PROBLEMS IN THE DESCRIPTION OF MIDDLE HIGH GERMAN

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'Die mittelhochdeutsche Periode der deutschen Sprachgeschichte stellt der Forschung zwei grundlegende Fragen, die bis heute eine allseitig befriedigende Lösung nicht gefunden haben: 1. Die Frage nach dem Bestehen einer '*mittelhochdeutschen Schriftsprache*', 2. das Problem der Entstehung und ersten Entwicklung der 'neuhochdeutschen Schriftsprache' ".[1] The first of these questions has challenged Middle High German scholars since Lachmann's day. Lachmann believed "dass die Dichter des 13. Jhs. bis auf wenig mundartliche Einzelheiten, ein bestimmtes unwandelbares Hochdeutsch redeten, während ungebildete Schreiber sich andere Formen der gemeinen Sprache, teils ältere, teils verderbte, erlaubten".[2] This statement of opinion proved acceptable only to Lachmann's immediate disciples. Later research has shown that the language of the Classical period admittedly did override regional dialects but never achieved complete uniformity.

The striving towards a unified *Dichtersprache* can be proved by a number of factors. Firstly, it is reasonable to assume that poets, travelling from court to court, from one dialectical region to another, would-for utilitarian purposes if for no other reason - attempt to develop and maintain a standard language which would be accepted and understood everywhere. Secondly, there are specific comments made by the poets themselves which indicate an attempt made in the direction of standardization, e.g. the remarks of Ebernand von Erfurt:

> ich bin ein Durenc von art geborn,
> het ich die sprâche nû verkorn,
> unt hete mîne zungen
> an ander art getwungen,
> warzuo were mir daz guot?
> ich wene er effenliche tuot,
> der sich der sprâche zucket an,
> der er niht gefuogen kan.

Thirdly, there is a great deal of evidence in Classical Middle High German poetry which shows that the poets carefully avoided those linguistic forms which were peculiar to their own local dialect. Walther von der Vogelweide, for example, who came from the Bavarian area, rhymed *mîn* and *dîn* with *Constantîn* (10,29), despite the fact that in his own local dialect the pronunciation was already *mein* and *dein*. Admittedly Walther occasionally made a slip, for example in rhyming *verworren* with *pharren* (34, 18-19), and Hartmann von Aue likewise carelessly rhymed *laschte* with *glaste (Êrec*, 1780-1781). The rarity of such slips in Classical literature reveals the pains taken by the poets to conform to a standard which presented all of them with

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[1] H.Paul/W.Mitzka, *Mittelhochdeutsche Grammatik*, Tübingen, 1960, p.32.

[2] K.Lachmann, *Auswahl aus den Hochdeutschen Dichtern des 13. Jahrhunderts*, 1820, p.VIII.

certain difficulties. No Classical poet from the Bavarian area used, in his poetry, the Second Person plural pronouns Nom. *ez*, Acc. Dat. *enc*, Gen. *enker*, which he employed in his native dialect. It is possible to prove that these regional forms did exist in the Classical period, but they were not used in literature. They appear for the first time in the writings of the Austrian Enikel (about 1280).

Any worthwhile conclusions that can be reached concerning the nature of Middle High German must be based, in the last analysis, on evidence in manuscripts. There are thousands (literally) of extant manuscripts, many of which have not as yet been edited (or properly investigated by scholars), and have therefore contributed nothing, or little, to our knowledge of the Classical language. There are, for example, more than 80 extant manuscripts, and manuscript fragments, of the *Weltchronik* of Rudolf von Ems, a poem of 33.472 lines written about 1251. But the only Edition available to scholars is that of Ehrismann,[3] who made little use of the bulk of the manuscripts.[4] Much the same criticism is applicable to Junk's Edition of *Willehalm von Orlens*,[5] a poem of 15,689 lines written about 1237 and available in 32 manuscripts. Rudolf's *Barlaam und Josaphat*, a poem of 16,244 lines written about 1227, and extant in over 20 manuscripts and fragments, is available only in the inadequate and archaic Editions of Köpke (1818) and Pfeiffer (1843). And Rudolf is only one of a number of important poets whose works have not as yet been satisfactorily edited. The manuscripts concerned undoubtedly contain information of crucial importance for our knowledge of Middle High German vocabulary, grammar, syntax and pronunciation.

Textual criticism in the field of Middle High German has a long, rich and complicated history, and a variety of seemingly contradictory methods have been employed. The first Editor, in the modern sense of the term, was Karl Lachmann (1793-1851). Lachmann and his pupils followed an extreme policy of "normalization", i.e. they consulted (or attempted to consult) all available manuscripts, chose

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3. *Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters, Vol.20*, 1915.

4. See, for example, Strauch, *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* (1916), 1448–54; Behaghel, *Literaturblatt für germanische und romanische Philologie* (1917), 152 ff., *Literarisches Centralblatt* (1916), 108 ff.; Hofmeister, *Mitt. aus der hist. Lit.*, 47, 79–83. Concerning the Wildung manuscript discovered in 1933, see H.Noll, "Die Wildunger Handschrift der Weltchronik des Rudolf von Ems", *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, hg. von H.Paul, W.Braune und E.Sievers, 58, 445 ff. Concerning the Freiburg fragment, see K.J.Heinrich, "Ein Fragment der Weltchronik des Rudolf von Ems aus der Universitätsbibliothek Freiburg", same Journal, 58, 454 ff.

5. *Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters*, Vol.2,1905. See Panzer, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 43, 476–479; Zeidler, *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* (1906), 3140 ff., *Literarisches Centralblatt*, 57, 144 ff. Cf. also C. von Kraus's criticism of Junk's Edition of Rudolf's *Alexander*: "Text und Entstehung von Rudolfs Alexander", *Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu München. Philos.-philol. und hist. Klasse, 1940*.

those readings they considered best, and altered the spelling, grammar, syntax and metre in all cases where these differed from the "norm" that they themselves had set up. But they were handicapped by the fact that they were pioneers, and a large proportion of their phonological, grammatical, metrical and other "rules" have been proved wrong by subsequent research.

The first major revolt against the techniques of Lachmann and his followers came at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1904 Roethe established a fundamentally new method in the *Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters* (DTM). The principle followed in these texts is basically simple. It involves, firstly, a decision on the Editor's part as to which is the best manuscript available. The Editor then publishes the text of this manuscript, as far as possible without alteration, and supplies (or should supply) in his critical apparatus all important variants in the other manuscripts.

The methods employed in the DTM are open to certain justifiable criticisms. Extant manuscripts are, in general, copies of earlier manuscripts, made usually by scribes speaking a dialect different from that of the original poet. The necessity to choose one manuscript only as the "best" can place an obligation upon the Editor to set aside a whole series of "second bests" which could possibly, in part at least, be closer to the original than the Editor's chosen manuscript. Admittedly the reader has, in theory, a complete list of variants in the critical apparatus. But for reasons of space it is usually impossible to provide all important (or possibly important) variant readings.

For most works of Middle High German literature the best editorial technique is based, in effect, on a compromise between the two extremes shown by Lachmann and Roethe. Friedrich Ranke's Edition of *Tristan und Isold* is in many respects an example of such a compromise. In forming the text, the Editor will take fully into account every scrap of evidence from every available manuscript of the work. One of several basic matters to be decided by the Editor is the extent to which he will attempt a reproduction of the poet's own dialect. The Middle High German poets admittedly avoided, in poetry, the use of their local dialect. But they all did use at least some dialectical forms: they strove towards a standard language, as we have seen, but they did not quite achieve it. Fortunately much research has been devoted to the language of the most important poets, but it is still not generally realized how much yet remains to be done.

Basic reference works available to the Editor are in most cases quite inadequate. There is, in particular, no good Middle High German dictionary. An elementary student of Middle High German is tolerably well served today by the *Handwörterbuch* of Matthias Lexer of 1878 and the revised *Taschenwörterbuch* of 1959. On the other hand, the *Handwörterbuch* is quite archaic. It is peppered with misspellings, wrong constructions and wrong meanings, and even contains words which probably never existed. The *Taschenwörterbuch* is, despite its seeming revision, still based primarily on the information contained in the *Handwörterbuch*, and is therefore of only very limited value to the scholar. Various attempts are being made at the present time to prepare a new and up-to-date Middle High German dictionary. This project cannot however be satisfactorily completed until the compilers have at their disposal up-to-

date editions of all Classical Middle High German works, and if possible good word-indexes to them. [6]

The damage that faulty critical editions can inflict upon dictionaries and grammars is seen clearly in the case of *Der guote Gerhart*, Rudolf's earliest and best poem. Lexer's *Handwörterbuch* and *Taschenwörterbuch* both contain a number of words whose existence, meaning, use and spelling have been arrived at on the basis of Moriz Haupt's Edition (1840) of *Der guote Gerhart*. Most Middle High German grammars, including that of Paul / Mitzka, contain likewise some conclusions reached, in the last analysis, on the basis of readings in this poem.

Haupt created the text of his Edition without having seen the manuscripts upon which his work was based. He was forced by circumstances to use copies of the manuscripts, made by hand by colleagues in Vienna. These copies contained an extremely large number of errors, which seriously damaged Haupt's text and critical apparatus (Approximately a quarter of the readings in the apparatus are incorrect.) In addition, Haupt followed Lachmann's principles of editing. He "normalized" to a degree which is, by modern standards, unacceptable.

The effect of Haupt's critical edition can be judged by an examination of Lexer's dictionary. The *Handwörterbuch* lists, for example, the word *gewaltesære* and gives as one of its meanings *ein chor der engel*. The source given for this meaning is Haupt's Edition. The word occurs once in the poem, i.e. in line 347. The readings in Manuscript A and Manuscript B are however as follows:

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6. There are in existence a handful of word-indexes, mostly mimeographed, and there is an urgent need for more. However the preparation of such indexes is a lengthy process, entailing the transcription on cards of all words in the given text, and their subsequent arrangement in (a) alphabetical order, and (b) order of line-numbers. Word-indexes published to date include: R.M.S. Heffner and W.P. Lehmann, *A Word-Index to the Poems of Walther von der Vogelweide*, Wisconsin, 1950; E.J. Morrall, *Heinrich von Morungen: Complete Word-Index*, Durham, 1956; M.E. Valk, *Word-Index to Gottfried's Tristan*, Wisconsin, 1958; R.M.S. Heffner, *Collected Indexes to the Works of Wolfram von Eschenbach*, Wisconsin, 1961. A word-index to *Der guote Gerhart* is available at the Department of German, Auckland. The indexes available vary greatly in quality. Valk's index, for example, (which, he tells us in the Preface, is the result of nearly 20 years' labour) contains a large number of errors: wrong spellings, e.g. *harte*, 6013 instead of *horter*, 6013; *brüsten*, 14160 instead of *brusten*, 14160; *lob*, 15619 instead of *lobes*, 15619; and, in particular, many cases where homonyms are wrongly listed under the same heading, e.g. *hort*, 4911, 6221, 16540. The list of so-called "misprints" and "spelling inconsistencies" in the Preface shows also that Valk did not properly understand Ranke's methods of editing. The only "inconsistencies" to which he is entitled to draw our attention are outright misprints, such as 1196, *ihr* instead of 1196, *ir*; 7516, *suozc* instead of 7516, *suoze*; 17632, *versterlin* instead of 17632, *vensterlin*. Inconsistencies in language do not necessarily indicate mistakes.

A : *Der gewalte stete macht*

B : *Der gewallt stere macht.*

The line should read: *der gewalte stæte maht*, which follows exactly Manuscript A (apart from two minor orthographical adjustments), and not, as in Haupt's Edition: *der gewaltesære maht*. The poem contains no evidence, in my opinion, that the word *gewaltesære* existed.[7] A further example is the word *unlonbære*, for which Lexer lists *Der guote Gerhart*, line 1074. Admittedly Manuscript B does contain this form : *vnlonbäre*, but there are indications that it is corrupt. Manuscript A, which is earlier (about 1325) than B (about 1475), and much more reliable, gives *vnlobewære*. Haupt does not attempt to justify his rejection of the latter form. Haupt's Edition has also led Lexer into morphological errors. Under *furrieren* (to give one simple example only), Lexer quotes *Der guote Gerhart*, line 784: *der mantel was furrieret*. The past participle is however *gefurrieret* (Manuscript A) and Manuscript B gives only a corrupt form, *gefuettert*. *gefurrieret* occurs likewise in line 3574 in A.

The Grammar of Paul / Mitzka likewise contains errors arising from Haupt's Edition, e.g. the following comment: "Die einsilbige Form in der 1. 3. Sg. Ind. Prät. erscheint auch bei Dichtern, die sonst das *e* nicht abwerfen, z.B. bei Rudolf von Ems".[8] There is however no morphological aspect of *Der guote Gerhart* which has been more distorted than the poet's apocope of *e*. In many hundreds of cases Haupt inserted an *e* where it was absent from both manuscripts, and where its absence was in keeping with what we now know of Rudolf's language. He also did not hesitate to elide an *e*, present in both manuscripts, if its presence was not justified by his and Lachmann's principles. Such insertions and deletions on Haupt's part have resulted not only in wrong assumptions concerning Middle High German morphology, but also in a distortion of Rudolf's metre.[9]

The text of *Der guote Gerhart* is not unique in presenting problems to the student of Middle High German language and literature. Rudolf's other, less well-known poems present questions equally challenging. And Rudolf is only one of a number of Classical poets whose works contain unsolved problems. A complete and scholarly description of Middle High German, including the creation of up-to-date dictionaries and grammars, will only become possible when all extant manuscripts have been carefully edited.

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7. The word occurs once, in a quite different sense, in Ranke's Edition of *Tristan* (line 11027).

8. Paul/Mitzka, *op.cit.*, p.167.

9. See Rudolf von Ems, *Der guote Gerhart*. Herausgegeben von John Asher. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, Nr.56. Max Niemeyer Verlag. Tübingen 1962.