

THE FABLES OF ULRICH BONERIUS (CA. 1350)

*Masterwork of Late Medieval
Didactic Literature*

79.
Das guete das in hand ze vil
Dwer kinderich wil ich mane
Villicht komet von den zonen
Vn sind gesellen gut als e
Die gassenst zengung von wert mit me
Do sand sie dar denbe man
Gey bi sin gesellen uff dar kin



Ein binglich or vn angawalt
Gis herten leid noz manigvalt
Vil seier zu my dar meist sprach
Do er in als becrupre sach
Wie er mit in was un...

Translated by Albrecht Classen

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**Cambridge
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INTRODUCTION

Medieval and early modern German fable literature was deeply influenced by Ulrich Bonerius's *Der Edelstein* (*The Gemstone*), representing a major stepping stone between late antiquity and the Enlightenment (eighteenth century).¹ His highly popular collection of fables, which continues to be enjoyable and instructive to read even today, provides valuable insights into late medieval culture, mentality, ethics, and morality, and it sheds important light on the genre of didactic literature. What he has to say about people's stupidity, ignorance, failures, and evil character still applies to us, sad to say, very much until today, but his advice how to correct and improve oneself also carries considerable weight for the modern world.

There are some interesting parallels with the fables written by Marie de France (ca. 1190),² but Bonerius approached his task from a more learned perspective, and he was also fully trained as a translator/writer, intending his works as material for preachers, although (or just because) he employed a fairly simple style and addressed his concerns in a direct, yet very convincing fashion. His fables contain much pragmatic advice for many of life's ordinary situations high and low, warning us about vices and lauding virtues.

We clearly hear a preacher's voice, but Bonerius was obviously fully aware of people's countless shortcomings, failures, and foibles, and addressed them through his hundred narratives, many of which closely follow the ancient models of animal stories (Aesop), while some of them also talk about people's interactions, regularly leading to problems and conflicts.

¹ In German-language research, he is normally identified as 'Ulrich Boner,' but both in the prologue and the epilogue to *The Gemstone* he relies on the Latinized version, which I prefer, especially because the word 'boner' has a pornographic connotation in modern English. The name goes probably back to the profession of one of his forefathers, meaning, the butcher. For a solid introduction to Bonerius, see Klaus Grubmüller, "Boner," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, 2nd, completely revised ed. by Kurt Ruh et al. Vol. I (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1978), cols. 947–52.

² Marie de France, *Fables*, ed. and trans. Harriet Spiegel. Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

To be fair, however, there are significant similarities between the Anglo-Norman fables written by Marie de France and the Middle High German fables composed by Bonerius. Both draw mostly from the same sources, and both embrace very similar values and ideals. They differ in their interpretations of the morals or lessons to some extent, but not drastically. They provide different prologues reflecting their own personal situations, but they use many of the same animals and narrative contexts. Both begin with the same fable (no. 1) about the rooster who cannot make any use of the gemstone hidden in the dung pile, but the rest of the fables follows separate paths in each collection. Marie's fable about the wolf and the lamb (no. 2) is no. 5 in Bonerius's work, Marie's fable about the mouse and the frog (no. 3) appears as no. 6 in the German collection, Marie's no. 4 is Bonerius's no. 7, Marie's no. 5 is Bonerius's no. 9, etc. Subsequently, the differences grow progressively, so that we can only identify some thematic overlaps in both of their works. In the case of the Middle High German narratives, the Swiss poet at times improved the context considerably. For instance, whereas Marie talks about a greedy dog carrying a piece of cheese in its mouth, Bonerius has the dog holding a piece of meat, a more realistic variation. Both poets also include their own individual fables, so we would have to read these two works in tandem, but not in any direct relationship. While both adopted classical sources, they also pursued their own ideas and offered interesting interpretations, which make both collections into creative and innovative contributions to this tradition. It is highly unlikely that Bonerius might have been familiar with the efforts by Marie, but both can be identified as outstanding literary representatives of their times. Comparing Marie's *Fables* with Bonerius's *Edelstein*, we discover two great contributors to the genre of fables, especially because both preserved their independence and included not only the well-established narratives handed down by Aesop (6th c. B.C.E.), Phaedrus (1st c. C.E.), Babrius (2nd c. C.E.), Aphthonius of Antioch (315), Avianus (early 5th c.), and Romulus (10th c.; also known as Anonymus Neveleti, or Anglicus), but each also created his/her own fables and hence deserves credit for being a poet on his own.³ Bonerius's fables also prove to be a

³ See the useful introduction by Harriet Spiegel, ed. and trans., Marie de France, *Fables* (see note 2), 6–7. For a solidly researched study especially of the Latin fable tradition, which includes, however, also comments on Bonerius, see Aaron E. Wright, 'Hie lert uns der meister'. *Latin Commentary and the German Fable 1350–1500*. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 218 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), 107–31. See also the older studies providing valuable comparisons between Bonerius's versions and the Latin sources: Anton E. Schönbach, "Zur Kritik Boners," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*

combination of translations and literary innovations because the poet offers numerous examples illustrating the value of freedom, addressing personal stupidity, the value of fair and objective judges, and also the responsibility of teachers. In short, this Dominican priest explicitly reflected his urban background and his personal concerns as a friar monk preaching to a city audience.

The Genre of the Fable and Its History

As in many other cases, it is not easily possible to define the genre of the fable in concrete terms, although most commonly animals appear and act out certain ways, characters, intentions, and types of behavior as illustrations of human (mis)behavior. The discussion about the nature and characteristics of fables goes back to the eighteenth century, such as when Gotthold Ephraim Lessing presented both an extensive treatise on this genre and a larger collection in 1759. This famous playwright and critic engaged, above all, with the fables composed or edited/cast into verse by Antoine Houdar de la Motte (1672–1731), Henri Richer (1685–171748), and Johann Jakob Breitinger (1701–1776), among others (curiously, not by Jean de La Fontaine), examining many different perspectives. He reached, however, only the conclusion that all short narratives with a moral lesson would fall under this category.⁴ But fables can also be predicated on objects, birds, and

6 (1875): 251–90; Reinhold Gottschick, “Ueber die Quellen zu Boners Edelstein,” *Königliches Gymnasium zu Charlottenburg, Jahresbericht* 6 (1876): 1–3; id., “Über die Benutzung Avians durch Boner,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 7 (1876): 237–43.

⁴ *Lessings Werke*, ed. Georg Witkowski. Meyers Klassiker-Ausgaben. Vol. 3 (Leipzig and Vienna: Bibliographisches Institut, n.y. [1911]), 419–20. I translate directly: “When we trace back a general moral statement to a particular case, then grant this case the status of reality, and then make a story out of it, in which you can recognize the general observation again, then this poem is called a fable.” Later, Lessing offered an extensive review of Bodmer’s and Breitinger’s edition in 1781, Lessing, *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Karl Lachmann. 3rd, newly rev. and expanded ed. by Franz Muncker. Vol. XI (Stuttgart: Göschen, 1898), 322–51 [wrong pagination in Stange’s bibliography]. Lessing already demonstrated a high degree of philological acumen, an understanding of the value of comparing the various manuscripts and incunabula with each other – he was aware of six manuscripts and the first incunabulum – in order to gain a good understanding of what the original might have looked like. He points out that the two Swiss editors were not the first ones at all to have discovered medieval manuscripts with Bonerius’s fables; instead, a Herr von Heineke and Johann Saubertus had already come across the Bamberg incunabulum from 1461. Lessing offered some valuable criticism of the edition

people, as long as there is then a moral lesson at the end.⁵ Most commonly, the animals or plants mentioned in a fable are anthropomorphized in order to reflect on human conditions, problems, concerns, conflicts, shortcomings, failures, vices, and also crimes.

A modern definition, concise and yet comprehensive, would be: “A brief verse or prose narrative of description, whose characters may be animals . . . or inanimate objects . . . acting like humans; or, less frequently, personified abstractions . . . or human types, whether literal . . . or metaphorical The narrative or description may be preceded, followed, or interrupted by a separate, relatively abstract statement of the f.’s theme or thesis.”⁶ Fables have been composed in all of world literature and have constituted a major genre because they contain a significant didactic message which is regularly contained in an entertaining narrative about misfortune, success, failures, misery, happiness, ignorance and stupidity, and intelligence and wit.⁷

prepared by the two Swiss philologists and, more importantly, published some of the fables missing in Bodmer’s and Breitinger’s publication. For the digital copy of Lessing’s works from 1898, see online at:

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015050680787&view=1up&seq=16> (last accessed on July 20, 2020). For the intense discourse on the fable in the eighteenth century, see Thomas Noel, *Theories of the Fable in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975).

⁵ There are many scholarly efforts to come to terms with the fable, but most have remained a bit unsatisfactory because every fable author has operated somewhat freely and made it difficult for modern scholars to come up with strict, uniform, and clear definitions. See, for instance, Klaus Grubmüller, “Zur Pragmatik der Fabel: Der Situationsbezug als Gattungsmerkmal,” *Textsorten und literarische Gattungen: Dokumentation des Germanistentages in Hamburg vom 1. bis 4. April 1979*, ed. Vorstand der Vereinigung der Deutschen Hochschulgermanisten (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1983), 473–88.

⁶ David Lee Rubin and A. L. Sells, “Fable,” *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 400–01; here 400. See also the detailed and precise article “Fabel” in Gero von Wilpert, *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur*. 8th, improved and expanded ed. (1955; Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2011), 254–55, which comes along with an extensive bibliography.

⁷ Harold J. Blackham, *The Fable as Literature* (London and Dover, NH: Athlone Press 1965); Gerd Dicke and Klaus Grubmüller, *Die Fabeln des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit: ein Katalog der deutschen Versionen und ihrer lateinischen Entsprechungen*. Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften, 60 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1987); see now also Mishael Caspi and John T. Greene, *Parables and Fables as Distinctive Jewish Literary Genres: The Origins and Structure of Indirect Speech about God* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011). For a collection of Chinese

Some of the most influential and popular fables ever written, apart from those by Aesop, originated in India, compiled in the collection known as *Kalila and Dimna*, or the *Bidpai Fables*, from around the third century B.C.E. In the mid-sixth century C.E., the physician Burzoë, at the request of Chosroë I Anoshirvan, ruler of Persia from 531 to 579, translated those tales into Middle Persian. This collection, in turn, was translated into Old Syriac not long afterwards, and in the middle of the eighth century, the Persian Ibn al-Muqaffa' translated it into Arabic; this became the source for many other translations, such as into Greek by Simeon, son of Seth, in ca. 1050, then into Old Slavonic, and Medieval Italian. A Hebrew translation by Rabbi Joel appeared at the end of the twelfth or early thirteenth century, which Giovanni da Capua translated into Latin by the end of the thirteenth century. This, in turn, became the source of the German translation by Antonius von Pforr in 1480 (printed). A Spanish translation of Ibn al-Muqaffa' appeared in 1251 (anonymous), and many other translations into different languages followed.⁸ There are some shared motifs in the eastern and the western tradition, and the ethical ideals appear to be surprisingly similar. We find many other fable collections also in Arabic, such as *Marzubannama* by Marzuban (ca. 1220) or *Fakihat al-Khulafa' wa Mufakhat al-Zurafa'* by Ahmad ibn Arabshah (1389–1450), and we could easily widen our perspective by including fables also from other cultures and languages throughout the world. But let us return to *The Gemstone*, which offers overwhelming proof for this intensive but heretofore little-studied phenomenon of a nearly global transmission of texts throughout the Middle Ages by way of copying and translating.⁹

fables, see, for instance, Mary Hayes Davis and Chow-Leung, *Chinese Fables and Folk Stories* (New York, Cincinnati, OH, and Chicago: American Book Company, 1908); for a short selection of African fables, see https://www.worldoftales.com/African_folktales.html#gsc.tab=0 (last accessed on July 20, 2020). For Arabic fables, see *Marzubannama* by Marzuban (ca. 1220) or *Fakihat al-Khulafa' wa Mufakhat al-Zurafa'* by Ahmad ibn Arabshah (1389–1450).

⁸ Nasrullah Munshi, *Kalila and Dimna*, trans. from the Persian by Wheeler Thackston (Indianapolis, IN, and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2019), ix–xiii; cf. Albrecht Classen, “India, Persia, and Arabia in the Mind of a Late Fifteenth-Century German Author: Transcultural Experiences through the Literary Discourse. Antonius von Pforr and his *Buch der Beispiele der Alten Weisen*,” *Philological Quarterly* 99.2 (2020): 119–45.

⁹ See the contributions to *Text, Transmission, and Transformation in the European Middle Ages, 1000–1500*, ed. Carrie Griffin and Emer Purcell. *Cursor Mundi*, 34 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018). The contributors mostly deal with Irish, English, and Italian literature. Only Matthew Wranovix engages with textual transmission in late

Why This Translation

Medievalists and scholars working on fable literature will profit deeply from this late medieval Swiss-German collection, now also available in an English translation, especially because Bonerius rendered famous Latin sources into his fourteenth-century Swiss German.¹⁰ Scholars working on eighteenth-century literature will profit from this as well because his fables began to receive great attention once again at the end of that century. *The Gemstone* could be profitably used in an academic classroom today because the animal stories are easy to understand, generally entertaining and pleasing, and the subsequent moral lessons are quite direct and to the point, obviously mirroring general concerns, worries, ideals, and values, and thus can be regarded as valuable sources for the study of the history of mentality, history of everyday life, medieval politics, and philosophy. Moreover, anyone searching for moral and ethical teachings in a slightly different context will greatly enjoy the insights proffered by Bonerius. His fables shed considerable light on the social, political, religious, and economic conditions at his time, but his lessons also ring deeply true until today.

The History of Reception of Bonerius's Fables

These fables were recently edited once again in an impressive fashion and are now available in a bi-lingual volume prepared by Manfred Stange (*Ulrich Boner: Der Edelstein*, 2016),¹¹ with the original Middle High

medieval Germany, but limits himself to the efforts by bishops to organize centrally the distribution of liturgical texts or pastoral handbooks. Vernacular literature is hardly discussed, and the real impact of eastern, especially Arabic literature on the European scene, not to talk of classical literature, is not even considered. See the valuable review by Shari Boodts in *The Medieval Review* 20.18.13 (online).

¹⁰ As to the genre of the European fable, see Reinhard Dithmar, *Die Fabel: Geschichte, Struktur, Didaktik*. 8th rev. ed. Rpt. of the completely rev. ed. from 1988. Uni-Taschenbücher, 73 (1988; Paderborn and Munich: Schöningh, 1997); Hans Georg Coenen, *Die Gattung Fabel: Infrastrukturen einer Kommunikationsform*. Uni-Taschenbücher, 2159 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000). But, to reemphasize this important point, fables were written all over the world; see, for instance, Harleen Singh, *The Rani of Jhansi: Gender, History, and Fable in India* (Delhi, India: Cambridge University Press, 2014). We are still far away from the full understanding of the global literary network connecting many of those fable collections with each other.

¹¹ Ulrich Boner, *Der Edelstein: Eine mittelalterliche Fabelsammlung*. Zweisprachige Ausgabe Mittelhochdeutsch – Neuhochdeutsch. Herausgegeben, übersetzt, mit Anmerkungen, farbigen Abbildungen, einem Nachwort, Literaturverzeichnis, Register

German text on the left page and the modern German translation on the right. But they remain mostly unknown outside of the German-speaking world of medievalists. The English translation of Bonerius's fables will put them on par with, if not above, those by Marie de France (fl. ca. 1160–1200) and will make them accessible for a much wider audience. Even only a superficial comparison between the Anglo-Norman and the Swiss-German texts quickly demonstrates that Bonerius offered much more lively, detailed, and interpretive fables, obviously fully aware of his more complex, probably late medieval urban audience, whereas Marie addressed only a limited courtly group of listeners/readers.

From early on, German philological research had recognized the high value of this fable collection. They were first fully discussed and edited by Johann Jacob Bodmer and Johann Jacob Breitingen in 1757 (94 fables, based on the Zürich manuscript Z1, lost since 1776),¹² then by Johann Joachim Eschenburg

und Fabel-Verzeichnis versehen von Manfred Stange (Überstadt-Weiher, Heidelberg, and Neustadt a. d. W., and Basel: verlag regionalkultur, 2016).

¹² Johann Jacob Bodmer and Johann Jacob Breitingen, *Fabeln aus den Zeiten der Minnesinger* (Zürich: Orell, 1757). Ulrich Boner, *Der Edelstein (Öffentliche Bibliothek der Universität Basel, Handschrift A N III 17)*. Farbmikrofiche- Edition. Mit einer Einführung in das Werk von Klaus Grubmüller. Kodikologische und kunsthistorische Beschreibung von Ulrike Bodemann. *Codices illuminati medii aevi*, 4 (Munich: Edition Helga Lengenfelder, 1987); online at: <https://www.omifacsimiles.com/brochures/cima04.pdf>. They point out that Johann Georg Scherz already had edited fifty-one of Bonerius's fables from the Strassburg manuscript in his *Philosophiae moralis germanorum medii aevi specimen ... ex MSC nunc primum in lucem publicam productum*, 1704–1710, followed by comments by Gottsched in 1746 and Lessing in 1773 and 1781. Christian F. Gellert printed some of Bonerius's fables in 1744 and 1746, and this inspired Johann Jakob Bodmer and Johann Jakob Breitingen to do the same in 1752. In the following decades, various major German philologists turned their attention to Bonerius's fables to experiment how to prepare a historical critical edition, exploring thus the basic principles of modern philology, such as Johann Joachim Eschenburg (1810), Karl Lachmann (1817), Georg Friedrich Benecke (1816), Franz Pfeiffer (1844), and Anton E. Schönbach (1875). For Lessing's engagement with medieval literature, and hence also with Bonerius, see Albrecht Classen, "Lessing als Philologe: Seine Kenntnis und Wertung mittelalterlicher Dichtungen und Texte," *The Lessing Yearbook* 19 (1987): 127–63. The most significant study of Bonerius's fables to date is the monograph by Klaus Grubmüller, *Meister Esopus: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Funktion der Fabel im Mittelalter*. Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 56 (Zürich and Munich: Artemis, 1977), here pp. 297–374.

in 1810,¹³ George Friedrich Benecke in 1816,¹⁴ and then, truly magisterially, by Franz Pfeiffer in 1844.¹⁵

Bonerius's fable collection was a great success in the Middle Ages, as documented by the impressive number of manuscripts containing his narratives. Below is a list of all known manuscripts containing either the full collection of the *Edelstein* – he himself put together one hundred fables, framed by a prologue and an epilogue – or a shorter selection. I have added also as much information about the manuscripts in their composition (often combining a variety of similar or other texts) and the illustrations, and the dialect used by the scribe, as I could assemble:

1. Augsburg, Universitätsbibliothek, cod. Oettingen-Wallerstein I,3.fol.3, fol. 1r–98v, 1449, paper, I + 275 leaves, 2°, Swabian, completely illustrated (100 ill.). The manuscript also contains *Des Teufels Netz* and the *Sibyllen Buch* (*Sibyllenweissagung*), both didactic texts reflecting on society at large and the various estates.
2. Basel, Öffentliche Bibliothek, cod. A.N.III.17, fol. 1ra–58vb (ca. 1410 or ca. 1420), parchment, 59. fol., 2°, Alemannic, completely illustrated (71 colored ill.).
3. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. germ. 2° 579, fol. 1r–105v (15th c.), paper, Alemannic, not illustrated.
4. Bern, Burgerbibliothek., Ms. hist. helv. X.49, pp. 1–206 (ca. 1466–1473), paper, 210 pp., 2°, Alemannic, completely illustrated (71 ill.).
5. Colmar, Bibliothèque de la Ville, Ms. 78, fol. 122ra–vb (= fable no. 1), 1397, paper, 128 leaves, 2°, Alemannic, not illustrated. Most of the manuscript is reserved for the didactic narrative, *Schachzabelbuch* (Chess Book), by Konrad von Ammenhausen.
6. Donaueschingen, Fürstlich Fürstenbergische Hofbibliothek, cod. A.III.53, fol. 1ra–vb. (15th c.), paper, 1 leaf (fragment), Bavarian,

¹³ Johann Joachim Eschenburg, *Boners Edelstein in hundert Fabeln: Mit Varianten und Worterklärungen* (Berlin: Unger, 1810).

¹⁴ George Friedrich Benecke, *Der Edel Stein getichtet von Bonerius. Auch Handschriften berichtet und mit einem Wörterbuche versehen* (Berlin: Realschul-Buchhandlung, 1816); now online at: <https://books.google.com/books?id=3CsHAAAAQAAJ&hl=en>.

¹⁵ Ulrich Boner, *Der Edelstein*, ed. Franz Pfeiffer. *Dichtungen des deutschen Mittelalters*, 4 (Leipzig: G. J. Göschen, 1844); now online at: <https://books.google.com/books?id=U9xJAAAAMAAJ>; or at: https://books.google.com/books?id=CIMGAQAIAAJ&pg=PA3&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=4#v=onepage&q&f=false.

- with illustration. This manuscript is today in Karlsruhe, Landesbibliothek, same signature.
7. Dresden, Landesbibliothek, M 67b, fol. 103ra–45rb (ca. 1450–1470), paper, 225 leaves, 2°, North-Bavarian-East Franconian (Nuremberg?), completely illustrated. It also contains Thomasin von Zerklære's *Der Welsche Gast (D)*, excerpts from Hugo von Trimberg's *Der Renner*, and a variety of short verse narratives.
 8. Frankfurt a. M., Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. germ. qu. 6, fol. 199r–228v (1446–1449), paper, illustration + 242 + illustration leaves, 4°, Swabian, completely illustrated (120 ill.). The manuscript also contains Hugo von Trimberg's *Der Renner*; the didactic narratives *Von der Jugend und dem Alter* (On Youth and Old Age), *Greisenklage* (Lament of the Old Man), and the *Spruch auf den schwäbischen Städtekrieg* (Verse Narrative on the War between the Swabian Cities and the Bavarian Duke Frederick the Wise, 1387–1388).
 9. Frauenfeld, Kantonsbibliothek, cod. Y 22, fol. 3r–107v (2nd half of the 15th c.), paper, 120 leaves, 4°, Swabian, illustrations had been planned but were not realized. There are some additional religious poems included.
 10. Fulda, Landesbibliothek, cod. Aa 110 4°, fol. 304ra (= fable no. 32), 2nd half of the 15th c., paper, 413 leaves, 2°, Rhine-Franconian.
 11. Genf-Cologne (also: Cologne-Genf), Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, cod. Bodmer 42, fol. 8r–120v (ca. 1455), paper, 106 leaves, 2°, Alemannic, illustrations planned, but were not realized. For a digital copy of the manuscript, see <http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/fmb/cb-0042>.
 12. Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, cpg 86, fol. 1r–120v, 1461, paper, V + 120 + IV leaves, 2°, Bavarian, illustrations had been planned, but only the first ten were pre-sketched. For a digital copy, see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg86>.
 13. Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, cpg 314, fol. 1ra–50rb (1443–1447), paper, 197 leaves, 2°, Swabian (Augsburg); the *Edelstein* completely illustrated (90 ill.). The manuscript contains numerous other verse narratives or stanzas, such as by Freidank, but then also the heroic epic poems *Dietrichs Flucht* and *Rabenschlacht*. For a digital copy, see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg314>.

14. Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, cpg 400, fol. 1r–111r, 1432, paper, V + 111 + V leaves, 4°, Alemannic, not illustrated. For a digital copy, see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg400>.
15. Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, cpg 794, fol. 1r–80v (ca. 1410–1420, maybe specifically 1415), paper, I + 80 + I leaves, 2°, Bavarian, completely illustrated. For a digital copy, see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg794>.
16. Karlsruhe, Landesbibliothek, cod. Ettenheimmünster 30, fol. 1r–108v (2nd half of the 15th c.), paper, 126 leaves, 2°, Alemannic-Swabian, illustrations planned, but were not realized. The manuscript also contains some didactic stanzas by Freidank. For a digital copy, see <https://digital.blb-karlsruhe.de/urn/urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-107601>.
17. Karlsruhe, Landesbibliothek, cod. Ettenheimmünster 37, fol. 84r–237v, 1482, paper, I + 238 leaves, 4°, Alemannic-Swabian (Constance?), illustrations planned, but were not realized. The manuscript also contains a calendar in verse; for a digital copy, see <https://digital.blb-karlsruhe.de/urn/urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-103141>.
18. Munich, Staatsbibliothek, cgm 576, fol. 1r–90v (2nd half of the 15th c.), paper, 90 leaves, 2°, Alemannic, only the first 19 illustrations realized (up to fol. 17r).
19. Munich, Staatsbibliothek, cgm 714, fol. 222r–225r (= fables nos. 72 and 82), (1455–1458), paper, 495 leaves, 4°, Northern Bavarian (Nuremberg), not illustrated. The manuscript contains many different texts, including Konrad von Würzburg's *Trojanerkrieg* and Hans Rosenplüt's Shrovetide Plays. For a digital copy, see <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn/resolver.pl?urn=urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00024106-2>.
20. Munich, Staatsbibliothek, cgm 3974, fol. 124r–213r (1446–1466), paper, 321 leaves, 2°, Bavarian (Regensburg), Latin/German manuscript, *Edelstein* as the German complement to the Latin commentated *Anonymus Neveleti*, completely illustrated. The manuscript also contains the entertaining precourtly verse narrative *Salomon und Markolf* and a *Biblia pauperum*. For a digital copy, see <https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/0008/bsb00088606/images/index.html?ip=193.174.98.30&id=00088606&seite=1>.
21. Munich, Staatsbibliothek, clm 4409, fol. 87r–132r (12th–15th c.; Boner's fables, 15th c.), parchment/paper, 229 leaves, 4°, Bavarian with some Swabian influence, partly Latin, partly German

- manuscript, *Edelstein* until fol. 122v, as the German companion to the Latin commentated *Anonymus Neveleti*, only partially illustrated. The manuscript also contains a variety of other Latin-German poems. For a digital copy, see <https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/bsb00006778/images/index.html>.
22. St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, cod. 643, S. 1a–89a (3rd quarter of the 15th c.), paper, 260 5., 2°, High Alemannic, *Edelstein* completely illustrated. The manuscript also contains many verse narratives and the *Zürcher Stadtchronik*. For a digital copy, see <http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/de/list/one/csg/0643>.
 23. St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, cod. 969, p. 116–129 (15th c.), paper, 222 p., 4°. Alemannic, not illustrated. The manuscript also contains various ascetic-mystical treatises from the women's convent of Wonnenstein. For a digital copy, see <http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/csg/0969>.
 24. Strassburg, Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire, Ms. 2935 (previously cod. L germ. 727. 2°), fol. 164r–182v (15th c.), paper, 185 leaves, 2°, Alemannic, not illustrated. The manuscript also contains Jakob Twinger von Königshofen's *Chronik*. For a digital copy, see <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10224652f>.
 25. formerly, Strassburg, Stadtbibliothek, Joh. Bibl. Ms. A 87, fol. 5r–122v (15th c.), paper, 122 leaves, 2°, Alemannic, not illustrated, burnt in the fire of 1870.
 26. formerly, Straßburg, Stadtbibliothek, Joh. Bibl. Ms. B 94, 1411, paper, 201 (?) leaves, 2°, Alemannic (Freiburg i. Br.), not illustrated, burnt in the fire of 1870. The manuscript also contained a version of Egenolf von Staufenberg's *Peter von Staufenberg* (verse narrative about a knight's relationship with a fairy).
 27. formerly, Strassburg, Stadtbibliothek, no call number (14th/15th c.), paper, 4°, Alemannic, illustrated (uncertain), burnt in the fire of 1870.
 28. Stuttgart, Landesbibliothek, cod. HB X 23, fol. 79r–148r (ca. 1446–1449), paper, 149 leaves, 2°, East Middle German, not illustrated. The manuscript also contains texts such as Johann von Tepl's *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen* (The Plowman from Bohemia; a dialogue prose text pitting the Plowman [= Everyman] against Death), the didactic *Cato*, and Jacobus de Theramo's *Belial*.

29. formerly, Wernigerode, Stolberg, Bibliothek, cod. Zb 4m, fol. 135v–137v (= fables no. 57 and 82) (end of 15th/early 16th c., disappeared since 1931. The manuscript also contained a number of medical treatises. Numerous illustrations.
30. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, cod. 2933, fol. 1r–102v (ca. 1470–1480), paper, 106 (originally 122) leaves, 4°, Rhenish-Franconian, completely illustrated.
31. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, cod. 2.4.Aug.2°, fol. 15ra–52rb (ca. 1490–1492), paper, with 7 parchment leaves, 169 paper leaves, 2°, North Bavarian/East Franconian (Nuremberg?), completely illustrated (104 ill.). The manuscript contains numerous other didactic texts, such as by Hermann von Linz, Freidank, and the Monk of Salzburg.
32. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, cod. 3.2.Aug.4°, fol. 26r–58v (15th c.), paper, 58 leaves, 4°, Bavarian with some Alemannic, illustrations had been planned, but were not realized. The manuscript also contains a German translation of Jacobus de Cessolis's chess treatise (*Schachzabelbuch*).
33. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, cod. 69.12.Aug.2°, fol. 1r–96v, 1492, paper, 96 leaves, 2°, North Bavarian, completely illustrated, but the colored pen drawings were often cut out.
34. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, cod. 76.3.Aug.2°, fol. 1r–95v, 1458, paper, 199 leaves, 2°, Swabian (Augsburg?), completely illustrated. The manuscript also contains several Shrovetide plays by Hans Rosenplüt and KÜchlin's *Reimchronik vom Herkommen der Stadt Augsburg*.
35. formerly, Zürich, Z 1, fol. 1ra–80vb (end of the 14th c.), parchment, 80 leaves, 8°(?), Alemannic (Bern?), not illustrated. Since Breitingen's death in 1776, the manuscript has been lost.
36. Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, cod. C 117, fol. 2r–119v, 1424, paper, 119 leaves, 4°, Alemannic, not illustrated.¹⁶

Bonerius's fables were also some of the earliest texts ever printed in the West:

1. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, 16.1.Eth.2°, fol. 1r–88v. Bamberg: Albrecht Pfister, 14. Februar 1461 (= GW 4839), 88 leaves, 4°, East Franconian, with 101 woodcuts.

¹⁶ See also the detailed descriptions of each individual manuscript online at: <http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/1763> (last accessed on July 20, 2020).

2. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 8° Inc. 332 Zirn., fol. 2r–78v (Bamberg: Albrecht Pfister, ca. 1463/64 = GW 4840), 78 leaves, 4°, East Franconian, with 103 woodcuts.¹⁷

Only when Heinrich Steinhöwel published his own collection of fables, which were printed in Ulm in 1476, did Bonerius face a serious competitor on the early modern book market, whereupon his fame slowly faded away.

Before the appearance of Bonerius's fable collection in 1350, German poets such as Herger, Reinmar von Zweter, Bruder Wernher, der Marner, or Frauenlob had created only a few examples; by contrast, *Der Edelstein* is the first comprehensive, fully developed anthology of fables, mostly drawn from the classical and early medieval tradition. Only the poet Der Stricker (ca. 1220–1240) had created a larger body of fables before Bonerius.¹⁸

Once this Bernese Dominican priest had created this large corpus of fables, other poets interested in this genre followed suit, such as Gerhard von Minden with his *Wolfenbütteler Äsop* (1370), the so-called *Magdeburger Äsop* from the early fifteenth century, Ulrich von Pottenstein's translation of the so-called *Cyrrillische Fabeln* (between 1408 and 1416), and the *Nürnbergger Prosa-Äsop* (ca. 1412). In fact, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries witnessed a true explosion in fable literature, both in Latin (Laurentius Valla, Remicius, Abstemius, Accursiana, Sebastian Brant) and in the various vernaculars. In the German-language area, we can identify such major writers as Johann Geiler von Kaysersberg, Johannes Pauli, Philipp Melanchthon, Martin Luther, Hans Sachs, Ulrich Zwingli, Hans Wilhelm Kirchhof, Erasmus Alberus, Burkhard Waldis (fifteenth and

¹⁷ Wolfgang Milde, "Zu den beiden Bonerdrucken Albrecht Pfisters <GW 4930 imd 4940>," *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* (1976): 109–16. See also Doris Fouquet, *Ulrich Boner: Der Edelstein. Faksimile der ersten Druckausgabe Bamberg 1461, 16.1 Eth. 2o der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel* (Stuttgart: Müller u. Schindler, 1972).

¹⁸ Der Stricker, *Erzählungen, Fabeln, Reden: Mittelhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch*, ed., trans., and commentary by Otfried Ehrismann (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1992). His fables remained relatively popular until the early sixteenth century (manuscript C), and they are mostly very different from those composed by Bonerius. For the long list of manuscripts containing The Stricker's short verse narratives, including his fables, see online at <http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/367> (last accessed on July 20, 2020). Cf. also Bruno Boesch, *Lehrhafte Literatur: Lehre in der Dichtung und Lehrdichtung im deutschen Mittelalter*. Grundlagen der Germanistik, 21 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1977). Oddly, he does not even mention Bonerius by name, and touches on the genre of fables only in passing, despite acknowledging its significant role in didactic literature (226).

sixteenth centuries), and many others. Fables were very attractive also all over Europe and were produced in many different languages, not to mention the other continents (see above). In light of the enormous popularity of the fable throughout the early modern age, we recognize Bonerius's central role in this reception process, and after a hiatus in the seventeenth century, his impact continued in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁹ Some of his fables were also picked up by the famous collectors of fairy tales, first the Brothers Grimm (1812), then Ludwig Bechstein (1847), and others, which indicates the extent to which the generic term 'fable' could be used in a variety of contexts and was not at all limited in the strict sense to the type of narratives as originally developed by Aesop.²⁰

Bonerius the Author

We do not know much about Bonerius in biographical terms, but we can be certain that he was a Dominican priest in Bern, where he is documented several times between 1324 and 1350.²¹ For the first part of his collection (fables 1–62), he mostly relied on the collection by Gualterus Anglicus (ca. 1175), formerly known as the so-called *Anonymus Neveleti*, identified as such since Isaac Nicholas Nevelet had published the Latin fables in distichs in Frankfurt a. M. in 1610. They are now recognized as the fables by the so-called Romulus (twelfth century).²² This version has survived in more than a hundred manuscripts.

For the second part (fables 63–91), Bonerius drew from the Latin fable collection by Avianus (early fifth century). Some additional narratives, not necessarily fables but pursuing the same didactic intent and using a parallel structure, Bonerius borrowed, at least indirectly, from a variety of sources, such as Petrus Alfonsi's *Disciplina clericalis* (12th century), the *Alphabetum narrationum*, and the works of other famous authors such as

¹⁹ Adalbert Elschenbroich, *Die deutsche und lateinische Fabel in der Frühen Neuzeit*. 2 vols. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1990). Vol. 1 contains the selected texts, vol. 2 offers commentary and literary-historical information. For Bonerius, see vol. 2, p. 9.

²⁰ See *Kinder- und Hausmärchen gesammelt durch die Brüder Grimm* (Zurich: Manesse Verlag, 2002), Vol. II, 172–74.

²¹ Despite numerous entries in various reference works and lexica, until today our knowledge about Bonerius's personal life and works has not gained much at all in detail. See, for instance, Walter Mitzka, "Boner, Ulrich," *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, ed. Otto zu Stolberg-Wernigerode vol. 2 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1955), 443; online at:

<https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118661418.html#ndbcontent>.

²² Klaus Grubmüller, *Meister Esopus* (1977), 58–85.

Jerome, Jacques de Vitry (ca. 1160–ca. 1240), Valerius Maximus (fl. 14–37), Aulus Gellius (ca. 125–after 180), Macrobius (fl. ca. 400), and Odo of Cheriton, not to forget the highly popular *Gesta Romanorum*. However, he also invented his own fables, so he was not simply a collector and translator. As much as he ‘translated’ especially from Avianus and Romulus (*Anonymous Neveleti*), there are numerous smaller and larger differences in the plot development, imagery, and moral and ethical commentaries. All this makes the *Gemstone* a fairly independent piece of late medieval (Swiss) German literature of high literary quality which exerted a tremendous influence well into the sixteenth century.

Bonerius’s Ethical, Moral, and Philosophical Messages

The earliest manuscripts containing Bonerius’s fables date from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, certainly a further confirmation for the significant growth of literary interests at that time, especially because most of those manuscripts originated from private, secular collections in the hand of wealthy aristocrats and urban intellectuals/merchants and were probably also used for teaching in schools. The poet was deeply convinced of the moral, ethical, and religious value of his fables for men and women, old and young, poor and rich (his own formulation often repeated throughout his collection), commonly bringing to his general audience’s attention situations in the countryside and the city. He also argued strongly throughout his collection that a rational, intelligent, but also pragmatic approach in life would be the only advisable path for people.

Many times, he also insists on the great value of individual freedom, which resonated clearly in fourteenth-century Bern and other parts of future Switzerland. We could also argue that the poet echoed an ever-growing sentiment advocating personal freedom and the freedom of the urban community, which also explains the extensive distribution of his collection of thirty-six manuscripts mostly from southern Germany and modern-day Switzerland.²³

There is a clear indication that Bonerius conceived of his fables as a systematically developed literary project, framed by the prologue and the epilogue, but many of the manuscripts do not reflect this holistic concept quite the same way, obviously as a result of the various scribes’ different

²³ Johannes Janota, *Orientierung durch volkssprachige Schriftlichkeit (1280/90–1380/90)*. Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn der Neuzeit, III: *Vom späten Mittelalter zum Beginn der Neuzeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2004), 300–03.

interests or concerns.²⁴ As he says in his epilogue, his intention had been to create 100 fables (v. 9), although most of the surviving manuscripts do not contain all of them. The number 100 was always regarded as highly symbolic, indicating completion, perfection, and harmony, such as in the case of Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia* (completed in ca. 1320, so just 30 years before *Der Edelstein*), which consists of three *cantiche* (*Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, *Paradiso*), each with 33 cantos (symbolizing the age of Christ at His death), which amounts to 99 altogether, plus the prologue, which precedes the *Inferno*.²⁵

At the same time, we have to remember that Bonerius published his *Edelstein* exactly at the same time as when the Florentine poet Boccaccio (1313–1375) published his *Decameron* (ca. 1350), which also consists of hundred stories, ten of them told every day over ten days altogether. It would be impossible at this point to say whether those two poets knew of each other, but it is absolutely striking that both employed exactly the same structural pattern. In each text, there is a prologue and an epilogue, and then there are the hundred tales/fables. While Bonerius adds his personal comments to each fable in his epimythium, Boccaccio has his story-tellers exchange ideas about the meaning of each tale presented to them. However, while Bonerius composed mostly fables in the traditional sense of the word, Boccaccio created secular, often erotic, and always entertaining prose narratives. Significantly, both poets were extremely successful with their works, Bonerius in his Swiss-German, Boccaccio in his Florentine-Italian, both regularly exposing people's shortcomings, failures, and weaknesses, and both presenting also model cases of a virtuous lifestyle. Both the *Edelstein* and the *Decameron* mostly addressed an urban audience and

²⁴ Klaus Grubmüller, "Boners 'Edelstein' und seine Überlieferung," Ulrich Boner, *Der Edelstein*, Farbmikrofiche (see note 11), 7–16. See also the catalog accompanying an exhibition, *Fabula docet: illustrierte Fabelbücher aus 6 Jahrhunderten*, ed. Ulrike Bodemann. Ausstellungskataloge der Herzog-August-Bibliothek, 41 (Wolfenbüttel: Herzog-August-Bibliothek, 1983); Ulrike Bodemann and Gerd Dicke, "Grundzüge einer Überlieferungs- und Textgeschichte von Boners Edelstein," *Deutsche Handschriften 1100–1400: Oxforder Kolloquium 1985*, ed. Volker Honemann and Nigel F. Palmer (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1988), 424–68.

²⁵ For the symbolism of 100 as expressed numerous times in the Bible, see <https://www.biblestudy.org/bibleref/meaning-of-numbers-in-bible/100.html> (last accessed on July 20, 2020); for number symbolism in general, see Heinz Meyer, *Die Zahlenallegorese im Mittelalter: Methode und Gebrauch* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1975); Heinz Meyer and Rudolf Suntrup, *Lexikon der mittelalterlichen Zahlenbedeutungen* (1987; Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1999).

obviously exerted a mass appeal.²⁶ While Boccaccio has ten individual story-tellers, Bonerius operates by himself and offers his own interpretations for the instruction of his audience.

In contrast to Dante, Bonerius does not engage much with such spiritual questions concerning the structural and mathematically conceived composition of his work, though he has clearly a spiritual perspective in mind when he expressed his opinions about the meaning of his fables, which he always offers at the end of his narratives. Hence, the comparison with Boccaccio offers many more productive insights into shared literary interests during the fourteenth century.

The Middle High Swiss-German Text in Modern Editions

We know that Bonerius hailed from Bern and was a Dominican priest, who obviously intended his fables as narrative illustrations for public sermons. He had a patron there, Johann von Ringgenberg, whom he addresses in the prologue (v. 44) and in the epilogue (v. 39). This Johann (the First, documented between 1291 and 1350) played a significant role in imperial and Swiss politics, and he accompanied Emperor Louis IV the Bavarian on his journey to Rome in 1327/28, where he excelled through his bravery. Johann was also an accomplished poet whose stanzas, strongly influenced by those composed by Walther von der Vogelweide, are included in the famous *Manesse Codex* created in Zürich on behalf of the Manesse family (today, Heidelberg, ms. C, fol. 190v–192r).²⁷ There is also a fictive author portrait

²⁶ I have recently discovered a number of late medieval German verse narratives, *mæren*, which could have served as Boccaccio's sources, if not both Boccaccio and his German predecessors drew from the same Old French *fabliaux*. Albrecht Classen, "Boccaccio's Literary Sources Beyond the Expected: The Decameron in Light of Some German Verse Narratives: "Gänslein," Ruprecht von Würzburg, and Jans Enikel," *Global Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 1.1 (2019), online at: <https://www.pubtext.com/pdf/?boccaccios-literary-sources-beyond-the-expected-the-decameron-in-light-of-some-german-verse-narratives-gnslein-ruprecht-von-wrzbur>; id., "German-Italian Literary Connections in the Late Middle Ages: Boccaccio's *The Decameron* in Light of Some Late Medieval German Narrative Precedents," to appear in *Arcadia* (considerably expanded and revised version). I do not suggest now that Boccaccio and Bonerius were in personal contact, but both obviously composed their works in the same intellectual and literary milieu.

²⁷ For a biography, see Gustav Rochte, "Rinkenber, Johann I. von," *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 29 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1889), 57; now online at: https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/ADB:Rinkenber,_Johann_I._von. For the digitized version of this famous manuscript, see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/epg848> (both last accessed on July 20, 2020). See also my comments in note 1 of

of Johann, but none, of course, of Bonerius, who used a completely different genre and wrote long after that codex focused on courtly love poetry had been completed.

Until today, we rely primarily on the edition of Bonerius's fables as published by Franz Pfeiffer in 1844. He used mostly the manuscript A, today called Z 1 (Zürich, end of the fourteenth century). Bodmer and Breitingner had published these fables contained in that manuscript already in their anthology *Fabeln aus den Zeiten der Minnesinger* (1757), but it disappeared with Breitingner's death in 1776.²⁸ The fables are arranged in a very different order, beginning with no. 2, 6, 7, 9, 12, and then 4, etc. Pfeiffer complemented the text in Z 1 with texts contained in the other Zürich manuscript, C 117, from 1424, and the Heidelberg manuscript cpg 400 from 1432, offering the full range of hundred fables in the right sequence, as originally intended by Bonerius, as far as we can tell today based on the surviving manuscript evidence.

The Translation

In this translation, the first of its kind for Anglophone readers, I have relied on the edition prepared by Manfred Stange, who in turn used Pfeiffer's text version and modified it only slightly. In the late nineteenth century, Max Oberbreyer (1881) and Karl Pannier (1894) had already published their respective German translations in verse of a selection of Bonerius's fables.²⁹ This English translation is independent of those previous efforts and of the new one by Stange, though I have regularly consulted his suggestions. However, numerous times I had to divert from Stange's reading and offered my own version based on a careful study of the various dictionaries, which is then reflected in the footnotes.

the translation. See *Codex Manesse: Die Miniaturen der Großen Heidelberger Liederhandschrift*, ed. and commentary by Ingo F. Walther, together with Gisela Siebert (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1989), 127 and the color reproduction of the page depicting the poet in an idealized style, fig. 45.

²⁸ Bodmer and Breitingner did not identify themselves on the title page, but in the introduction, they use the first-person plural for themselves. For a digitized version, see <https://archive.org/details/fabelnausdenzei00unkngoog/page/n23/mode/1up> (last accessed on July 20, 2020).

²⁹ Max Oberbreyer, *Der Edelstein von Ulrich Boner*. Ausgewählt und sprachlich erneuert mit Einleitung und Erläuterung. Sammlung altdeutscher Werke in neuen Bearbeitungen, 10–11 (Staßfurt and Leipzig: Foerster, 1881); Karl Pannier, *Der Edelstein, von Ulrich Boner*. Ausgewählt und sprachlich erneuert (Leipzig: Reclam, 1894).

At any rate, rendering Bonerius's fables into English represents a very different task than to translate them into modern German, especially because many idiomatic phrases and technical terms cannot be simply translated into English. I have tried hard to follow more closely the original than Stange, which might diminish some of the literary elegance Stange aimed for but it serves the purpose to be more authentic and to provide a clear sense of how Bonerius spoke, what images or metaphors he used, and how he actually expressed himself. Of course, I had to adapt many of his phrases or sentences as well in order to render them into proper modern English, but the reader can still follow closely, comparing every line in the original with the text in the translation.

The consequence is that Stange's translation sometimes reads more fluent and more natural, but then it also tends to move a bit too far away from the original narrative as well. I prefer to stay as close as possible to Bonerius's own text, even if this means at times that the syntax might ring a bit stilted in modern English. I observe as much as possible the verse structure, but I do not imitate the poet's rhyming scheme or meter. He himself explained in the prologue and also in the epilogue that he did not have great poetic ambitions and tried to express himself in a simple, straightforward manner so as to help his audience understand his didactic messages clearly and without delay.

Occasionally, I have added an alternative word or phrase in square brackets right in the translation when this seemed to help understanding the meaning of Boner's statement better, such as replacing a pronoun with the concrete noun or name for clarity's sake. Otherwise, numerous notes offer additional explanations.

Bonerius's Messages For His Contemporaries and For Us Today

True, Bonerius composed his fables by now ca. 670 years ago, but his observations and comments about human behavior, failures, shortcomings, or vices have not lost anything in their validity or relevance for people all over the world. Indeed, with respect to fable literature, which extends back to antiquity, we face the stunning observation that human attitudes, values, desires, vices, etc. have not changed much despite radical, even revolutionary transformations in material, technical, scientific, and political terms throughout time.

The need to educate young people about proper behavior – whether students in monastic schools during the Middle Ages or in modern schools and universities – to appeal to adults to remedy their wrong actions and

words, and the absolute necessity to hold up these literary narratives as mirrors for all people has not changed at all. Thus, Bonerius, like Avianus, Romulus, Marie de France, Der Stricker, and many others, deserves close attention once again because he conveys universal and global lessons of great significance, and we all can certainly learn from this wise, experienced, dedicated, and passionate author of fables.

This Dominican priest obviously knew very well what he was talking about, being deeply aware of human frailties, vile inclinations, and people's often rather evil nature at large. After all, ethics are not part of the human DNA; they must be taught over and over again, as these fables illustrate quite dramatically, and this in tandem with fables composed in many other parts of the world, such as those contained in the extremely popular *Kalila and Dimna*.

In a way, throughout his *Edelstein*, Bonerius exemplified, without stating it explicitly, the Seven Deadly Sins, also known as the Capital Vices, or Cardinal Sins: pride, greed, wrath (anger), envy, lust, gluttony, and sloth. Especially the early medieval Desert Fathers, among them, above all, Evagrius Ponticus and his disciple John Cassian (*De institutis coenobiorum* [Institutes of the Coenobia], ca. 420 C.E.), had created this list of vices, mostly out of a concern for the spiritual well-being of the desert hermits and coenobitic (solitary) monks. These Vices stand in strong contrast to the Seven Heavenly Virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, courage (or fortitude), faith, hope, and charity. Both groups of ethical concepts were already addressed in many different ways by the ancient philosophers, but here we are dealing with theological notions, above all, fundamental for the establishment of the Christian Church in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

Subsequently, every medieval and early modern ecclesiastic was deeply aware of these vices and virtues and preached about them regularly in their masses. In essence, as we could probably all agree, their truth has not been diminished until today, and most of the evils in our postmodern world could be identified through this list of seven deadly sins as well.³⁰ In fact, Bonerius's fables address all of them and reflect upon them from many different perspectives, but nicely packaged, so to speak, in entertaining,

³⁰ Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature*. Studies in Language and Literature (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State College Press, 1952); *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins*, ed. Richard G. Newhauser and Susan Janet Ridyard (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2012); *The Virtues and Vices in the Arts: A Sourcebook*, ed. Shawn Tucker (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2015).

didactic tales. In their core, however, those fables sharply target human sinfulness and alert us about the dire consequences of criminal, evil, and vicious acts and foolish, naïve, arrogant, and prideful behavior. The great popularity of his fables far into the late fifteenth century, and then again during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, confirms that here we face one of the great medieval authors who has much to say even for us today.

If there ever might be a question – and that is, unfortunately, a stark truism – why we ought to turn our attention to the past, to the Middle Ages, or pre-modern literature at large, then these fables provide the answer in a striking fashion. Experiences acquired through lived lives over thousands of years make it possible for us today and tomorrow to develop further as individuals, to establish ethical standards for ourselves, and to contribute to the growth of our society. We do not need to reinvent the wheel all the time and should really learn from those model cases (negative and positive) provided by the fables in order to move forward as a human race, and this not only in technical, material terms but, much more importantly, in ethical, moral, spiritual terms.³¹ I am sorry to say, but much, if not all of the political malaise we are facing today can easily be examined and explained by using the lens provided by Bonerius’s verse narratives. He obviously knew very well what he was talking about concerning people of all ages and gender – and today: races, sexual orientation, religions, and languages – and he would probably have been horrified and disgusted about our modern world, which seems (2020) to face more of a decline than progress. The wolves continue to devour the innocent sheep, and injustice and violence seem to grow every day.

Nevertheless, there are those medieval (and early modern) fables, and they speak an open and direct language. We thus face a fantastic opportunity to understand, to learn, and to change our behavior once again, and the more we study those verse narratives, the more we are invited to reflect on fundamental human behavior and hence to draw lessons from the many different cases presented. Bonerius’s fables, like all other previous

³¹ Albrecht Classen, “The Amazon Rainforest of Pre-Modern Literature: Ethics, Values, and Ideals from the Past for our Future. With a Focus on Aristotle and Heinrich Kaufringer,” *Humanities Open Access* 9(1). 4 (2020), published on Dec. 24, 2019, online at: <file:///C:/Users/aclassen/Downloads/humanities-09-00004.pdf>; id., “The Past as the Key for the Future: Reflections on an Ancient Question. What Does (Medieval) Literature Mean Today in the Twenty-First Century?,” *Athens Journal of Philology* 6.3 (2019): 147-70; online at: <https://www.athensjournals.gr/philology/2019-6-3-1-Classen.pdf>; id., “What is *Humanities Open Access* all about? Innovative Perspectives and Inclusivity as the Platform for Novel Approaches in Humanities Research,” *Humanities Open Access*, June 30 (2020), at: <file:///C:/Users/aclassen/Downloads/humanities-09-00055.pdf>.

literary efforts in that regard, represent extreme situations, but in that way they are excellent fictional models which provide hope for us as parents, teachers, and scholars insofar as the negative examples strongly urge us not to follow the many different types of bad behavior and evil actions and to improve, both on a private and a public level, ourselves and all others, and thus human society at large.

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My wife Carolyn (J.D.), to whom I happily dedicate this book, was kind enough to read the entire translation out loud several times once it was finished, while I simultaneously compared the original Middle High German text, which helped considerably to identify final problems and to clean up difficult passages or to find alternative, more idiomatic English expressions. Four eyes and ears notice more than two, and her legal expertise also helped to confirm that I had used the correct technical language in some of the fables. I greatly appreciate her help as an early copy-editor.

Since the poet hailed from Bern, Switzerland, I have regularly consulted the famous Swiss *Idiotikon*, now available online: <https://www.idiotikon.ch/>, apart from other dictionaries of medieval German (Lexer, et al.), now all accessible on the amazing online page “Wörterbuchnetz,” <http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/cgi-bin/WBNetz/setupStartSeite.tcl>. To be sure, Bonerius employed quite often grammatical structures that would not work in standard Middle High German, and there are also a good number of phrases and words that are so individual that they are not contained in any dictionary (hapax legomenon). But his linguistic idiosyncrasies and peculiarities – at least in comparison with standard Middle High German – are valuable dialect variations, which rarely make his text excessively hard to understand for German medievalists.¹

Since this translation was created during the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, which limited most of our usual options in life, it was a great and fruitful project, so I am very grateful to Cambridge Scholars Publishing for having accepted it for their publication program. It makes available one of the most significant fourteenth-century Middle High German texts in a straightforward and unpretentious English translation. My colleague Marilyn Sandidge (Westfield State University, MA), was kind enough to read critically an early version of this introduction and to make some corrections.

¹ Balsiger, Felix, “Boners Sprache und die bernische Mundart,” *Zeitschrift für hochdeutsche Mundarten* 5 (1904): 37–99.

For this book, I have used, with permission, several manuscript illuminations from manuscript Heidelberg Universitätsbibliothek, Codex Pal. germ. (cpg) 794,² and I would like to express my gratitude for this generosity.

² <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg794/0005/thumbs> (last accessed on July 20, 2020).

TRANSLATION

Prologue

Oh Lord, You Master without Beginning,
Master without End,
almighty Lord, child of the Virgin Mary
from whom all creatures descend,
5 God, Lord over all the throngs of angels,
the ocean of your omnipotence
is completely incomprehensible!
Whatever is being sung or told about You,
people's intellect will never be able to grasp.
10 You are an infinite band encircling us
holding all Your creatures together.
Whatever is flying, swimming, or walking,
You provide them all with your high roof.
No person's mind, heart, or spirit
15 has ever fully understood your miracles, oh Lord.
You are an overflowing treasure,
a treasure above all treasures, oh You amazing God,
grant us the strength that we can follow
Your commands according to Your will
20 and that we can remain free of all sins
and that we recognize the works
that You have created
and which You have granted us as a mirror, oh Lord
as a model for us so that we direct our lives
25 toward the high path
of virtues and the trail of honor.
All creatures teach us,
whether they are good or evil,
that we have to love You, oh Lord.
30 The school masters rightly tell us:
"A fable achieves more than speaking simple words!"
It enriches the minds of many people
and fills them with virtues and happiness.

A good fable comes along clothed in honor;
 35 a good fable disciplines an uncouth man,
 a good fable can tame women,
 a good fable decorates young and old,
 just as the green leaves do in the forest.
 Therefore, I, Bonerius,
 40 have made up my mind
 to record a number of fables,
 simple and without particularly artistic skills,
 in honor of the dignified man,
 Sir John of Ringgenberg,¹
 45 in German, using plain words,
 easily understandable in all of their parts,
 having translated them from the Latin,
 as I found them written down [in my source].² One phrase

¹ This is Ulrich Bonerius's patron who paid him for writing these fables. Most medieval literature was composed and written down upon a patron's request or in the hope that a patron would sponsor it. After all, there was not yet a modern book market, and much depended for the poet/writer on the possibility to find someone wealthy enough to pay the writer or poet for his/her efforts and also for the parchment upon which the text was written. Of course, modern authors also need to have a publisher and an audience to make it. For a good biographical outline, along with a copy of the image of Johann von Ringgenberg in the Codex Manesse fol. 190v, see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg848>, and then <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg848/0376> (both last accessed on July 20, 2020).

² For medieval authors it was generally more important to demonstrate that they were learned enough to draw from an authoritative source than to claim that they were the original 'genius' behind the work, having created an innovative piece of literature, a notion which did not emerge until the late eighteenth century. In other words, the literary or philosophical tradition was of supreme importance, and most poets tried, first of all, to situate their work within the pedigree of classical literature, which enjoyed the highest authority for all learned individuals. We know of some cases when a poet such as Wolfram von Eschenbach even made up some mysterious sources upon which they had based their works in order to meet that expectation. Wolfram explicitly refers to the ominous but purely fictional source of Kyot, when he composed his *Parzival*, a Grail romance (ca. 1205). For Bonerius, it was critically important as a fable author to emphasize his sources from late antiquity, especially because fables belong to the category or genre of didactic literature, representing fundamental learning for all people. Nevertheless, and this makes Bonerius's fables so significant for us today, within the framework of ancient (Aesop), late antique (Anonymous Neveleti, or Romulus), and medieval fable literature (Avian), he regularly injects personal opinions and reflects upon his personal concerns about

above all, motivated me, which I had read:

50 “Idleness means downfall and shame.”

The person who is idle will receive my bill [will reap his reward]:

your own body, the devil, and society

will rob him/her of the strength to do good deeds.

I will ignore what some might say against me,

55 who are filled with hatred and spread evil rumors.

After all, others who are better than me

have to tolerate often enough

evil-minded words,

whether voiced by young or old.

60 Why would it avoid just me,

this poison from hateful tongues

which creates nothing but evil?³

But I regard my own suffering as minuscule.

This little book is properly entitled

65 as *The Gemstone* because it contains

fables with a variety of wise statements about life,

and it produces also good spirits,

such as the thorn does to the rose.

The person who does not properly

70 recognize the gemstone and its property, will have little profit from it.

He⁴ who looks at the fable only superficially

and does not recognize its inner core,

will gain little profit from it,

as the very first fable will tell you.

75 Women and men, pay attention to this.

Thus, here the little book begins.

social, moral, philosophical, and religious issues relevant both at his time and universally. See the Introduction for a much more detailed discussion of these aspects.

³ Here and throughout his work, Bonerius addresses timeless problems within human society, and here it is evil-mindedness, tattling, spreading false rumors, backstabbing, and also miscommunication.

⁴ It would be too cumbersome to differentiate between the genders when a pronoun is used. ‘He’ will here always entail ‘she’ as well. Bonerius often enough differentiates between women and men, but then also between young and old people because he intends to approach society at large. After all, he was a Dominican preacher and regularly faced a mixed audience both in church and in public.

Fable no. 1: **Of a Rooster and a Gemstone
On the lack of understanding**

Once upon a time
it happened that a rooster
flew to its master's dung heap,
which was a very common event.
5 It looked for some food,
just as a wise person also does.
It found something which did not concern it much,
that is, a valuable and large gemstone
located in an undignified position.

10 It said: "Oh God, mighty lord!
how have I failed in profiting from my discovery!
I would get much more from a kernel of barley
than from you; you are useless to me.
What good are you for me? What shall I do with you?"

15 Know then, neither your beauty
nor your nobility are profitable for me.
If master Hippocrates had found you,⁵
he could have made better use of you
than myself; I have no idea what to do with you."
20. The rooster then tossed the gemstone away,
because it was completely without any worth for it;
it would have much rather liked
a kernel of oat.

 This fable serves
25 as a symbol of the ignoramus who carries his fool's stick,
which he prefers over a kingdom.
All of those resemble the fool
who dismisses wisdom, the arts, honor, and material goods
out of a foolish mind.

30 For them the gemstone is of no use.
A dog rather takes a bone
than a pound of gold, believe me that.
That's exactly the way how the fools pursue their desires,
orienting their habits and efforts
35 toward the bounty here on earth.

⁵ This is a typical example of Bonerius's attempts to display his learning by referring to ancient authorities, such as this famous father of medicine, the Greek physician Hippocrates (460– ca. 370 B.C.E.).

They do not recognize the property of the gemstone,
and even less what good message is hidden
in the fable,

or any deeper wisdom,

40 which is unknown to the fools.

While seeing, the fools are blind.

The fool can [as far as I am concerned] just go on living
and ignore this fable:

he will not gain any fruition from it,

45 just as it was the case with the rooster.

Fable no. 2: **Of a Monkey and a Nut
 On sloth and suffering**

Once upon a time a monkey came to a place
 where it found many good nuts.
 It would have liked to eat some:
 It had been told that the kernel
 5 would be tasty and good.
 The monkey, however, was deeply troubled,
 when it noticed that the outside of the nut was bitter
 and that the shell was hard.
 10 “I have been told much about nuts,”
 It said, “but they did not tell me all the truth;
 they have fooled me in my mind.”
 It immediately threw down the nut,
 because it could not get access to the kernel.
 15 Many people are like the monkey,
 whether they are young, old, poor, or rich,
 who dismiss because of a short-term bitterness
 a long-term sweetness.
 When you want to light a fire,
 20 then there will first be a lot of smoke,
 which bites you in the eyes.
 If you then do not want to blow more into it,
 until it is burning well
 and give as much heat as it is supposed to do,
 25 then you will not get any fire going,
 and you will not have light or heat.
 This is the same with spiritual life:
 when a person wants to dedicate himself to God,
 he must accept much suffering.
 30 He will have to avoid many things,
 and the smoke of many burdensome matters
 will hurt him at the beginning
 before the fire of love
 will inflame his mind
 35 and can give him solace
 both in death and in life.
 May you, human being, keep this well in mind,
 the person who wants to serve God
 must not let go of this goal when tempted by others
 40 and must pursue his steady endeavor.

**Fable no 3: Of a Hunter and a Tiger
 On slander**

People practice much slandering,
they talk badly about young and old.
The tongue of many people cannot exist
without [spewing forth] slander and without envy.
5 Envy and hatred bring about backbiting
and slander; neither women nor men
can be secure from it. Whatever you do,
it seems good only to one fourth of all people.
Secretly, the arrow of the tongue
10 comes shooting out of the evil person's mouth
and wounds women and men.
Hardly anyone can protect himself
from the toxicity of the tongues,
as the following fable illustrates.
15 A hunter once went to the fields
where he caught many animals.
He carried a crossbow in his hands:
whatever animals he was familiar with
and encountered there,
20 he shot and killed many of them.
Since he was lying in hiding
they could not guard themselves from him.
Thereby they ran into great sorrows;
they were greatly afraid of the hunter.
25 At that moment a tiger came running
which did not know about the hunter.
The tiger comforted the small animals
and said: "Let go all of your fear! –
I do not see either a man or a dog
30 who could cause us harm." At that moment
the hunter shot an arrow through the leg
of the tiger, which made it
lame; it could hardly walk.
While before it was so fast, now it had to limp along.
35 A fox then spoke to the tiger,
when it saw its wounds:
"Tell me, who shot at you?
Let me know this."

It acted as if it felt pity
40 for the tiger's wound. But people say
that many lament the sorrow of others
whom they actually rather see dead.
The tiger then began to sigh
(it could hardly speak),
45 and said: "I believed myself to be safe
since I did not see my enemy.
I know well that I have been wounded
by someone, but I do not know who might have caused it,
may God help me.
50 But I tell you honestly
that women and men should watch out
of him who knows how to shoot secretly."
He who causes wounds with the tongue,
is the person no one can protect himself from.
55 Slander brings about murder.
The evil word spoken by an evil person
is faster than the arrow shot with the crossbow.
Who can be strong enough⁶
that he can get away from the malignment
60 of the rumor spread by the evil people? No one has ever heard of
that.
If I might be free from being slandered,
it would be a miracle, if that were to happen!⁷
That what has happened to many a virtuous person
I cannot avoid either.
65 He who does not like my poem,
be it a woman, a man, a young or an old individual,
should simply break off the reading and be polite about it;
if he is willing, he should let me live in peace.
And if this book has some faults
70 in any regard, he should improve it himself:
that is my honest desire.
He who acts well, will find respect.

⁶ The poet says literally: "who can be free."

⁷ Bonerius uses here a double negative, which Stange translated literally, but this does not make sense since the narrator exclaims that it would be unbelievable.

Fable no. 4: **Of a Tree on a Mountain
On spiritual efforts**

There is a tree, standing on the top of a tall mountain,
of a miraculous kind:

it is tall, big, long, and wide.

It has delightful branches

5 and is covered with beautiful leaves.

It carries the best fruit,

the best that can be found in the world.

This tree has the property

that if a person desires its fruit,

10 he is never getting any

of their sweetness

unless he first accepts the bitterness

of the roots, which are truly bitter,

hard and sour, without any color.

15 He who is deterred by the bitterness

of the roots, as I have said,

and does not want to demonstrate steadiness of the mind,

will not enjoy the good fruit;

instead, he will have to forego them.

20 With this tree I mean

the highly developed life,

which does not grant easily anything to anyone.

He must struggle in the field

of virtues, and must sustain suffering

25 before he can make his way

to the mountain top⁸ where the tree is standing.

When he then can taste the sweetness of the fruit,

then all of his suffering

will disappear, and he will enjoy great happiness,

30 because he will be free of all sorrows.

This fable addresses those

who believe that they can enjoy, without experiencing suffering,

worldly pleasures, praise, and esteem

throughout their lives.

35 This will not happen to them, though,

as far as I understand this matter.

⁸ Literally: mountain ridge; but the meaning is generally aimed at: the top of the mountain, the place which is hard to reach, that is, a universal symbolism of life.

The tree is full with delicious fruit.

He who strives for knowledge and wisdom,
must, for sure, accept suffering as well.

40 No one can climb up to the mountain
and reach this tree:

Art acquired is not simply a dream.

He, however, who sleeps during his youth,
and does not strive for honor, knowledge, or virtues

45 will not achieve anything in his sloth,
but sorrow, and no one will have pity for him
when he fails without knowledge and wisdom.

He who wants to spend his youthful years
by pursuing nothing but vain things,⁹

50 will feel very sorry, when he turns old,
and then it might often happen to him
that his eyes will fill with tears
because of his regrets, and then it will be just right
that people will mock at him.

⁹ He says, literally: luxury, or foolishness, vanity, etc.

Fable no. 5: **Of a Wolf and a Sheep
On unjust violence**

A wolf who was thirsty
 approached a body of water.

A sheep did the same.

Both came to the creek.

5 The wolf drank water while being upstream of the sheep.
 It said to the sheep: “This might be the cause of much pain for you.
 The fact that you do not let me drink
 and that you have soiled the creek
 will cause you much harm.”

10 The sheep said: “Wolf, leave me in peace!
 I have not caused you any injury.
 It is true, without any doubt,
 that the water in the creek runs down toward me
 and does not flow back up to you again.

15 For that reason you have dirtied my water,
 and not me, the other way around.”
 The wolf angrily looked at the sheep
 and responded to it filled with rage:

“Tell me, what is the point of your contrary answer,
 20 and how dare you to threaten my life?
 Should I not be treated better by you?
 Your father acted the same way against me,
 which happened seven years ago,
 when I saw you with your father.”

25 Then the simple-minded sheep said:
 “Sir Wolf, your words are completely wrong,
 you have erroneously counted my years,
 I am barely seven months old.

Moreover, you say that I am threatening you:
 30 that is not true; instead, you are threatening me.”

The wolf immediately responded:
 “Tell me, how dare you to open your mouth
 and speak up against me
 with the same arrogance [as your father]? I will now
 35 take revenge for this, it is time.”

It immediately killed the sheep on the spot.

 This fable pertains to those
 who destroy many people through their vanity,

filling their minds with arrogance.

40 When the guilty person causes some harm
to the one who is innocent,
then God may avenge that! This evil attitude fills the mind
of many lords
living in a village, in a castle, and also in a city.

45 He who ruins through his evil-mindedness
virtuous life and the material goods
of the poor people, who are innocent
so that their children become orphans,
is to be condemned forever
so that God's wonders will become visible.

Fable no. 6: **Of a Frog and a Mouse
On lack of loyalty and deception**

A frog said to a mouse

When they met:

“May God greet you, my dear fellow!

May our friendship last forever!”

5 The mouse could not pursue her path,
because a raging creek had destroyed it.

“I will help you, by God,”

said the frog. “Believe me honestly,
you will get safely to your hole.”

10 It tied the mouse to its own leg
with a rope, so it was done.

The frog then said to the mouse:

“I will teach you how to swim well
(its heart was filled with disloyalty),

15 thus you will get safely to your house.

“Well, then,” said the dumb mouse.

The frog then jumped into the water,
and pulled with its leg

the mouse; it intended to dive down

20 and to drown his friend.

The mouse struggled to get up, the frog pulled down;

it did the very opposite what it had pledged,

and broke its promise to the mouse.

A bold harrier¹⁰ witnessed that

25 and decided the evil fight [between the two] in such a way
that it made both of them unhappy.

It caught the mouse with its talons,

while the frog was tightly bound by the rope
in which it was entangled.

30 Both their lives were thus lost:

The harrier dropped them on the grass

and quickly devoured both.

A person often digs a pit for himself
when he believes that he has done it for the other.¹¹

¹⁰ A harrier is a diurnal hawk which hunts during the daytime, flying low over the ground, feeding on small mammals, reptiles, or birds.

¹¹ This proverb is perhaps best rendered as: Curses, like chickens, come home to roost, or: Harm set, harm get, or: The biter will be bitten.

35 Disloyalty, when it is displayed,
rarely reaches a good outcome.
Where words and deeds differ from each other,
the person will barely gain any honor.
When the tongue hides full of deception
40 the falseness of the heart,
then women or men can barely
protect themselves from falsehood.
If the frog had not committed a deception
to the mouse, and had not lied with evil intention,
45 it would have probably survived.
All deceivers must be dishonored.

Fable no. 7: **Of a Dog and a Sheep
 On false witnesses**

Once, a dog raised many complaints
as I will relate to you.
It complained bitterly
what had happened to it
5 because of a sheep. The dog blamed it
for having caused some damage;
because of the sheep, it had lost
its food; and the dog was angry about it.
The sheep responded to the dog
10 in front of the judge, and said:
“I am telling you honestly
I am completely innocent of that
which the dog is charging me for.”
When the dog heard this and understood it,
15 it responded: “I will prove this clearly,
just as I am supposed to according to the laws:
I am right in this matter.”
It then presented false witnesses
who were the enemies of the sheep?
20 (How can justice be done in such a case?)
This were a wolf, a vulture, and a harrier.
All three of them began to shout:
“The sheep must die, that would be only justice.”
They truly made a lot of noise.
25 They cut open the body of the sheep.
But this happened out of false righteousness.
The sheep had to be in the wrong,
which their false testimony had brought about.
The sheep was quickly killed.
30 Then appeared again
the wolf, the vulture, and the harrier
and took what they needed to eat.
 The same still happens often today,
that an evil villain
35 lies about the righteous one
and gives false testimony,
which often hurts the one who is in the right.
Falsity has placed its foot

thus, in this world

40 and pitched its tent
that women or men can barely
protect themselves from falsehood.

Falsehood now often goes
together with princes to the imperial council.

45 Falsehood has become so valuable
that people desire to buy it all the time.

The false tongues command the right,
and they make crooked what was straight before.

**Fable no. 8: Of Four Animals Who Were Friends
 On evil company**

Once four companions agreed
that they would share all their possessions,
whatever they would gain through hunting.
They swore an oath on this.

5 One of them was a fierce lion,
the other was a goat, the third was a tame ox,
and the fourth was a sheep,
as I have read in a book.

They came across a deer,
10 which pleased them all.

Once they had caught it,
they did not hold back,
they cut it immediately apart
and divided it up into four parts.

15 Then the fierce lion said:
“The first part I should get
because it is due to me because of my noble rank
which is beyond yours.

The other part belongs to me because of my strength
20 and also because of my great skill.

The third part falls to me as well
because I have fought the most.

And the fourth part is also mine,
I don't care about our friendship
25 which we have sworn together.”

They were all afraid of the lion's rage;
they had to leave their parts to him
and had to leave the place with hungry stomachs.

It often happens (and it is also just right)
30 that when the servant wants to compare himself
with the lord, and this out of his stupid mind,
he hurts himself, it is not good
to eat cherries with the lords.¹²

They [the lords] have decided
35 that he who wants to eat cherries with them,
will receive nothing but the stems,

¹² Again, this is a proverb and means: It is not wise to assume that one could be an equal to the lord.

thrown into their eyes, believe me that,
and that's what is in all their minds.

The lord says, when the time for sharing has arrived,

40 "I gladly give you your part,
you take the calf, leave the cow to me;
and if you do not agree, then I move ahead
and take the cow together with the calf."

In this way the poor man

45 is cheated both ways, and this cannot be in any other way:
in face of violence no one can be protected.

**Fable no. 9: **Of a Dog Who Carried Away a Piece of Meat
On excessive greed****

There is a story about a dog
who carried in its mouth
a piece of meat which was pretty big,
something which always pleases members of his species.

5 The dog got to a creek
where there was neither a bridge nor a plank,
there was neither a ferry nor a ferryman.
It had to try to cross by itself.¹³
When it got to the middle of the river,
10 it saw the shadow of the meat,
which it carried in its mouth.
It said: "I would have certainly enough
if I could have that piece as well."
Immediately it opened its mouth widely
15 and wanted to take hold of that piece [the shadow].
In this way, however, he lost the one
that he had held in its mouth.
This left him sad and check-mated.
The fact that it had lost its piece,
20 as a result of its greed, made it mad.
The shadow had tricked it.

 This happens until today at many locations
that a stupid illusion
deceives women and men.

25 When one lets go what one has for sure
for a pipe dream, this often causes great anger.
He who desires what is not his own,
will easily lose what is his.
Greed never leads to good results.
30 It sullies the character of many people.
Greed brings it about
that friends begin to hate each other.
Greed creates anger,
and many souls are lost thereby.
35 Greed has many companions
in the castle, the village, and in the city.
These are: the reeve [magistrate], the mayor, and the councilman,

¹³ Literally: it had to cross it on its own feet.

and all their staff members,
the steward and the judge,
40 the defense attorney and the prosecutor,
the toll keeper and the gate keeper,
the shepherd and the field controller,¹⁴
priests, lay people, young and old,
all kinds of monks and nuns,
45 the bishop and the chaplain,
the abbot, the provost, and the deacon.
Whatever one sings and says about them all,
they all live influenced by greed.

¹⁴ A field controller was in charge of the fields, supervising the individual tasks throughout the year, ensuring that the hedges were kept in good order, and that wild animals were properly kept out. He was often hired by a rural community to protect the fields from thieves, especially during harvest time.

**Fable no. 10: Of a Thief Who Got Married
On unjustified joy**

A woman married a man
who was a thief; wherever he went
he stole everything he could;
he was an expert in thievery.

5 His neighbors were glad [about the wedding]:
they organized a wedding celebration for him.
They all praised this worthy marriage.
Many people danced.

A wise man then told the following fable,
10 when he observed the foolish enjoyments:
the sun was displeased with being alone,
and being without children angered it.
It married a woman so that its family

15 would not disappear.
From this resulted great lamentation by the earth,
as I am telling you:

it raised a great complaint to God.

The earth said: "God my lord,

20 I will be lost forever.

One sun alone has burnt me badly.

If it will then have a child, I will be finished
and I will be lost for good.

It alone causes me so much pain.

25 If it will have heirs and children
that are even hotter than itself,
oh dear, how will I then fare?"

This is the way how it will be with the thief,
who alone by himself causes much damage.

30 If he will have children, that won't be good.

You can often observe that the children
are much worse than the father,
so no one ought to feel happy
for those who are filled with an evil mind.

35 When weeds push away
the good plants, or, when the evil ones have
companions, then both women and men
will suffer great harm.

**Fable no. 11: Of a Wolf and a Crow
On evil thanklessness**

Once a wolf walked, as was its nature,
 hungrily on the path of robbery.
 Soon it found what it desired,
 something to rob, which pleased its heart.
 5 As we hear, there was a goat [which it killed].
 Greedily the wolf started to bite into it,
 which caused the wolf great harm
 and made it very unhappy.
 A bone got stuck in its throat,
 10 which did not go down or come up
 and was tightly lodged there.
 If the wolf had not eaten so greedily,
 this would not have happened to it.
 I have to say honestly,
 15 I wished that women and men,
 who act just as greedily,
 experience the same misfortune as it happened to the wolf.
 Then many people would shriek, ‘oh dear, woe is me,’
 whether it would be a woman or a man;
 20 They are in need of many doctors.
 The wolf was in a great misery
 and was afraid it might have to face death.
 The reason for that was its gluttony.
 It was forced to seek out a doctor.
 25 It came to a place where it found a crow.
 The wolf said that it would pay for the service
 with three hundred pounds,
 if it could restore its health.
 It would give to the crow a loan and a gift,¹⁵
 30 if it could help and save its life.
 The crow said: “Sir Wolf, open the mouth!
 I will quickly restore your health.”
 It pecked with its head into the throat
 and quickly caught the bone
 35 and pulled it out,
 which made the wolf very happy.
 The crow then said: “Sir, give me now,

¹⁵ Meaning: give whatever the crow would demand.

since you have recovered your life,
what you have promised me before,
40 since you are well again.”

It would only be right and proper
if knights, burghers, and servants
would uphold what they have promised.

I think that those are out of their mind
45 who betray their deeds and words.

Truth is the treasure of all honor.

The wolf said: “What am I supposed to give you?

You got already from me your own life
which depended on me for some time;

50 I could have easily bitten off
your head; your life shall be
the payment for your service,
take it and off with you.”

The crow had to bear this mockery in return for its honest deed,
55 which rightly aroused its bitter anger.

Some say that it is not only the half that has been lost,
but the whole, when you provide a service
to an evil person because his unstable mind
is constantly aimed at evilness.

60 Hence here my advice,
he who wants to do a good service,
offer it to the good person,
then he will receive for his effort
certainly, a reward for his service.

**Fable no. 12: Of a Male Dog and a Bitch
 On the lack of loyalty**

A bitch once said to a male dog:
“I suffer from sorrow and worries.
I am pregnant with little puppies
and soon expect the hour of my delivery.
5 I do not know where to go
or who would allow me into his house
until I will have delivered my babies.
Would you help me, out of your goodness,
and grant me to enjoy the opportunity
10 to choose you as my trustworthy friend
from among everyone else?
Otherwise I would have to go out to the open field
where I would perish without any consolation.
If I could become free of my burden
15 in your house, I would then promise you
to leave again when you let me know
by telling me specifically that it is time.”
The male dog answered then
and said: “You ought to be rewarded for the fact
20 that you are pregnant with little dogs.
Also, you belong to my family;
it seems just right and proper
that I do not let it happen that you might die
and perish if you do not find housing.
25 My house will be open for you:
go then, and lie down in my bed.”
The dog then made room for the bitch
in his house, which pleased her.
But he got few thanks from her.
30 She acted very ungratefully.
Once she had delivered
and the dog had learned that,
he soon rushed back to his home.
There he found neither meat nor bones,
35 his house was filled with little puppies.
He said: “All went well for you;
now please, leave my house,
let me move in again.”

She closed her ears and locked the house,
40 forcefully she pushed him out of it.
She broke her sugar-sweet pledge
with which she had given him her promise, and hurt him.
For nothing in the world would she let the male dog back in.
He had to remain outside of the house
45 into which he had let her in
when she had needed help.

He who can speak in sugar-sweet words
and act in a deceptive manner,
will cheat those who believe him.

50 What is not true is simply a lie!
He who does not want to be betrayed
ought to watch out at all times
when people speak sweet words;
that's my advice, honestly.

55 After all, from the sweetness of words
result much heartfelt pain.
They deceive women and men;
blessed be he who is able to be on guard.

**Fable no. 13: Of a Snake Which Received Food in the House
On evil recompense**

Every season of the year is such
 as God has arranged it
 in His infinite wisdom.
 The summer brings forth nice fruit,
 5 the fall follows summer,
 and then comes the cold winter
 which is hard and bitter to take.
 It forces many creatures
 to search for a place where
 10 they can sustain themselves, as I have also
 read about a snake.
 It reflected on where it could survive
 the harsh winter weather,
 which caused it sorrow and suffering.
 15 It snuck secretly into a house
 where no one chased it away again;
 the people gave it a good place to stay.
 When the host espied it,
 he fed it out of magnanimity.
 20 It was well protected from the frost.
 But the snake could not abstain
 to act according to its nature.
 The snake spread its poison in the house.
 The host said to it: "Now leave from here!
 25 You may no longer stay here."
 The poisonous snake jumped at him
 and wanted to kill him for the goodness,
 having protected it from death [from the cold]
 out of his graciousness.
 30 Many people have a heart filled with poison
 and they pay with evilness for good deeds,
 although those were done out of kindness.
 They pay with the bitterness of gall
 for the sweetness of honey.
 35 They cannot hide their poison.
 They attack those who treat them well,
 as the snake had done.
 Both women and men

watch out, I give you this good advice
40 against those whose heart is filled with poison!
Their friendship and comradery
are always based on deception.

**Fable no. 14: Of a Donkey and a Lion
 On mockery by the fools**

A fool clearly reveals his foolishness
 when he, who is filled with folly
 tries to make fun of a wise person.
 When the latter has finally had enough,
 5 he says: “Fool, let this now go!”
 A donkey once said to a lion:
 “Greetings with God, my brotherly warrior!¹⁶
 You might well be a goat!”
 It began to make a lot of fun of him,
 10 but the lion never responded to it.
 It ignored the donkey’s greeting.
 But then the donkey stomped on the ground,
 and this mockery made the lion angry.
 “You should have lost your life,”
 15 said the lion to the donkey.
 “but you are an evil person and of a low status,
 so because of my noble mind
 I will ignore, you fool, your mockery.
 I am too noble and of a too high social class
 20 to diminish my own noble mind,
 that will not happen.
 You are a fool, that’s quite obvious!
 Mock those of your own status,
 that’s my advice, so help me God!”
 25 No one ought to mock the high-ranking lords:
 when they want, they know how to avenge
 the mockery, or whatever one might do to them.
 Often, however, they have disregarded this foolishness.
 The fools are always ready to mock others.
 30 The wise person can rather ignore the fool’s derision,
 than that the fool will ever live without making fun of others.
 It would rather mock itself, by God [than abstain from this vice]!
 The fool is pleased with himself,
 and the entire world is filled with fools.

¹⁶ He uses here the archaic term “recke,” which was normally employed in precourtly heroic and other narratives for the mighty warriors of the past. The word “recke” rhymes with “mecke” in the following line, which in turn is an onomatopoeic phrase for the sound made by goats.

35 The wise person ought to protect himself
from the fool's mockery, that's my advice;
whoever wants to join the fools' mockery
must also tolerate the fools' evilness.

**Fable no. 15: Of a Field Mouse and a City Mouse
 On freedom in poverty**

One day a field mouse said,
filled with joy, when it met for the first time,
a city mouse, one of its kind, coming its way,
“It will be of eternal profit for me
5 that you have come to my house.”
With great excitement it invited the city mouse to come in.
The host was really pleased,
and its goodwill contributed much to improve the food.
It smiled at its guest
10 and said: “Let us eat without worries
what good things we have.
If there is not enough food,
the good intention will compensate for it.”
The city mouse then readily invited
15 its friend, the field mouse, [to come to visit it as well]
and took it to its own house [in the city],
and guided it into a well-stocked cellar,
which was filled with good food;
there was much meat and fish.
20 It said: “Now eat, my good friend,
of the best food, as you find it here,
and enjoy a carefree life.
Take bread, curd, and good cheese
as much as you like, we are well protected here
25 from dogs and cats.”
Then they suddenly heard
the cook rattling at the door lock.
The city mouse which was at home there, quickly fled
and left its friend simply behind.
30 It did not know where to go:
it fled into one direction, then into another direction,
and the cook gazed at it carefully;
he would have liked to kill it by stomping on it.
But then he had to leave the cellar again.
35 He locked the cellar behind him.
The visiting mouse was very upset:
it had no longer any interest in the meal;
it would have almost lost its life.

After a while the city mouse which was at home there
40 came out of its hiding place.
It said: "My dear friend,
be happy and let your sorrow go!
Eat and drink and enjoy your life!
This cellar is filled with delicious food."
45 The visiting mouse replied
and said: "If I manage to get out of here,
I would rather chew my beans
than to bear the fear
as a price for your pleasant food,
50 which is mixed in with the bitterness of gall;
you can have it [all for yourself].
It might be appropriate for you, but it is not for me;
you should have it all for yourself.
I want to leave and return to the open field
55 and prefer to live happily in poverty.
You can live a life of great worries.
The greatest life you can have
is to exist happily in poverty.
Poverty is without any worries,
60 whereas the rich person faces many fears.
While the poor person rests peacefully,
the rich person is burdened with concerns.
The poor one is safe at all times,
the rich one never leaves the fears behind.
65 The poor person sleeps securely,
the rich person stays away, filled with struggles.
How can a pleasant life be good,
when fear and worries burden the mind?
To own only little without fear
70 is better than to own much with fear, by Christ!"
With these words and in this manner
they separated from each other.

**Fable no. 16: Of a Fox and an Eagle
On deception and smartness¹⁷**

Once a fox was complaining about its suffering.
 It lamented that its kids were in danger of being killed
 since they were captured.
 It then went to a place
 5 where it found the eagle and approached it with a great request.
 The fox begged it to put aside
 its aggression and anger
 and should not harm its children
 because the eagle kept them
 10 in its nest, where it had carried them,
 located in a tree which was very tall,
 and where it raised its young ones.
 It wanted to eat them [the little foxes],
 but they defended themselves,
 15 whatever might happen to them.
 The fox was deeply worried
 about its children, and this for good reasons:
 they were captured and about to be killed.
 The eagle had no mercy,
 20 and its little ones even less; now listen,
 how he still can gain happiness
 who gets caught by the evil one
 who knows no pity.
 The fox demonstrated its smartness
 25 since the eagle did not want to grant
 any mercy. It surrounded the tree trunk,
 where the nest was located, with straw.
 Only the courageous one survives!
 It took a torch into its mouth,
 30 which was already burning.
 With the torch it set fire
 to the straw, which quickly burned.

¹⁷ The original word carries many different meanings: wisdom, cunning, smartness, intelligence, skill, knowledge, shrewdness, etc. This is not untypical of medieval languages at large; there were less words and those tended to carry many more meanings, which invites us deeply to examine most carefully the actual statement in its context. Interpretation and linguistic analysis thus gain a high degree of philosophical relevance.

The smoke went up the tree,
 and thus, the fox forced the eagle
 35 to return its little ones [of the fox],
 which are still alive today.

Intelligence is better than brute force.
 He who lives for a long time grows to old age.¹⁸
 There where force is used without intelligence,
 40 people have to go through many struggles.
 He who combines force with wisdom will succeed.
 He who is happy to do something good will find a good solution.
 Force without intelligence does not last long,
 just like snow exposed to the heat of the sun.
 45 Often the low-class person hurts the high-ranking one;
 a peasant can put a king into checkmate.¹⁹
 He who exerts violence²⁰ without justice,
 will never reach a good end.
 With the help of smartness, power will be overcome,
 just as fire melts the ice.

¹⁸ This is a nearly non-sensical sentence, a tautology, but the poet needed to have a verse with an ending rhyme word (“gewalt” – “alt”).

¹⁹ Throughout the Middle Ages, the game of chess, having been inherited from the Persians via the Arabs, was highly popular in courtly culture and was played by many members of the royal courts, especially the kings, as a medium for entertainment and learning about proper political and military strategies. See the contributions to *Chess in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: A Fundamental Thought Paradigm of the Premodern World*, ed. Daniel E. O’Sullivan. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 10 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012). Hence, medieval poets tended to use this phrase of ‘checkmate’ in order to express that the opponent was completely overcome and defeated.

²⁰ The term “gewalt” carries many different meanings, which is not untypical of Middle High German (and other medieval vernaculars): not only ‘violence,’ but also ‘authority’ or ‘law,’ ‘power’ and ‘aggression,’ all depending on the circumstances.

**Fable no. 17: Of an Eagle and a Snail
 On evil advice**

An evil tongue brings about murder,
there is nothing worse than evil words
and the advice of false tongues, as I have to tell you.

This once happened to a snail
5 which had withdrawn into its shell.

Then a bold eagle came flying by
which grabbed the shell with its talons
and carried it away. Then a crow said:

“If only you could enjoy it,
10 the shell is filled with good food.

You might enjoy it for sure
if you follow my advice.
Fly up high and swing with your wings,²¹
let the snail fall down.

15 If the shell then breaks, believe me that,
you will have food as you like it.”

Thus, the crow taught the eagle how to do it.
The snail became very worried about it.

The eagle let the shell drop,
20 and the snail fell on the ground, where the shell broke.
The crow rushed up to it and was very happy
about the food: it then ate the snail.

With this fable you can learn
that the tongue is filled with deception.
25 The worst organ that we have
is the tongue as we are being told.
The tongue creates much strife,
through which both body and mind get destroyed.

The tongue puts shame on many,
30 it maims and gouges.
The tongue destroys many countries,
it causes murder, robbery, and arson.
The tongue splits loyalty
so that the person who loves begins to hate love.
35 There is no better strategy to gain honor

²¹ The poet uses the term “gevider,” which means ‘plumage,’ but the specific term ‘wings’ makes better sense here.

but to control one's tongue.²²
The evil tongue can divorce
a loving wife from a loving husband.
The snail would have easily survived,
40 if there had not been the tongue
of the crow which wanted to see it dead.
Therefore, those will never be free of badness
who have an evil tongue, wherever they are!
Those who have a good tongue remain free of pain.²³

²² Literally: to become the master of the tongue.

²³ Here is an interesting example of the differences between the present translation and the German one by Stange, who offers more than a translation and goes one step further, interpreting the simple words as: 'The righteous will remain free of tortures to their souls.' Bonerius probably had something like that in mind, but my goal is not to put words into his mouth and to imagine what he might have intended.

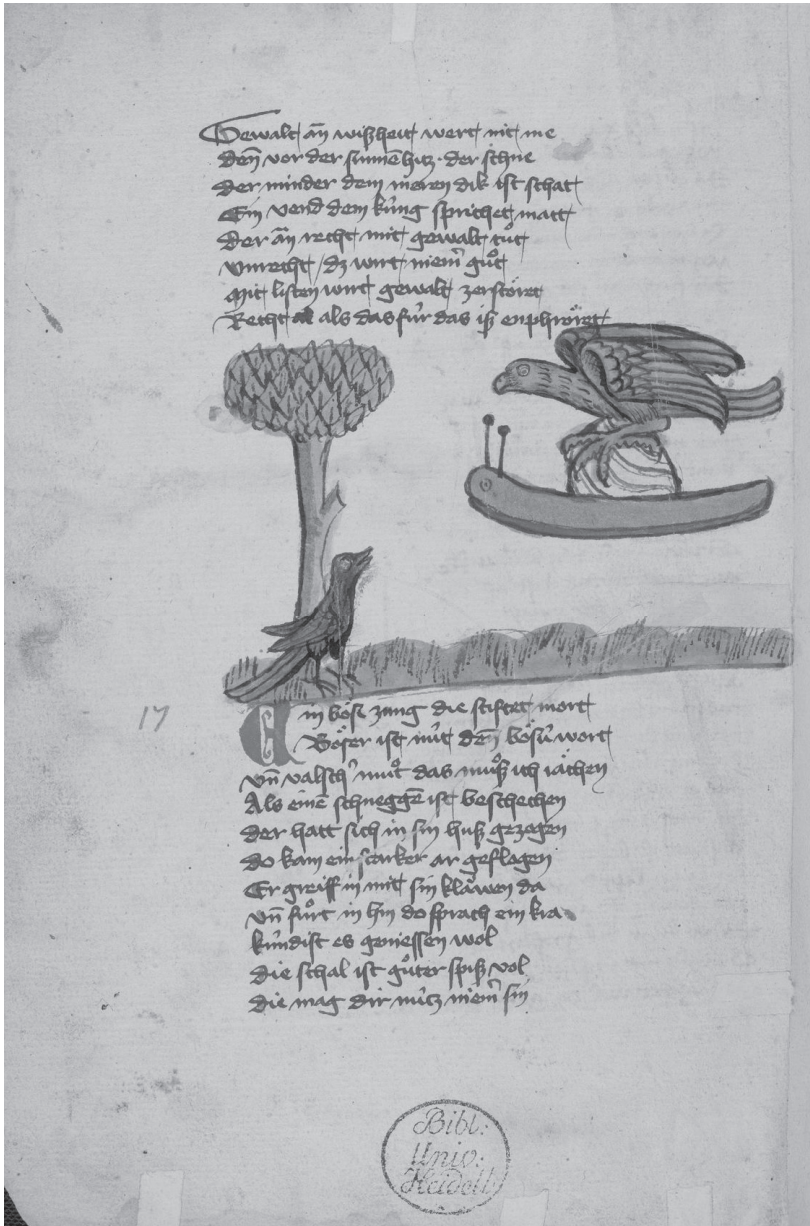


Fig. 1: Heidelberg Universitätsbibliothek, Codex Pal. germ. 794, fol. 1v

**Fable no. 18: Of a Fox and a Raven
 On foolish vanity**

A fox felt very hungry.
 It went to a tall tree
 to which a raven had flown,
 carrying a block of cheese which it had pulled
 5 out of a storage area in an attic.
 The fox became immensely happy about it.
 When the fox looked up to the raven
 it said with flattering words:
 “May God greet you, my dear Sir!
 10 I would like to be your servant
 and remain in your service forever.
 This seems to me to be just right and proper:
 you are so noble and so powerful,
 no other bird can be compared to you
 15 in all the kingdoms.
 I suppose that the beauty of the sparrow-hawk and the falcon,
 of the goshawk and the peacock
 must pale in comparison with you.
 The sound of your voice is so sweet;
 20 one hears your voice everywhere
 resounding in the forest
 when you begin to sing:
 I have noticed that very well.”
 The raven said: “You speak the truth.”
 25 [Fox:] “Now sing, my dear lord.”
 The raven responded: “I will do so.”
 It began to open its mouth and sang
 which could be heard throughout the forest.
 While it was singing, the cheese
 30 fell down, which mightily pleased the fox.
 The raven felt embarrassed,
 and it suffered from the loss.
 It is just right, by God,
 that he experiences loss and mockery
 35 who believes more the deceiver
 than his own smartness, so be aware about that.
 Excessive vanity
 and too much desire for public esteem

brings upon that person
40 who accepts such praise
the shame that neither he nor his family
will ever gain dignity, as it has become
now obvious in this fable.
May the hypocrites be forever
45 cursed and also those
who are false prophets.

**Fable no. 19: Of an Old Lion
 On the old enemy**

There is one thing which many people desire,
but as soon as you have acquired it, it becomes worthless:
Old age makes you unhealthy
because it is accompanied by many illnesses.

5 The young man desires to become old [turn into an adult],
but the old one can no longer transform back into a young one.

When the old one arrives at the point in time,
when he can no longer take care of himself,
then he will be fortunate if he then has friends;

10 his enemies will not pay any respect to him,
as a lion, which was old
and had lost its power and strength,
experienced with its enemies.

When a boar looked at it,

15 it remembered the harm it had experienced in the past,
so it bit the lion in its legs.

An ox also came by,
and when it saw the old lion,
it remembered its previous wounds;

30 it then rammed with both of its horns into the lion's body.
The donkey also came running by;
it hit the lion's forehead
who had, in its youth
displayed much rough behavior.

25 The lion began to sigh
and said: "Indeed, during my youth
I have hurt many people,
and now I must abstain from that.

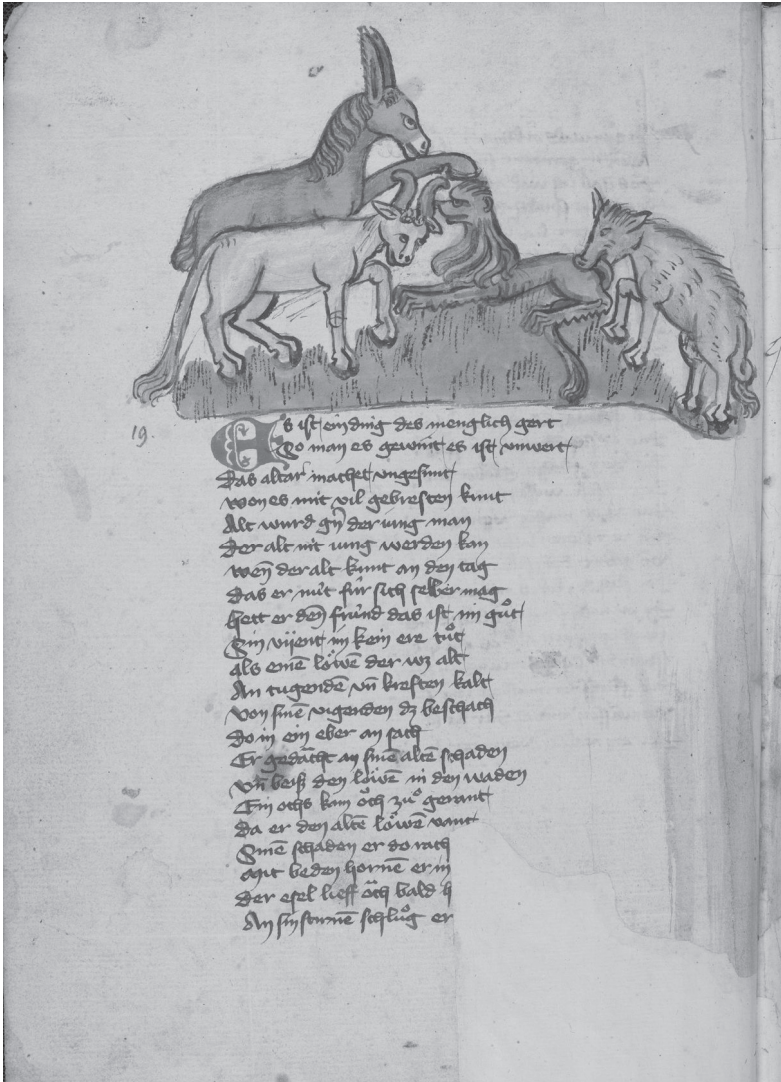
My strength, my honor, my great courage
30 are all gone. He who does something wrong
during his youth, namely something which he was not supposed to do,
will certainly later receive his reward.

Those whom I once had hurt, what I must lament now,
do not want to forgive me that now.

35 Therefore I feel very sorry for myself.
It is a good thing to win friends.
But it is even better if you can keep them,
whether they are women or men.

He who does something evil will certainly receive
40 a reward,²⁴ as it is supposed to happen to him.”

²⁴ Literally: money, meaning: punishment.



19.

Es ist ein Ding des meniglich gert
 Do man es gewint es ist runder
 Das aldar machet ungeschert
 Von es mit vil gebrechen kint
 Alz wurd gij der umg man
 Der alt mit umg werden kan
 Weij der alt kint an der tag
 Das er mit für sich selber mag
 Gert er der fründ das ist in gut
 Ein wijent in kein erz rüt
 Als eine löwe der umg alt
 An rugende in kraften kilt
 Von sine rugenden dz bester
 Do in ein eber an tag
 Er gedat an sine alre spaden
 Von der löwe in der ruden
 Ein oge kan oeg zu gewint
 Da er der alre löwe ronet
 Eine spaden er so mag
 Oeg beder horn er in
 Der epl lieft oeg kilt q
 In sin forme seelig er

Fig. 2: Heidelberg Universitätsbibliothek, Codex Pal. germ. 794, 3v

**Fable no. 20: Of a Dog and a Donkey
 On thoughtless foolishness**

Once there was a little dog
 which was dearly loved by its master.
 It was so well trained
 that it could do many smart tricks.²⁵
 5 At one time, it jumped up, then it jumped down,
 it ran hither, then it ran thither.
 Then it jumped onto its master's lap.
 It earned praise for its smartness:
 the master kissed it many times
 10 on its neck and mouth.
 He had much fun with the dog.
 And both women and men
 showed how much they were delighted about the dog.
 All the time it got its food
 15 from its master's table,
 whether it was meat or fish.
 The master's donkey observed
 that the dog enjoyed so much pleasure
 because of its abilities,
 20 and that it received, without any effort on its own part,
 many kinds of food.
 The donkey said: "In this way
 I can also secure my food.
 Another animal shall carry the bags [henceforth].
 25 My body is splendid, my fur has a great color,
 my back is strong, and I have a noble spirit.
 Why would I be lacking
 in abilities compared to the dog?
 I also know how to delight people and play games,
 30 [actually] better than pulling a cart."
 Having spoken those words, it went forward
 and made its way through the crowd of people.

²⁵ Again, a very complicated case. The poet uses the word "kluogkeit," meaning, literally: 'knowledge,' but the dog is so impressive not because of its intelligence or wisdom, but because it has learned to do little athletic tricks. As to dogs in medieval German literature, see Albrecht Classen, "Hunde als Freunde und Begleiter in der deutschen Literatur vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart: Reaktion auf den 'Animal Turn' aus motivgeschichtlicher Sicht," *Etudes Germaniques* 73.4 (2018): 441–66.

All of them who were present called out:

“Hold it, hold it, what is going on?

35 What does the donkey want here?”

The donkey went up to its master
and placed one foot on his knee,
with the other it embraced him
and began to caress him.

40 This was very displeasing to the people
who were the master’s servants,
so they began to beat the donkey
with sticks and rods.

It did not desire the food any longer

45 which was [as it believed] going to be prepared for it there
because of its great skills.

The servants did not spare it any of their beating;
it was pushed out and suffered from great embarrassment.

 When a true fool desires

50 what his nature does not grant him,
he may well have to pay for it dearly.

He deserves to be reprimanded,
who claims certain things
which had never been granted to its kind.

55 Whatever nature has given
people can hardly fight against it.
Clever behavior is fitting for the little dog,
and the donkey ought to carry bags.

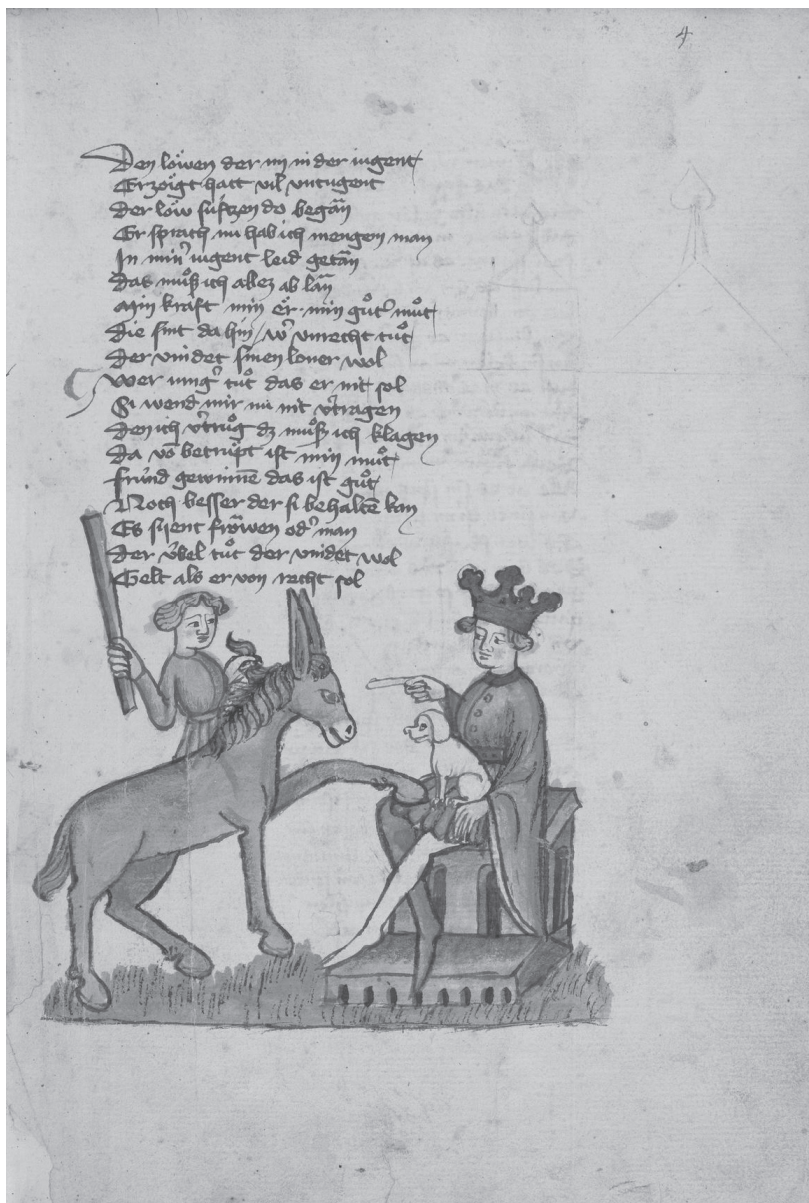


Fig. 3: Heidelberg Universitätsbibliothek, Codex Pal. germ. 794, fol. 4r

**Fable no. 21: Of a Lion and a Mouse
 On mutual help**

One day a lion walked
 through a forest where it caught
 a mouse which it wanted to kill.
 The mouse said: “Sir Lion, let me go!
 5 It would be neither fitting for your virtue
 nor for your high nobility,
 and you won’t earn praise or honor
 if you kill me; let me go!
 What honor could a king gain,
 10 if he kills a servant,
 over whom he has [anyway] control all the time?
 If he thinks that this would earn him honor, he would not be worthy.
 What great victory might it be
 when a lion kills
 15 a mouse? The person who can cause damage but refrains from doing it
 gains really more honor.
 If you let me live, Sir,
 I might well be of good use for you;
 I cannot do any harm to you,
 20 even less than a chicken can do to an eagle.”
 The lion let go of its aggression
 and allowed the little mouse to run away.
 It was deeply overjoyed about this:
 “I will be grateful to you,” it then said.
 25 Not a long time after
 the lion was caught
 in a net which was strong.
 It would have given a thousand marks
 if it could have gotten out of it.
 30 It was certain that it would not survive.
 While it was lying there as a prisoner,
 the mouse arrived early before dawn
 to the place where the lion was caught.
 It said: “May God greet you, my lord!
 35 What do you lament about? What do you suffer from?”
 “I am caught and about to die,”
 said the lion to the mouse.
 It answered: “Lord, you will get free,

I will help you and preserve your life,
40 since you granted me my own.”
What else shall I tell you?
The mouse began to gnaw at the net
and bit into the cords.
The net began to tear
45 apart, there was a big hole.
Quickly the lion got out of it²⁶
and greatly thanked the mouse.
It said: “Sir, I was happy to do it.”
Think about it, how powerful is the one
50 who does not have any shred of gratefulness!²⁷
Those in power ought to display pity;
power ought to be matched with virtues.
The powerful one ought to live peacefully with the poor one;
he might be quite useful who cannot cause any harm.
55 The lion let the little mouse go,
which it could have easily killed.
[The mouse] could not cause him any harm,
but [the lion] needed its help to survive.
The mouse remembered what the lion had done to her,
60 and helped him to get free.

²⁶ Literally: ran away, but since there is a conversation between both animals afterwards, I chose this translation.

²⁷ Of course, this is meant ironically.

**Fable no. 22: Of a Harrier who was Sick
 On regrets that come too late**

The saying is: “He who has recovered from sickness
become the same as he was before.”

He who spends much time praying and acts evilly
will be lucky if his ending is good.

5 For carelessness and an evil life
little reward is given.

Once upon a time it happened
that a harrier spoke to its mother
and bitterly lamented its suffering
10 because it was sick, close to death.

It said: “My dear mother,
it seems to me that it cannot be otherwise
but that I have to die, unfortunately.

15 If my soul would then also be lost, I would be sorrowful.
Look at my great efforts
and pray to the gods that they have
pity on me.”

The mother said: “My dear child,
20 the gods are very angry.
You have attracted the gods’ wrath,
I am afraid you might be a lost cause.

The gods hardly ever forget
what they intended to do
25 in response to your misdeeds.

You express regret out of fear.
Your repentance comes too late now,
it will help you only a little.
Repentance after the fact is rarely useful.

30 It seems to me that the person has a dumb mind
who decides, after the horses have been stolen,
to lock the gates to the stable.

Repentance in your soul is not helpful
if it is triggered by fear of death.

35 A wolf once was sick. When it had recovered
it was a wolf just as before.

If you had not angered God,
and if you had not broken His commands,
and if you had not harmed women or men

40 and if you had stopped doing
your evil deeds during your youth,
and if you had set your mind on virtues,
then your prayer to God would have been accepted
and you would then heal in your soul.”

45 He who wants to be heard by God,
ought to make sure that his sins will be removed
and that his life becomes good.

Where deeds, words, and mind work together,
God will listen to the prayer,

50 when it comes from the heart, as it ought to be.

He who begs God for those things,
which are profitable for the soul,
will be without any doubt rewarded
with what he desires for the well-being of his soul.

55 He who begs [God] for what will hurt himself [his soul],
and then would receive those things, that would not be good.

God wants to listen to your prayer
as it is best for you, as He did for St. Paul,
and not as you wish it to be.

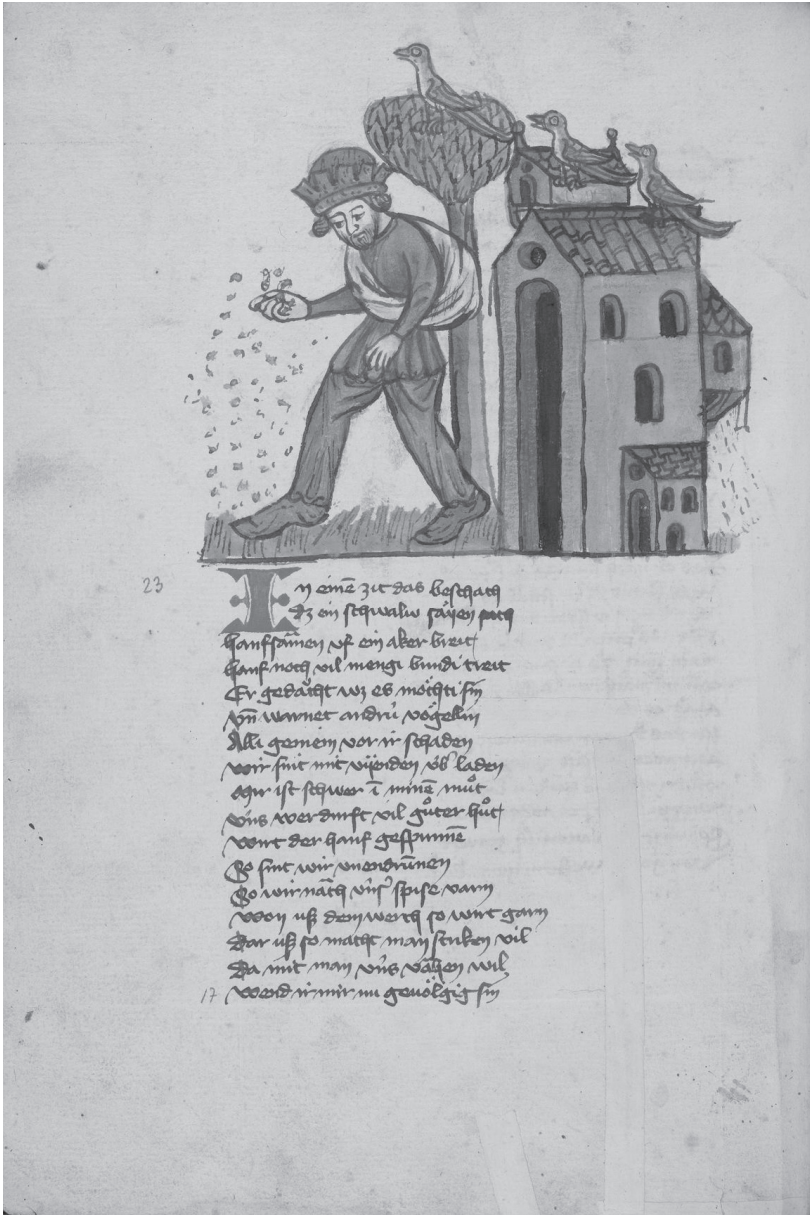
60 Otherwise it would hurt your soul.
If that what you are begging God for,
is something you have earned through deeds,
and if you chase away from your heart
resentment and the blast of envy,

65 then you will be rewarded by God
as does a good father, granting you what your heart desires.

**Fable no. 23: Of a Swallow and Hemp
 On lack of foresight**

Once upon a time it happened
that a swallow observed how
hemp seed was sowed on a large field.
Hemp can bind together many bundles.
5 The swallow wondered what this might be [– it figured it out]
and warned all the birds
about the danger:
“We are threatened by enemies.
I am worried in my mind:
10 It would behoove us to be very careful.
Once the hemp will be spun
we will hardly manage to escape
when we are looking for our food.
They make thread out of this hemp,
15 with which they make many nets and ropes
and with which they want to catch us.
If you are ready to follow me
and believe my words,
I want to give you good advice
20 which will help you to preserve your life:
resist the beginning
and fly to the field
where you ought to eat up all the hemp seed
not leaving any behind, that’s what I advise you.
25 This way the matter will be taken care of
through which you might [otherwise] get into trouble.”
The birds thought that this was a stupid joke,
what the swallow advised and urged them to do.
The hemp grew then the way nature does it:
30 As soon as it later had been spun,
people made ropes and bird nets.
When the birds, looking for their food,
flew to the field
and believed to be completely safe
35 many of them were caught.
 He who does not want to follow good advice,
will not get any help when things go badly for him.
Good advice in all matter

is useful for those who can follow it,
40 be it women or men.
He who acts upon good advice
what he is supposed to do, will profit from it.
Those who overly believe to be completely safe
will eventually hardly survive.
45 It happened that way to the birds
although they could have avoided it.



23

In eme zu das bester
 Ez ein stewartu paves pater
 Ganspinner uf ein aber bizer
 Ganspinner vil mengi bunder treit
 Er gedarft us es meiqri fin
 Von wanner in die vogelen
 Alle gamen vor in seiden
 Vor sint mit wipiden vil laden
 Gern ist stewart i mine mit
 Uns vor dem vil guter frucht
 Vont der gans gestomme
 So sint wir in den rinen
 So wir natu vil spuse wam
 Vont usi daz wera so wint gann
 Dar us so mact man reiben vil
 Da mit man ons reiben wil
 17 Vont in mir in gaulig fin

Fig. 4: Heidelberg Universitätsbibliothek, Codex Pal. germ. 794, fol. 7v

**Fable no. 24: Of People Who Beg for a King
On Servitude**

There was a country in Asia
called Atrica.

It was said that people there
enjoyed great liberty.

5 It was also reported
that there was neither a king nor an army.
People there lived without any external force.
They enjoyed freedom in every regard.

No lord repressed their minds;
10 they lived their lives as they thought it to be good.
They had a free life, and free property.
But then they wanted to grant to someone
the power and the great honor [of a king].

No one wanted to appoint one among themselves.

15 Then they enthroned
a king with whom they did not become happy.
They could not resist him,
they could not make him revert to the previous time,
they lost all their freedom.²⁸

20 It is certainly right and is certainly good,
when a person who does not have confidence in himself
and does not grant honor, and then falls into misfortune,
is not helped by anyone.

He deserves what he is suffering from.

25 When the king gained his power
and his many dignities,
he quickly displayed the [typical] character of lords:
Whatever it might have been, small, large, evil or good,
whatever his heart desired

30 he immediately received
from the people. They became his serfs.
They would have been better off without a king.
No one was allowed to pursue his own will,

they all had to be his subjects [serfs],
35 whether son, daughter, or servant,
everything was just right for the king,
whether there was war or peace,

²⁸ This is a difficult verse; literally: Their free mind was imprisoned.

they all had to serve him, otherwise they were threatened with the death penalty,²⁹

and they all had to be his serfs.

40 Your own action, you own consequence,
 the harm of it all is yours.

It is always that way (may God protect me!)

that a person who suffers from harm and mockery
cannot uphold his own honor

although he really might want to have it

45 and does not recognize when his life is good
and then experiences much sorrow
and suffers poverty and misery.

Who would then feel pity about that?

That person might then truly say for sure:

50 “This sorrow I have brought upon myself;
in the past I was a free man, now I am a servant:
I have deserved what happened to me.”

²⁹ Idiomatic expression: “bî der wide”: at the willow, or tree, from which the guilty one could be hanged. Hence, the willow symbolically served for legal purposes.

**Fable no. 25: Of Frogs Who Wanted to Have a King
On freedom and subjugation**

A pond was filled with frogs
who enjoyed their lives as was natural for them.
They had water and a field.

5 They were completely free,
they did not have a lord among themselves
and they only wanted to enjoy freedom
in their being, in their lives, and in their possessions.
But they could not stand the freedom.

10 They began to lament all the time
that they could not live without a king.
God Jupiter should give them a king
who would have power over them.

Then the god Jupiter laughed
15 and was quiet again, but they began anew
to beg the god asking
for a king. Then Jupiter hurled
a piece of wood into the pond:
it was supposed to be their king.

20 They were so scared that they feared they could not survive,
they all fled quickly.

No sound came out of their throats.
Then the first strike of fortune occurred,
the wooden log rested there quietly,

25 it did not move by the width of a hair.

The frogs noticed that
and could not resist
until they sat on the king.

Yet they screamed as loudly as before:

30 [their lament was that] they would be miserable forever
unless they would be given a king
who would be able to govern them well.

When Jupiter heard that screaming
he sent a stork to the pond.

35 The stork who was then supposed to be their king
did not let anyone of them live.

Its beak was open, its stomach was empty,
it swallowed [virtually] all of them, which pleased it much.
The frogs' lament was great,

40 they were much dismayed about that king.

They said: “Lord, rescue us from this sorrow,
help us, otherwise we will all die,
it does not let any one of us live.

We would like to be free of a king.”

45 Jupiter said: “That cannot be!

You have filled my ears

with requests, now I have given you
a king who will govern your lives,
and you will have to be its subjects.

50 If it so desires, it will not let any one of you live,
and you have deserved that.”

He who can be a lord should not be a servant!

He who has what is sufficient for him,
has enough, and fares well.

55 He who wants to be his own lord
should follow my advice if he wants to survive:
if he wants to keep inner peace and honor,
he should not subject himself to another person
and keep his free spirit.

60 When he feels happy, he should be content
and should not desire something
which might make him fail,
as the frogs did [to themselves]
which since then had to face sorrow.

**Fable no. 26: Of a Harrier and Pigeons
On evil constables**

Once a big fight broke out
which deeply upset many birds,
as the following fable tells us.

The harrier had announced war

5 against the pigeons, which created many problems for them
because they were afraid they might have to die.

They could not find any safety
from the harrier, so they suffered great pain
and anxiety; in their hearts

10 they were terrified.

They all got together in a council
and they all agreed

that they would not be able to survive
without a constable, which was, as they determined,

15 the hawk which was very powerful.

It would certainly defeat the harrier
and would help the pigeons in their suffering
so that they would not all die.

When the hawk had become their constable,

20 it quickly fell back to its nature
and displayed its aggression:

the pigeons were all lost,
none of them could survive.

The one who was supposed to be their protector

25 was their enemy. The sheep are lost
when the wolf becomes the shepherd.

The harrier's announcement of its military threat was better
for the pigeons than the hatred of their own constable.

When people want to achieve something

30 and keep the goal in mind,

then they will hardly fail in that,
whether they are women or men.

To him who must make a choice between two evil persons,
let me give this advice

35 that he chooses (this will be to his advantage)

the one who will cause less harm.

When the one is chosen as the protector
who destroys the people then,

both women and men will be lost.

40 No one can protect himself from that person.

Fable no. 27: Of a Dog and a Thief
On the nature of gifts

Once a thief came sneaking up
to a house where he discovered
a dog which was keeping a close guard,
as a dog should properly do.

5 The thief would have liked to steal something
if he only could hide it from the dog.

The dog angrily barked at the thief
and one could hear this barking very well.

The thief then offered a gift to the dog
10 and said to it: “Here, take this bread!

Be quiet and do not betray me!”

The dog responded: “You evil rogue!

If I were to take your gift, then my master’s
meat and also his wheat would be lost.

15 The cows in the stable
would all be lost as well.

There is much gall in your food,
which threatens to rob me of my future nourishment,
which my master gives me every day.

20 Listen to what I am going to tell you:
“To be fed daily pleases me better

than to get a little food at night.

The food in one night [which you offer] will not be enough
to rob from me what I am supposed to get for the rest of my life.

25 I do not want to be poor forever
just because of this little piece of food.

Your piece of bread hides a fishing hook.

If you do not run away soon, you will suffer for it.”

The dog got up and began to bark.

30 The thief quickly ran away.

 He who takes a gift, is obliged
to him who gives it; therefore, I advise you
to keep this well in mind

if you are the one to receive the gift.

35 No one should give up for a small good
his personal freedom [free spirit].

In the gift there are often hidden
many evil intentions,

as this dog would have almost experienced.

40 When you receive a gift, consider
who offered it and why he gave it to you,
and if you do that,
then the gift will be, believe me that,
of good profit for you without any doubt.

**Fable no. 28: Of a Wolf and a Pig
 On distrust**

A wolf said to a pig,
when it saw that it was far along in its pregnancy:
“When your fruit will be born,
then watch out that it will not be lost;
5 I want to be their guardian.
Then your children will grow up safely.”
When the pig saw the wolf,
it spoke very angrily to it:
“Go away! Your protection is painful to me.
10 To see you is troubling for my eyes.
You are only intent on lying and deceiving,
and you are not good for anything else.
During the day you rob others, during the night you steal from them,
that’s what you do, you wear a thief’s helmet
15 on your head.
He who might believe you
would be a fool; flee, otherwise our dog
will track you down.
May God help you then, if it catches you;
20 leave me free of your protection!”
The wolf quickly ran away
and rushed to the forest.
The pig well protected its piglets.
The wolf was not going to be their protector.
25 Many people offer themselves in service
to those whom they [really] want to destroy.
The wise man is telling us that we should not
believe every individual.
You ought to know well his [true] loyalty
30 to whom you now want to entrust
your life, your goods, your honor.
Turn away your mind and your thoughts
from those who are false.
Do not believe too easily, which will be to your advantage.
35 This fable has taught you this lesson:
the pig did not believe the wolf.

**Fable no. 29: Of a Molehill
 On excessive fear**

One day, a mole, according to its nature
went its way to find some food
and pushed up a big pile;
this is the same what the other moles do.

5 Many people noticed this molehill:
men and women came to see it.
They wondered what it might be.
They believed that no one would survive [from an imaginary danger]
and were afraid that the mountain would soon
10 cover the land and all the world.
They stood far away and watched,
no one dared to go close
to the amazing thing, and that was good so.
They were transfixed there and filled with fear.
15 Finally, a mole appeared
making its way out of the hill.
The people laughed about it and mocked it,
all their fear had dissipated.

 In the same way, there are often some winds
20 from which then results very little rain.
It often happens that following a loud thunder
there is only a small storm.
Many people voice threat with words
who know very little how to fight.
25 It is only half a war when words are uttered;
women have many of those available.
A small matter often creates
large fear in the minds of many people.
This was the case with the people here:
30 a small matter made their hearts tremble,
and consequently, women and men
felt despondent; that's what a mole did to them.

**Fable no. 30: Of a Lamb and a Wolf
 On evil advice**

A farmer once owned a lamb
that had lost its mother.

He put it together with his goats,
where it was well protected.

5 One goat substituted for its mother
And let the little lamb drink its milk.

A wolf approached it [from the outside of the pasture]
and began to say sweet words
and said to the lamb:

10 “May God greet you, my dear friend!
I am so sorry for your misfortune.
The fact that you are so alone makes me sad;
I should have said that to you already a long time ago.

15 How do the goats matter to you?
What kind of friendship might you have with them?
Go with me, let those goats be on their own!

I will take you to your mother
who will feed you well

20 with good milk with which she is full.”

The lamb answered and said:
“Sir Wolf, when I saw you the first time,
I was horrified about your false advice
and also about your evil deeds.

25 I will not abandon my friends
through whom my life is protected.

I rather receive my food
from a goat, and be safe in that,
than to follow you into the wilderness.

30 Your false advice displeases me.”

Thus, the lamb remained
well protected because it was smart.

To live safely is a good thing
and grants you also a happy mind.

35 He who wants to part from friends
will profit very little if he does that.

There is nothing as good as good advice;
the person who gets it will be blessed.

He who wants to follow good advice

40 will not experience later any regrets
as a result of his actions, as we can learn
from this little lamb.

He who wants to accept evil advice
and follows it, will hardly keep

45 his honor and his virtues.
Evil advice is a bad piece of clothing.

**Fable no. 31: Of an Old Dog
On unrewarded service**

Once a man owned a dog
which he loved more than any amount of money.³⁰
It was young, strong, and fast
and also barked loudly.

5 When much time had passed
the dog had to lament its old age,
which had had a negative impact on it:
it could no longer bite,
and it could no longer run fast.

10 Its master was angry about that.
Once the dog had caught a bunny
but this then escaped from its mouth,
for which the master in his rage beat the dog.
Altogether it had become frail.

15 Its strength, its youth were gone.
This was of disadvantage for the dog.
The dog then began to sigh.
It looked at its master
and said, filled with fear:

20 “God, oh lord, what has happened to me?
When I was young, fast, and strong,
I never lost any prey.
Every animal had to die
which I espied. Now I am suffering.

25 All the good things have been forgotten,
no one needs my service any longer.
Whatever great things I used to do,
no one unfortunately remembers.
While I was able to provide service, I was appreciated.

30 Everyone now expects that I perform well.
During my youth I was highly praised
when I commanded full strength.³¹
Now I am old, and I have lost
my praise and my honor.”

35 In this respect
the young person should keep in mind (I advise you that)

³⁰ Literally: more than a pound of money.

³¹ Literally: when I was in my best virtues.

when he offers his service [to his lord].

While in service, many become ill
and do not get any help and any thanks.

40 The wise person ought to keep this in mind,
as people say (I know about it myself quite well)
that providing service to evil people
will never provide you with a reward.

No love lasts long

45 beyond the time when the service is needed.

Once you no longer offer service,
there won't be any love anymore.

**Fable no. 32: Of a Hunter and a Bunny
 On confidence**

Once a hunter together with his dogs
entered a forest, and their noise
alerted the family of bunnies.
They wanted to flee, but did not know where to go.

5 They were very scared,
their legs were ready for the escape,
so they could flee successfully.

When they fled
they reached a ditch filled with water,
10 where there were many frightened frogs.
The bunnies could not cross the ditch.
Fear had robbed them of all their strength,
and the frogs disappeared to the bottom.

Then one of the bunnies said: "I fully understand
15 that other animals are also scared;
the frogs have reminded me of that.

Let us have a cheerful mind,
then we will hardly suffer any harm.
Be hopeful! Don't be scared!

20 We shall escape when we will be hunted.
We will succeed through our confidence
and it will be the best part of our honor
when we flee, which we will not hesitate to do.
Our forefathers did the same."

25 They ran away fast, which was necessary,
because they were afraid of experiencing their death.

 People are saying that he who is dying from fear
brings this upon himself
that he will be buried in the dust.

30 Everyone should be confident
both young and old, women and men,
then they will hardly fail to achieve their goal.
Confidence brings about
that the one who was sick will recover.

35 Confidence is always good,
it strengthens people's optimism.
He who is filled with confidence,
will fare well during suffering.

He who despairs without any need
40 deserves rather to experience death.
Despondency brings about great harm,
it destroys the soul and the inner spirit.
No one should despair
because after evil often the good returns.

**Fable no. 33: Of a Goat and a Wolf
 On children's obedience**

Once a goat wanted to go to the pasture
so she left behind in the barn
a young goat, its daughter.
It said to her: "Do not let anyone in!
5 Keep the door locked
and do not go outside.
Stay inside, that's good for you,
that way you will be protected from the wolf."
As soon as the kid was locked in,
10 immediately a wolf appeared outside.
Deceptively it approached the barn
and acted as if
it were the goat mother
in voice, in behavior, and it said
15 to the kid: "Let me in,
my beloved little daughter."
The kid asked: "Who are you? Stay outside!
I am not going to open the gate to the barn.
My mother has forbidden me
20 to go outside to you.
I know you well, your voice is fake,
Neither the use of German nor of French will help you.
You are not going to get in here, by God!
I want to observe the order
25 given to me by my mother
who told me not to let in anyone.
You are a wolf, I can clearly see that,
and you are filled with evil cunning."
The wolf was forced to keep standing outside of the door,
30 and had to leave very hungrily.
 Oh Lord God, there are so many
here on earth who have developed the same trickery,
who use words so sweet as honey
but intend nothing but evil deeds and murder
35 in their hearts!
They employ many deceptive words,
but their words and deeds are not the same:
they deceive and lie in their deception.

Their words are filled with the sweetness of honey,
40 but their deeds are the result of the bitterness of gall.
You need to watch out well,
when you want to protect yourself.
This fable also teaches us,
young, old, or whoever we are,
45 that we observe firmly
what we are required to do.

**Fable no. 34: Of a Snake Which Was Wounded
On Insecurity**

Here is a story about a snake
 which lived in a house
 safely and felt quite comfortable there.
 But I wonder how a creature, filled with poison
 5 could be good in the first place.
 The fact that the house owner let it live
 was the result of his generous human nature.
 Human beings are created so as to be kind.
 But hardly anyone is so good
 10 that he never falls into a rage.
 This comes from the exchange of those words: ‘mine’ and ‘yours.’
 We can often notice that
 which creates hatred between friends.
 If the words ‘mine’ and ‘yours’ did not exist, let me tell you,
 15 then no one would try to hurt the others.
 The snake got into great trouble
 because of its wrath, and it was immediately wounded
 by the house owner.
 Anger separates friends and good relatives.
 20 He who has kept free of anger,
 does not do any rash and stupid things.
 The house owner felt sorry
 that he had hurt the snake;
 he begged it immediately
 25 to forget it all and to let it be
 because he had done it in his wrath.
 The snake answered him right away
 and said: “Put your sword out of your hand,
 the weapon with which you have hurt me.
 30 If you do not do that I will be afraid of you.”
 The man then threw down the small sword,³²
 and this pleased the snake very much.
 The person is in a much better shape
 who is often filled with anger but then also wants to
 35 leave it behind, and then asks
 for forgiveness, than the person
 who rarely shows anger, but then neglects

³² Here it is suddenly a ‘knife.’

to ask for forgiveness.

A person who is filled with regret
40 and feels sorry for his evil deed,
should then also let it go
through which he has caused some harm.
God accepts true repentance
when it comes from the heart.

45 However, he who is always ready
to commit a sin and to do a roguery
and does not abstain from doing evil deeds,
will not profit much from repentance.

Fable no. 35: Of a Wolf, a Sheep, and a Deer
On the nature of an oath given under duress

A wolf once served as a judge,
as I read in a book.
Much injustice took place there.
This criminal locked the door
5 for the righteous, as was most apparent
in the case of a little simple sheep.
It was brought to trial by a deer
over some money. The sheep almost despaired,
but it insisted on its innocence.³³
10 The wolf said: "The deer is in need,
I must grant him his request that you pay the money,
which should have happened already a long time ago.
This is my judgment, on my oath.
Sir Deer, and if this were my case,
15 I also would demand the money back or ask for a pawn."
The sheep immediately responded,
and said to the deer: "I know well
that I owe you, Sir, the money;
give me just a few days of delay,
20 I will then pay up completely."
The sheep saw clearly and noticed
that it had no chance to be treated fairly,
so it had to request a delay of a few days
because it did not want to perish in this case.
25 When the lords' wrath breaks loose
then the poor people are completely lost.
Where injustice becomes the new justice,
then the innocent person will be led astray.
Where wolf wants to be the judge
30 the righteous person will hardly survive.
The sheep, being in such a dire strait, was afraid
that it would be condemned to death
out of injustice and deception.
It said: "I swear you an oath,
35 Sir Deer, that I will pay you back
what I owe you, and in the exact amount
as you will tell me. Let me go!

³³ The meaning here is that it claims not to have borrowed money from the deer.

I will closely observe my oath.”

The sheep took off and went away.

40 With the help of cunning it escaped from the wolf.

A rogue can deceive another rogue,
just as the fox catches other foxes.

When the day of repayment arrived,
the deer began to demand its money:

45 “Upon the oath which you swore me,
pay me back my money,”

it said. The sheep then gave the deer this answer
and replied: “Sir Deer, the situation is not as you think,
I do not owe you anything. I believe that I am

50 free of any charge and unencumbered, by God.

I had to swear you an oath
in a matter where I was charged innocently.

If I had then not sworn the oath,
the wolf would have torn me asunder
55 and would have devoured me.

God will forgive me that oath.”

An oath sworn under duress is not binding,
if it is given out of real fear [for one’s life].

He who swears an oath driven by fear
60 without this being a true one,³⁴

can then be released from it without dishonor,
as was the case of this little sheep.

True fear can exculpate an honest man
from such an oath.

³⁴ Literally: without the inner sense and mind.

**Fable no. 36: Of a Fly and a Bald Man
 On deserved mockery**

A fly flew around impetuously,
and often bothered a bald man.
Repeatedly it landed on his forehead,
but the man did not neglect to defend himself.

5 Soon enough he hit it with his hand,
but the fly was fast and quickly flew away.
The fly then began to mock him
for having hit himself.

Then it flew back to the forehead.
10 The man clearly noticed it
and said: “Listen, fly, what I am going to tell you!
Even though I have tolerated your mockery
and even though I have hit myself ten times,
I am still healthy.

15 You cannot kill me.
But, if I hit you
only once, you will be dead.”
He who leads himself into danger,
and this through a small harm which he does to others,
20 is determined by a stupid mind.
Many fools begin something
that causes harm to themselves,
as this fly did,

when it landed on the man’s bald head.

25 It caused him only a little harm
and risked for this its own life.

 No one ought to cause harm to others.

He should rather look out
for how to protect himself from harm.

30 If he does that, it will serve him well.
The fly did not abstain from its mockery:
as many times as it escaped from being hit by the man,
as many times it began to mock;
the bald man had to tolerate this mockery.

35 Fools’ mockery is never good,
and targets whatever anyone does.
As a consequence, they will perish
and they thus become the butt of the joke.

He voluntarily becomes the object of mockery
40 who knows nothing else but how to mock others.
He who wants to make fools of other people
easily becomes the object of the game of fooling himself.³⁵

³⁵ The original text plays with the characteristic German term ‘äffen’ for making a fool of someone, meaning, to act like a monkey (*Affe*), or ‘to pull someone’s leg.’ Only in this light, the last line then makes sense: he becomes easily the game/toy of monkeys.

Fable no. 37: Of a Fox and a Stork
On how to pay back roguery

Once a fox invited a stork as a guest
(the stork was very happy about it).
He [the fox] said: “My very dear friend,
already today you ought to come and see me;
5 we shall have a good time together by the end of the day.
I want to organize a big meal for both of us.”
When the stork arrived at dinner time
and believed he would find a full meal,
the fox made a fool of the stork.
10 He boiled the food to its death
so that at the end there was nothing but broth.
The stork could not eat that food
and was left with nothing but a great hunger.
This kind of hospitality irritated it badly.
15 The fox ate much and drank.
The stork thoroughly thought about
how it could pay back the fox’s roguery
because it was angry
that it had to leave again still being hungry.
20 The fox had been responsible for that.
The stork flew up to the top of its willow tree
where it caught a fat chicken.
That one was quickly fried.
The stork filled it with good ingredients.
25 Then it flew down to the fox
and invited it [to dinner], which pleased the fox very much,
saying, “you are always a welcome guest to me.
Well then! I want to pay you back for
your hospitality and your food
30 that you served me, honestly.”
The fox was very hungry at that moment.
The stork locked itself in a glass container,
together with its food, which was delicious.
This made the fox very sorrowful.
35 It saw the food and smelled it as well,
which made its entire body long for it.
When someone sees something which he cannot obtain
and which he really wants to have, then this is a pain

and causes much suffering in the heart.

40 The fox was greatly tortured.
It had to depart from there being very hungry,
just as he had done to the stork.

When the deceiver is deceived
and when the liar is lied to,
45 who would then have pity?³⁶ It is just right.
No one should deceive another person.
He who cheats and lies, loses his respect
and no one will want to treat him as an honorable person [which he is not].
There is so much fraud everywhere

50 that people believe that this is the norm.³⁷

He who deceives [others] hurts himself
because he imposes sinfulness upon his soul.
When you fool me, I make a fool of you.

You are not gaining anything, and I gain even less.

55 He who does what he is supposed to do without deception
will be well rewarded by God.

What you want that other people do to you,
you should do to me.³⁸

³⁶ Stange left out this entire sentence.

³⁷ Stange translates quite differently: that one believes that it [the deception] is righteousness. Bonerius formulates this line in a rather ambiguous fashion.

³⁸ Obviously, this is, in Bonerius's words, the classical 'golden rule': this is the "principle of treating others as you want to be treated." Indeed, this is a universal truth which writers throughout time, representing virtually all religions and cultures, have formulated countless times. It is also found, of course, in the New Testament: "Do to others what you want them to do to you. This is the meaning of the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets" (Matthew 7:12), and in the Islamic *Hadith*. It is a fundamental principle of the Bahá'í faith as well. See also Shabbat 31a by Hillel the Elder.

**Fable no. 38: Of a Wolf Who Found a Picture
 On the deception of the beautiful**

A wolf once went over land
when it found the picture of a person.
It was engraved on a rock.
His head was beautifully decorated,
5 his forehead shone forth, his eyes were shining,
his cheeks had the color of roses,
his lips were red, his throat was white,
he was so beautiful without any fail.
When the wolf saw that picture,
10 it became deeply frightened and said:
“Oh Lord, what might this miracle be?
Is this a human being? Let me know!”
Having spoken those words,
it began to approach the picture.
15 It turned it this and that way,
but it also noticed right away
that the person had eyes and yet did not see,
that he had a mouth and yet did not speak;
his hands did not do anything,
20 his feet were forced to stand still.
When the wolf noticed that,
it thought to itself:
“What good is the eye which does not see?
What good is the mouth which does not speak?
25 He who invests so much beauty,
is really wasting his time.”
Then the wolf said: “I believe
that this beauty would be more fitting for the soul
than for the body, the eyes of which are blind
30 and the ears of which are deaf.”
The soul may well beautify the body,
whereas the body causes great harm to the soul.
What good is a body without a soul, a spirit?
Its beauty is good for nothing.
35 Indeed, whoever looks at a picture
notices that it is devoid of all grace.
There are many pictures [illusions] here on earth,
which think cunningly

how they could please the world.

40 Their appearance is like a glowing coal,
which immediately turns into ash.

Their bodies create nothing but dung and worms.

Their eyes do not see anything real,
their mouths do not speak good/real words;

45 their ears are not ready to listen to anything
but mockery and foolish words;

their hands rarely do anything good;

their words, their deeds are meaningless;

their feet quickly rush toward sinfulness;

50 their tongues and necks are poisoned;

they are too lazy to do anything good;

they are correctly called the children of this world

but are only images without any understanding,

as the wolf realized in this story.

**Fable no. 39: Of a Crow and a Peacock
On borrowed beauty**

A crow looked at itself
and saw that it was black and ugly.
All of its companions looked the same,
but the black color irritated it nevertheless.
5 It thought about how its feathers might
gain a lighter sheen.
While it went around
it found the feathers of a peacock,
which were gleaming in many colors.³⁹
10 The crow decorated its own plumage with them
and its whole body.
This then resulted quickly into a huge conflict.
The crow despised its fellow crows
and other birds, small and large.
15 This came from the borrowed glow of colors
of the peacock feathers, which were not its own.
The crow no longer wanted to be in the company of the other crows,
and decided instead to go to the peacocks.
It wanted to be like them
20 because its plumage was stunning.
But, when the crow got to the peacock,
the latter immediately recognized
that its beauty was nothing but borrowed.
It began to feel hatred against the crow.
25 It felt upset about the crow's arrogance,⁴⁰
who had dressed up with false feathers.
The peacock violently attacked the crow
and punished it right away
and pulled out all of its feathers [including the black ones].
30 Those never grew back on the crow.
It was put to shame because now it was all naked
and many of its fellow crows mocked it.
He deserves to be laughed at
who is so full of vanity

³⁹ In the Middle High German original, the poet uses only the singular, 'one feather,' but since the crow then covers its entire body with feathers, and since later in verse 16, Bonerius then employs the plural, the change here makes good sense.

⁴⁰ The poet here switches back from the plural (peacocks) to the singular.

35 that he desires out of foolishness
what nature has not granted it.
The higher the mountain, the deeper is the valley;
the higher the honor, the deeper the fall.
Love, which has been bought,
40 and make-up and pretense
do not provide any stability.
He who has a too high opinion of himself
will easily come falling down.
We have learned this quite often
45 that miserable arrogance is to be laughed at.
God loves true humility.
He who believes to be the best,
is easily identified as a fool.
If the crow had not desired anything else
50 than what nature had granted it,
and if it had known itself better,
it would not have been shamed so publicly.

**Fable no. 40: Of a Mule and a Gadfly
On toleration**

We read about a mule
 which was harnessed to a cart,
 filled with a heavy load.
 Nevertheless, [the mule] pulled it without fail
 5 because it had been well fed
 and because it was well shoed.
 It knew its master very well;
 he carried a stick in his hand,
 he drove the mule forward, it had no choice.
 10 In this tough situation a gadfly came by
 and said sternly,
 when it saw the mule:
 “Sir Mule, you must now suffer⁴¹
 because I will make your life miserable,
 15 believe me that.
 That is my heart’s desire.
 You will not escape from me.
 You will experience discomfort from me.”
 When the gadfly had thus spoken its threat, the mule looked up
 20 and said to it:
 “You food for swallows, what do you want?
 How dare you to threaten me?
 You miserable, dishonorable thing!
 Everyone who sees you, hates you.
 25 If I were not forced by my master [to do my job],
 thousands of you would have to die.
 Your bragging will not turn out well for you,
 and likewise your threatening and your roguery
 which you have done to me right now,
 30 except that you see me walking in harness,
 but if I were free and without ropes,
 I would have immediately killed you.
 However, right now I must tolerate you
 because I am pulling my master’s cart.”
 35 There are many evil people
 who come up with evil cunning
 when the wheel of fortune looks favorable on them

⁴¹ Literally: you must give up hair.

and when it looks bad for the good ones.

Then they appear buzzing like the gadfly.

40 They cause many bad wounds with words
to him who would like to be safeguarded
and protected from them.

Their words cut like a sword,
their deeds are dishonorable.

45 Whether they are young, old, women or men,
they must suffer from the gadflies
and tolerate the arrows shot from vile words.
You can notice their evilness everywhere.

**Fable no. 41: Of a Fly and an Ant
 On cusswords**

Once a war broke out
with words and fighting.
A fly came across an ant
and said to it filled with malice:
5 “Go away, you miserable creature!
Your life is truly too hard for you.
You struggle day-in and day-out,
as God has told you,
to secure poor food, necessary for living,
10 and for which you are striving all the time,
just as the donkey does in its harness.
Your mind is always depressed,
you never rest neither at night nor during the day.
There are no comparisons
15 between your poor life and my own.
I am proud, noble, and refined,
and while you have to walk on the earth,
I am flying in the air, and then you see me standing
with great joy on the king’s table.
20 Whether it is meat or fish
I am eating of it from the king’s plate.
Then I am drinking good wine
out of a silver and a golden cup.
By contrast, you hardly get water.
25 I enjoy every pleantry:
the queen carries me on her head,
whereas you are stuck in your hole
and dig around like a swine.
My chair is covered with fur;
30 your house is decorated with thorns.
I am rich in joys and food.
Your life is very unlike my own.”
Once the fly had spoken those words,
the ant angrily looked up
35 and said: “Be quiet, you shameless creature!
How dare you to compare yourself with me?
My life is one of innocence,
while yours is evil and poisonous.

I live better in my house
 40 than you in the king's palace.
 Your flying is nothing but constant unrest;
 I feel happy in my poverty.
 However much you might own, it is never enough for you.
 How little I might have, it all belongs
 45 only to me and my companions.
 What you claim as your own, that's not yours,
 you must get it through robbing and stealing.
 I do not need to hide my food from anyone,
 and everyone grants it to me.
 50 You are hated by everyone;
 you are good only for doing harm,
 you make many people unhappy,
 you make everything dirty what your mouth touches,
 therefore, there often comes a moment
 55 when you are killed by a fly swatter,
 whereas I am left in peace
 because I do not cause any harm to anyone;
 you are filled with every kind of evilness.
 This fable speaks to those
 60 who want to respond to vile words
 with equal vileness.
 From this easily results a big fight
 resulting from a few small words. He who does that
 does not have the mind-set of a mild-mannered person.
 65 He who does not want to know himself
 verbally attacks three neighbors [at once],
 and then he will hear back immediately
 what they think about him truly.
 A soft answer calms down anger.
 70 Wrath destroys the best friendship.
 Wrath is the entrance door for all sins.
 When someone closes that door, the virtues
 arrive there with their kindness.
 A harsh word triggers another,
 75 a good thing brings about another one,
 while a bad thing unleashes many others.

Fable no. 42: **Of an Ant and a Locust
 On preparation for the future and carelessness**

Here is a word of wisdom which seems good to me:
he who takes precaution, defends himself well.
When his time will come [when he will get old]
and then owns property, this will be helpful for him.

5 An ant was well aware about this
and made sure that its house was filled [with food].

As soon as summer arrived,
it quickly began to work
and never rested its legs.

10 It went out to work early and stayed out late,
striving hard to find food.

It said: "At one point, winter will arrive
when it won't be possible to work.

Easily the day might arrive

15 which might not offer anything to eat.

A wise person ought to secure for himself
provisions, which will give him high spirits
and which are also a protection against hunger."

The ant worked around and ran everywhere,

20 and during this time it hardly slept
the whole summer because it knew well
that he who does not work as he is supposed to do
to get his food,
will [later] suffer great pain.

25 The ant's efforts filled its house with food;
and it withdrew into its home
together with its companions when the [cold] season arrived
filled with ice and snow.

At that moment a locust came running by

30 which did no longer find anything in the field
to eat; it was suffering.

It could die from hunger.

It knocked at the door.

The ant right away stepped out

35 and said: "Sir, what do you need?"
The locust answered: "I am starving to death,
and both the ice and the snow
hurt me badly.

Share your food with me,
 40 or I will be finished.”
 The ant answered, saying
 politely, realizing
 that the locust had fallen into great suffering,
 which had mocked it during the summer
 45 and had bothered it badly,
 while it had worked hard to collect food:
 “Young Sir, you stay outside,⁴²
 you will not get any of my food.
 You used to jump far and up high,
 50 while I dragged with great effort
 the food [into my house], which I now will enjoy.
 He who acts prudently, will have enough at the end.
 Today you will have to go away hungrily,
 that is my final decision.”
 55 He who wants to sleep throughout the summer,
 will then, when the winter arrives,
 have to suffer thirst and hunger,
 which he will not be able to prevent.
 He who is lazy during his youth
 60 and does not strive for honor or virtues,
 what wonder then if things turn out badly for him
 if he does not prepare for his old age?
 While the iron is still hot
 one ought to smite it.
 65 While the wonderful summer lasts,
 one ought to acquire what one desires.
 While the young person is still strong
 he ought to accumulate resources, that’s my advice.

⁴² Stange uses the feminine here: young maid (“Jungfer,” which in itself is very archaic), but only because in modern German the word for locust is feminine, ‘die Heuschrecke.’ In the original text, however, the poet explicitly uses the masculine, “Junghêr” (young lord).

**Fable no. 43: Of a Mouse and Its Children
 On hypocrites**

It is the kindness of nature
that virtually all creatures
dearly love their children
which are born from their bodies,
5 one more, the other less.
When their children suffer, they feel pain.

 A mouse took the best care
of its children, just as a mother
always does. When the time came for it
10 to go out to look for food,
it said: “Now listen, my children,
you won’t know who is a friend or a foe,
you won’t be able to distinguish that.
The world is filled with dangers.

15 So, follow my advice
and do not run around outside;
instead, stay in the house!”
Then the old mouse left them.

The young mice then began to get into action;
20 they could not hold back,
they ran in and out of the house.

Then a rooster came flying into the house
together with its flock of chicken.

Its red crest shone brilliantly,
25 and its spurs looked fabulous.

The little mice wondered
who this lord might be.

They were afraid that they would not be safe from it.
They fled in one or the other directions.

30 The rooster did not pay attention to them.

Once the ruckus was over,
the rooster walked out of the door
to the yard to find its food.

The chicken followed it.

35 As soon as it had walked out of the door
the mice came running out of their hiding places
and were happy that they did not have to be afraid any longer
and had survived the danger of the rooster.

This was the result of their stupid minds.
 40 A cat was lying next to the fireplace
 very calmly and slept.
 The throng of mice ran around it.
 They all looked at the cat,
 and it seemed to be quite innocent⁴³
 45 in its behavior and in appearance.
 The little ones thought that it would be friendly,
 a kind animal, intelligent and tender.
 The little mice kept running around
 50 when the mother mouse returned
 coming back from the forest,
 and the kids quickly rushed
 back to their original place
 where their mother had left them behind.
 55 The old mouse said: "Have you obeyed
 my command?" "Yes, by God,"
 all the young mice said,
 "a crowned lord with its spur
 came by with loud music,
 60 we were very afraid of its anger
 and quickly fled back to our hole."
 "No," said the old mouse,
 "it is not doing anything to you, it leaves you alone,
 you will be safe from it."
 65 The little ones, however, responded,
 which did not please their mother:
 "We saw at the fireplace
 a little animal, which looked quite charming
 and seemed like a cleric,
 70 it rested its head on its legs
 and was sleeping.
 Whenever one of us ran up to it,
 it did not even move a bit."
 The old mouse said: "Oh dear, why
 75 was I ever born? You poor creatures,
 did you not recognize the cat?
 The greatest enemy which we have
 is the cat, stay away from it.
 Flee from it, if you love your life!

⁴³ Unclear passage; the text says: it was done like a cleric.

80 Its peaceful appearance can give you
the bitterness of gall.
If you do not flee from it, you will regret it later.”

 This fable is intended [to teach] those of you,
whether women or men,

85 who live here on this earth
and whose appearance
and actions are not aligned with each other.
Who may protect himself from them?
They do evil things, but display a good behavior,
90 and thus they deceive many people.

Often a person puts on a sheep skin
who carries the heart of a wolf.
No one can recognize him through the words,
only his actions reveal him truly.

95 Many people appear like angels in appearance,
who have the mind-set of a devil.

They are like the dung pile covered with snow
which on the inside is vile and stinks badly,
and yet looks like a beautifully painted grave
100 which on the inside is filled with worms.

It is good to lead an upright life.
He who has protected himself from sinfulness,
and whose words and actions speak the same language
may well become God’s child.

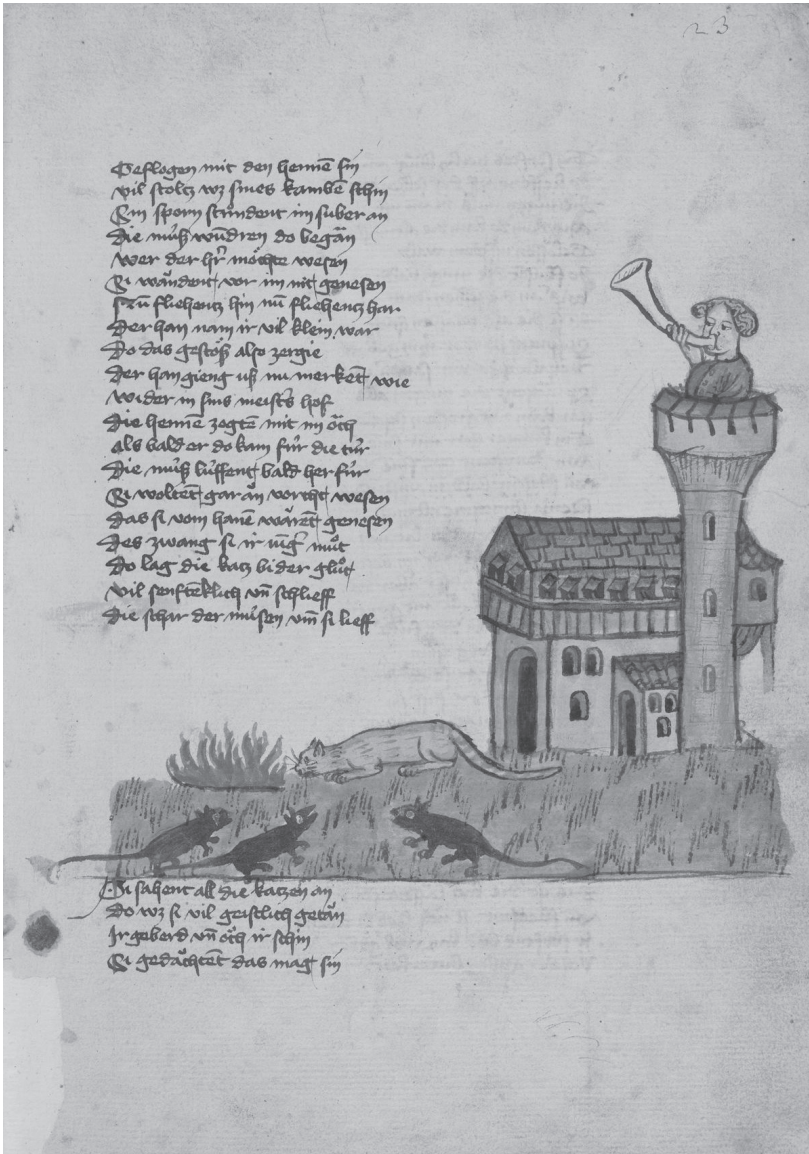


Fig. 5: Heidelberg Universitätsbibliothek, Codex Pal. germ. 794, fol. 23r

**Fable no. 44: Of the Animals and the Birds
 On the lack of constancy**

Let me tell you this, once it happened
that a great fighting erupted.
The animals claimed that the earth
had been given to them, where they were supposed to live
5 and where they were to find their food.
Just the same way
the birds talked about the earth,
insisting that the air and the earth belonged to them;
God gave both to them.
10 For that conflict they were ready [animals and birds]
to risk their lives.
A bitter war erupted then
about the question who was right in that matter.
Knights and servants rushed to the war,
15 which turned very bitter and bloody.
The birds would have liked to defend themselves,
but they suffered from misfortune.
When this happened,
the bat witnessed that and left its army
20 and flew to the animals,
and thus turned its back on to its own companions,
driven by its cowardly heart.
It escaped from them at a time when they [the birds] really needed it.
This cast great shame upon it.
25 The eagle then joined the other birds
and called out to them.
It inspired their hearts and minds,
as the bold one often does.
Thus, the birds gained the victory.
30 The animals were greatly grieved
that they had to withdraw from the battlefield.
The bat then returned
and came flying back to the birds.
The birds left the site
35 and exposed the bat,
expelling it in a shameful manner from their own.
On top of it, the bat received the penance
that it was allowed to fly only at night

and get its food in the dark.

40 He who wants to serve two lords
and gain the advantage from both
must get up from sleep very early in the morning.⁴⁴

He who abandons his own companions out of cowardice,
will suffer from misfortune, which is no wonder.

45 When a person is so unreliable
that he, out of his evil mind,
abandons his friends at the time of their greatest need,
ought to turn red out of shame.

He who supports the enemies
50 and betrays the fellow citizens,
deserves to go under
and should die in a dishonorable fashion,
as the bat did in this story.

For that reason, it will never have
55 honor, respect, and dignity.
There are not many who feel sorry for it.

⁴⁴ Idiomatic expression, meaning, you cannot do two things at the same time (or, as we would say today: multi-tasking).

**Fable no. 45: Of a Weasel which was Caught
Of forced service**

Once a weasel went into a house,
where it caught many mice,
but then it happened to it
that it was caught as well.

5 As soon as it realized this,
it said to the house owner,

“Sir, let me go,

you ought to give me my freedom,
because I have certainly earned it

10 that you should not kill me.

Look, how clean is your house!

There are neither rats nor mice running around.

Sir, you should reward me

and let me go without grudge.

15 Think of all my labor!

I will happily provide you with my service.”

The man responded: “It is certainly true,

you have emptied my entire house

of mice and big rats,

20 which had bothered me much.

However, you did that to get food for yourself

and not on my behalf.

You did not intend to be useful to me.

You want to save your life now, claiming

25 that you caught the mice, which are
both your and my enemies.

You hunted them out of gluttony

because then you could eat more easily

my own food supplies all by yourself.

30 You did not want to have company.

Why should I let you live

since you have [always] been my enemy?

You have misused my meat, my bread;

therefore, you will have to die.”

35 The weasel could not deny those charges,

and hence it had to suffer from the man’s anger;

it had served him without his approval,

and it was then killed on the spot.

He who does good deeds without any intention to do so,
40 how can this work out well?
Good intentions embellish all deeds and words,
good intention deserves to be rewarded.
The weasel did not have a good intention
when it served [hunted], because its mind had been set
45 on how it could survive
and how it could secure its own food.
Its evil intention undermined that
what was actually of good use for the man.
Good intention makes small deeds very big.
50 Good intention will not go without reward.
Where there is good will, honestly,
and good deeds, God will praise that.

**Fable no. 46: Of a Frog and an Ox
 On arrogance**

Once a frog jumped out onto a meadow
together with its son.

There it saw a big ox.

This created trouble for the frog.

5 It said: "Oh Lord, why should I
give You thanks for the fact
that You gave me such a poor body?

On top of it, my life is rather miserable
compared to many animals which are as big
10 as the ox right here."

The frog would have liked to be similar
to the ox. It immediately began to blow itself up.

Then its son said: "My dear father,
it is of no use, stop this blowing up!

15 You cannot fight against that
what nature has granted you."

But the father did not want to let go,
arrogance filled its mind.

Again, it began to blow itself up

20 with full force and said: "If I could become
as big as the huge ox,
then my greatest wish here on earth
would be fulfilled, on my oath."

Its son responded: "Father, I am worried

25 that you torture yourself without any need;

I am afraid you might die from this.

You might lose your life.

Listen to me! Let go of this extreme ambition in your heart!

Dear father, follow my advice,

30 and stop with this haughty self-blowing up!"

The old one said: "Are you kidding me?

I won't do that, so help me God!

I must become as big as the ox,

and all my children will be proud of it."

35 It blew itself up until it burst.

If it had been content with its own life,
it would have hardly suffered anything.

 We have observed it many times

that he who aimed for more honor
40 than he should strive for,
or more than he ought to,
will get little profit from it.

He who is poisoned by vanity,
will not do well.

His heart will be filled with envy and hatred
45 of the one who is his superior, and then this brings about misery
for him,

and the one who is below him, he chases away through envy.

He hates his own companions.

He begrudges it much if someone is better
than him. Therefore, it would be better
50 that he who is envious would have
eyes all over his body so that he could see
what good might happen to anyone else.

He would then blow himself up [with boasting] so much
that he would explode (and that would be good).

55 This would happen very quickly,
as was the case with the frog.

**Fable no. 47: Of a Lion and a Shepherd
On the reward for remembering service previously
rendered**

A lion was so hungry
that it went on a hunt for some animal
for food, and this is what happened.
It got into big trouble.
5 It stepped with a paw onto a thorn,
which made its leg swell up, and its paw
become putrid. It suffered great pain
from the thorn, as we read in the story.
The thorn stayed stuck in the foot
10 and hurt it, which badly irritated the lion.
It could not help itself to get
out of this plight, and the paw could no longer be used.
The other paws had to stand still as well.
The lion could hardly walk, it had to stand still.
15 The lion suffered great pain,
the thorn caused it much trouble,
it did not know what to do in this situation,
even more helpless than a deaf chicken.
He who is not sick, and has never been sick,
20 does not look for any medicine.
But the lion got an idea
and thought about what might help it
during its time of physical suffering,⁴⁵
so that its foot could recover.
25 He who is sick, truly learns something.
No one should ignore small wounds,
see, this is my advice,
because many things can then often go wrong.
The lion was driven by its nature
30 and also by its wound (it hurt badly)
to look for a medical doctor.
It was immediately granted that wish.
It got to a location where it found a shepherd,
who immediately recognized the lion.
35 He thought it wanted to kill him.
He was ready to let it have the sheep

⁴⁵ Literally: day of sickness.

so that it would not take his life.
Just when he was terrified to death,
[he noticed] that the lion acted kindly.
40 The shepherd was rather pleased about that.
The lion showed its paw to the shepherd
so that it would help him recover from the wound
and get its paw healed.
The shepherd quickly understood
45 that the lion was badly wounded
and suffered; he observed this easily.
He discovered the thorn in the paw,
from which the lion suffered so much.
He pulled out the thorn with his hand,
50 which immediately healed the lion.
Once this matter was done,
and it felt no longer any pain, the lion regained its happiness.
It looked closely at its medical doctor
and engraved his picture into its heart
55 and thought in its mind
how it could pay back for this good deed
which the shepherd had done to it.
It still is a matter of fact that a virtuous person
never ought to forget the person
60 who does something bad or good.
The lion happily departed from that place
and left behind the shepherd with the sheep.
Not long thereafter it happened
that the lion was caught.
65 It was caught by Romans, as we are told,
It was paraded with great fanfare
to a large palace
and securely locked in a cage
together with other wild animals.
70 With the food appropriate for them
the guards fed the animals every day.
Whatever they gave them, was completely
devoured by the animals.
Then, many years later
75 the same shepherd was taken prisoner,
who had healed the lion's paw.
This was a man

who had committed many crimes.
Therefore, he was condemned to die.
80 He was handed over to the animals as food.
They were supposed to devour him.
The lion did not forget
the good deed that had been done to it.
It began to look closely at the man.
85 It recognized that he was the same person
who had helped him to recover [its health].
The man stood there completely terrified,
but the lion approached him kindly
and went up to him. And then it kissed
90 the shepherd on his lips.
It bowed its head before it
and displayed complete loyalty to him.
With its tail it chased away the other animals
so that he survived.
95 The Romans observed [this miracle],
both women and men.
They were astounded and wondered what might be the reason
that the shepherd could survive.
The shepherd then told them
100 about how the lion had become wounded
and how he then had pulled out the thorn from its paw.
The lion had remembered that.
The lion's loyalty saved the shepherd
in this horrible situation because otherwise
105 he would have been dead according to proper judgment.
The Romans allowed both to live
when they understood the great miracle
and let both go free.
The shepherd regained his happiness
110 and the lion left and went its way.
Old loyalty is valuable,
it inspires many people's minds.
Even if something is far away from your sight
it should be close to your heart.⁴⁶
115 One should remember service rendered for a long time.
Good service pleases loyal hearts.

⁴⁶ This is, of course, the still current phrase, now in the negative, i.e., ultimately, in the positive: 'out of sight, yet not out of mind.'

The old friend is often a good person.

The old enemy causes harm.

He who tends to forget what others have done for him in the past,

120 will urgently need good advice,

even if that won't do much for him. Then not only the half
will be lost what one might do for him, but everything.

Lack of thankfulness never turns out well
and carries the hat of shamefulness.⁴⁷

125 Insofar as the lion was grateful,
the shepherd profited from it and survived.

If it had not been grateful,

then even its medical doctor would not have been rescued.

⁴⁷ Metaphorical expression, meaning: this person will be generally despised.

**Fable no. 48: Of Fever and the Flea
On excessive desire for comfort**

A fever⁴⁸ met a flea,
and this at a time when the latter did not feel well at all.
It had had a bad night
and had passed its time miserably.
5 This was also the case with the fever,
and both began to talk,
after they had greeted each other, about their misery.
The flea said: "I am starving to death.
I thought that I surely would have my food.
10 I tell you, honestly,
Sir Fever, that I did not do anything else
during last night but to stay awake,
but it did not help me at all.
I am going to relate to you what happened to me.
15 I jumped to a monastery,
where I believed to be able
to find plenty of food, but I failed.
I jumped onto a high bed,
which was covered with elegant blankets
20 for the abbess. She was very rich,
as I could tell judging by her demeanor.
She was highly educated.
When she went to bed at night,
I welcomed her there,
25 I really wanted to get my food.
She noticed, however, that I had arrived
jumping from the cover onto her body.
She screamed: 'Iremtrud, do not stay
away for so long, come here.
30 Something has bitten me, I do not know what, what might that
be?
Have you not properly checked
the sheets? Truly, blame on you!
I am so angry, believe me that.
Bring the light, don't hesitate!'
35 I quickly fled," said the flea,
"I was glad that I got away.

⁴⁸ The poet means: chills, or shivers.

Once the light had been turned off,
I returned to the same spot
on the bed, as before.
40 Again, the lady screamed: ‘Oh dear!
What is going on in my bed?
Bring the light, what might it be?’
I escaped quickly, it was high time.
If they had gotten me, I would have died.
45 The women did this the whole night,
and I did not get what I had wanted.
For that reason, I am hungry and exhausted.
May God help me that I will do better the next time.”
The fever said: “Now, be quiet!
50 My night I spent as badly as you did.
I did not have a better time than you, believe me that.
Yesterday I got to a house
where I began to torture a woman,
55 I jumped onto her limbs
with full force, whereupon she quickly sat down
and boiled a strong stew
which she ate. Next to her was a jug
filled with water, of which she drank plenty.
60 Then she brought in a vat
filled with clothes which she was supposed
to wash, but she did not want
to grant me any rest.
She cursed at me badly.
65 She never rested throughout the night
and was very busy the entire time
and caused me great discomfort.
In the morning, when it dawned,
she put the vat on her head
70 and walked out to the creek
and cleansed the clothes, which hurt me badly.
I could no longer stay there.
I have been miserably tortured.
I recommend that we exchange, upon my advice,
75 both our resting places
and tomorrow, upon our oaths,
we’ll return and meet again
and tell each other

about our successes and failures.

80 The flea said: "Yes, let's do that."

The fever went looking for its good luck

in the monastery

and made the abbess feel chills.

But her maid helped her immediately.

85 She was quickly covered again.

Her bedroom was filled with good supplies.

She said: "My back and also my legs

are trembling badly, give me a brick stone
nicely heated.

90 That will give me helpful perspiration.

I hope to recover soon.

I have also read

that one should massage the feet

thoroughly with vinegar and salt.

95 Rose water should then be applied

to my forehead to give it relief.

That helps to get rid of bodily heat.

Pay attention, when I begin to sweat

then take the fur and cover me.

100 Do not let anyone come in, that's my request,⁴⁹

so that the perspiration does not go away.

Also, tell the maids

to be ready at a moment's notice

to do what I will order them to do.

105 You should also watch out

that everyone takes good care of me

and provides me with beverages and food.

Make a rice dish

mixed with almond milk,

110 and let me also tell you

to get candied violets

which will cool me down

and help me with my stool.

Further, get a pomegranate

115 which will give me great relief.

I will be so grateful when I will be well again."

The fever was well taken care of,

whereas the flea suffered hunger.

⁴⁹ Meaning: keep the door closed and avoid any draught.

It got to the home

120 where the fever had been before
and where it received a good treatment
by the laundry maid.⁵⁰

She had completely dried her linens.

Her house was impoverished,
125 there were very few provisions.

The maid sat down near the fire
and ate whatever she could find there.

Then she went to sleep
on her bag with straw.

130 This made the hungry flea very happy.

The woman laid there and slept.

The flea went up and down,
and no one prevented it from getting its food;
it got what it desired

135 throughout the entire night. In the early morning
both met again,
the fever and the flea.

Both were pleased about their resting places.

The fever said: "I feel very well:

140 The abbess ought to continue providing me with a bed
for eighteen weeks or more."

The flea responded: "I also did not have to suffer
any worse on the bag of straw.

You will find me throughout the summer

145 in a cheerful mood on the bag of straw."

Then they parted from each other.⁵¹

He who pays too much attention to his sickness,
might get too much of it.

People say that excessive comfort

150 makes healthy people sick.

According to one's arrangements [in life]

⁵⁰ This is meant ironically, of course.

⁵¹ The organist and composer Erasmus Widmann (1572–1634) also included a poem on fleas, "Es ist ein Thierlein auff der Welt" (no. 8), certainly a bizarre but hilarious topic. See Albrecht Classen, (together with Lukas Richter), *Lied und Liederbuch in der Frühen Neuzeit*. *Volksliedstudien*, 10 (Münster, New York, et al.: Waxmann, 2010), 238–40; for a text edition, see Albrecht Classen, *Erasmus Widmann (1571–1634): Edition seiner weltlichen, unterhaltsamen und didaktischen Lieder und Gesänge* (Berlin: Weidler, 2011), 31–32.

a person is often getting sick, as I have heard it.
The laundry maid resolutely got rid
of the fever, whereas it stayed for a long time
155 with the cultured abbess.⁵²
He ought to be happy about this forever.

⁵² Strangely, Stange translates here “kluog” (intelligent) as “beautiful.”

Was wil der apfel raschen an
 Er gieng hin für den hirn stan
 Ein fuß leit er in uf die bme
 Gut den andern er in vñ wie
 Er liegnd in pene erntan
 Das gewel mit wol den hütan
 Die des hirn dien wun
 Den apfel se ganietet sehtin
 Gut sehtin vñ mit stangen
 Der spiß in wol belangtan
 Wodete die in pole in besut
 Vñ in poltan blühtan
 In in wunt sehtan mit gestant
 Gekant er uf gewilte want
C Welch wate vor des liegert
 Des in natun in mit gewit
 Der mag des wol engeltan
 Dar zu pol man in sehtan
 Der seht der dringe minet an
 Das in gestlecke nie gewun
 Vor die natun hat gegeben
 Dem mag d' menschen kunn wid sehtan
 Den kunnst in seht in blühtan wul
 Der apfel seht wate pol



Fig. 1: fol. 5r, Bonerius, fable no. 21

Der künig so bald stille lag
 Er niht seig mit als vñ ein har
 Die froiq wunden das gewar
 Si kunden mit gemassen
 Of dan künig si do paffen
 Si sprächen ab lue als ei
 Ien mußt in wester we
 In wunde der ein künig geben
 Der red nider mochte in leben
 Do Jupiter das gescrey vernam
 Ein storcken pmit er in dem dan
 Das der in künig solt wesen
 Der künig in künig ließ gesehen



Sin mußt wir offen sin mag was wem
 Er seiland alles das in bekam
 Der froste klag wart sehr groß
 Des küniges si vil seker verdros
 Si sprächen her us super not
 Hilf uns wem wir sint alle tot
 Er lue wir künig gesehen
 In künig wend wir gesehen wesen
 Jupiter sprach es mag mit sin
 Ir künig erfüllt die oron min
 Mit dem in dem us us geben
 Ein künig der nider wu leben

Fig. 2: fol. 9r, Bonerius, fable no. 25



Fig. 3: fol. 14r, Bonerius, fable no. 35



Fig. 4: fol. 60r, Bonerius, fable no. 76

**Fable no. 49: Of a Hawk and a Crow
 On those who feed their own enemies**

A hawk had built its nest
high on the top of a tree, where it raised
all of its little ones.
Now, there was near-by
5 a crow which had built its nest there.
This created a close friendship,
but the crow faced much poverty and struggle
getting its food, which was very unpleasant for it.
Beetles and worms
10 and other kinds of critters
were its food. But then it saw well
that the nest of its friend was full
with all kinds of good food.
Whatever the open field and the forest offered,
15 whether those were little animals or birds,
the hawk brought to its little ones.
When the lazy crow witnessed that
it said to its husband:
“Listen, my dear beloved,
20 it is quite obvious that we are lazy.
We cannot catch any bird,
and for that reason, our nest and our little ones
have often to be desolate.
I have now thought about something
25 how our nest might get filled with food.
If it might please you,
I will steal the hawk’s eggs
and will hatch them (you must keep it a secret).
Thus, our children will become noble
30 and bold, just as the hawks are.
Then our family will gain in fame
and we will always have food.
Our attitude will improve.”
The crow’s mate responded: “This seems to be a good idea.”
35 The female crow then stole the hawk’s eggs,
which was to bring trouble to the crow.
The hawk realized what had happened
and thought to itself:

once the crow has hatched your eggs
40 then it will become quite obvious
that it will have created for itself
worries, misery, and struggle.
The crow then sat on the eggs
and was rather cheerful.
45 The hawk flew back and forth
and closely watched the crow.
It said: "God greetings to you, my friend,
what are you up to there?"
"I am hatching my eggs," said the crow,
50 "as all of my kind do everywhere else."
"Well, then sit quietly and hatch well,
when that will come forth as is the natural course
what you hatch, then we will see
what your offspring is, my dear friend.
55 Even the smallest thread ever spun
will come to light."
Once the crow was finished with hatching,
it had to feed the young birds
with so much food
60 that much unrest entered the life
of the wife and the husband.
The crows had much work to do
to feed the young hawks.
This filled their hearts with worries.
65 When their [the hawks] feathers had grown
real trouble and sorrow emerged.
The crows could not give them enough food,
for which they lost their lives
because the young hawks attacked them.
70 The female crow began to scream loudly,
which echoed throughout the forest.
When the old hawk witnessed that,
it said: "What is wrong, dear friend?"
"I have lost my life,
75 my children have done that to me,
which I have hatched with difficulties."
The hawk answered: "I am sorry to hear that.
I have often told you so before:
you have through this hatching

80 brought this suffering and your death upon yourself.
It would have been better if you had not done [your evil deed].
Thus, the miserable hatching bird died.

 It is just right and proper
that he who wants to elevate his family
85 beyond that what nature has given it,
will hardly ever achieve that goal.
He who intends to feed its own enemy
and then miserably fails, ought not to be surprised.
He who desires what he is not supposed to get,
90 seems to me to be a foolish person.

Many strive for material goods
which cause him great harm.
So many hatch their own death.
The ox also admitted: "This suffering
95 I have brought upon myself,"
when it had to pull the cart
and had to unload the manure itself.
There are still many oxen like that:
he who causes harm to himself
100 through vanity, will never have a good life.

Fable no. 50: Of a Lion and a Horse
On false fame

Once a lion walked around
driven by hunger
looking for something to eat.
A person is intelligent
5 who knows how to secure his food.
The lion saw a horse
on the meadow, which pleased it mightily.
In its mind it thought by itself
how it could deceive it,
10 so it began to tell lies to it
when it saw that the horse was alone.
It spoke to it in sweet words,
“May God greet you, my dear friend!
I want to be your good doctor,
15 I can heal you well
because I am the master of the medical sciences.
Whatever might ail you, let me know,
I might well be able to heal you.”
The horse looked at the lion
20 and realized its roguery.
It was ready to pay it back
and said: “I am suffering from great trouble.
In my hoof there is a great thorn,
and therefore, my leg has become festered.
25 I have been in need of a doctor;
and God directed me to you.
You got here to provide me with help.
I will be grateful to you, when I will be well again
having recovered from my great sickness.”
30 Those words did not stump the lion,
so it said: “Hold up your hoof to me,
I will heal you from all suffering.”
The horse said: “Lion, come here
and look closely at the thorn,
35 and when my hoof will recover,
I will give you a thousand pounds.”
The lion was a fake doctor.
The horse paid it back by being a rogue itself.

When the lion approached the horse
40 and wanted to kill it,
the horse was cunning enough
to hit the lion with its hoof
at its forehead, which made it fall down unconsciously,
then it fled away from it. Thus, the false doctor
45 was put to shame, and that was good,
because it was filled with roguery.
Once the lion woke up again,
recovering enough that it could leave;
it did not see the horse any longer
50 and said to itself ruefully:
“I have to admit it honestly,
it was just right what happened to me.
My heart was filled with deception,
and I received my payment for it.”
55 He who says what is not true
and lies, operates pathetically.
A rogue ought to deceive the other rogue.
When a person is filled with cunning,
he should be deceived as well, that’s only right
60 when his words are crooked, when his deeds are not honest.
He who claims to be someone who he is not,
will easily fail in his own cunning.
Many people claim to be experts in some art,
who command only very little intelligence.
65 The lion claimed to be a medical doctor,
but the horse wanted to preserve its health without the lion’s help.

**Fable no. 51: Of a Horse and a Donkey
 On despising the world**

There was once a horse beautifully outfitted,
it was the most attractive horse around.
The bridle and the saddle
were extraordinarily decorated with gold.
5 The saddle blanket was out of red silk.
It considered it a complete necessity for itself to be nobly equipped.
Once it took a narrow passage,
where it encountered a donkey,
which was simple-minded and of a low social rank.
10 It carried a big bag on its back.
The donkey did not make room for the horse,
for which reason it was badly harassed
and had to suffer for it.
The horse began to curse at it.
15 It said: “You miserable animal,
you ought to have made room for me.
If it were not beneath my nobility,
I would have killed you here on the spot,
you pathetic creature!
20 You bag-carrier, you lazy thing.
How did you dare to do this to me,
to walk toward me without making room?”
The donkey remained quiet and kept its calm.
Soon thereafter it happened
25 that the horse got swollen legs [suffering from stiffness].
Its owner did not tarry
and removed all the gears,
and took off all the beautiful gadgets. Now look,
all of its beauty was lost
30 and its misery grew.
It was harnessed in front of a cart
and had to pull it and work hard.
Misery and sorrow
made its life terrible.
35 It became thin and haggard,
one could even see its ribs pushing through the skin.
With its hooves and legs it hit
many rocks [by accident on the road].

It also turned morose and weak.⁵³

40 Its back was almost broken.

They gave it oat straw
as food; its life was horrible.

As soon as the donkey witnessed
that the horse was so ill and so weak

45 it began to mock at it.

It began to speak with biting words
and said: "May God greet you, my lord!

Where has your splendid saddle gone?

Where did you put your bridle?

50 I see you now without a saddle blanket;

your decoration is rather small;

one can see your bones through the skin;

there is no silver and no gold on you;

and there is no one who loves you.

55 Your high spirit has been crushed;

where is now your honor, where is your wealth?

Too much honor is half-way sinfulness.

You ought to ask for a band-aid

to be placed on your back.

60 Your skin begins to look torn,

your body and your legs are weak,

you have many sorrows.

You will live in poverty from now on,

This is the result of vanity.

65 Arrogance has never a good outcome,

it causes much harm."

With this fable I mean to talk about the world,
which makes you pay dearly for vanity.

Worldly power and bodily strength

70 disappear, as does mastery.

Worldly honor does not hold,

worldly enjoyment comes to an end.

For that reason, no one should despise

the poor people; it could easily happen

75 that the rich will experience many misfortunes,

while the poor might do very well,

as it has happened in our story;

⁵³ The poet means that the horse was bitter like gall.

the rich got poor, the poor got rich.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ The poet refers here to the philosophical notion about the Wheel of Fortune, as Boethius (d. ca. 524) had developed it in his *De consolazione philosophiae*, a standard textbook in all of medieval and early modern schooling. See *Boethius in the Middle Ages: Latin and Vernacular Traditions of the "Consolatio philosophiae"*, ed. Maarten J. F. M. Hoenen and Lodi Nauta. *Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters*, 58 (Leiden: Brill, 1997); *Vernacular Traditions of Boethius's De Consolatione philosophiae*, ed. Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr. and Philip Edward Phillips. *Research in Medieval Culture* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2016); *Remaking Boethius: The English Language Translation Tradition of The Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. Brian Donaghey, Noel Harold Kaylorm, Philip Edward Phillips, and Paul E. Szarmach. *Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 40 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval & Renaissance Studies, 2019).

**Fable no. 52: Of a Man and His Son and a Donkey
 On being the victim of falsely directed mockery**

One day a man went to the market;
he took his son along with him,
and as well as his donkey
so that he could ride on it.

5 The man sat on the donkey
and rode along; his son had to walk
with him; he did not have an animal to ride on.

It then happened by chance
that they encountered people
10 who were greatly surprised [about what they saw].
They said: “Look, how the man
rides and lets his son walk!

If he let his son ride
and walked next to him,
15 he would do much better.”

When the man heard that,
he got off the donkey
and his son climbed on, and it pleased him
that he also could ride.

20 The man did not mind
to walk next to the donkey.
Then they encountered two other men.
One of them said to the companion,
when he saw the son riding [on the donkey]:

25 “What is this, my dear fellow?
The old man must be a fool
that he lets his boy ride.
The little one should run and trot,
whereas the old one should ride.”

30 The father did not wait a second
to get on to the donkey,
behind his son, and thus rode off.
Both of them rode on the donkey.

This caused them trouble
35 when people witnessed that.
“In nomine domini, amen!,”⁵⁵
they said, “look at this

⁵⁵ Latin: In the name of Lord, amen!

how the old fool travels
seated on the saddle placed on the donkey,
40 he and also his son
will thus kill the donkey.
Truly, there is no need for that.
The old man ought to get his rest
while riding, and the young boy ought to walk.”
45 When the man had thus spoken,
the father turned to his son and said:
“Well, we both ought to walk,
the donkey also needs to get a break.”
Thus, they kept walking on the road
50 and the donkey followed them, not loaded with any weight.
They then passed by women and men.
They all said: “Look at this,
how foolish both of them are,
the old man and his son,
55 that they do not try
to ride on the donkey, which does not carry anything.”
The father then said: “Son, listen to me,
we both ought to think about
how we could carry the donkey;
60 then let’s see what the people will say.”
They immediately pushed down the donkey
and tied together its four legs,
and they hung it off a big stick;
they had lost all interest in riding.
65 “Hey ho, up with it!” said the father,
while the son looked miserably
because he had to carry the donkey.
This made all people say:
“Wait, wait, take a look at that,
70 two people carry a donkey,
which really should carry both.
This cannot be but an astonishing story,
one clearly notices that they both are fools;
they are both blind in their mind.”
75 When the old man realized
that no one spoke kindly about them,
he began to sigh deeply.
He looked at his son

and said: "Listen to what I am going to tell you.

80 Whether the donkey carries me
or you, we are called fools;
when it carries us both, the animal might perish;
when it walks empty, we are called imbeciles.

When we carry it, tied to a stick,
85 then no one is more foolish than us.

Therefore, I want to give you this advice,
act properly and well.

He who acts righteously, will be rewarded with many riches."

Hardly anyone can avoid to be blamed by people.

90 Who can live without people spreading rumors about him?

He who wants to maintain his honor,
should not abstain from doing what he wants, as a result of any opinion:
he ought to do what he deems to be the right thing.

The world is filled with foolishness.

95 However much a person does good deeds,
the world will not regard it more than half good.

With open eyes many people are blind,
whose hearts are filled with so much poison
that, whatever they hear or see,

100 they say the worst about it.

He who can safeguard himself from that
(whether women or men),

can truly give praise to God,
if he can live without being mocked by people.

**Fable no. 53: Of a Shaved Donkey
 On evil mockery**

It was said about a woman
that she had a bad reputation.
Her lack of honor was significant,
she did not possess any female honor.
5 Her deeds were evil and miserable.
Everyone who saw her said,
whether they were women or men,
that she was completely unworthy.
She lived in a castle on a high hill
10 near a city where a market took place.
Whoever among her servants went there,
learned of bad stories which were told
about her.
Everyone was sick of her bad reputation.
15 The woman did not ignore this.
When one of her servants returned from the market,
she said to him: “What do they say in the city?
What stories are being told there?
Tell me, tell me, what might they say?
20 Is there no one who has a good opinion about me?”
The servant said: “What am I to say?
I heard many people complaining about you.
Everyone who is walking around there
is talking only about you
25 day in and day out.
Their tongues rarely rest,
whoever has a mouth and can talk,
reprimands you, and this both women and men.”
The lady said: “I regret this very much.
30 Many people suffer from trouble
without any reason and without any justification,
as I have to realize myself.”
Then she did something secretly,
early in the morning of the market day
35 and ordered a donkey to be shaved in such a way⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Although the poet uses the verb “schinden” for ‘to flay,’ the following lines indicate that they only shave the animal; otherwise it would not be able to walk around. Flaying would have meant its certain death.

(no one was supposed to learn about it)
that it barely stayed alive.

[In the morning] they drove it
up and down the streets.

40 They went through all the streets,
the donkey brought its own skin to the market,
tied to itself.⁵⁷ It was elegant,
just as donkey skins are.

All women, men, and children

45 said to each other,
when they saw the shaved donkey:
“I wonder what this might mean.”

Only the lady knew what was the reason
why the donkey was shaved.

50 This worked out well for her,
people completely forgot about her,
whether young or old, poor or rich;
no one talked about her shortcomings,
which pleased her servants.

55 When those returned to the court
she said: “If anyone thought about me today,
on the market, I would feel chagrined.”

[Her servant:] “No, my lady, on my oath!
No one thought about you today.

60 A shaved donkey had been brought there,
which everyone, who was there, closely inspected;
no one remembered you;
they all paid attention only to the donkey,
which was led around everywhere.

65 The donkey has helped you;
today we did not hear one word about you.”

The lady said: “God be praised
that the people’s mockery has stopped!

The donkey has given me help

70 by diverting all the talking away from me.”
No one can ban people from talking,

⁵⁷ This is an idiomatic phrase in German still used today but it cannot be rendered fully into English. It commonly means: To risk one’s own neck, to endanger oneself, to expose oneself to a serious danger. See https://www.redensarten-index.de/suche.php?suchbegriff=seine%20Haut%20zu%20Markte%20tragen&bool=relevanz&sp0=rart_ou (last accessed on July 20, 2020).

whether women or men.

He who is becoming the public topic
of evil rumors,

75 ought not to neglect
to get a shaved donkey.

He needs a wide and good sleeve⁵⁸
who wants to stuff people's mouths.

Therefore, I give the advice

80 to watch out even better.

Every person ought to live in an upright manner
so that he does not offer any cause for rumors,
and when he does that, he won't have to worry
about what evil things people might say about him.

⁵⁸ Idiomatic phrase, meaning: He needs much strength.

**Fable no. 54: Of a Nightingale and a Sparrow Hawk
 On an evil outcome**

A nightingale had once built its nest
at a secret spot
where it wanted to be secure
so that its little ones could grow up safely.
5 Now, it happened that a sparrow hawk approached,
flying up to the nest,
landing on a branch where the nightingale
was sitting and sang its sweet song.
When it espied the sparrow hawk,
10 it said, filled with great fear:
“Mercy, my dear lord!
Grant me your grace
and allow my children to live.”
The sparrow hawk said: “That cannot be,
15 but if you can sing so well
that I must pay respect to you
on behalf of your children, well, then sing!”
The nightingale began to sigh,
its heart was filled with bitterness;
20 but she was forced to act as if
she were free of all worries, which caused it pain.
It feared very much that her children might be killed.
With its mouth it then sang,
while its heart struggled with great pain.
25 It could not profit from it.
The sparrow hawk was filled with malice.
It killed its children right in front of the mother,
who could not prevent it.
The sparrow hawk ripped out their hearts,
30 which caused the nightingale great pain.
The death of its children hurt it badly;
it cried loudly, “oh dear, woe is me,”
and lamented the innocent death
of its children and its own sorrow.
35 Very soon afterwards,
the sparrow hawk was also caught
in a net. When the nightingale
witnessed that, it said immediately:

“He deserves an evil end
40 who has wallowed in sins
and did not want to display mercy
for my children and for me.
What wonder if he now suffers misery!
He deserves to face death.”
45 He who leads an evil life
will easily experience an evil outcome.
He might be lucky who always acts
as an evil person and yet enjoys a good end.⁵⁹
One hardly sees a wolf wear
50 a sheep’s tail. It has also been told to me
that he who always gives in to sinfulness
and lives without any mercy for others,
ought to suffer, without receiving pity himself,
sorrow and even death.

⁵⁹ Meaning: this will be a great exception.

**Fable no. 55: Of a Wolf and a Fox
 On treason**

I have heard that once a wolf
 had hid along with its supplies
 in a cave of a rocky wall,
 which was filled with good food.
 5 It wanted to enjoy a long rest.
 A fox came to it
 as is typical of foxes, driven by cunning,
 because it had discovered
 the food. It would have liked
 10 to cheat the wolf by getting it out of the cave.
 It desired to get the wolf's food.
 When it reached the wolf,
 it said: "May God greet you, my brother!
 How can you spend so much time
 15 without me? This pains me.
 I am telling you honestly,
 that I cannot forget you."
 The wolf looked at the liar
 and responded: "Sir Fox, I know it well
 20 that you like me, but your evil heart
 is filled with treachery.
 What I possess today, you envy.
 Your sweet words do not correspond
 to your deeds, get away from here, right away!
 25 You will not gain any of my food."
 The fox responded: "As you wish."⁶⁰
 Then it left filled with bitterness.
 It was greatly peeved at this humiliation
 which the wolf had done to it.
 30 Then it saw a shepherd
 in a meadow to whom it said:
 "I want to provide you with protection
 from the wolf. Trust me!
 I want to show you its burrow.
 35 You ought to get your revenge soon
 on your enemy, as I am advising you.
 If you want to catch it, you will get it.

⁶⁰ Literally: I will let it go.

It lies up there in a cave
 where it cannot get away from you.”
 40 The shepherd left his sheep behind.
 He took a spear into his hand.
 Together with the fox he quickly got to the cave
 where the fox had left the wolf.
 He began to stab and slay it.
 45 When the wolf was dead,
 the fox occupied the wolf's house,
 and it also got possession of its food.
 This was the outcome of the treason which it had committed.⁶¹
 But it did not take long
 50 when it was also betrayed.
 A net was set up outside of the cave,
 which consisted of strong ropes.
 Thus, the fox was caught,
 its roguery was defeated.
 55 He who is filled with dishonesty
 will hardly be whitewashed.⁶²
 He who knows nothing but treason
 and shameless lying,
 will deserve it if he is betrayed himself
 60 and will be lied to.
 Lying and betraying are two things
 which are bereft of all honor.
 A liar might manage to travel through a country,
 but once he returns, he will be shamed.
 65 No vice lasts for long,
 Whoever aims to harm other people,
 will be hurt himself, that is true.

⁶¹ Treason was regarded as one of the worst vices and crimes in the Middle Ages. See the contributions to *La trahison au Moyen Age: de la monstruosité au crime politique (Ve-XVe siècle)*, ed. Maité Billoré and Myriam Soria (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2009), and now also to *Treason: Medieval and Early Modern Adultery, Betrayal, and Shame*, ed. Larissa Tracy. *Explorations in Medieval Culture*, 10 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019); cf. further my own new study, Albrecht Classen, “Treason: Legal, Ethical, and Political Issues in the Middle Ages: With an Emphasis on Medieval Heroic Poetry,” *Journal of Philosophy and Ethics* 1.4 (2019): 13–29; <https://www.sryahwapublications.com/journal-of-philosophy-and-ethics/pdf/v1-i4/2.pdf>.

⁶² Idiomatic phrase, meaning: will hardly experience a good life.

No wrong lasts for thirty years.
The fox was caught in the net
70 which it had woven itself
for the wolf, and this out of its evil cunning.
Praised be the one who is free of treachery.

**Fable no. 56: Of a Deer and a Hunter
 On harmful self-love**

A deer felt thirsty
and went to a well,
the water of which was beautiful, translucent, and clear.
In the water it recognized
5 itself, and it saw how impressive was
its body. And when it saw that,
it was pleased about its antlers.
Indeed, its head was well decorated with them.
This made it fall victim to great vanity.
10 Whatever praise it learned about
other animals, it did not seem to be comparable to its own greatness.
Its heart was filled with joy.
Then it looked at its legs,
which were thin and short,
15 which pleased it only very little.
The deer felt very disappointed.
Its feet seemed to be unworthy to its otherwise beautiful appearance,
and also its legs. Whoever feels contempt
for the sword with which he can
20 defend his life, and therefore wants
to give it into his enemy's hand,
then he cannot be surprised if he will be shamed.
When the deer thus detested its legs,
at that very moment
25 a hunter arrived with his dogs.
He chased away the deer from its resting place.
The deer fled; the hunter followed it
running after the animal because he wanted to catch it.
The dogs were also most eager
30 to kill the deer.
The deer quickly fled
and turned to the forest.
Its legs helped it,
whereas its antlers were useless.
35 When it was thus hunted
and it got to the forest, feeling relief
because its legs and feet had helped it,
although it had appreciated them little [before],

it soon got entangled

40 with its antlers.

Thus, the hunter and the dogs caught it,

which made the deer very unhappy.

Its legs had helped it to get out of danger;

its antlers brought it death.

45 He who loves what causes harm to him,

and hates what would be good for him,

does not act smartly. But there are many

people like this. He who wants to feed

his own enemy, will suffer badly.

50 Some people carry their own enemy within themselves.

If this enemy gains dominance,

it immediately fights against him

and causes him fear and pain;

it possibly brings him his own death.

55 The deer was very pleased about its antlers,

which made it lose its life.

The same thing happens often to a person

who loves what causes him harm,

and hates what would be good to him.

60 Great vanity rarely does good to you.

**Fable no. 57: Of a Lady and a Thief
 On women's lack of loyalty**

I have read of two people
whose hearts were intertwined in love,
that is, a man and his wife.
He loved her like himself.

5 Death parted both from each other;
the man died, which caused his wife
great sorrow because she had loved him dearly.
She did not find any consolation,
when she lost her dear husband.

10 She could not be consoled by anyone;
she cried and lamented all the time,
when she sat next to his corpse.
Then he was placed into his grave,
which increased her sorrow and pain.

15 She did not want to leave the grave,
she was inconsolable.
She cried loudly, "oh, woe is me."
Neither rain nor snow
could make her move away from the grave.

20 She spent day and night
in a greatly pitiful state;
she did not do anything else.
She was deeply upset.

She sat next to the grave all by herself
25 and cried, while being next to a fire.
She did not experience any relief.
Now, it had happened at that time
that a man had been executed by hanging
in a field not far away from the grave [cemetery].

30 A man kept watch over him, who was paid for this job,
so that the corpse of the hanged man could not be taken off the gallows.
If this thief would be cut off the gallows,
the judge would have been very angry,
and the guard would have lost his head.⁶³

⁶³ It was obviously a great concern for the surviving family members to remove the body of a hanged person because this public execution was deeply shameful. Also, there was a great desire to bury a person, perhaps, if possible, in blessed soil, if not a cemetery, in order to protect the soul in the afterlife. Cf. Romedio Schmitz-Esser,

35 When that man saw the fire and heard
the widow lamenting her husband's death,
he felt a great desire for her.
He went to the grave
and looked at the woman, who appeared to be very attractive.
40 He gathered some wood for her fire
so that she would be safe from the cold.
He said: "Lady, be of good spirit!
Since your dear husband is dead,
turn your attention to the living.
45 Another mother had also a son
who was just as good, who will help you
relieve your pain and reduce your sorrow."
The more he looked at the woman,
the more he burnt in lust for her.⁶⁴
50 The man lost his self-control
and said: "My dear lady,
if you might grant me the favor,
I would like to substitute for you, truly,
all your sorrow, believe me that!

Der Leichnam im Mittelalter: Einbalsamierung, Verbrennung und die kulturelle Konstruktion des toten Körpers. Mittelalter-Forschungen, 48. 2nd unchanged ed. (2014; Osfieldern: Jan Thorbecke, 2016), 529–31, 536, et passim. However, he draws mostly on historical and religious documents, but is not aware of this literary motif of the 'stolen corpse,' which is then replaced by a recently deceased man, whose widow suddenly no longer cares about her previous husband. This motif can be traced back to Petronius (first century C.E.), which was highly popular throughout the Middle Ages, such as in Marie de France's *Fables*, ed. and trans. Harriet Spiegel. Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1994), ca. 1200, no. 25. See also *Die Historia von den Sieben weisen Meistern und dem Kaiser Diocletianus*. Nach der Gießener Handschrift 104 mit einer Einleitung und Erläuterungen, ed. Ralf-Henning Steinmetz. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 116 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2001), no. XIV; early 15th century. This collection can ultimately be traced back to medieval Persian literature, ca. 900 C.E., but it seems to have enjoyed a universal popularity also in Europe. For a parallel case involving hanging at the gallows, see the anonymous *Fortunatus* (1509), here cited from *Romane des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts: Nach den Erstdrucken mit sämtlichen Holzschnitten*, ed. Jan-Dirk Müller. Bibliothek der Frühen Neuzeit, 1 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1990), 420–21.

⁶⁴ The poet here uses the 'classical' term "minne" = 'courtly love,' hence a highly esoteric word normally found only in courtly love poetry (*Minnesang*) or courtly romances, but in the present context he really only means sexual desire.

55 Every kind of joy which the body and the soul might produce
you can have today.”⁶⁵
The woman secretly wiped away
the tears from her eyes.
She looked seductively at the man
60 and said: “If I could believe
what you have said in truth,
I would let go all my heart’s sorrow
and would be happy to comply with your wish.”
He said: “My lady, that will be the case!”
65 He embraced her tenderly
and made love with her,
of which I do not want to say anything else.
After all this had happened,
the man left the woman
70 and returned to the gallows.
He had not kept a good watch.
His heart was filled with fear.
The thief’s body had been removed from the gallows;
[the guard] was not happy about it at all.
75 He was greatly afraid of the judge’s fury
and worried that he would have to die.
He should have kept a better watch.
He returned to the grave
where he had left the woman behind.
80 She welcomed him lovingly.
He told her the terrible story
what had happened to him,
that is, that the thief had been taken
off the gallows, for which he himself would surely
85 lose his life, he would have to die as a punishment.
There would be no remedy to rescue him.
The woman said: “Now follow me
and listen to what I am going to tell you.
I want to give you a good advice
90 so that you will preserve your life.
Let us dig up my husband,
then get a rope

⁶⁵ Meaning: From now on you have complete freedom to enjoy your life.

and pull him up on the mortal gallows⁶⁶
and hang him in place of the thief.

95 That's what I am advising you on my truth!

Let's go, I will help you with that.”

The man did as the woman had told him.

Thus, she departed [spiritually and physically] from the dead man.

That was miserable advice.

100 Lucky the person who does not have any business
with evil women whose heart is bent
on roguery and evil deeds.

A cunning wife never turns out well.

From women often evil originates

105 which has happened many times,
for which mankind had to pay for dearly.

Sir Adam had been fooled,

the city of Troy was destroyed,

Sir Sampson was blinded [by gouging],

110 Sir Solomon was shamed.⁶⁷

The dead husband was hanged at the gallows.

He who does not think of all that

is a mindless person;

all those evil deeds were done because of the advice of a woman.

⁶⁶ The poet again uses the adjective “mat” for the gallows, which derives from the chess term ‘check mate,’ here meaning, ‘finish,’ ‘deadly,’ or ‘mortal.’

⁶⁷ This is the typical list of classical or biblical figures who were all badly misled by women and lost their lives or eyesight, their power or their honor. See the excellent anthology of relevant texts establishing a long tradition of vicious misogyny, as is here the case, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires with Karen Pratt and C. W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).



Fig. 6: Heidelberg Universitätsbibliothek, Codex Pal. germ. 794, fol. 41r

Fable no. 58: **Of the Three Roman Widows
On women's loyalty**

Once there were three good women.
 They aspired for good manners and honor.
 They were young and pretty,
 demonstrating worthy women's behavior.⁶⁸
 5 They possessed a high level of worthiness
 and wore the clothing of honor.
 They were noble and wealthy.
 No other woman was a match for them in terms of manners.
 They were born in Rome.
 10 They all three had lost their beloved husbands
 who had been taken away from them through death.
 They had to live the life of widowhood.
 Their words, deeds, and their manner
 were good. They avoided everything
 15 with all their strength,
 what was untrustworthy and poor.
 They wanted to protect their chastity.
 Then their kin made efforts
 to get them married again,
 20 and to accept both hardship and profit
 in marriage, which would be good for them.
 This made them all feel very depressed
 when those words had been uttered.
 The first one answered and said:
 25 "I know well that no man desires me,
 except for my goods. He who would receive those,
 would easily neglect me,
 once he would be in the possession of those.

⁶⁸ While the previous 'fable' closely followed the pattern of medieval and early modern misogyny, this 'fable' offers the very opposite perspective, which mirrors medieval dialectics. See the major example of this kind of contrastive perspectives regarding the value of courtly love and courtly ladies in Andreas Capellanus's debate narrative, *De amore* (ca. 1180/1190). Eleonore Stump, *Dialectic and Its Place in the Development of Medieval Logic* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1989); Constance Brittain Bouchard, "*Every Valley Shall Be Exalted*": *The Discourse of Opposites in Twelfth-Century Thought* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2003); Albrecht Classen, "Dialectics and Courtly Love: Abelard and Heloise, Andreas Capellanus, and the *Carmina Burana*," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 23 (2013): 161–83.

He would prefer those over me,
 30 as I can clearly tell. For that reason
 I want to stay unmarried.
 I want to use my goods
 according to my own will,
 I want to have the freedom to reject requests and to grant them,
 35 just as it seems right to me,
 and I want to keep my free will,
 therefore, I will reject all men
 and want to enjoy a free life.”
 There was no long pause,
 40 when the other woman spoke up.
 She was also supposed to take a husband
 and should not remain alone.
 People said that she was young, beautiful, and rich,
 and that she was liked by everyone.⁶⁹
 45 She said: “This will certainly not happen.
 I would otherwise break my loyalty
 toward my dear [first] husband,
 whom I lost with great pain,
 when death took him away from me.
 50 My heart continues to be filled with love
 for him as if he were still alive.
 Therefore, I do not want to remarry
 because my husband is still alive [in my mind].
 How could I do that
 55 to take another man
 in addition to him? If anyone would hear about it,
 I would get flushed red out of shame.
 What would force me do this?
 I want to rise from the dead on the Day of Judgment
 60 together with my dear husband.”
 The third woman said: “It pains me
 that I have to lament and cry for the rest of my life
 over my husband’s death.
 No one should give me another husband!
 65 My husband was such a good man

⁶⁹ Bonerius formulates this verse as is in order to conclude with a rhyming word for the preceding verse, but the meaning is rather obscured thereby. He probably intended to say that she enjoyed the life of this world, as Stange has it in his translation, or, as I prefer, that she was an image of the world, or liked by the world.

that he never during my whole life with him
troubled my heart or my mind.

Therefore, I ought to lament him honestly.

If I were getting an evil man after him,

70 I always would have to suffer from sorrow and pain.

My life without a husband is much better for me.

If I were to take a kind man,

I would have to worry all the time

that I might lose him as well,⁷⁰

75 when death would cause me sorrow

through his death. Therefore, I want

to remain completely without a husband

and want to lead a chaste life.”

When a woman loses her dear husband,

80 she should remain without a man.

Stay like that! That’s my advice.

Many widows experience misfortune

when they marry again.⁷¹

Easily there will be much ‘woe is me.’

85 Who did that to her? She did it herself.

If she had stayed without a husband

because of her loyalty and constancy,

she would have joy without sorrow.

⁷⁰ Literally: if I were to lose him out of my eyes.

⁷¹ Recent research has discovered that the late Middle Ages knew of a strongly developed discourse on widowhood as a worthy and respectable (but sometimes also as a contemptible) social status; see the contributions to *Upon My Husband’s Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe*, ed. Louise Mirrer. Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Civilization (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1992); *Medieval London Widows, 1300–1500*, ed. Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton (London and Rio Grande, OH: The Hambledon Press, 1994); Albrecht Classen, “Witwen in der Literatur des deutschen Mittelalters: Neue Perspektiven auf ein vernachlässigtes Thema,” *Etudes Germaniques* 57.2 (2002): 197–232; id., “Widows: Their Social and Religious Functions According to Medieval German Literature, with Special Emphasis on Erhart Gross’s *Witwenbuch* (1446),” *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 28 (2003): 65–79; Britta-Juliane Kruse, *Witwen: Kulturgeschichte eines Standes in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007); Anne Foerster, *Die Witwe des Königs: zu Vorstellung, Anspruch und Performanz im englischen und deutschen Hochmittelalter*. Mittelalter-Forschungen, 57 (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2018); Katherine Clark Walter, *The Profession of Widowhood: Widows, Pastoral Care, and Medieval Models of Holiness* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018).

She should not lament about that [second marriage],
90 when she experiences much sorrow.
Whatever results from it,⁷²
will be bad for her. She will then have to pay for it.
When a woman does that [remarry],
her mind will be tortured.

⁷² This is difficult to translate because of the idiomatic content. The verb 'risen' means: 'to rise' or also 'to fall,' but the poet probably intends to say: when something fails or develops in an unexpected way to one's disadvantage.

**Fable no. 59: Of a Dog and a Wolf
 On freedom and servitude**

Once two fellows walked
(they were of rather different minds)
on a road through the forest,
and talked about many different things.

5 One was a wolf, the other was a dog.
Finally, they got to a meadow,
and this is what happened.

The wolf then said to the dog,
“Tell me, my dear fellow,

10 what is the reason for your shining fur?
You are so proper and so smooth,
and it appears that you receive good food,
about which you never have to worry.”

The dog answered: “Listen to what I am going to tell you!

15 My dear master provides me with food
from his table, so that I
protect his farm and also his house
When anyone who wants to carry away anything [steal something],
I will announce it, and therefore I am loved [by my master].

20 I do not allow the robber or the thief
to carry anything out of the house;
this way I earn my food.”

The wolf responded: “That sounds very good;
thus, you live without any worries.

25 By contrast, I have to trouble myself
with getting enough food in my poor life.

If you were to agree to it,
I would like to be your companion
so that I can have my food as well

30 without any worries.” The dog answered: “Well then,
Sir Wolf, come with me to my master’s house!
No one will chase you away from there.”

The wolf was very glad about those words.
Then both went together.

35 [At that moment] the wolf looked at the dog’s neck
and immediately inquired:

“Tell me, my dear fellow,
what is the reason that your neck

is shaven and scratched?

40 How did it happen that you lost your hair?"

The dog responded: "I will tell you.

During the day I must wear a collar
and must stand being bound with a rope.

I am not allowed to go anywhere.

45 I must always be a prisoner.⁷³

I tolerate that in return for my food."

Once it had said that,

the wolf turned to the dog and replied:

"Oh no, my dear fellow,

50 for nothing do I want to be a prisoner.

I do not love my stomach that much

that I would be willing to give up

my freedom, believe me that.

You keep your good food,

55 and enjoy a long life!

I will eat what I can find

while enjoying my freedom.

This will serve me better.

I do not want to abandon my free will

60 in return for your food."

Then the wolf ran back to the forest,

and the dog quickly returned home.

A poor man is richer

who can exercise his free will,

65 than the one who is rich but must serve

and who will hardly ever be free of worries.

The one who is in servitude, where does he have freedom of will?

He owns neither his own body nor his property.

Nothing really belongs to him

70 who does not command a free will.

Freedom is the glory of all life

and provides happiness in one's mind.

Freedom makes women and men to excellent individuals.

It can make the poor person rich.

75 Freedom is the treasure of honor,

it is the crown of all deeds and words.

I think that he has a poor life

⁷³ Oddly, Stange softens the phrase in the original, translating it only as: 'I must always be tied with a rope.'

who must give up his free will.
Freedom exceeds all material goods
80 in this world. He who gives up his free mind
for silver and gold
will reap the result of sorrow.

**Fable no. 60: Of the Stomach, the Hands, and Feet
 On envy and hatred**

Once a big complaint erupted
among friends, as I am going to tell you.

The feet lamented badly,
and the hands were tired of working.

5 They all charged the stomach
and said that he was a true debaucher
and a loafer,

and yet it would, although it was rarely becoming empty,
constantly demand new food.

10 However, it was lazy, which it much liked to be.
Whatever the feet would have to earn through walking
and what the hands would have to purchase
(whether it was crooked or straight)
it would take it all happily.

15 They said to it: “This cannot be!
You must also strive together with us
and you must do work
like us, if you want to stay with us.”
What else should I tell you?

20 The stomach got scared and worried.
They no longer wanted to give it food
which it needed to survive;
both the hands and the feet refused to do so.
[The stomach] did not like this at all.

25 How much it begged them
to get fed with enough food,
neither the hands nor the feet granted it that.
Quickly the stomach got sick,
it lost its heat and its functions.

30 That caused the hands to feel great pain
and also the feet (this was just right for them).
The body became very feeble,
and because of this sickness the mouth closed.
Immediately the hands failed,

35 and the feet no longer could walk.
The stomach could not receive any food,
and thus, both hands and feet died
as a result of the stomach’s misery.

If they had given it food,

40 they would have surely preserved their lives.

 An individual certainly needs his friends.

No one should hate his friends.

Envy does not cause any heart pain

except to oneself, who feels it.

45 When someone is not willing to tolerate the other,
thinking only of his own profit, who should then feel pity for him,

such as when he himself gets into hardship

and then suffers, together with his friends, his death,

as happened here with the hands!

50 That was just right, I have to admit that.

**Fable no. 61: Of a Jew and a Royal Servant (Cupbearer)
 On exposing a murder**

Once a Jew wanted to travel
through a forest, for which he needed
protection because the forest was filled
with murderers. The Jew was well aware of it.

5 He went to the king
and requested a protective guard. The king said:
“You will receive that,” and ordered
his servant,⁷⁴ on the threat of death,
to accompany the Jew and guard him well.

10 “I will do that, as it is my duty to do so,”
said the servant. Right away
he took the Jew by his hand
and led him along the road.

The Jew carried a large amount of
15 gold with him on this journey.
The servant noticed that well.

In his mind he was thinking hard
(the right moment and right condition make many to thieves)
how he could kill the Jew.

20 He thought: “You will solve all of your monetary problems,
when you get the gold; who would reveal this,
or who could bring this case to the court?”

⁷⁴ Normally, the term ‘schenke’ means ‘cupbearer’ for the king, but here Bonerius means it in more general terms, ‘servant.’ Germanic, especially Carolingian court structures, but then also high medieval offices at the royal courts have attracted much scholarly attention; see, for instance, Hildegard Graf, “Die vier germanischen Hofämter in der deutschen Heldendichtung: eine philologisch-historische Untersuchung,” Ph.D. diss. Freiburg i. Br. 1963; Georg Duwe, *Erzkämmerer, Kammerherren und ihre Schlüssel: historische Entwicklung eines der ältesten Hofämter vom Mittelalter bis 1918* (Osnabrück: Biblio-Verlag, 1990); Claus-Peter Hasse, *Die welfischen Hofämter und die welfische Ministerialität in Sachsen: Studien zur Sozialgeschichte des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts*. Historische Studien, 443 (Husum: Matthiesen, 1995); Werner Rösener, “Hofämter und Hofkultur an Fürstenhöfen des Hochmittelalters,” *Luxus und Integration: materielle Hofkultur Westeuropas vom 12. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Werner Paravicini (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2010), 27–39. For an excellent overview with detailed historical references, images, and bibliography, see Bernhard Peter, “Erzämter und Erbämter in der Heraldik,” online at: <http://www.welt-der-wappen.de/Heraldik/erzamt.htm> (last accessed on July 202, 2020). English-language webpages are by far not of the same quality.

You are alone, be courageous!
 No one will do anything against you because of this murder.”
 25 When the Jew noticed this,
 he sighed deeply and said:
 “I do not doubt and I know it well
 that God will bring this murder to light.
 Before it will be completely forgotten,
 30 the birds will reveal it
 which are flying here, as God knows!”
 The servant thought that this was ridiculous.
 When he had pulled out the sword
 and wanted to slay him, a partridge
 35 came flying by out of the bushes.
 Then the servant said: “Jew, take note!
 The murder that I will commit against you
 the partridge will reveal.”
 He slayed the Jew and took his gold.
 40 Then he went home and was cheerful.
 Soon thereafter it happened
 that a bunch of partridges were sent
 to the king and were well prepared [for dinner].
 The servant carried, as I read in my source,
 45 one of them to his lord.
 At that moment he thought of the Jew’s words,
 which he had spoken before his death,
 when he had seen the partridge flying by.
 He began to laugh loudly,
 50 which he could not repress.
 When the king noticed that
 he spoke kindly to him:
 “Tell me, servant, what is the reason
 that you have laughed
 55 when you saw the partridge?”⁷⁵
 He said: “Sir, let me tell you that.”
 He revealed to him what he had done

⁷⁵ As we have discovered only recently, laughing and laughter carry great epistemological function, and medieval poets addressed both commonly, as in this fable; see the contributions to *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Epistemology of a Fundamental Human Behavior, Its Meaning, and Consequences*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 5 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010).

to the Jew whom he had been ordered to guard
 and guide through the forest,
 60 where he displayed his great untrustworthiness.
 Thus, the murder was revealed
 to the king. His own words did this to him
 who had committed the evil deed.
 For that reason, he had to be hanged at the gallows.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ It's worth noting here that the Jew is introduced as a highly respectable person of great wealth, as an individual who is well treated by the king, and as an innocent victim, and this in strong contrast to otherwise intense anti-Judaism in the late Middle Ages. The poet does not voice any kind of hatred against the Jew and unmistakably cast the royal servant as a murderer who deserves the death penalty for his evil deed. Considering that Bonerius wrote his fables exactly during the time of the Black Death (ca. 1347–ca. 1351), when the public, terrified because of the massive death of people as a result of the pandemic, was more eager than ever before to commit pogroms against Jews, this fable stands out as a remarkable counter-example. For other relevant examples, see Albrecht Classen, "Complex Relations Between Jews and Christians in Late Medieval German and Other Literature," *Jews in Medieval Christendom: "Slay them Not"*, ed. Kristine T. Utterback and Merrall Llewelyn Price (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 313–38. For the opposite case, see now the anthology, *Judenhass: Die Geschichte des Antisemitismus von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Trond Berg Eriksen, Håkon Harket, and Einhart Lorenz. Trans. from the Norwegian by Daniela Stilzebach (2005; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 71–87. There are countless excellent studies highlighting the violence and hatred directed against Jews in the Middle Ages; but the other perspective, as illustrated here, also deserves to be considered; see, for instance, Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, and London: University of California Press, 1999). For a detailed investigation of how Christians tended to manipulate evidence to incriminate their Jewish neighbors for no reason except fear, jealousy, and greed, see also Birgit Wiedl, "The Host on the Doorsteps: Perpetrators, Victims, and Bystanders in an Alleged Host Desecration in Fourteenth-Century Austria," *Crime and Punishment in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: Mental-Historical Investigations of Basic Human Problems and Social Responses*, ed. Albrecht Classen and Connie Scarborough. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 11 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 299–345. The entire case discussed by Bonerius is apparently free of anti-Judaism; the murder itself is motivated only by the servant's monetary greed; there are no religious connotations here to be discovered. This narrative left a deep impact on nineteenth-century fairy tales; the Brothers Grimm included a slightly changed version in their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen gesammelt durch die Brüder Grimm* from 1812, that is, actually, in vol. II from 1815 under the title "Die klare Sonne bringt's an den Tag" (Zürich: Manesse Verlag, 2002), no. 115 (for the standard reference: KHM 115: 1815, 29; for the digitized version of vol. II from 1815, see online at:

65 If he had not seen the partridge,
 he would not have revealed the murder.
 He was hanged, and that was right!
 No one should commit murder for material gain.
 He who does wrong out of greed
 70 will be hanged, and who would complain about that?⁷⁷
 Rightly the one should perish
 whose heart is filled with treason.
 He who is ready to do evil in order to gain material goods,
 will be exposed by the partridge,
 75 as it happened with the servant.
 I have to admit, this was really correct.
 God does not let any murder be unpunished.
 He who does something evil will receive his reward,
 here on earth⁷⁸ or in the afterlife,
 80 as the Holy Scriptures teach us.

http://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/show/grimm_maerchen02_1815), and in their notes they referred explicitly to Bonerius as their source: [https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Kinder-_und_Haus-M%C3%A4rchen_Band_3_\(1856\)/Anmerkungen#115](https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Kinder-_und_Haus-M%C3%A4rchen_Band_3_(1856)/Anmerkungen#115). See Hans-Jörg Uther, *Handbuch zu den "Kinder- und Hausmärchen" der Brüder Grimm* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 256–57. Ludwig Bechstein included this story unchanged from the medieval source in his collection of 1847; Ludwig Bechstein, *Märchenbuch*. Nach der Ausgabe von 1857, textkritisch revidiert und durch Register erschlossen, ed. Hans-Jörg Uther (Munich: Diederichs, 1997). Allegedly, Bechstein drew inspiration from a Leipzig manuscript, but this must have been an error since those fables were never copied in a manuscript kept in a Leipzig library. For a modernized text version, which proves to be very close to Bonerius's fable, see <https://maerchen.com/bechstein/das-rehbuhn.php> (last accessed on July 20, 2020).

⁷⁷ Bonerius offers here an excellent example of what constitutes cold-blooded murder; cf. the contributions to *Medieval and Early Modern Murder: Legal, Literary and Historical Contexts*, ed. Larissa Tracy (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2018). See also Albrecht Classen, "Murder in Medieval German Literature - Disruptions and Challenges of Society. Crime and Self-Determination in the Pre-Modern World," *Neophilologus* 104.1 (2019): 97–117. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11061-019-09629-2>.

⁷⁸ Literally: here among people.

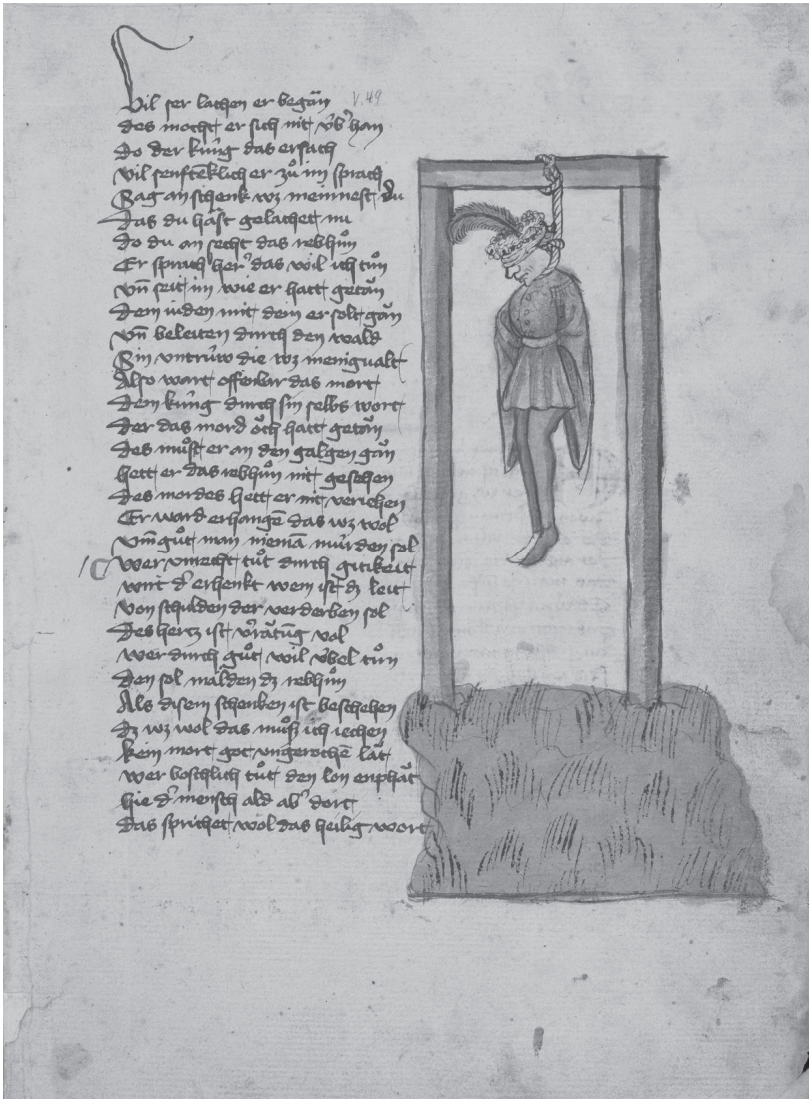


Fig. 7: Heidelberg Universitätsbibliothek, Codex Pal. germ. 794, fol. 47r

**Fable no. 62: Of a Bailiff and a Knight
 On the revelation of what is right**

Once there was a king who enjoyed high esteem,
as I have read in a book,
he was powerful and wealthy.
He had two bailiffs, both very different from each other,
5 one of them supervised the knights [the young bailiff],
the other one was in charge [the old bailiff]
of what was needed at court [material supplies],
whether for women or men;
he arranged it all properly.
10 Jealousy did not stay away for long
and also envy, or hatred which never rests
and which hardly anyone can escape from.
The knight [the young bailiff], who displayed that hatred,
said to the king:
15 “Lord, it is not all good
what your old bailiff does.
What he does is quite wrong
and hurts the lords and the servants.
Your goods are disappearing;
20 he steals and robs with the intention
to help his own friends who want to be masters.
By God, I do not let this go on any longer.
I am prepared to fight against him
so that I can stop his evil deeds
25 which he has often done.
I am sure that he then will have to let it go.”
The old man thus got into severe trouble;
he was afraid that because of misfortune he might die.
But he was completely innocent.
30 The cause of it was envy and evil hatred,
which made him the object of accusations.
He then immediately looked
for a proxy to fight on his behalf
because he was lacking the necessary strength
35 to be a fighter.⁷⁹
Then his friends proved

⁷⁹ See Sarah Neumann, *Der gerichtliche Zweikampf: Gottesurteil – Wettstreit – Ehrensache*. Mittelalter-Forschungen, 31 (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2010).

that their loyalty was small.
He looked for help, but he did not find any.
All those whom he had provided his service before
40 abandoned him now in this emergency.
At that point his farmhand came by
who looked closely at the fighter [the young bailiff]
and thought by himself: “If God might help me
in my innocence, then I might actually
45 overcome the knight.”
Immediately he stepped
into the fighting ring full of joy.
“This is a funny situation,”
said the fierce knight,
50 “that a peasant dares to mock me here;
I will return his mockery in kind.”
Filled with wrath he began to hit upon him.
The farmhand stood there calmly,
the hit touched him like a wind.
55 He himself did not cause the other any harm.
However, the knight wanted to kill
the peasant and hit him again.
The farmhand took note of that
(he was a very smart person)
60 and hit back at the knight
striking his arm which hurt him severely.
The knight could no longer fight
because his arm was badly wounded.
His misfortune got worse;
65 because of his envy he lost his life.
The old bailiff was declared to be innocent.
Thus, God revealed righteousness,
and disloyalty was destroyed.
 He who wants to betray the other
70 needs to find many good causes.
When a true emergency arises,
then all the friends are dead [gone].⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Meaning: they are no longer present. This is the teaching by Boethius in his *De consolatione philosophiae* (ca. 524) according to which misfortune is actually a good thing because it reveals who the true friends are. See, for instance, Albrecht Classen, “The Human Quest for Happiness and Meaning: Old and New Perspectives: Religious, Philosophical, and Literary Reflections from the Past as a

Who is a friend and who is not a friend,
this suffering will reveal quickly.
75 A loyal friend makes you happy,
innocence does that as well.
Righteousness ought to protect
the righteous one; the one, however, who is filled
with disloyalty will not thrive.
80 I have also read
that the lie must disappear
when you see truth standing up.
That is really just right.
The peasant killed the knight,
85 and because he was an upright person,
he became his master's heir,
as Aesop already told us.
May God grant us joy and protect us always from sorrow.

Platform for Our Future: St. Augustine, Boethius, and Gautier de Coincy," *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 5.2 (2018): 179–206
(<http://www.athensjournals.gr/humanities/2018-5-2-3-Classen.pdf>).

**Fable no. 63: Of a Woman and a Wolf
 On untrustworthy women**

Once a wolf felt very hungry,
as you can read in the fable by Avian.
It immediately left the forest
and arrived in front of a house.

5 There was a woman who had a child,
as is often the case with women.
The child cried and screamed.

The woman offered the child an egg
and said: “Be quiet, my dear child!

10 If you are not silent, the wolf will take you,
I will simply turn you over to it.
So be quiet if you want to keep your life.”

When the wolf, which was outside of the door,
heard the threats and the words,

15 it believed that it would surely get the child as food
and thought that it would thus thrive
once it would have received what had been pledged to it.
The woman was not [really] filled with any hatred
for her child, neither much nor little.

20 The child cried as hard as before,
until it finally became quiet.

The wolf could keep standing there as long as it liked,
but no one gave it any food,
since no one was nice to it.

25 It remained standing there until noon,
it felt great hunger.

Since it was so deceived,
it returned home

where it found its own child and wife.

30 Meagre and hungry was its body.
The she-wolf said: “Why are you so unhappy,
it seems to me that you are depressed,
whatever might have happened to you.”

“That is true, I must admit it,”

35 said the he-wolf to the she-wolf.

“How could my heart be cheerful
with an empty stomach? That cannot be.
Since without food and without wine

hardly anyone will be filled with happiness.
40 Once I am full again, I will also sing.
Today, a woman deceived me
and has truly lied to me.
She said she wanted to give me her child:
her words were faster than the wind,
45 her heart and her mouth did not speak the same language.
Much misfortune comes from evil women;
many women have an unsteady mind.
Among two women hardly even one is good,
women's cunning is widespread.
50 They never hesitate to lie and to deceive.
Trusting a good promise makes the fool happy.
If it is not fulfilled, then he has also to accept
insult with injury,
as has happened to me, God knows,
55 by a woman, that is true.
I say this honestly,
he who is not deceived by women
ought to give praise to his good host.
I, the wolf, can testify to that.
They are all full of trickery.”

**Fable no. 64: Of a Snail and an Eagle
 On desire which is contrary to nature**

A snail was angry with itself,
 its slowness bothered it much.
 The fact that it could not move well
 and could not fly, you see, filled it
 5 with sadness and frustration.
 Then it went to the eagle,
 crawling, and complained
 about its lack of abilities and said: “I must tell you,
 the daily distance which I cover is short,
 10 and this often grieves me.
 If you could teach me how to fly
 I would give you, honestly,
 gold and gemstones,
 and additionally, I would be, as long as I live,
 15 in your service.”
 The eagle said: “My wings⁸¹
 can easily carry you
 as far as you wish. He who wants to learn
 how to fly must be willing to dare something.
 20 Hence, I am willing to carry you
 high into the air, have some courage!
 When you then can fly well, it will be your profit.”
 Having spoken those words,
 the eagle took the snail
 25 with its talons and flew high into the air.
 One deceiver then deceived the other.
 Once it had reached a great height,
 the snail began to sigh.
 Flying bothered it considerably,
 30 as none of its kind could not
 fly either; that’s true.
 At that moment the eagle let it fall,
 down to the ground, where its shell broke.

⁸¹ The noun “verke” is normally spelt ‘verge’ or ‘verje,’ meaning the ‘ferryman’ or ‘ferry,’ but the context indicates that Bonerius means ‘wings,’ although none of the relevant dictionaries offer such an explanation. Stange suggests that the poet meant something like: “vêtach, vêtach, vêtich, vitech, vitich, vêtache, vêteche, viteche” (Lexer), meaning ‘wings.’

Full of misery, the snail said:

35 “I have hurt myself so badly,
I will never desire to fly again.

I understand well that he who desires
what its nature does not grant,
must pay for it dearly.

40 Great honor is hardly ever achieved
without much effort; surely, that’s true.

Even if I were to live a thousand years,
I will never desire this again
what no one can grant to me.”

45 He who wants to enjoy stable peace,
should not desire the ability to fly.

He, however, who cannot live without this skill,
should follow my advice,

to wait until he has grown a good plumage,

50 since no one without feathers should try to fly.

**Fable no. 65: Of a Crab and Its Son
 On unjust punishment**

If that what is given by nature
to each creature is getting lost,
you must replace it with great exercise.
Without exercise your nature will not be so helpful.⁸²
5 Often, training changes
your nature, as you can often learn.
But where exercise and nature
join forces in an individual,
you will then hardly be able to distinguish between both.
10 One must work with both constantly,
as it happened in the following fable.

 An old crab saw a young one
crawling behind it.
It said: “Dear son, let it go!
15 How can you walk in such a wrong fashion?
Son, if you think
that you move forward correctly,
you are deceived. You do not walk properly.
You must learn how to crawl properly,
20 as your father has also done.
That will help you well, and it is also good.
When a son does as his father does,
he will be praised, and people will say:
he is as good as his father was.”

25 The son said: “Father, you are right.
I know it fully well, without fail,
a son ought to follow his father.
That will be good for him, and it is laudable.
If he does that, he will be praised.
30 I would say that he is not out of his mind
who follows his father’s nature.
Therefore, my dear father,
walk ahead, let me see! Just as you walk,
so I will walk, and when you stand still,
35 I will also stand still; just as you act,
so I will act like you.”

⁸² Bonerius uses the term “gewonheit,” meaning: habit, but the point here is that the individual must exercise his skills and talents, otherwise those won’t develop fully.

When the father was supposed to walk forward,
 he actually walked backwards
 and returned the same way
 40 which his son had pursued before him.
 Then the son said: "My dear father,
 no longer reprimand me,
 you use the same walking style as I do.
 You moved backwards without delay,
 45 when you were supposed to move forward;
 hence, no longer chide me!"

 He who wants to criticize the other,
 ought to act as well as possible
 so that he will not be reprimanded himself.
 50 If he does that, he will be well.
 If he who has wounds on his forehead
 chastises me, I take umbrage to that.
 He who teaches well and acts badly,
 irritates many people.
 55 Wise words and stupid deeds
 are performed by those from the Fools' Mountain.
 If he, who criticizes me, does not do the same mistake,
 then I am pleased with it.
 Otherwise, he should chastise himself first,
 60 but if he is willing to do that, he would be
 justified to chastise me.⁸³
 If the old crab had done that,
 his son would not have been criticized.

⁸³ Meaning: once the other would have corrected his own ways, then he could turn to the other and criticize what he might be doing wrong.

**Fable no. 66: Of the Sun and the Wind
 On good and bad behavior**

Once there erupted a big fight
with words, which has still not been fully settled,
regarding arrogance and pride;
neither of which brings about anything good.

5 It happened out of uppity
when the wind said to the sun
that it was much stronger than the latter.

The sun responded: “I have such power
that I can bring about everything

10 during a day.

You cannot do that with your strength.

I command a much greater mastery
than you with your great uppity.”

The wind replied: “I take umbrage

15 that you want to compare yourself with me
in terms of strength. Let us both go
to a proper judge.”

They chose Lord Jupiter
as a judge in their case.

20 Each one’s individual power was to be evaluated
by the fact who would accomplish with its strength
its task first.⁸⁴ The one would be the winner,
who would be able to rob the clothes
from a man, and this would be a decisive victory.

25 Once they had agreed on that,
the judge said to both of them:
“We will find out in a short while
who is the stronger one among you two.”

There was a pilgrim

30 who walked on a road. The wind began
to blow hard and mightily.

The pilgrim tightened his belt.

The wind was strong, the rain was cold,

⁸⁴ Bonerius uses the temporal adverb, “ê,” ‘first,’ which Stange changes to the qualifying adverb ‘better,’ which in a way works well in this context. I prefer, however, to stay closer to the original.

whereupon the pilgrim folded his coat tightly⁸⁵
 35 and wrapped it firmly around his body.
 The wind did not manage to rip off his clothes.
 After the wind's efforts were done,
 the sun came through the clouds,
 shining beautifully, and it became hot.
 40 This made the pilgrim quite happy.
 he took off his coat
 and his suit. He delighted in the sunshine
 and soon sat down.
 He thus quickly recovered from his previous suffering.
 45 Thereupon Judge Jupiter said:
 "I am a witness and can testify
 that the sun with its soft force
 has won over the strong power
 and the rebelliousness of the wind."
 50 You can learn from this fable
 that brute force rarely creates something good.
 Evil behavior brings about the same result;
 rudeness lacks all good manners,
 and rudeness is the source of evil.
 55 Rudeness never has a good outcome;
 evilness also does not stay for long.
 You win without great effort
 with softness and patience.
 He who wants to live and prosper
 60 should not be rude.
 The sun won [the argument] with great politeness,
 when the man took off his clothing,
 which he had wrapped around his body
 because of the force of the wind.

⁸⁵ The poet says, literally, that the pilgrim folded the coat twice, and Stange translates it that way, but we would have to visualize rather that the coat is pulled together.

Fable no. 67: **Of a Donkey and a Lion’s Skin
On the lack of understanding**

There was a donkey which had to work hard,
 which its master wanted it to do.
 He placed many bags on the animal,
 which hurt its back.

5 I also heard that the donkey
 had to pull a cart and carry heavy loads;
 it had to do tough work.

One day it was let loose
 and got out to the meadow
 10 where it looked for its pasture.

It did not take long
 that it soon came
 to the underbrush,⁸⁶
 where it found the skin of a lion.

15 It liked the skin very much.
 Its heart leaped for joy
 because it was completely sure in its mind
 that it would from now on be free from all suffering.

It placed on its body the lion’s skin
 20 and walked around boasting of its power.
 It claimed borrowed strength
 and upset the other ordinary farm animals
 in the pasture, indeed.

They all fled when they saw it
 25 strutting around in the lion’s skin.
 No animal dared to stand up to it,
 which was all due to the lion’s skin.

Its master was greatly irritated;
 he thought that he had lost the donkey.
 30 This aroused a mighty anger in him.

⁸⁶ The term “hürst” is probably typical of the medieval Bernese Swiss-German and cannot even be found in the standard Middle High German dictionaries, such as by Matthias Lexer. It means either a wooded hill, a bushy area, or underbrush; see: <https://digital.idiotikon.ch/idtkn/id2.htm#!page/21641/mode/1up>. But the word does not seem to be known any longer in modern-day Bern dialect as there is no entry for it in the online dictionaries, such as: <https://www.berndeutsch.ch/>; or <http://www.edimuster.ch/baernduetsch/woerterbuechli.htm#H> (both last accessed on July 20, 2020).

He began to look for his donkey;
he did not find it where it was supposed
to look for its food in the pasture.
He went out to the open field
35 searching for it far and wide.
He really needed to find his donkey.
At the end when he discovered it,
he recognized it by the ears.
He pulled off the lion's skin
40 and hit the donkey hard with a stick
and said: "You must remain my donkey;
the appearance of a lion won't help you.
I will tell you now the truth,
you must carry the bags again.
45 You will get hurt from my hard beating,
unless you carry the bags as before."
Borrowed color will not last long.
And he who desires purchased love
seems to me not to be a wise man.
50 He who believes that he can gain esteem
with borrowed acclaims, will lose it.
But he who enjoys as a result of his nature
great praise, will be well dressed [acknowledged].
No one should rely on borrowed fame.
55 Another person's praise often disappears,
fake arrogance comes tumbling down.
He who overdoes it with pride
by means of the elegance of his dress [appearance],
might well become a donkey;
60 you will recognize him by the ears.

**Fable no. 68: Of a Frog and a Fox
 On fake bragging**

Once, a frog came hopping along
to a meadow where it encountered
many animals which were in a happy mood.

It said: “If you trust me,
5 I’ll get you medicine
with which you can preserve your life.

With my great mastery
I can return to the sick one
its strength, and can make it
10 healthy again immediately.

No one in the whole world
can compare himself with me
in terms of wisdom and deep knowledge.
Therefore, the entire world loves me.

15 No doctor has as much understanding
as I, which becomes apparent
when I prove that my words are true.”

When a fox heard those words,
it said: “Sir Frog, how can that be?
20 Your skin color does not demonstrate
that you know how to apply medicine.

First of all, make yourself get well again with your medicine
and heal your own sickness. Once you have done that
everyone will believe you more.

25 Your skin color does not prove
that you know very much about medicine.
Heal yourself first,
then myself, and then you will have demonstrated
that you are a great physician.

30 If you do not do that, then you are blind [ignorant].”
The frog turned red for shame in its face.⁸⁷

And this was just right, so help me God!
He had claimed skills
which never pertained to its kind.

35 When the blind man wants to lead

⁸⁷ The poet simply relies on a common observation about people whose cheeks turn red when they are ashamed, which would not happen at all with frogs, but this is a fable, addressing basically people’s behavior.

the one who can see, people will laugh much about it.
 He who wants to be a medical doctor,
 ought to help himself visibly.
 How does the one claim to heal me,
 40 who cannot heal himself?
 He who boasts about something which is not true,
 will quickly be put to shame.
 Those who brag about themselves will do harm to themselves.
 Bragging about something fake will not stand up for long.
 45 Praise which is coming from one's own mouth,
 is not really praise. But deserved praise
 that results from good works, as it should be,
 will prove itself as worthy.⁸⁸
 Another person ought to give me praise,
 50 and you should not blame yourself either.
 A good person should be praised by everyone.
 The evil individual regards himself as great.
 I acknowledge him who does not desire to be praised
 and yet receives good praise!
 55 I think that the person is out of his mind
 who praises himself without any justification.
 Hence, you should wait if you do not want to appear insane,
 until other people praise you.

⁸⁸ The modern German proverb reflecting this is: "Eigenlob stinkt" (Self-Praise stinks). For good explanations with context, see https://www.redensarten-index.de/suche.php?suchbegriff=~~Eigenlob%20stinkt&bool=relevanz&sp0=rart_ou (last accessed on July 20, 2020).

**Fable no. 69: Of a Dog which Carried a Bell [Around Its Neck]
On happiness based on evilness**

There is a story about a dog
which was evil and deceitful.
Its behavior did not correspond
with its actions insofar as it acted
5 kindly and yet was filled with cunning.
Many noticed that clearly
whom the dog bit into their legs.
Those then had both the insult and the injury.
The dog acted that way for a long time
10 never staying away from causing some damage.
Quietly it followed people.
Once it had bitten, it quickly
ran away. Many people complained about this
to the dog's master. He was angry about that.
15 He attached a bell around the dog's neck
so that one could hear,
wherever it walked, where it was,
so that one could better watch out for it
and protect oneself from its deviousness.
20 The vicious dog felt happy about it,
being joyful that it had deserved [as it believed]
the honor of receiving
a bell hanging around its neck.
This vanity caused it great danger
25 from all the other dogs.
The dog at first became very happy about the bell.
Then an old dog came by
which knew well why the man
had given the bell to the dog,
30 that is, only because of its deceitfulness.
It said to the other dog: "What are you so happy about?
Looking down upon me, you fool,
and all the others of your kind, will hurt you.
He who does not wear a bell,
35 as was given to you, will be better off.
It will reveal the way how you do your cunning things,
whereas you think that you own it as a sign of honor.
You should rather lament about your own evilness.

The bell clearly demonstrates

40 that you are filled with perfidy.”

 He who desires honor for his cunning,
will get only praise in the form of chastisement.

When someone indulges in vanity

and then becomes the object of mockery, who would object to that?

45 He who is happy when he does something evil
is filled with a devilish mind.

When a person wants to be the only one who is good [praiseworthy],
he will not let others have their own breathing space,⁸⁹
as this dog had also done.

50 For that reason it had to walk around with the bell,
which it had gotten as a result of its deception.

The bell exposed its evil manners.

If evil people were to wear a bell,

then you would see many walking around with bells.

55 He who believes himself to be highly worthy
reveals his evil nature to the world.

⁸⁹ Literally: will hardly allow the others to get well.

**Fable no. 70: Of a Cat and Mice and a Bell
On the enemy in the house**

There was a war that had lasted for very long
and it continues until today. To him who wants to know about it
I will tell about it
with true words, right away.

5 This war involves the cat and the mouse.

Both lived in a house.

There was little love between them,⁹⁰
irrespective of how attractive the cat looked.

Who can protect himself

10 when the enemy is nearby.

The mice had to watch out
and lived in great fear.

The cat's power was great,
which deeply scared the mice.

15 No one could protect them,
and they were all unhappy.

Then they did not wait any longer
and called together a council.

They all deliberated

20 how they might arrange it
to be safe from the cat's anger.

They all had to worry greatly;
the cat's power was enormous.

The mice came up with many suggestions.

25 At the end they agreed
on one idea, namely that one of them

ought to hang a bell
around the cat's neck.

It ought to carry
this bell only for the reason

30 that they themselves could protect themselves
better from the cat's cunning.

Then one of them spoke up,

⁹⁰ Originally: little trust. The Middle High German Word "triuwe" carries many important meanings, including 'loyalty,' 'commitment,' and 'reliability.' This word represented one of the highest virtues in courtly society. Otfrid Ehrismann, *Ehre und Mut: Äventiure und Minne. Höfische Wortgeschichten aus dem Mittelalter* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1995), 211–16.

it was an old mouse, and said:

“We are all happy about this idea!

35 It might help us much, indeed.

And if God grants it we might survive.

Deliberate now, and then agree

on the one among us alone

who will dare to carry out this deed,

40 to hang the bell

around the cat’s neck (which I think is a great idea).

This will then give us much relief

and allow us to live free of worries.”

Not one mouse wanted to volunteer

45 for this deadly action. At the end

the mice’s advice remained useless.

He who wants to succeed in a war,
needs good advice.

Wisdom and great intelligence

50 often win over great power.

What power without wisdom cannot achieve

can be done by wisdom without power.⁹¹

He who carries out his work once well advised
will often achieve his goal.

55 Late regret does not demonstrate

either carefulness or the willingness to listen to good advice.

But when the enemy is in your own house,

you will hardly get rid of him.

If the evil people carried many bells,

60 then you would be able to protect yourself better.

If the cat carried a bell that could be heard clearly,

then the mice would be fast enough

to run away from it.

The enemy who comes quietly causes harm.

⁹¹ This is a nice example for a rhetorical chiasmus (sequence of words in a reverse order, such as: A – B – B – A. Otherwise, Bonerius does not employ many rhetorical devices. See, for instance, David Mikics, *A New Handbook of Literary Terms* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 55. Much better actually proves to be T. V. F. Brogan and Albert W. Halsall, “Chiasmus,” *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 183–84. There are many online resources for further examples and explanations.

**Fable no. 71: Of a Snake Which was Tied Up
 On evil ingratitude**

Here is a fable of a man
who walked through a forest
where he came across a snake.
A shepherd had caught it
5 and had tied it up firmly
to a strong stick,
so that it could not get away from there.
There was the defeated snake,
stretched out by a very strong rope.
10 It suffered much pain.
When the man saw the snake
he approached it kindly and said:
“I want to help you out of your suffering
so that you do not have to face death here.”
15 The snake was was near perishing.
The man untied it and thus saved it.
He gave it good food and helped it to recover.
The snake subsequently rewarded him,
once it had gotten strong and fast again,
20 by winding itself around the man’s neck.
It caused him pain and suffering.
The man said: “What does that mean?
You have made me very sad,
because you pay back my good deed with an evil one.”
25 The snake said: “I am acting rightly toward you!
I do just as the other snakes do.
I cannot abstain from using my poison,
I must live out my nature as a snake.”
The man said: “I will happily agree,
30 now that I have understood your words,
to go to an impartial judge.”
They both reached this agreement.
The fox was the judge in their case
and said in its fox-like manner:
35 “I cannot decide this case
based just on what you both are saying, and need to examine this case
personally.
Let me both see

how the conflict developed.”

The man said: “I am happy about that.

40 Let us tie up the snake again
to the same stick

to which the shepherd had tied it before.

Then you can determine, following your personal examination,
how to decide our case.

45 This happened immediately;
the snake was bound again.

Then the fox said to the snake,
when it saw it tied up that way:

“Untie yourself, do not wait,

50 and get away from here, now is the time!”

“My friend,” [the fox] said to the man,

you may go away from here freely,

but if you want to liberate your own enemy,

then you will suffer from it.”

55 Thus the man was freed from a great danger;

the snake had to die there,

which was right and justified.

What is crooked, will hardly get straight.

People use a proverb which seems to be true,

60 as it has become evident here:

“He who takes the thief off the gallows,

will not be thanked by him afterwards.”

What is poisonous will never do something good,

it retaliates for a good deed with an evil one.

65 Such a person cannot resist his own nature

and cannot abstain from his own roguery.

Often the result of kindness is

sorrow and pain for people,

as happened to this man.

70 I have to say honestly,

where evil cunning comes forth,

you need great skill.

He who wants to catch a fox with the help of another fox,

needs very good strategies.

75 If the fox had not been the judge,

the man would have hardly survived.

**Fable no. 72: Of Entrusting Goods (Of Two Merchants)
On good advice**

You ought to use a good strategy to counteract
what is being done with cunning.
Once two merchants went on a trip
to gain profit. They got to an inn
5 where they were well received,
as it should be the case with guests,
by the female inn-keeper who was
in charge of the hostel. On that day
they entrusted great property to her
10 (it was in good hands with her),
and did this with the mutual understanding
that she should hold it without any objections
until the time had come
when they both had made up their mind in agreement
15 to ask for it back.
They both were of the same mind
that she should give it back to them
only when they both would appear again [together],
and under no other condition. Then they left
20 to do their business as merchants and gain profit.
The woman kept the goods safely
and in great loyalty, as one should do
with goods that are entrusted to you.
Not long after that, one of the two merchants
25 returned and said:
“My heart is filled with sorrow.⁹²
Give me back the goods, I need it
because my friend has died.
I owe much money,
30 which I alone now have to pay back,
I am telling you that honestly.”
The woman believed that it was true
and immediately returned the goods to him.
The rogue was very happy about it.
35 He went away with the goods
to foreign countries in order to do business.

⁹² Stange extrapolates, probably correctly: I have had great misfortune. The original, however, does not exactly relate that.

His companion did not know anything about it.
 After a while it happened
 that he returned
 40 and also demanded to get back his goods.
 The woman was shocked, this caused her deep worries.
 She pled full innocence
 and said: "I have given the goods
 to the other man, honestly,
 45 he who had entrusted it to me, saying that he was in need
 and that his friend had died."
 The man responded: "What I am saying is clear-cut.
 Individual contracts supersede territorial law.
 No one was supposed to get the goods
 50 unless we both had returned together,
 I and my companion.
 I will insist on the validity of those words."
 The woman became deeply worried
 and lamented her predicament to a wise man,
 55 asking him to advise her,
 how she should handle this bad case.
 The wise man [lawyer] said:
 "Lady, do not worry!
 As I have understood the case,
 60 you will not suffer any harm,
 I will represent your case,
 and I trust you will get out of it well."
 Then he addressed the merchant and said,
 when he recognized his cunning
 65 and had listened to his claim:
 "The lady who is standing here,
 does not lie; she was entrusted
 with goods, which she kept safely,
 for both you and your companion, [with the understanding]
 70 that when you both would return to her
 she was supposed to return it.
 What a personal contract stipulates
 must be upheld.
 Go then, bring your companion,
 75 then she will give you immediately
 everything that she owes you."
 The merchant searched for his fellow

but found him nowhere, and thus
the lady was freed from this predicament.

80 She was helped in that case by the wise man.

He who is entrusted with goods
ought to pay attention that he protect it
and [be careful about] to whom he must give it back,
so that he does not become the victim of derision

85 and also does not suffer from harm.

It is very difficult to protect oneself
from those who are disloyal.

Therefore, it is necessary that the ignorant one
follow the advice of a wise man.

90 When he does that, he will rarely

go wrong, believe me that,
and his action will have a good result.

If the lady had not asked for advice,
she would not have gotten out of this bad situation.

**Fable no. 73: Of Two Fellows and a Bear
 On false friends**

Once two good fellows went
 (although they were of different characters)
 through a forest.
 They talked about many different things.
 5 They swore an oath
 that they wanted to observe loyalty and truth
 together until their death.
 One of them had brown, the other had red hair.⁹³
 While they were talking
 10 suddenly a bear approached them
 on their path.
 They did not know where they should
 flee. When the one with the red hair
 realized the situation, he broke without delay his promise
 15 to be loyal, and so he abandoned his oath.
 He was immediately ready to betray the other.
 He quickly fled from his companion
 and climbed a tall tree, from where he could
 observe his companion
 20 (this is really a case of great disloyalty!).
 His companion was in great danger
 and acted as if he were dead,
 so he did not move at all.
 At that moment the bear arrived
 25 and turned to him where he was lying so quietly.
 It thought that the man was rotten carrion,
 turning him around and smelling him.
 The untrustworthy men noticed that,
 he had abandoned his friend to his misery
 30 as many people tend to do so.⁹⁴

⁹³ The poet uses the adjective ‘red’ for rhyming purposes only (“tôt” – “rôt”), so it seems at first sight. But, as we will see below, the color red stands for an evil mind.

⁹⁴ Here, we understand that the adjective ‘red’ is used to designate those people in general who break their promises and are not to be trusted. This color is mostly associated with something positive (fruit, lips, gems, etc.), but at times also with negatives, such as Jews or prostitutes; see William Jervis Jones, *Historisches Lexikon deutscher Farbbezeichnungen*. Vol. IV: *Frühneuhochdeutsch – Neuhochdeutsch L–R* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2013), 2219. For the motif of the ‘red Jew,’ see Andrew

The bear went away and left the man
lying there. When it had disappeared,
the red-haired fellow realized that
and climbed down and said:

35 “Tell me, my dear friend,
what might it have been what the bear
whispered into your ear?

I clearly saw from the tree
that it had placed its mouth to your ear.

40 If he taught you something, then let me know it.”

The other one said: “What am I going to tell you?

The bear has whispered much into my ear
and taught me in particular

the following: ‘You ought to be more on the guard

45 of him who is sitting in the tree,
that’s my advice to you!

After all, when it is getting very dangerous,
he will abandon you because he is the red one.”

Women and men ought to

50 stay away from the red ones.

You will profit from trustworthy friends,
while you will get into trouble through evil people.

Through the good ones you will become good yourself.

The evil person never does anything good.

55 Many are friendly companions at the dinner table,

but you ought to check carefully
their real loyalty in the time of danger,
when all friendship has disappeared.

A true friend is a rare treasure.

60 Watch out for the evil person.

The red-haired fellow broke his promise
as soon as he saw the bear.

For that reason, he will always have to suffer.

He who is loyal will do well.

Colin Gow, *The Red Jews: Antisemitism in an Apocalyptic Age, 1200–1600*. Studies
in Medieval and Reformation Thought, 65 (Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 1995).

**Fable no. 74: Of Three Fellows Who Were Merchants
 On wise simplicity**

One day, three fellows agreed
to share in everything,
their good food and costs.
That was the opinion which they had agreed on.
5 They reached the consensus
to share their loss and their profit
altogether, and this with the purpose
of traveling together to a foreign country.
10 They did not know the road too well.
Two of them were smart fellows,
and they were also rather cunning.
The third was a simple man.
Then it happened to them
15 that they began to lack in food, which caused them
harm and worries.
They got to a forest
where they found but a cold resting place.
They quickly started a fire.
20 They had hardly any food;
they suffered great hunger.
They made a loaf of bread out of flour,
which they soon put into the fire [to bake it].
One of the rogues said to the other⁹⁵:
25 “If we could get the bread all for ourselves
we would satisfy our hunger.
The simpleton would probably eat all day,
and it would be hardly possible to fill his stomach.”
The rogue wanted to exclude the simple man
30 from eating the bread.
Then his companion responded:
“I am happy to hear your words,
I am sure that I can arrange it
that we [alone] will get the bread.⁹⁶
35 During the time while it is being baked,

⁹⁵ He is obviously talking only to the other companion in secret.

⁹⁶ The text says suddenly: the cake, but the author certainly meant only ‘bread.’ We have to assume that the speaker had so far addressed his equally evil companion in secret, and only now speaks ‘publicly,’ including the third man as well.

let us all three lie down and sleep
under this tree.

Then each one should tell
his dream, as soon as we wake up
40 and the bread is done.

He, whose dream is the most amazing,
will get the bread.” “Yes, for sure, yes, for sure!”
they all said together.

The two of them slept, but not the third [the simpleton].
45 The reason was his hunger.

As soon as the bread was done and baked,
he grabbed it and ate it all by himself.

There was very little left of it.

I believe he would not even have gotten stomach aches
50 if he had eaten more than that.

He laid down and went to sleep.

Soon, one of the rogues called out
to his companion and said⁹⁷:

“I became very happy in my heart!

55 I dreamed so well
that it will please us both.

It seemed to me as if a beautiful angel
led me to God’s throne
where He is seated in heaven.

60 This dream really seems to be extraordinary to me.”

The other then said: “That is true!

And let me share with you right away
my dream, dear friend.⁹⁸

It seemed to me as if a horribly looking devil

65 took me down to hell
where I witnessed the suffering
of many poor souls.”⁹⁹

Very happily the other one said:

⁹⁷ He believes that the simple man is still asleep, so he tells his dream only to the other rogue, whereas the third man really overhears them and uses this knowledge later to outsmart them both.

⁹⁸ They both talk to each other and let the third one sleep, so they pretend to each other and hope to outwit the simpleton.

⁹⁹ This would represent a *catabasis*, the visit of the underworld, as we find it in the Old French *Roman d’Eneas* or in Dante Alighieri’s *Divina Commedia*. The circumstance in our fable, however, is of much less significance.

“We can certainly claim the bread for ourselves.

70 When this peasant suffers
from hunger, there won't be anyone he can complain to.
Wake him up! He must tell us his dream.”

The good man had heard those words.

Then one of the rogues began to call for him,

75 and he said [to them]: “What might those shouts mean?”

[One of the two others said:] “It is us, your companions!”

He: “How did you get back here?

I learnt that you went away.”

[The other:] “Where we are, here? Are you crazy?

80 What is wrong with your brain?”

He: “I am not mad, let me tell you my dream,
as I am supposed to do.

I had a most astonishing dream,
which made me very sad,

85 because I thought that I had lost you both.

One of you got to heaven,
led there by a good angel.

The other was taken down to the hellish fire
where he witnessed

90 the suffering of the poor souls.

Now, it has hardly ever been heard
that anyone has returned
from hell or from heaven.

For that reason, I quickly took

95 the bread out of the fire
and ate it because I was hungry.”

Thus, the two others were tricked
by the one to whom they had lied.

It is just right and proper

100 that he who is simple and honest
should profit from it well.

The two men became the object of much mockery
because they had wanted to do a great roguery
to the simple man.

105 Their cunning caused them suffering.

The good man avenged himself
and ate the bread all by himself,
which all three of them
had been supposed to eat.

110 He who does not hold a devious thought
and is older than seven years of age,
will be praised.¹⁰⁰ It is also true
that often deception fails
whereas righteousness wins victory.

¹⁰⁰ The poet means: everyone who has a critical mind, is mature enough to understand the consequences of his deeds, and who abstains from evilness or vices.

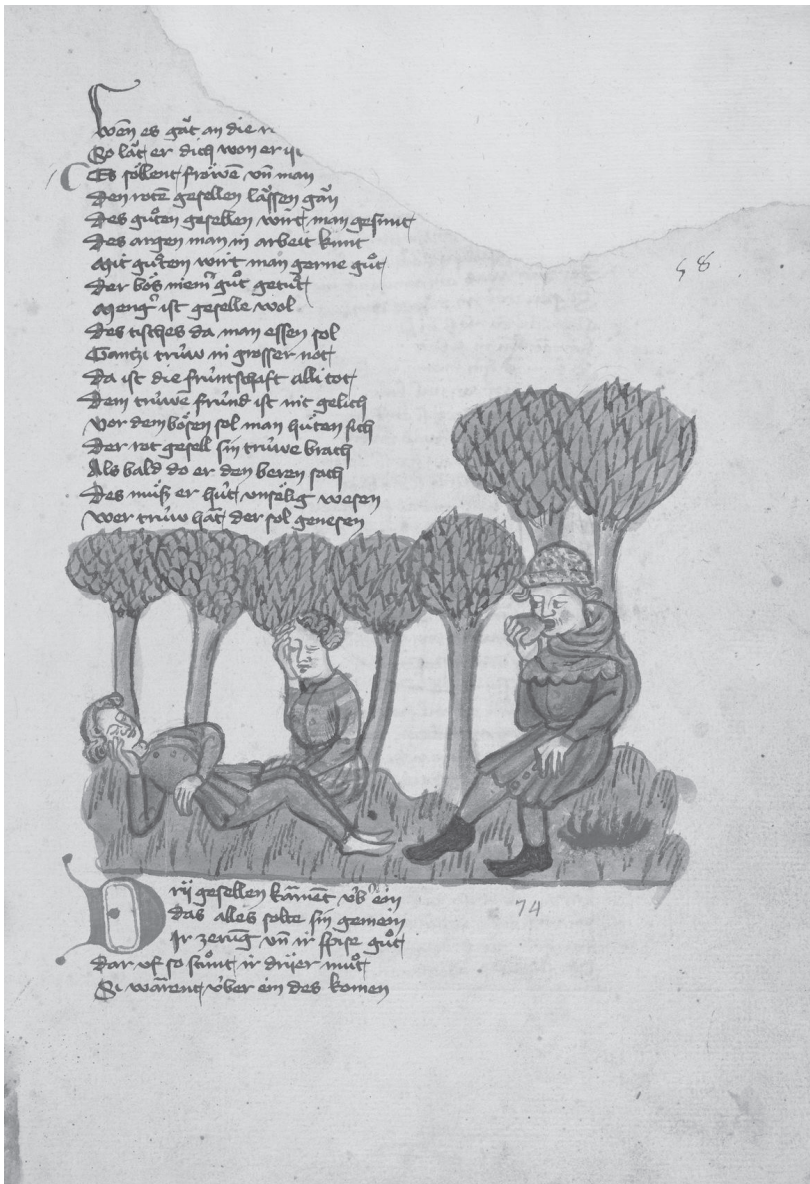


Fig. 8: Heidelberg Universitätsbibliothek, Codex Pal. germ. 794, fol. 58r

Fable no. 75: Of a Bald Knight
On how to retort to mockery

I have read about a knight
who was completely bald
and had no hair. He disliked that.
Therefore, he had the habit
5 of placing a good cap
with hair [a wig on his head], but it did not make him
particularly happy in his heart.
Once it happened that he went
to a tournament that was taking place at that time.
10 There were many good knights.
He proudly rode across the field
as many knights tend to do.
Boldly he broke his lance [in a joust],
and he was pleased that people noticed it.
15 He rode here, he rode there,
whoever clashed with him had to realize
that he was a mighty knight.
Then it happened by chance
that his helmet was pushed off,
20 and at the same time
he also lost his cap.
This exposed his baldness.
His head was bald, there was no hair.
Many people noticed that
25 and were rather shocked.¹⁰¹
He said: “What drives you to make such a fuss about it
that I have lost all my hair
along with the cap. Take a look,
a long time ago I have already lost
30 what grew on my head.
Hence, it is no wonder
that now my cap has fallen off.
Artificial color disappears,
whereas natural color stays.

¹⁰¹ The text says: “grūs,” which literally means ‘horror’ or ‘fright,’ but the poet might have meant: ‘shock’ or ‘surprise.’ In fact, in v. 40 Bonerius uses the explanatory term “spott,” which makes clear that the people had laughed about the scene with the knight having lost his wig and hence his artificial hair.

35 When you use hemp for your fence,
it will disappear quickly.
Thus, it was just right what happened
with my cap, as I have to say.”
The people listened to his words
40 and stopped their mockery.
 He appears to me as a wise person
who knows how to retort to mockery
with a witty reply. He acts much better
than he who wants to counter derision with threatening words.
45 He who was rich in the past, is poor today.
The wheel of fortune does not turn equally.
He who is standing, can, if he is lucky, remain thus.
If he falls, he can hardly get up again.
There is no constancy in the world:
50 What is dear today, will be misery tomorrow.
He who was healthy yesterday,
is sick today. Therefore, people say
that the person cannot be wise
who relies on the outward appearance of the world.
55 When the knight lost his cap,
this symbolized the instability of the world.

**Fable no. 76: Of a Humpback and a Toll Taker
On mockery that is deserved**

There is a story about a count
 who had strange habits.
 One of them was that
 only those who crossed the bridge to his castle
 5 on horseback or on foot had to pay a penny¹⁰²
 (no one could refuse this),
 if he was a hunchback or a blind person,
 if he had a goiter or a scab,
 or if his body was covered with eczema.
 10 For each individual bodily affliction
 the lord demanded a payment.
 Whoever wanted to cross the bridge
 had to pay the fee to the toll collector.
 The toll collector strictly insisted on that.
 15 Whoever suffered from an ailment,
 had to pay a penny. And then, he was immediately
 allowed to walk freely across the bridge.
 He, however, who arrived without any affliction,
 did not have to pay anything. Then it once happened
 20 that the toll collector saw a man
 who was a hunchback stepping onto the bridge.
 He ordered him to stop right away
 and said: “You must give a penny!”
 The hunchback refused to do so, however.
 25 The toll collector looked at the hunchback [now more closely].
 He saw that he also had a goiter, so he said:
 “Give me two pennies!”
 The hunchback fought against this even further.¹⁰³
 Then the toll collector observed that the hunchback was also blind.
 30 [He shouted:] “Now give me three!” Then he realized,
 when he took off the man’s hat that he had also eczema.
 “Now, give me four pennies!”
 The hunchback began to fight against the toll.

¹⁰² This was within a different currency system, so not to be confused with the American penny. Probably \$10–20 in modern currency, if not more.

¹⁰³ Stange translates this line as if it referred to the hunchback, but it makes more sense in light of the subsequent increase of the toll that the narrator means that the toll collector was shameless in demanding an additional payment.

Then the toll collector realized well
 35 that the hunchback's body was covered with scabs.
 "Give me five pennies, and don't you dare fight me!"
 Then he said further: "If you don't want to be beaten badly,
 then there won't be any alternative for you [so pay up].
 If you had thought about it properly,
 40 you would have been able to cross the bridge without fighting,
 paying only one penny.
 but now I have taken five.
 That's all your own fault.
 Do not blame me for it."
 45 Easily a wise person
 can prevent with small means
 great trouble. A spark creates
 a fire which often grows big.
 Whoever takes immediate action
 50 in whatever he would have to do next anyway,
 why would that cause harm to anyone?
 If I reveal my ailments myself,
 who would prevent me from doing that?
 I believe that I will have to accept the harm which I will have done to
 myself.
 55 He who gives a pound in place of a penny,
 and yet could receive a horse and a dog
 just for half a penny,
 does not seem to be a wise man to me,
 as it happened with this hunchback.
 60 For that reason he got into trouble.
 If he had given a penny
 right away without any refusal,
 he would not have suffered any insult or injury
 on this bridge.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ This seems to be a problematic narrative not well developed. There is no clear indication that the hunchback strongly resisted the demands; on the contrary, it says: "des wert er sich geringe" (v. 28; he resisted very little). It also does not say that the hunchback deliberately exposed the other ailments to fight against the toll collector, maybe trying to force him to spare him from paying the toll. In fact, the toll collector is the one who discovers one ailment after the other. Of course, this does not change anything of the didactic lesson at the end of this fable.

**Fable no. 77: Of Two Pots
 On useless company**

Once a great river
swelled up and overflowed,
forging a huge new channel,
taking down with it whatever was in its way,
5 whether it was great, long, or wide.
It was said that the river also took
two pots with it
with all its force; one being made out of ceramic,
the other out of cast iron.
10 Both bopped along
when the water had captured them.
I have learned about the following myself.
Since the ceramic pot was lighter
it floated better on the water.
15 It flowed ahead, and the iron pot was far behind.
The iron pot said: “How come you are so fast
and do not wait for me?
We ought to be good companions.
Wait for me, I want to travel with you,
20 God will protect us both well.”
The ceramic pot said: “I cannot help it.¹⁰⁵
If you were to get ahead of me
so that I would then bump into you,
or you into me,
25 only one time, I would be dead.
What would force me to get into such a situation?
I cannot compare myself with you;
I can cope well without your company.
Whoever bumps into the other,
30 the harm will always be mine.”
When the weak person becomes a partner
with the strong one, the latter will hardly ever be able to avoid it
that he will hurt the weaker one.
The big one causes harm to the small one.
35 The poor one does not belong well to the rich one.
The lower-ranked ought to avoid the higher-ranked.
The servant should not compare himself

¹⁰⁵ Literally: I am too ill.

with his master; see, that's my advice.
He who holds the handle of a knife,
40 can easily hurt the other one.¹⁰⁶
He who joins forces with superiors,
must then carry his own load, as I am telling you.
When the short one must carry the long one,
then he certainly needs
45 the long one to bend down.
The short one ought not to put on the same decoration,¹⁰⁷
even when he wants to be like the long one.
Poor and rich do not fit together.
The ceramic pot swam high up on the waves,
50 and the iron-cast one took many hits.¹⁰⁸
It has also happened often
that the powerful one died and the sick one regained his health.

¹⁰⁶ Again, the same chess metaphor is used here: to checkmate the other.

¹⁰⁷ Meaning: he ought not to pretend to look like the long one.

¹⁰⁸ Meaning probably: often hit the ground or other objects.

Fable no. 78: Of a Lion and an Ox
On self-protection triggered by fear

Once a lion went hunting
because it was hungry, so it went to a meadow
where it sought for food.
There he came across
5 an ox which was huge.
It walked around all by itself and without a master.
The lion felt very happy about that,
when he realized that the animal was not guarded.
The lion was certain that the hunt would go well
10 and it was sure to get its food.
As soon as the ox saw the lion,
it said, thinking carefully, to itself:
“I cannot fight against it;
I should not wait for it to come toward me,
15 only by flight will I get away from it.
Escape will be my way of protecting myself.
He who flees from that which one ought to flee,
will have certainly fought well.”
The ox fled, and the lion followed.
20 It was eager to catch the animal.
Now, the ox got to a cave
where it could have protected itself well,
but a ram had already hidden in it.
It threatened the ox with its horns,
25 not being afraid at all.
The ox had to flee with full speed.
Its fear of the lion made it run so fast
that it escaped even from the ram.
Yet, if the lion had not been coming after it,
30 the ram would not have survived
because the ox would have certainly killed it.
 The wise person ought to tolerate much,
which will be to his advantage and help him.¹⁰⁹
He will be pleased with it, if he acts that way.
35 Many times people forgive a servant’s mistakes
because of his master’s respectability.

¹⁰⁹ This is the same as the modern German proverb: “Der Klügere gibt nach” (The wiser person gives in, or makes room).

Because of the judge, as I hear say,
many have to forgive the court servants' actions.

Accept your own age

40 when this is honorable and useful.

One person enjoys his own youth,
and the dog profits from its master's virtues.

When one has a good mind, people respect the good person.

The evil person is, however, what he is because of his roguery.

45 One has regularly to respect
the steward and the farm manager,

the bailiff and the castellan,

not because of their wisdom,

but because they exert authority.

50 Young and old, listen to this!

The ox did not flee from the ram

because of its [dangerous] power; it was more afraid

because the lion was running after it,

the strength of which it knew well.

55 If it would have been safe from the lion,

the ram's power would have been meaningless.

**Fable no. 79: Of a Monkey and the Other Animals
 On arrogant self-praise**

Once there was a great assembly
on a large meadow,
with many animals being very agitated.
Whoever could carry a staff and a bag,
5 came walking or riding to the court.
I heard regarding this meeting
that Jupiter was its presiding judge;
he ruled over the assembly.
Birds and animals got there,
10 and also many kinds of fish.
Lord Jupiter presided over the assembly.
He wanted to know,
whose child was the most beautiful.
Now listen to this amazing account!
15 According to what I read in this fable,
many animals wanted to be the best.
They decked out all their children,
the fish, the birds, and the oxen,
the peacock, the goose, and also the ant,
20 the lion, the bear, and the elephant,
the deer, the wolf, and also the fox,
the rabbit, the panther, and the lynx,
the horse, the donkey, and the cow,
they all came together with their children,
25 the sheep, the goat, and the pig,
each one wanted to be admired as the most noble.
When they had all come together
and when every mother praised her own child,
30 (and many certainly deserved that recognition),
the crude monkey came running up there
together with its little ones.
It began to praise its own children
and said in front of all the animals:
35 “You see well, my lords, that my children
are the most beautiful ones amongst all animals.”
Thereupon the judge Jupiter
began to laugh, and with him the entire assembly of animals;
they burst out mocking her

40 and this because of the monkey's arrogance.
The monkey was ridiculed there.

 The same happens elsewhere as well.
He who praises what does not deserve praise,
follows the monkey's method.

45 He who praises what he should not praise,
deserves to be mocked at.

Every mother believes that her children
are beautiful, even if that is not case.
The monkey was pleased about itself.

50 No one should praise oneself.
But if he stands out because of his virtues,
for sure, he will also be praised
for these virtues, without anyone scoffing at it.
He who does good will be praised by God.

55 We are all so enamored with ourselves,
hence, the country is filled with monkeys.
There are many people who are blind
who do not like any other children but their own,
and they praise what ought to be castigated.

60 Thus the world is filled with shortcomings.
Until today the world has been like this.
Is there anyone who does not desire fame?
Please come forward and take money from me,
if I owe him anything, I will pay you.

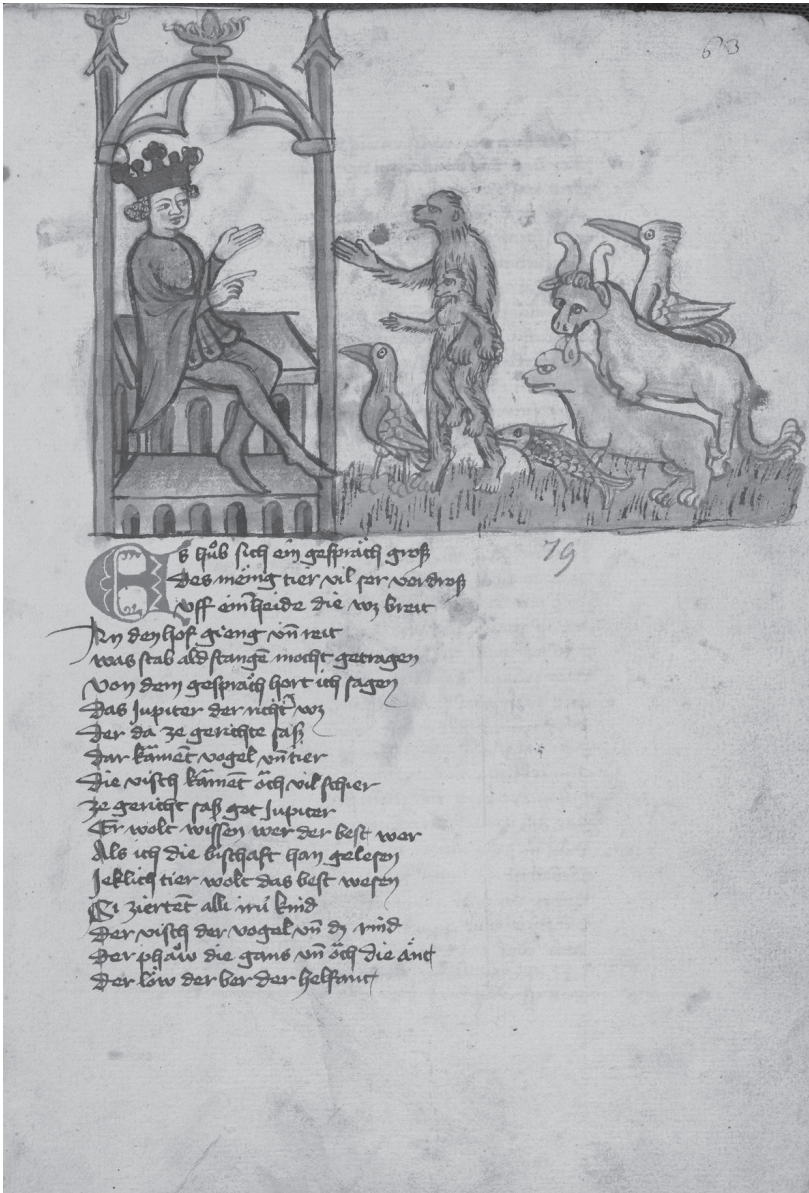


Fig. 9: Heidelberg Universitätsbibliothek, Codex Pal. germ. 794, fol. 63r

**Fable no. 80: Of a Goose that Laid a Golden Egg
 On insatiable greed**

There is story about a man
 who owned a goose which he liked very much
 but which he should have appreciated more.
 I have read about that goose
 5 that it laid a golden egg every day.
 The man was frustrated that it did not lay two
 or three every day.
 That was the man's great complaint,
 and it was his greed which made him feel that way.
 10 This frustration strongly grew in his heart,
 which never does anything good which would be praiseworthy
 in women or in men.
 He was rather irritated about the need to wait.
 One egg alone, which the goose gave him every day,
 15 did not satisfy him,
 Now take note of what I am going to tell you.
 His greedy heart wanted too much,
 which he had to regret at the end.
 He killed the goose, but this hurt him badly.
 20 As soon as he had cut open the goose,
 believing that it would be filled with gold,
 he realized that he was deceived, and this served him right.
 Wanolf is Triegol's brother.¹¹⁰
 He did not find there anything but goose dung.
 25 Thus, his greed was shamed.
 He who does not trust himself,
 how can he trust anyone else?
 You can often hear wise people say
 that he who desires too much
 30 will not be granted [any of] his wishes.
 Material things do not extinguish greed.
 To gain physical objects [money] requires much labor,
 and anxiety comes to him who must protect those goods.

¹¹⁰ This is a play with puns. Both names imply that he was the victim of self-illusion ('wan' = deception; "triegen" = to cheat). Bonerius seems to be the only writer at his time to use this proverbial phrase since all available dictionaries, if they even refer to this phrase, cite only Bonerius; so it might have been a local expression in Bern.

Also, his heart will be filled with pain
35 when he loses his property. It is the nature of goods
that they have never satisfied
a heart, irrespective of what people are saying.
You should not kill a goose
that lays a golden egg every day, if you own one,
40 that's my advice.

**Fable no. 81: Of a Peacock and a Crane
 On the disrespect of others**

There is a story about a peacock
which was very arrogant.
Its overall splendid appearance was the reason for that,
and also its beautiful feathers.

5 Its neck was delightful,
its back was covered with charming feathers;
its train was as broad as a bathtub,
sparkling in amazing colors.

Often it looked at itself,
10 which made it become very vain.
When its colors had deceived it,
a crane came flying to it
where [the peacock] strutted around.

It welcomed it in a snooty way
15 and said to it:
“Woe it is that God ever looked at you!
There is no beauty in you at all,
there are no colors on your body,
you are extremely ugly.

20 My colors shine in many hues,
green, purple, and heavenly blue,¹¹¹
and he who recognizes it properly,
will see that my back shines in golden color.
My train is beautiful and elegant.

25 You cannot compare yourself with me,
I do not need your company.”
The crane responded: “You spoke well!¹¹²
But there is no good resulting from your beauty,
you must walk in the puddles.

30 You ought to have two crutches
so that your legs and feet
do not look so ugly and dirty.
That would help you, indeed.

Let me tell you a bit more:
35 As soon as the month of May arrives,

¹¹¹ It's not clear what the differences were supposed to be between, literally, 'blue' and 'heavenly blue,' so I replaced 'blue' with 'purple' to avoid word duplication.

¹¹² Again, a satirical comment.

people do not wait any longer, they immediately
 pluck out your feathers,
 and then you walk around more naked than a pig.¹¹³

They will take your long tail,

40 your beauty will not profit you.

They will pluck you, as one does with scabs.

My feathers are incomparably better,
 irrespective of their white and ashen color,
 than your plumage, observe this well,

45 because I can fly, that's in my power,

just as I wish to do it, free from any control,

up into the air I follow my paths,
 without bridges and without planks,
 over the sea and the land.

50 I am familiar with all those routes,
 which gives me much joy.

Your life is determined by boredom.

But I am filled with pride and inner joy.

Your fame is only good for being ridiculed.

55 So, stop with your bragging!

My esteem is higher than yours.”

Thus, the crane crushed the peacock's
 pride, which was based on nothing but all of its feathers.

He whom nature has clothed

60 with external beauty

ought to abstain from mocking the other
 whom he sees walking around without that beauty.¹¹⁴

It is easily possible that the other is dressed better
 with virtues and worthiness.

65 He who elevates himself [above others]

out of vanity, will see that his ignorant mind

will be dashed right away

and can hardly recover.

Glowing colors easily fade away,

¹¹³ The adjective comparative “schotter” is not represented in any of the relevant dictionaries, but the noun ‘schotte’ relates to milk production, hence a white product, so the proper translation seems to be ‘more white’ or simply ‘naked,’ especially in the comparison with a pig which has no feathers and no fur.

¹¹⁴ Although Bonerius here uses the term “kluogkeit” = intelligence, smartness, knowledge, the contrast between the external and the internal “kluogkeit” indicates that he means attractiveness, or special qualities.

70 whereas bland colors stay.

He who is blinded by his own beauty
will rightfully be shamed.

It is good when a person recognizes himself.
Self-knowledge hardly ever hurts.

75 The physical attractiveness deceived the peacock,
whereas the crane flew [freely] in the air.

**Fable no. 82: Of a Priest and a Donkey
 On vanity based on one's voice**

There was a young and intelligent priest,
as there are many among his colleagues.
He was proud of himself and cheerful.
He believed that he had a great voice.
5 He was very keen on singing.
He believed that no one could sing better
than he, which made him very happy.
He actually could not sing well,
but he was completely committed to it.
10 Although his singing did not please people,
he sang very much,
driven by his own foolishness.
Once it happened
that he sang with a very loud voice
15 at the altar. Nearby there was a woman
who had lost her donkey
three days ago.
She cried much and lamented loudly.
When the priest saw her crying,¹¹⁵
20 he kindly spoke to her:
“Tell me, woman, what does that mean
that your eyes are filled with tears.”
He assumed that she had remembered something,
which his voice [singing] had triggered.
25 Then he said: “Would you like me to sing more?”
She: “Oh no, sir, it hurts me.”
He: “Why is that, let me know?”
She: “Glady, sir,” she said, “I have to reveal to you
why I have cried.
30 My donkey, which meant a lot to me,
has been devoured by the wolves.
I cannot forget that.
When you sing so gloriously,
then your voice is just like

¹¹⁵ Grammatically, the text says: ‘when she saw the priest crying,’ but the poet clearly means it the opposite way. This appears to be due to the Bernese dialect, which possibly did not differentiate clearly enough between the nominative and the accusative masculine in the pronoun: *der/den*.

35 the voice of my donkey.
Thus, you, my lord, remind me
directly of my donkey.
I wonder how it could be
that your voice
40 is so similar to that of my donkey.”
The boastful priest was thus shamed.
His donkey voice was exposed.
But he was very pompous about himself
as a donkey usually is.
45 He who believes that he is the best,
is very similar to a fool.
I am surprised that the ear is so close
to the mouth and yet does not help it
that a person can recognize himself
50 and his own voice, which is really strange.
Many believe that they can sing well,
but they have a voice that is harsh and shrill
and they bray just as the donkey does.
If he were to hear himself – which would be good –
55 with the help of the ears of others,
he would not turn into a fool,
as it happened to this priest.
I also hear many people say
that those who sing badly, sing much;
60 maybe he intends to make many people deaf.

**Fable no. 83: Of an Oak Tree and a Reed
 On strength and weakness**

There was once an oak tree on the top of a mountain
which never yielded to any storm
because it was strong, tall, and wide.

At the foot of the mountain there was a swamp,¹¹⁶

5 through which flowed a cool creek
in which many reeds grew.

Flowers and and grass also flourished there.

The oak had deep roots.

It stood there without hardly any motion.

10 Who would have thought
that it might topple down [one day]?

Its strength protected it against that.

When it had stood there for a long time,
a wind blew, called Aquilo,¹¹⁷

15 which had much force.

Out of the ground it suddenly lifted the oak tree,
together with roots and the great branches,
and tossed it into the swamp.

When the tree had fallen down,

20 the oak spoke to the reed:

“I am surprised that this was possible
that you are still standing here,

so proud and fine, although you are so much more fragile
than myself. What might have preserved you?

25 I was strong, tall, and large,
now I am lying here bereft of all strength.”

The reed said to the oak:

“I am small, weak, and supple,
and understand of myself

30 that I cannot resist
the one who is stronger than I am.

Truly, that’s what preserved me.

¹¹⁶ Bonerius could also mean a swamp, a pond, or a lake with any kind of body of water where reed can grow, i.e., with open water.

¹¹⁷ That is the wind called boreas, the north wind, the bringer of cold winter air; hence a mighty wind blowing in late Fall and early Winter. The name has its roots in Greek mythology; <https://www.greeklegendsandmyths.com/boreas.html> (last accessed on July 20, 2020).

I am able to bend down well
and lie almost flat on the ground
35 I cannot withstand the wind;
I let it blow high up.
If you had done the same,
one would see you still standing on top of the mountain.
You always wanted to fight the opponent,
40 and therefore you have fallen down.
Your strength and your pride were too great,
and, therefore, you have lost the fight.
If you had been able to bend down,
you would have remained standing as I do.
45 Now you suffer from injury and insult,
which is just right, so help me God!”
No one is so strong and so great
not to encounter someone being his equal.¹¹⁸
He who cannot give in sometimes,
50 does not seem to me to be a wise person.
He who stands rigid better ought to watch out
not to fall down, as I advise you.
The higher the mountain, the deeper the valley,
the more strength you have, the worse the fall.
55 He who turns his coat in the direction
from where the wind blows
and thus can avoid superior force,
will be able to stand better.
He who falls down, will hardly ever get up again.
60 The reed kept standing, the oak fell down.

¹¹⁸ Bonerius probably means: who is stronger than oneself, as is the case with the wind versus the oak tree.



Fig. 10: Reed, Lakeside Park, Tucson © Albrecht Classen

**Fable no. 84: Of Four Oxen and a Wolf
 On treason**

Once there were four good fellows
 who were strongly committed to mutual trust.
 They had all pledged
 to share with each other
 5 all harm and profit.
 Those were four splendid oxen.
 They were bold and proud.
 Whether they were in the field or in the forest,
 there was no animal so fierce
 10 that would have dared to attack them.
 Their legs were strong, and powerful were their feet.¹¹⁹
 Their heads were well protected
 with sharp horns, large in size,
 with which they could stab badly
 15 any animal which might have wanted to attack them.¹²⁰
 The oxen would not hesitate and attack,
 whatever animal it might have been.
 The lion, the wolf, or the bear
 found them too hard to battle with.
 20 No animal gained any honor in a fight with them.
 The friendship among the oxen was great.
 This troubled many animals.
 A wolf came creeping up to them
 and greeted one of them.
 25 Its heart was filled with evilness.
 “My words should not worry you,”
 it said, “but I want to warn you:
 just do not reveal me to the others,
 considering how much you are my friend.
 30 I know that your three fellows
 have sworn to kill you.
 They have completely dismissed
 your previous service which you have rendered to them.
 They intend to betray you.
 35 I am telling you in all honesty.

¹¹⁹ Oddly, Stange translates “sol” with ‘trod,’ which is not too far-fetched, but not precise enough.

¹²⁰ Meaning: which might have dared to attack them.

You will notice right away
 that they conspire against you.
 I feel pity for your trust in loyalty
 because it was constant and great.
 40 You have lost all friendship.”
 Once the wolf had said that
 to the one ox, it then went
 to the second and said
 very secretly so that no one heard it
 45 the same thing what it had told
 to the first one. Then the third one was deceived
 and the fourth one as well,
 always by the same words.
 Then each one of them began to hate the others;
 50 they lost the trust in the others.
 There was great hostility and very little friendship among them.
 Right away each one of them walked its own way.
 Their anger was great.
 Therefore, they all lost in their efforts.
 55 The wolf’s lying had achieved that;
 malice makes many people feel sorry [at the end].
 Once their bond of love was broken,
 the wolf immediately returned
 and attacked one of the oxen.
 60 None of the three others came
 to help their fellow.
 Their disloyalty thus became evident.
 The same happened to the second ox.
 When the wolf observed their unwillingness to help each other,¹²¹
 65 it moved toward them with more violence
 and killed one after the other.
 They all became its victims;
 none of them could protect itself against it.
 The wolf’s treason brought it about
 70 that friends developed hatred against each other.¹²²
 Where real loyalty is supposed to be maintained
 one should not simply believe

¹²¹ Literally: when it saw their lack of loyalty.

¹²² For the topic of treason in the pre-modern age, see *Treason: Medieval and Early Modern Adultery, Betrayal, and Shame*, ed. Larissa Tracy (2019); Albrecht Classen, “Treason: Legal, Ethical, and Political Issues in the Middle Ages” (2019).

the whispering of some individuals; that's my advice.
He who wants to be friends ought to guard himself
75 against devious sycophants,
who with made-up stories achieve
that many good people's minds become mislead,
and destroys many good friendships.
Lying hurts the soul.

80 Therefore one should stay away from [this sin].
Evil lying brings about
that a brother hates his sister.

A lying monk is worse
and even worse than the devil's cunning.

85 He undermines the monastery, as I hear tell,
just as the fifth wheel on a cart.¹²³

You can protect yourself from the devil
with making the sign of the cross. Therefore, I am saying:
if the wolf had not lied so badly
90 and betrayed the oxen so much,
their friendship would surely have been maintained,
and they would not have lost their lives.

¹²³ Proverbial expression, meaning: an unnecessary part.

**Fable no. 85: Of a Knight who Turned into a Monk
 On honest people**

There was once a wise knight
who also possessed everything
what one might need to live here on earth.
His castle was filled, inside and outside, with all necessities.

5 One day he got the idea
that he should give up all his material goods
on behalf of God,
and turn to a life as a monk.

He realized this plan
10 and traveled to a monastery. – Thanks to him
who gives up his worldly life and goods for God!
He deserves praise who does this.

After he had joined the monastery,
his abbot, who used to be a wise man,
15 one day gave him a charge,
telling him that it would be necessary for the monastery
that he go with donkeys to the market
and find out
whether he could sell them.

20 They could no longer run well,
they were tired and old,
they suffered from many physical frailties.
The knight had to obey this order,
but he was not happy with this, as was quite apparent.

25 When he got to the market,
many people looked at the donkeys
and asked whether they were for sale.
“Yes,” he said. “Are they good in running?”
“No, not at all.” “Are they young or old?”

30 “They are suffering from many frailties,”
he said. “If they were strong and healthy,
we would not sell them for less than seven marks.
If they were young, strong, and energetic,
we would not happily offer them for sale.”

35 “Why are their tails hairless?”
He answered: “They have carried great bags,
which have made them collapse many times.
Then we pull them up by their tails;

therefore, they have lost the hair.”¹²⁴

40 They said: “Brother, is that true?”

“Yes, it is,” he said, “so help me God.

I am telling you this honestly.”

He went home again with the donkeys
since he had not sold any one of them.

45 He was immediately announced upon his return
to the abbot. The former knight had to accept for this [failed] journey
great penalty.

He said: “Lord, exempt me from that!

I have left behind my honor and property

50 and my free will

in order to join the monastery.

I cannot turn to lying,

I will stick to the truth

and will never hide it.”

55 He who joins a monastery out of a spiritual need
better watch out that he does not get harmed
in his soul. If he succeeds in that,

bravo for him! The one is getting more quickly lost
who does not look after himself

60 when he is making this decision
only with the intention to hold the plow in his hand.¹²⁵

He who puts on a monk’s habit
and does not practice spiritual deeds,
has the same experience as the blind person

65 who carries a light in his hand
and yet does not recognize/understand it.

It’s the same with him who carries the light and yet hits himself.

He who becomes an ecclesiastic better guard himself
from evil things. When he observes this,

70 he will illuminate people more effectively.

He also ought to pursue only truth,

¹²⁴ Bonerius uses the present tense, and Stange translates it that way as well, but the context clearly requires the past tense.

¹²⁵ Meaning: to secure his life’s income. This is a direct borrowing from the New Testament, Luke 9:62: “Jesus replied, ‘No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.’” But Bonerius changes the meaning slightly but significantly in that he does not criticize those who look backwards and long for their previous life, but those who enter the monastery as an economically safe haven.

as the knight had done.
He let go the business with the donkeys
and had other people do the sale.

**Fable no. 86: Of a Fir Tree¹²⁶ and a Thorn Bush¹²⁷
On arrogance in the world**

Once, a fir tree fell into a state of pride,
 as it happens with many people,
 for which you have to pay a penalty many times.
 It began to ridicule the thorn bush
 5 growing below it.
 All its mind was filled with arrogance.
 It said: “I am tall and broad
 and well decked out with branches;
 my crown extends high into the air;
 15 my branches are covered in green,
 women and men give me much praise.
 You, by contrast, are standing there, without receiving any praise.
 Look, you are good for nothing,
 except as fire wood. He who touches you,
 20 will be wounded without fail.
 Stroking you is hurtful.
 All people hate you;
 you cause harm to the body of many.”
 Once the fir tree had said that to the thorn bush
 20 it soon happened
 that a man arrived.
 He carried an ax in his hand.
 Right away he cut down the fir tree.
 The thorn bush, however, stood there without having been touched.
 25 It then said to the fir tree:
 “How come you are lying there, how come you lost
 your life and your worthiness?
 I am still standing here without any suffering.

¹²⁶ The fir tree (“Tanne”) has long been associated with the Christmas custom; see the German Christmas carol “Oh Tannenbaum” (Oh Christmas Tree”), composed by Ernst Anschütz in 1824, based on a song by sixteenth-century Melchior Franck. This evergreen coniferous tree is characterized by the needle-like leaves being attached to the twigs like suction cups and by the cones standing upright on the branches, resembling candles. The spruce tree (“Fichte”), by contrast, is much more common in the northern hemisphere and is not regarded as valuable as the fir tree in terms of its wood. However, it grows fast and easily and is thus the preferred wood in construction and other areas. Its cone is hanging down from the branches.

¹²⁷ Maybe the poet meant: hawthorn tree, but this fable talks more about the general underbrush, such as brambles, or blackberries.

Your beauty has hurt you.

30 Your fame has put you into a checkmate.
That what you thought would preserve your life,
see, that brought you your death.”

Thus, the fir tree lost without fail
its beauty and its green hair.

35 No one should overly praise
one’s own body: it is filled with weaknesses
and makes the person remain in misery.
While he is still living, he is already dead.
When he is standing, as the fir tree did,
40 and lives, he is enjoying great praise.
Once he has been felled, then also is cut down
power and fame, which will never return.
Who can enjoy the time
during which there is nothing but worries?

45 What you lose causes sorrow to you.
The presence is inconstant.
What will happen in the future,
no one is able to tell.

Hence, abandon the false enjoyment
50 since no one can be safe,
whether he will live tomorrow in joy
or steer directly into death.

The thorn bush kept standing, the fir tree fell down.
Neither strength nor beauty protected it against this [destiny].

55 Whether you are strong, noble, or rich,
in face of death everyone is the same.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Stange translates here literally: ‘everyone is similar to death,’ which does not make all that much sense because in the previous verses the poet had compared people of different social standing with each other who nevertheless all experience death without fail.

**Fable no. 87: Of an Emperor's Gemstone
On remembering death**

An emperor once owned a gemstone
which had powerful properties.
It was much heavier than lead
or any other metal.

5 When they placed it on a scale,
it lifted up the other dish,
whatever was put on there,
whether it was great, long, or wide.
No weight could outdo it.

10 Many people were surprised about this.
But when the gemstone was covered with ash,
it lost that very property,
its weight and all of its power.

Then the council of wise men in the emperor's service said:

15 "Lord, this gemstone is like you.
Your power extends over all kingdoms
that exist in the world.
It is great and extensive.

As long as you will live,
20 no one will be able to resist you.
You will be as heavy as the gemstone.
Everyone in the world is smaller than you.
But once you will have fallen down,
your power will not return again.

25 As soon as your head will be covered
with soil, your power will be gone.¹²⁹
Therefore, you should keep this in mind,
Lord, that you are a mortal.

Prepare yourself for the journey,
30 which no person has ever been able to avoid [death].

When the powerful one falls down,
then his power will be gone as well.
He who properly thinks about death,
will protect himself from the suffering in hell.

35 No one should enjoy [excessively] his youth
or his power. But if a person possesses virtues,
then he would be justified in being delighted about them.

¹²⁹ Meaning: Once you will have died and will be buried.

Once a person has to depart from here –
no one has had so much power
40 or so much and so extensive wealth,
and no one has enough wisdom
that he could protect himself from death –
then it will happen with him as it did with the gemstone.
Once he will be covered with ash,
45 he will be entirely robbed of his strength.
Similarly, the emperor will certainly
lose all of his dignity;
his power which he possessed before will be gone.
Think of that, young and old,
50 how quickly the world's power disappears,
and so also wisdom, nobility, and wealth.
Who can be of a joyful mind¹³⁰
and live happily in this world,
when no one can resist death?
55 Everyone who was ever born,
ends up in death,
whether he is young, old, poor, or rich;
all will have to die.

¹³⁰ Stange takes the crucial term “muot” too literally and translates it here as ‘a noble mind,’ whereas Bonerius really means happiness and carelessness.

**Fable no. 88: Of an Envious and a Greedy Person
 On envy and greed**

Once two fellows walked together,
but they kept their money separate from each other.
Each one wanted to hold on to his own.
Soon, they encountered on the road
5 a mighty and rich lord.
He greeted the two men in a friendly fashion,
but he understood their hearts well,
knowing that they were filled with vices.
One of them never got enough,
10 the other never let go of his envy.
The lord wanted to test their minds
and offered great wealth to both.
He said: "Ask for whatever you want!
It will not hurt me at all
15 to grant you your wishes
as you desire in your hearts.
One of you should start, the other then can follow.
Do not be too hasty with your decision.
What the first one will ask from me,
20 the other will get doubly.
You will certainly get
the gift which your heart desires."
The greedy man immediately thought by himself:
"Better wait with your request,
25 until my companion
has voiced his wish.
The good will certainly come my way.
Let him express his request first.
Whatever he then will ask for,
30 I will then get twice as much."
His greed made him decide
not to formulate his wish first.
He hoped to receive twice as much.
This immediately turned into his loss.
35 Envy and hatred are never resting.
The envious man thought about something malicious.
He did not want to let his fellow
enjoy any good

because his heart was filled
with envy and poison.

40 His fellow quickly realized that
and said: "My friend does not want to voice his request.
I am requesting that what happens to me,
my companion should experience doubly.
Gouge out one of my eyes,

45 I will happily accept this loss
because then my fellow will have to lose
both of his eyes." That happened.
The stranger immediately cut out their eyes.
Thus, they were shamed

50 and both were blinded.
Woe to him who is filled with greed!
He will never gain peace of mind.
The more he has the more he desires.
If the greedy ones would receive everything,
55 as happened to the one here,
we would see many people without eyes.
Envy and hatred can blind
both women and men.

The envious would happily get sick,
60 if then his fellow would suffer death.
Envy cannot stand anyone else;
we find it both in young and old people.
He who causes his own death
so that his enemy gets into trouble,
65 and he who kills himself through the strike
with which he wants to wound me,
does not seem to be a wise man to me,
as far as I can tell.

**Fable no. 89: Of a Donkey and Three Brothers
 On excessive miserliness**

A man was lying on his deathbed
but he had kept his smarts
and arranged all matters necessary for his soul [last will]
in the presence of authority figures.¹³¹

5 He had three sons who had grown up
and who were very bothered by his sickness.
He gave them a good donkey as an inheritance.
The man's explicit wish was
that it ought to belong to them in common.

10 Whoever took the donkey home with him
was supposed to feed it during the day.
The labor was to be done without any charge.
This arrangement in the last will was carried out.

The oldest son took the donkey
15 and immediately made it work.
If it did not carry its load fast enough, it had to suffer.
It worked all day long
and could never rest.

The donkey did not receive any food.
20 The man thought: "This is not your own donkey;
your brother will feed it well the next day
because it will work for him."

The next day the other brother
took the donkey and led it home
25 and did not give it any food.
He believed for sure
that his brother had fed the donkey well
and that it would be filled with hay,
because he was rich and owned enough.

30 The donkey pulled much and carried
many heavy loads throughout the day.
The lack of rest exhausted it much.
When the day came to an end,
the youngest brother arrived

¹³¹ This is Stange's suggestion, but it remains unclear. Literally, the poet says: "he arranged everything down to [or perhaps: in front of] a ring." This 'ring' might, or might not, be the circle of testators when a last will is pronounced publicly. Or it might mean: he passed on all of his possessions down to a ring.

35 and took the donkey with his hand
and led it right away to do its work,
without food and drink.

No one took care of the donkey.

The youngest brother thought naively

40 that the donkey had been well fed
by his brothers.

But that was not true, as it became known,
the donkey died as a result of its misery;
it had to die from hunger.

45 One brother after the other had relied on the others.
Greed has never died out until today.

All sins grow old/they never go away,
greed returns in many forms.

The shorter the life of the greedy one is,

50 the more he compiles goods.

Greed develops new leaves
constantly on all people.

The donkey suffered its death
for no other reason but utter greed.

55 If they had fed it well,
as one ought to feed a donkey,
it would have preserved its life,
and they would not have lost it.

But their greed was so great

60 that they lost their inheritance.

He who wants to use the donkey
must feed it; that would be good.

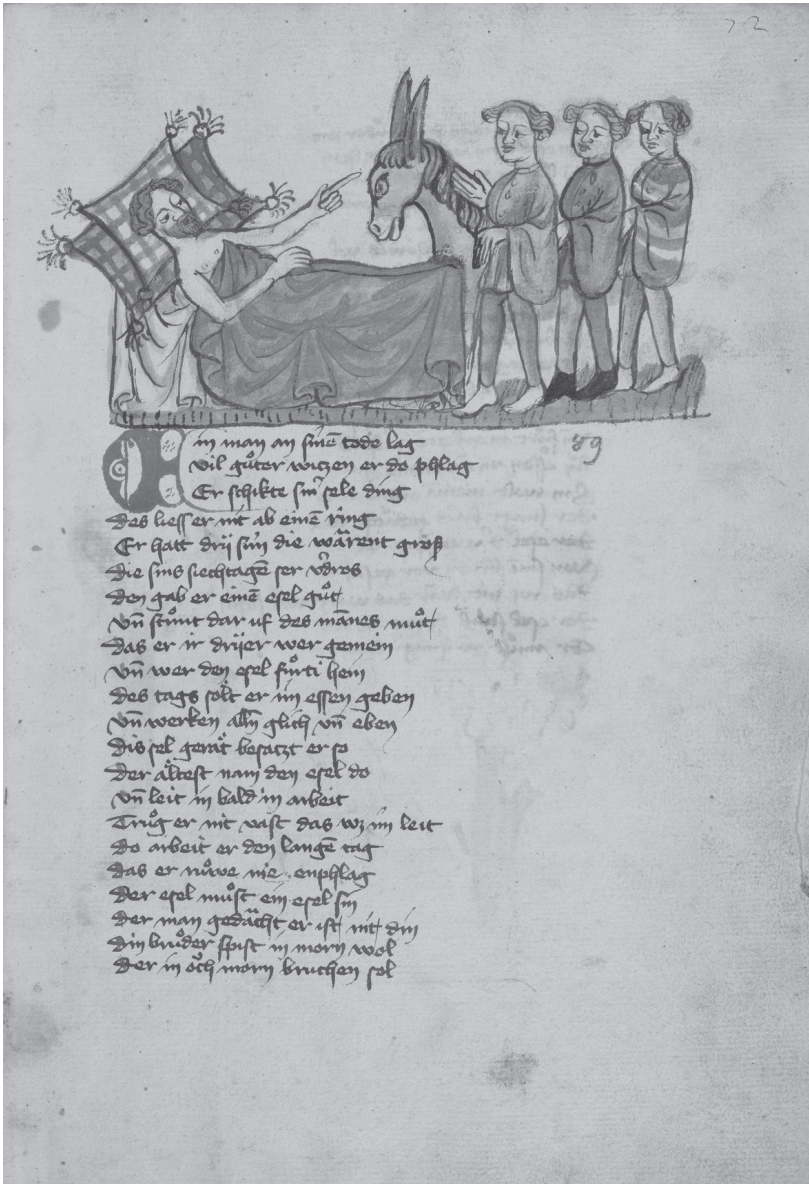


Fig. 11: Heidelberg Universitätsbibliothek, Codex Pal. germ. 794, fol. 72r

**Fable no. 90: Of a Lion and a Goat
On hurtful advice**

A goat looked for its pasture
because it was hungry, as is natural.
It walked high up to a rocky cliff
where no other animal could follow it.
5 A ferocious lion saw the goat
and said to it in a most friendly manner:
“I am surprised that you are willing
to risk your life for such poor food.
Your paths are very dangerous.
10 No one should accept such risk
for his food, that’s not good.
If he then fails in his effort,
people will say that he brought it upon himself.
Down here the paths are straight/easy,
15 here you can find flowers and clover,
leaves, grass, and more,
stay here where there is a very good pasture.
Return to the meadow,
here you find good food, better
20 than up at the cliff,¹³² believe me that.”
The goat responded to the lion
when she recognized its deception,
“I know well that you are speaking the truth.¹³³
Your words are true but your intentions are crooked.¹³⁴
25 Your heart is evil, your advice is good.
If I could be as safe down there as I am up here,
I would return immediately,
if I could find a secure place there.
But since I cannot be sure about that,

¹³² Stange erroneously translates the first use of “vluo” (v. 3) as ‘cave,’ but then corrects himself here in v. 20; each time it makes only sense to understand this as ‘cliff’ or ‘rocky wall,’ otherwise the lion would not comment that the goat could not find good grass growing up there. Hence, ‘cave’ is the wrong term.

¹³³ Clearly meant as satirical. Of course, the lion is right about the advantage of the pasture below in the valley, but the situation for the goat proves to be the opposite.

¹³⁴ This is a complicated verse. Literally it says: “Your works are crooked, your words are straight.” The lion’s statement is, indeed, true at face value, but the intentions are evil.

30 I do not follow your advice.”
 A wise man ought to be on his guard
about who gives him advice, bad or good,
who [seemingly] advises well and acts badly;
people rarely give good advice.¹³⁵
35 Study that person carefully
who wants to give you an advice pertaining to your life.
[Only] the one might be a good advisor
who advises what he himself is doing.
Consider the outcome of the advice,
40 what might result from it.
Never follow the advice of one who threatens your life.
If the goat had gone down from the cliff,
the lion would have taken its life.

¹³⁵ Surprisingly, Stange exceeds here what the poet clearly says: “selten” means ‘rarely,’ and not ‘never.’

**Fable no. 91: Of a Person Who Had Hot and Cold in His Mouth
On being double-tongued**

Once a man went on a trip
during the period when there is much snow outside.

After quite some time he reached a forest.

His troubles grew considerably there.

5 He suffered from great hunger,

he was afraid of freezing to death,

and while he kept going

a forest man welcomed him kindly

into his house and treated him well,

10 as a host ought to do with his guest.¹³⁶

When had gotten into the house,

he began to blow, because of the frost,

at his hands.

The forest man asked him immediately

15 why he had done that.

The frozen man responded:

“I blow at my hands

so that they might get warmer.”

The forest man said: “That is a good thing

20 that your breath gives you warmth.”

He made a fire and invited him to sit down.

He helped him to recover from the great cold.

After the guest had sat there for a while,¹³⁷

he [the forest man] wanted to make him even more comfortable,

25 demonstrating great friendliness toward him,

and gave him hot wine to drink,

saying that it would do him really well.

The guest placed the cup at his lips

and wanted to drink without delay.

30 But he immediately realized the great heat

of the wine and blew into it.

¹³⁶ Medieval poets did not often address the situation of winter, but at times, like here, we hear about snow and frost, after all; see Albrecht Classen, “Winter as a Phenomenon in Medieval Literature: A Transgression of the Traditional Chronotopos?,” *Medievalistik* 24 (2011): 125–50.

¹³⁷ Again, Stange offers a translation which is rather removed from the original: ‘Once his guest had warmed up.’

Thereupon the forest man said:

“Why did you do that?

Please let me know.”

35 He answered: “The wine is too hot for me,
therefore, I had to blow into it
so that it will get a little cooler.”

The forest man responded: “How is that possible
that you carry hot and cold

40 in your mouth. Even when I will be old,
I will not have forgotten this thing.

I have made up my mind
that a person has to leave my house
of whom I know that he carries hot and cold

45 in his mouth. Get out!
You are not going to stay in my house.”

[The guest] was driven out, which was just right.¹³⁸

People should avoid using two types of tongues.

How can anyone be safe from him

50 who first demonstrates full loyalty
to you in his mouth [with his words],
but then, behind your back, says nothing but evil about you.

This is an unreliable person
of whom one notices that he has two tongues.

55 [However,] many houses would stay empty
if you wanted to throw out everyone
who has the command over two tongues.

He may be poor, rich, young or old,
he may be a lay person or a priest,

60 he may be a tall or short person,
may be woman or man,

who could stand up to someone with two tongues?

You can hardly defend yourself against them.

They hit from behind

65 the same person whom they have touched
kindly before in the front.

They act like the scorpion,
which touches in the front and is also happy,

but soon enough takes its revenge

70 and stings with the tail.

¹³⁸ Bonerius does not mean at all that this frost-bitten man was rightly pushed out of the house. We have to listen carefully to the following explanation.

To have two tongues is worse
than being a stinking dog.
No one can be safe from him,
neither the good nor the bad one.

75 That person will slay one day three people,
first himself and the one whom he has betrayed
with words, and then the third person
who is witness to his betrayal.

Chase out of your house

80 the one with two tongues if you want to remain healthy
and without worries.

You ought to push him out quickly,
as the forest man had done,
for which he will earn praise and honor.

**Fable no. 92: Of a Nightingale Which Was Captured
 On worldly stupidity**

Once a hunter caught a bird
 which was small, noble, and tender.
 It was called a nightingale.
 As soon as he had taken it into his hand
 5 and planned on killing it,
 the little bird said: "Please let me go!
 You will not satisfy your hunger with me.
 I will give you three teachings,
 with which you will gain much good fortune,
 10 if you follow them closely."
 He said: "Tell me, what those might be?"
 The little bird responded:
 "Never believe that
 what is unbelievable. For what reason
 15 should one believe that
 what has never happened and also will not happen?
 The other point is, do not long after
 anything and do not lament
 in your heart about those things
 20 that are entirely lost for good
 and will not come back to you.
 Such a lament cannot be of use to anyone.
 My third advice is
 that you do not strive for things
 25 which you will never be able to secure for yourself.
 He hurts himself badly
 who does not follow this command,
 he will easily be the object of people's mockery.
 Observe closely this teaching,
 30 then you will gain much wisdom."
 The man was happy about this lesson
 and let the little bird fly away again
 up to a tree. After that
 the bird said to the man:
 35 "You have acted unwisely
 when you, fool, let me go
 and fly away, that will be your harm
 because I carry in my body

a gemstone, which is noble and large.

40 He who carries it will never lose a fight.

It also destroys all poison
and is larger than an ostrich egg
in size. You have lost it now.”

The fool would have sworn

45 that it all had been true.

He had completely forgotten the teaching
which the bird had given him.

He was so sad as if his life were at stake
and believed what was impossible.

50 He was very bent
on catching the bird again.

Then the bird said to the man:

“You will always have to stay a fool,
you have not paid attention to my advice,

55 you believed those things
which are really unbelievable:

namely, that I have a large stone
in myself. I am much too small for that.

Then, you carry worry and pain

60 in your heart

because you lost me, you fool.

Also, your heart is filled with anger

because you cannot catch me.

My path and yours do not intertwine,

65 you do not follow my teaching,
wherefore you are clearly a fool.”

A fool is often receiving a lesson,
but his heart is filled with stupidity.

He who believes what cannot be,

70 does not demonstrate great smartness.

What one cannot change without God’s help,
you ought to leave it up to God.

He who desires what he cannot get,
will face a strong blow against his greed.

75 He is not wise who longs for something
which he will never gain.

As much as there is in the world
excellent teaching, many people still continue
to believe what is not good

80 and hurts their souls.

Many still strive for goals
that they will never achieve,
as this fool has done.

The heart of that person must be filled with regret,

85 who does not want to follow the proper teaching.

But there are many such fools,
whom I do not want to identify now.

The fool then left and continued to be a moron.

Fable no. 93: Of Wolves, Shepherds, and Dogs
Of the usefulness of teachers

I have heard of a war
which no one could settle,
it was a big and hard struggle
which had already lasted for many years
5 and continues until today, as far as I know,
between the wolves and herd animals;
and it also involved the shepherds.
The wolves then collectively decided
that they wanted to have peace
10 (they all swore an oath by the willow tree
to the shepherds and the animals) on the condition
that those should hand over to them,
according to their agreement,
all the dogs that could be found on earth.
15 They had often heard being said
that the war had been caused by them.
They said: “All the war which we wage
has been brought about by the dogs.
Once the dogs will be killed,
20 then our suffering will be lifted
and we will no longer have any intention of fighting;
moreover, our friendship will be good [again].”
The shepherds were deceived thereby,
the dogs were taken to the [wolves]
25 and were killed.
Thus, the sheep faced great suffering,
and the shepherds had much trouble.
The animals were all defeated,
the cows, the pigs, the goats, the sheep.
30 When he is overcome with sleep
who is supposed to guard and keep watch,
then the enemy is doing his business well.
If, [indeed], all the dogs were killed,
the sheep would have to suffer misery.
35 The dogs’ loyalty is great,
no one is your friend without loyalty,

the dog's tongue can heal wounds,¹³⁹
with its mouth it barks at the wolves.

It watches firmly and guards well.

40 Therefore, one should not hand it over
to the wolves. See, that is my advice.

The [loyal] advisor [preacher] is characterized by the same
trustworthiness.¹⁴⁰

The advisor's tongue is good,
it heals the body, soul, and mind.

45 The dog watches out for its master.
When it is loyal, this will become evident,
when it is supposed to guard the sheep
from heretical wolves, which is its task.¹⁴¹

Who can survive without good advice?

50 How can people protect themselves

¹³⁹ Meinolf Schumacher, *Ärzte mit der Zunge: Leckende Hunde in der europäischen Literatur. Von der patristischen Exegese des Lazarus-Gleichnisses (Lk. 16) bis zum Romanzero Heinrich Heines* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2003), 7–9, 27–39. The poet refers here to the phenomenon that especially cats and dogs lick their own wounds which is said to have an antiseptic effect. Whether people in the Middle Ages had dogs lick their wounds remains rather questionable, but Bonerius here simply works with mythical ideas about dogs being the most loyal animals. Biomedical research has actually confirmed this observation; see, for instance, Nigel Benjamin, Simon Pattullo, Richard Weller, Lorna Smith, and Anthony Ormerod, “Wound Licking and Nitric Oxide,” *The Lancet* 349.9067 (June 14, 1997): 1776, online at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(05\)63002-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(05)63002-4).

¹⁴⁰ The author here refers to the Dominicans at large, being spiritual teachers and advisors.

¹⁴¹ Here Bonerius switches from the fable material to spiritual matter, identifying the good Christians with the sheep, and the heretics with the wolves. This thus makes the priests to the dogs, which is very fitting for Bonerius as a Dominican, a term allegedly meaning ‘the Lord’s dogs’ (Domini canes). When the mother of the founder of the Dominican Order, the later Dominic de Guzmán, or Dominic of Osma (1170–1221), was pregnant with him, she had a dream in which she saw a black and white dog carrying a flaming torch in its mouth and setting fire to the world. Indeed, the Dominican habit is black and white, and their central task has always been to teach, to preach, to cleanse the world of heretics, and to serve as inquisitors. William A. Hinnebusch, *The Dominicans* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1985); Gert Melville and Giles Constable, *The World of Medieval Monasticism: Its History and Forms of Life*. Cistercian Studies Series, 263 (Athens, OH: Cistercian Publications; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016); for the attributes of the Dominicans, see Willehad Paul Eckert, “Der Hund mit der Fackel und andere Attribute des hl. Dominikus,” *Symbolon* 5 (1980): 19–33.

and be safe from the wolves,
which hardly anyone can fight off?
When the dogs are handed over to the wolves
and the advisors' mouths
55 are locked, then the sheep will be lost.
God has chosen the teachers with the purpose
that they are to bark
at the heretical wolves' mouths, just as the dog
barks at the wolf and also at the thief.
60 Who teaches well is loved by God.¹⁴²

¹⁴² In a way, Bonerius gives himself a pat on the back for being one of those dogs warning his audience about the dangerous teachings of the heretics.

**Fable no. 94: Of an Individual Who was an Expert of the Black
Books
On false friendship**

We can read about a priest
that he was thoroughly learned
in the Seven Liberal Arts; and he also knew
much more, as I want to tell you.
5 He was also versed in necromancy.
Those books are black and cause much damage.
He had a good friend
and wanted to find out what his mind was made of,
and whether he could trust his friendship, that is, whether it was absolute
10 toward him and without lacking in anything.
He led him to a wide-open meadow
and said to him: “If you were being told
that you would possess, truly,
a land and a people,
15 would I then get anything from you?”
“Oh yes! You would really see
how much I would demonstrate to you my full loyalty.
You would be lord and master
of everything as God would advise me.
20 I am telling you this in all honesty.”
The master [priest] then cleverly brought it about
that his friend believed
that thirty men, well equipped,
came riding toward them on the meadow
25 and acted all in the same way
as if the friend were a rich king
and ruled over Cyprus.
Then they led him right away
with full honors toward his kingdom.
30 Once he had assumed the throne with full power,
his friend [the priest] came to see him
and said: “Sir, please remember
what you had promised me at the time
when this kingdom was unknown to you,
35 when we were good friends.
Now, do not keep any gift from me.
Let this gift be good enough

that I can recover from poverty.”

The king said: “What are you saying?

40 I have never heard anything about your friendship,
neither in good nor in bad terms.

So why did you come here.

You are not going to get any gift from me.

I do not know who you are.”

45 The master responded and said,
when he realized the king’s mind-set:

“I am the one who has given all of this to you.

Now, your life is so evil

that I will take away everything from you

50 what you have too much.

I will remove your kingdom from you,

maybe we will get together again

and can be good friends as before.”

The illusion disappeared and did not exist any longer.

55 Then the misled man found himself
back in the open field together with his friend
without royal dignity and power.

He felt great pain in his heart.

Then the master addressed him immediately

60 when he saw him being so sad.

“How then? Tell me, what troubles you?

Tell me this without fail.”

“I do not know what to say.

My heart is still filled with great amazement.

65 I was a powerful and wealthy king;

now I am back here again,

just as I was before and as I am now.

For that reason, my heart is confused.”

The master said: “My friend,

70 this is the way how the illusion of the world disappears.

The world knows no constancy.

After having given joy, it can give suffering.

After wealth it gives poverty.

You also see what fame¹⁴³ achieves:

75 public acclaim can undermine good habits.

¹⁴³ Bonerius uses the term “*ère*,” which traditionally means ‘honor,’ but it is better translated here as ‘fame.’ See Otfried Ehrismann, *Ehre und Mut, Aventure und Minne* (1995), 65–70.

It makes women and men to fools.
Power and fame make you often forget
the importance of the old friend,
as happened through the illusion of your fame,
80 when you forgot all about me.
Loyalty pleases friends;
no one ought to forget service previously rendered.
Him, who quickly forgets true loyalty,
I compare with a bird of prey.
85 Women also ought to, as I have learned,
pay attention to/guard their own loyalty.
Believe me, that's exactly the way how the world performs;
it gives high praise and pays badly,
as your kingdom did to you,
90 and for that reason I see you filled with regret.”

**Fable no. 95: Of Two Who Wanted to Gain Victory With Gifts
 On receiving gifts [bribery]**

The idea of ‘mine’ and ‘yours’ create much fighting,
as you can observe in the case of a war
about which I have read.

There was a fight between two rich men
5 who argued over some property.
The fight lasted for a long time, and both believed
that each of them was in the right.

Thus they got into heavy arguments.

Then their case was transferred
10 to him who was their lord
(who could have judged this better?)
so that neither side felt cheated.

No injustice was supposed to happen,
and both were to receive the full support of the law.

15 Once everything had been arranged,
it did not take long that one of the men
secretly went
to the lord

and brought him an ox, which was large.

20 The lord was not disappointed about this.

The man said: “My dear lord,
would you look favorably at my case?

My claim is valid, my words are honest,
the right is completely on my side.”

25 The lord said: “That will happen!

The gift will strengthen your claim.

I fully understand why you are in the right.”

The other man learned about that conversation;

upon good advice he quickly went to the court

30 and brought secretly a wonderful cow
to the lord’s wife. That’s the way how it happened.

Very submissively he said to her:

“Mercy, my noble lady!

Would you support my case?”

35 She answered: “No more words are necessary, be in good spirit,
your case will turn out well for you.”

The lady spoke to her husband,

when she had seen the great cow:

“Do me the favor, help that man
 40 so that he can win his case
 and thus regain his property; that’s my request of you.
 Do not disregard my wish!”

The lord promised this to his wife.
 As soon as he began with the court hearing,
 45 the two men arrived as well.
 Their argument was to be settled there.
 They both presented their complaint/charge.
 The judge, paying attention to his wife’s appeal,
 ruled in favor of the one who had given the cow.
 50 “Tell me, ox,” said the other man then,
 “do you not want to speak? It is the time.
 Do not keep quiet about my claim.
 Speak, my ox, I am begging you!
 Do not abandon me now under any circumstance!”
 55 The lord said: “It will not be possible
 for you ox to speak up.”

The cow had shut up the mouth
 of the ox; it stood there like a mute.
 The woman’s manipulative words and the cow
 60 won in this court case.
 The ox completely lost its claim,
 as its master realized clearly.

Receiving gifts can corrupt you,
 gifts mislead many people.
 65 To accept gifts rarely does good
 for women or men.
 Received gifts bring about
 that often the wrong triumphs over the right.
 He who undermines justice with gifts
 70 and favors injustice,
 is called a duplicitous person/hypocrite.
 Who would trust him?

A judge who wants to issue fair judgments
 does not need to receive any gifts.¹⁴⁴
 75 Neither out of love or enmity [for one side],
 neither out of fear nor friendship
 should the judge disregard
 the law; he ought to observe it well.

¹⁴⁴ Better would be: ought not to take any gifts.

When a beloved woman talks secretly,¹⁴⁵
80 and when a cow is accepted as a gift,
then the poor man can hardly win his case in court.
The cow talked, the ox kept quiet,
this was the result of the woman's advice,
which has often brought about harm.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ The verse “wâ daz küssi rûnet zuo” (79) perhaps contains a hapax legomenon, “küssi,” which normally means ‘pillow,’ but here maybe serves as a derivative of ‘kiss,’ hence referring to the beloved wife, or mistress. If the poet implied ‘pillow,’ he meant the secret talks between husband and wife at night with both resting in their bed.

¹⁴⁶ Stange reads this line differently, using the passive voice, which is not in the original: ‘so that the court decides on injustice.’

Fable no. 96: **Of a Cat Which Was Singed
On how to deal with women**

Opportunity¹⁴⁷ makes thieves, that's true.

To enjoy luxury hurts you, indeed,
 he who lives moderately, does well,
 as the following fable will tell us.

5 A burgher had in his house
 a cat which caught
 many mice; it was proud and looked splendid.
 It regularly received its food.
 Its fur looked impressive, being white and smooth.

10 The man had a neighbor
 who liked the cat very much [i.e., the cat's fur].
 His heart was filled with desire,
 so he thought hard about how he could get the cat.
 He looked greedily at the fur.

15 It was white as snow.
 He longed for the cat.
 There was nothing that would have stopped him from killing it.
 He said: "The fur must be mine!
 I will profit from it well.

20 I will get five shillings for it."
 Not long thereafter,
 the future cat thief was exposed¹⁴⁸
 and the owner was told
 that he [the thief] wanted to kill the cat

25 to get the shining fur.
 The owner said: "That must not be!
 Since the fur threatens the cat's life,
 I will arrange it so that she can live
 and that the neighbor¹⁴⁹ does not kill it.

¹⁴⁷ Stange translates "Stat" as 'a refined way of life,' maybe thinking of 'status,' but this does not make good sense because if the individual is already rich, he would not need to turn to thievery. The Swiss *Idiotikon* helps here, offering a variety of meanings, one of which is 'condition,' 'situation,' 'constitution.'
<https://digital.idiotikon.ch/idtkn/id11.htm#!page/111661/mode/1up> (last accessed on July 20, 2020).

¹⁴⁸ Obviously, the meaning is that the word got out that the neighbor intended to kill the cat for the fur.

¹⁴⁹ The text says: "gevatter," 'friend,' or 'relative,' but 'neighbor' fits best here.

30 I will apply a medical remedy.”
He went outside with a bundle of burning straw
and singed the cat so badly
that it turned red and ugly.
It had many patches on its body.
35 Thus the owner saved
his cat. He who acts the same way
will also rescue his cat.

When there is a woman who is misled by vanity
and loves to deck herself out
40 (and many women are not opposed to that at all),
then the man who wants to protect her well,
ought not to grant her all her wishes.
He ought to singe her skin/outer appearance,
so that she does not please other men too well
45 because of her ‘fur.’
Not one among them would be so constant
that, if she wants to please the world,
she would not be immediately weakened in her life.
When a wife is pleasing to her husband,
50 she will enjoy much honor.
A wife’s demeanor and female self-control
are the basis of all worthiness?
A beautiful, chaste, and well protected wife
increases a good husband’s spirit.
55 Never has there been here on earth
a better wife than the one who is of a good kind,
whose senses, body, soul, and mind
are not subject to instability.
That type of woman you do not singe:
60 the cat thief certainly will ignore her.

**Fable no. 97: Of a Child Called Papirius
 On the wisdom of children**

We can read about a child
called Papirius.

Although he was still very young, his manners were those of
a mature person.

His heart strove for wisdom.

5 In Rome he entered the city hall
together with his father. Many men
from Rome worked hard to do their best.

Now it occurred that one day
something extraordinary happened.

10 Therefore they had a council meeting behind closed doors.
They thus had agreed
that no one, neither the mighty nor the low-class members,
ought to talk about the meeting.

In the meantime, the boy's mother began to lament
15 that he had stayed away for so long.

He said: "My dear mother,
I went out with my father
and got into the city hall.

There I saw many wise men
20 who today met in a great council."

Thereupon his mother said to him:

"What have they deliberated today
for such a long time?" "Dear mother,
it cannot be that I reveal that to you,

25 or that I talk about the Romans' council openly.
It was strictly forbidden today."

When the woman heard that
the council was supposed to be a secret,
she really wanted to know what it was.

30 She could have killed the boy,
and she hit him hard. The boy responded,
when he saw how angry his mother was:

"I will tell you, what the council
has discussed in its deliberations today:

35 whether a woman can have two men
legitimately in marriage,
or whether a man can have two wives."

She called out: “By my soul and body,
it is much better that two men
40 have one woman instead of one man two women.
They would never enjoy a good day.
If I could decide that,
I would certainly fight it.”
She went to other women
45 where she did a typically female thing:
she revealed what the men had discussed in the council,
just as the boy had told her.
They all said: “We will all suffer great heart-felt pain
and war from now on,
50 if two women should be subservient
to one man.”
“Up now, my dear friends,”
one woman said to the other,
“let us go tomorrow early in the morning
55 together to the council,
and let no one stop us from doing so
to complain about this.
Let us then hear what they will tell us.”
When they had reached this decision,
60 and the council was confronted by the women,
they were surprised and wondered about the meeting.
They welcomed them well and let them in.
When they had heard what it was all about,
why the women had come to them,
65 they joyfully sent them home again
and said: “We have agreed
that one man should be content
with only one wife.”
When the women got home
70 one of the councilors said:
“Where might the women have heard
what was allegedly debated here?”
Thereupon the boy Papius said:
“Yesterday, when I got home
75 my mother wanted to know
what had been decided in the council.
I did not want to let her know that.
Then she began to hit me hard.

Therefore, I made up a lie on the spot
 80 and divulged the rumor as you have heard it
 just now from the women.”
 They all said: “Thank you very much!”
 From then on, they forbade that any child
 should be allowed to attend the council any longer,
 85 except this boy, eight years old:
 for his wisdom he was not punished.
 He who wants to have a closed-door council,
 should not trust children too much.
 Deaf people, children, and drunken men
 90 cannot keep a secret.
 Women are also of an unsteady mind,¹⁵⁰
 they do not keep a secret well.
 What one of them knows, however bad it might be,
 then two soon know it, or three.
 95 If there is something that might cause you harm,
 do not share this with women.
 What you want to keep a secret,
 do not tell it to your wife.
 But one ought to give them praise
 100 that they can keep quiet about something
 what they do not know.¹⁵¹ Unsteady
 and impatient is their mind.
 This has become quite obvious here.
 Praised be the one who can live without them.

¹⁵⁰ Meaning: they cannot be trusted.

¹⁵¹ He means this satirically, of course.

**Fable no. 98: Of a Bishop and an Archpriest
On church offices occupied by unworthy individuals**

There is a story about a certain bishop
who enjoyed great honor.

He had many learned priests under him.

His dignity was without end.

5 Now, there was a young man at his court,
a student who was smart in many things.

He was the child of [the bishop's] cousin
and the bishop liked him very much.

When his archpriest died,¹⁵²

10 the young man applied for the position.

The bishop granted him what he desired;
however, he was not worthy of it.

Not long thereafter,

a basket with good pears

15 was sent to the bishop.

He thanked the messenger well.

He was very happy about the gift.

Immediately he asked his servants:

“Whom can I trust enough

20 to keep my pears?

If only one of the pears would be lost

I would be more than just angry.”

Thereupon the young man said: “My lord,

I will guard them well just as you wish;

25 you will lose not one of them

and you will not have to get angry.”

The bishop responded to him:

“I think that you are not smart enough for that;

I will not entrust the pears to you.

30 I will charge someone else with that task.

I am afraid that if I gave them to you to keep them for me,

¹⁵² An archpriest serves in an administrative function managing a number of subordinate priests. He could also be called a dean, but he could not ordinate priests. His role was to supervise priests and prepare visits by the bishop. We could identify him as an intermediary between the priests and the upper Church administration. The most famous archpriest was the Juan Ruiz, the Spanish poet of the *Libro de buen amor* (1330/1340), another one of Bonerius's contemporaries. There were, however, no connections between them, as far as we can tell.

a countless number of them would be eaten.¹⁵³

Surely, I will not entrust the pears to you,
honestly, believe me that.”

35 A wise man heard him saying that.
Filled with concern, he looked at the bishop
and said: “May God have mercy
that you have done such a shameful thing.

You have entrusted so many souls
40 to him whom you know well
since his childhood and youth,
which will cause you forever
trouble and worries.

He, to whom you have refused to entrust
45 the pears, is supposed to be shepherd
of souls? How can then the sheep
survive when the wolf becomes the shepherd?”

Will he not get lost on the road
who is supposed to be guided by a blind man?
When both fall down, so be it.

The sheep will get immediately lost,
as soon as a child is appointed as the shepherd.
How can one teach another person¹⁵⁴
who cannot learn himself?

55 How can he feed the sheep
who himself can never get enough to eat
and lives in constant greed?

Those would be qualified to shear the sheep
who would likewise happily feed them,
60 and who would know how to shear them.
The sheep would thus fare much better.
Now, however, the people’s cunning is aimed only
at shearing the sheep.

Whether the souls might get lost [in that process]
65 does not matter to them at all.

They do not care what will happen with the souls.
The wise bishop entrusted
countless souls to the young man

¹⁵³ Stange translates “gezzen ungezalt” as ‘carelessly eaten,’ which might be implied here, but the text only says, ‘countless.’

¹⁵⁴ Stange uses the question word ‘why,’ but the text says clearly: ‘how,’ in the sense, ‘how would it be possible.’

and yet did not want to entrust him
70 the pears. It happens often
that when one whose task is to guard the souls,
people are not so sure about
whether he is guarded himself.
He who acts like that will receive
75 his reward which God is ready to grant.
May God grant us eternal life.

Fable no. 99: **Of a Foolish Schoolteacher
On natural foolishness**

There is a story about a knight
 who enjoyed great honor,
 wealth, and dignity.

He had sent his son to school

5 but it became clear that he was hardly capable
 of understanding the Holy Scripture
 and other religious texts.

The knight did not want to abandon his plan.

He very much would have liked

10 to see him [his son] become a priest. That was in his mind.

He sent him to school in Paris;

he was supposed to gain much knowledge.

The son spent a lot of money there,

but he did not study the books very much.

15 He found many friends there

who pursued the games of fools.

While he lived in Paris for a long time,

he gained very little knowledge.

The cost for his food and lodging was enormous,

20 which greatly angered his father.

When he returned home

and was assumed to have acquired a solid education,

his father was very happy to welcome him.

He prepared a great festive meal.

25 He invited all of his friends,

women, men, poor and rich.

When they all came together,

they looked at this priest.¹⁵⁵

His demeanor was smart,

30 he behaved in the way of all priests.

Suddenly he looked at the door in the room,

which had a hole drilled into it.

A cow tail was hanging in it.

Thereupon the highly educated priest said:

35 “In my heart, I am very puzzled,

how did the cow get through that hole,

and how did the tail get stuck

¹⁵⁵ Meaning: at this young scholar, or cleric.

in the door.” Then, right away,
 he left the company of people
 40 and went outside of his father’s house.
 There he gazed intently into the sky.
 At that moment, the moon wonderfully rose.
 The young man earnestly looked around.
 All of his friends were excited
 45 because they firmly believed
 that he had studied astronomy
 and that he was a master of great arts.¹⁵⁶
 But there was neither intelligence nor wit in him.
 Once he had studied the moon
 50 he went right away back into the house and said:
 “There is one thing that puzzles me mightily
 and about which I have thought much.
 I wonder why the moon looks just like the one
 which I have seen in the city
 55 of Paris. That’s really strange.
 They look just the same.
 Only a wise man would be able
 to distinguish them.”
 When the knight heard this,
 60 he said to his friends:
 “For good reasons I feel furious!
 The costs and the efforts have been lost
 with my son, as I can clearly see,
 because he is completely filled with idiocy.”
 65 The father and his friends
 had to accept that he was a fool.
 He who is an ignoramus by nature
 and has less smarts than a cow
 can never be made intelligent
 70 by the school in Paris.
 If he is an ass and a fool,
 he will stay the same in Paris.
 When nature has made a mistake

¹⁵⁶ Meaning: they expected that he would reveal a secret to them which he would have learned from the constellations or the position of the moon. Astronomy was one of the four study subjects of the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music), which followed after students had finished with their *trivium* (grammar, logic, and rhetoric).

what can then the wisdom of the clerics achieve in teaching?

75 What good does it do when someone attends a school
and consumes much money without any profit?

Even if he listens to the lectures of wise professors,
he will always remain a fool.

He might acquire valuable books,

80 but he will never become a good priest.

At home he is a boor, and a fool at school.

Those people are foolish in their deeds and
dumb in their words. And no priest/teacher
will be able to achieve anything with teaching.

**Fable no. 100: Of a King and a Barber
On considering the end**

Once, there was a market-day in a city.
 The city enjoyed a high level of freedom.
 Whether women or men,
 whoever wanted to go to the market
 5 enjoyed seven days of peace.
 Now listen to what I am going to tell you.
 That market was well protected.
 Many valuable goods were offered there.
 Whatever anyone wanted to buy,
 10 he could get it there immediately.
 A high-ranking priest, well educated,
 came to that market and acted
 just as if he were a merchant.
 He said: “Whoever wants to live well,
 15 should buy what brings him good fortune
 from me. I am offering great wisdom.”¹⁵⁷
 The king heard about this.
 He quickly sent his servants there,
 they were not to delay,
 20 and should ride there immediately.
 They should buy this wisdom for him.
 He said that he would not mind
 to pay whatever would be the price.
 The servants understood that fully.
 25 They took many silver coins,
 and when they got to that master,
 one of them said: “We have been sent here,
 Sir, the king has requested from you
 that you take this money
 30 and give him in return wisdom.”
 He took the silver and sat down.
 He wrote down a sentence and sent it
 to the king via the messengers.
 The sentence was translated from Latin to German
 35 and said: ‘You ought to keep in mind
 the end of your deeds and remember

¹⁵⁷ It is very conceivable that Bonerius indirectly refers to himself in this fable, since he himself addressed the public in his sermons and also in these fables.

what will happen with yourself in the future.
 Strive to understand/accept this wisdom.¹⁵⁸
 [He said:] “Take this advice to the king
 40 on my behalf.” They thought that this was a joke.
 They all would have sworn
 that all that money was just wasted
 which had been paid for the wisdom.
 But the king preserved [as you will see later] his life well with it.
 45 The purchase pleased him.
 The advice was full with meaning.
 He ordered that it be written on his door
 with golden letters. He who arrived there
 would thus be able to read it well.
 50 The king would have otherwise died
 sometime later, as I am going to tell you.
 He had many hidden enemies
 who all wanted to kill him,
 but only secretly so that they would not get
 55 into trouble for their misdeed.
 They all decided to assassinate him
 (they had very little loyalty toward him).
 They all agreed
 to give much money
 60 to a barber who was supposed to take
 the king’s life when he was to shave him.
 They wanted to give him a big payment for this
 as soon as he would have done it.
 Then, the barber wanted to go to the king
 65 in the palace
 and was prepared to carry out this deed
 for which he was to be paid.¹⁵⁹
 He became greatly frightened
 when he read the inscription
 70 which was written on the door:
 ‘Consider the outcome of your deeds

¹⁵⁸ Here, Bonerius reflects on his own writing of these fables, most of which he had translated from Latin (Avian and Romulus) into German. See my Introduction.

¹⁵⁹ There is a slight contradiction here. Just before, the text confirms that they would pay him after he would have killed the king, and here it says that he had already received his money. Stange quietly corrects Bonerius’s error, and I follow him in this regard.

and what might then happen to you.’

He began to tremble uncontrollably
and became white in his face like death.

75 The king was terrified when he saw him
turning so pale. He immediately said to him:
“Tell me now, what worries you,
or you will suffer your death.”

The king had him apprehended

80 and had his hands tied. The servants beat him too,
until he revealed truly everything
about the assassination which he had planned to commit
but about which the inscription had warned him,
which was written on the door.

85 Thus the king preserved his life.
His enemies had to escape,
which was just right.

The written advice thus had been very useful.

 He who can consider the outcome
90 of his actions is a wise person.
He who wants to keep the end in mind,
will not regret earlier deeds.

The end is the crown, not the struggle itself.

A good outcome carries a good name.

95 This good ending can certainly chase away
the sin, if you consider this correctly.

A good outcome makes everything good.

The good end never causes harm.

The ship’s pilot stands at the stern

100 and guides the ship so that it sails well.

He who keeps the end in mind,
will rarely suffer sorrow.

Epilogue

The conclusion of this book

He who wants to understand the message,¹⁶⁰
 [better] focus on the end of one's life.
 The profit comes through at the end
 of the fable, if you know how to understand it.
 5 The meaning of the fable is not
 what you only read or hear.
 Therefore, one ought to read the fable thoroughly
 in order to grow in wisdom.
 I have included one hundred fables
 10 in this book, which are not formulated
 in sophisticated words.
 All my language is simple,
 and direct without any jargon.
 But the words contain a treasure of deep wisdom.
 15 A thin peel covers it,
 and the kernel consists of great sweetness.
 A small garden often yields
 the fruit from which you will gain solace.
 Straight words and straight verses,
 20 that's what the world now does not appreciate.
 He whose words are artificially woven,
 has now [certainly] fought well.¹⁶¹
 He who cannot make use of straight words,
 will not get any use from crooked words either.
 25 Many offer sermons with convoluted advice,
 but they themselves do not understand what they are saying.
 He who knows how to wield the sword well
 profits from it. But many people carry
 a spear, knife, or a sword
 30 which is of little use
 in their hands. – This book,
 as it is written, now comes to an end.

¹⁶⁰ He says "bîschafft" = fable, but really means the lesson contained in his text/s.

¹⁶¹ He means this, of course, satirically.

He who reads it or listens to those who read it to him,¹⁶²
will always be blessed.

35 And he for whom it has been composed out of love,¹⁶³
will be free forever
from all kinds of misfortune.

His soul will never experience woes.

He is called [Johann] von Ringgenberg.

40 May he be known to God forever!

And he who translated it from Latin
into German,¹⁶⁴ ought to be remembered
for the rest of time in best terms,
in heaven and here on earth.

45 He is called [Ulrich] Bonerius.

Let us all beg God:

“Lord, protect us from the flames in hell
and help us to protect ourselves from

¹⁶² Bonerius reflects already a changing situation in the world of education. Increasingly, people in the late Middle Ages gained a certain level of literacy; especially in cities, more and more people went to school and gained a basic education. In the middle of the fourteenth century, when the real paradigm shift in terms of schooling had not yet fully occurred, the public continued to consist of some who were illiterate (majority), and some (minority) who could read and write. For the early and high Middle Ages, see Manfred G. Scholz, *Hören und Lesen: Studien zur primären Rezeption der Literatur im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1980); D. H. Green, *Medieval Listening and Reading: The Primary Reception of German Literature 800–1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For the late Middle Ages, see Ingeborg Spriewald, *Literatur zwischen Hören und Lesen: Wandel von Funktion und Rezeption im späten Mittelalter: Fallstudien zu Beheim, Folz und Sachs* (Berlin and Weimar, Aufbau-Verlag, 1990). See also Horst Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen, Schrift und Bild: Kultur und Gedächtnis im Mittelalter*. C. H. Beck Kulturwissenschaft (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1995).

¹⁶³ He means his patron who supported him in his effort to write these fables, providing him probably with money, writing material, sources, etc. The term “liebe” really means ‘gratitude,’ ‘thankfulness,’ ‘respect,’ but not at all ‘love’ in the erotic sense of the word.

¹⁶⁴ See the Introduction for more information on the fable tradition and how Bonerius fits into it. Stange, in the detailed commentary to his German translation, also provides extensive data and information.

50 the false advice given by our body,
and from the actions in the world
and from the devil's seeds.”
My children, let us all say ‘Amen’!

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INDEX

This index contains references to the animals, birds, snakes, plants, names, objects, values, ideals, events, seasons of the year, people, sickness, the legal system, freedom, markets, men, women, old, young, poor and rich people, behavior, foodstuff, and political and criminal activities as mentioned in the fables. All references pertain to the number of the respective fable where the topic, animal, theme, or motif appears. I have not considered the Introduction for this index.

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