, they expose the cultural fragments with which patrons wished to surround themselves: the virtues, the ideals, and the models that they still employed to shape

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54 See James Rushing, 'Adventure in the Service of Love: Yvain on a Fourteenth-Century Ivory Panel', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 61, 1 (1998), 55–65 (p. 65). See also Kathryn Starkey, 'Tristan Slippers', *Medieval Fabrications*, ed. by E. Jane Burns (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2004), pp. 35–53. Of Iwein in the Malterer embroidery, Rushing concludes that the process by which Iwein is included in the story is perhaps most important: 'The medieval process of literarization has resulted in the adaptation of a vernacular story into a topos of Latinate and Christian origin. In absorbing the story, the topos has reduced the main character to an exemplary figure...' See Rushing, *Images of Adventure*, p. 239.

55 Saurma-Jeltsch, 'Profan oder sakral', p. 293. Houses in Zurich and Basel show a similarly broad palette of images (p. 290).

56 For a comprehensive overview of medieval German pictorial examples, see James Rushing, 'The Medieval German Pictorial Evidence' in *The Arthur of the Germans. The Arthurian Legend in Medieval German and Dutch Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 257–79. See also the recent catalog of *Tristan* illustrations published by Stephanie Cain Van D'Elden, *Tristan and Isolde: Medieval Illustrations of the Verse Romances* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016).

the contours of their communities. In the murals of later medieval urban residences, for instance, we read the potential for tension among groups such as the landed hereditary aristocracy and those wealthy patricians who claimed to be their equals.<sup>57</sup> The ability to paint themselves through their insignia into Parzival’s adventures might have proved easier to achieve than equal status in reality, and perhaps just as affirming, to the patrons at the Haus zur Kunkel. The combination of fragments at the Haus zur Kunkel reveals a society on the threshold of change; they allow us a glimpse into a community configuring itself anew, drawing upon older literary or allegorical models (implicitly or explicitly) to navigate among its intersecting cultures (the clerical, the courtly, the literary, the secular, the religious, the patrician, the aristocratic) in the uniquely multivalent and polyvocal environment of mid-fourteenth century Konstanz. Regardless of how later audiences re-configure their – and our – literary models to shape new encounters, we might still agree now (as then) that it is good to imagine ourselves among those people—now, as then, we are perhaps better for it.

Alexandra STERLING-HELLENBRAND  
Appalachian State University  
hellenbranda@appstate.edu

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57 Saurma-Jeltsch, ‘Profan oder sakral’, p. 316.