

Disgrace in Diu Crone

Article

Published Version

Martin, A. G. (1984) *Disgrace in Diu Crone*. Reading Medieval Studies, X. pp. 79-90. ISSN 0950-3129 Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/85097/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

Publisher: University of Reading

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

Disgrace in *Diu Crône*¹

Diu Crône of Heinrich von dem Türlin is a work almost as intriguing as it is repellent. It is tasteless, repetitive and unwieldy, but at the same time it can be vivid and funny. It also presents the reader with a variety of puzzles. One which has been noted and discussed by several critics is its striking duality of tone, which makes it difficult to be sure what kind of poem it is intended to be. At times Heinrich produces passages of such overt burlesque, and in which the court appears in such a dubious light, that we can scarcely read the poem as straight Arthurian romance. Yet formally it bears most of the hallmarks of the romance genre: in its subject matter, its verse form, its vocabulary, and to a degree also in its structure. There are passages in the poem which it is very difficult to read as critical or satirical, since they appear to exalt the ideal knight and his traditional virtues. Such passages may be interpreted in a variety of ways. Do the more burlesque passages subvert the more conventional ones and force us to read them critically? Is Heinrich's characteristic extravagance of expression intended to deflate the value of his positive formulations? Lewis Jillings has suggested that the author is operating on two levels, so that his work can be read either as a Gawain romance or as an attack on the whole traditional model of knighthood.² Or perhaps Heinrich is simply incapable of reconciling the diverse sources on which he has drawn, ranging from *Parzival* to French fabliaux.³ For part of the difficulty is the fact that so much of Heinrich's poem is gloss on previous Arthurian literature, an exercise in literary response.⁴

In studying the poem with these puzzles in mind, I found my attention drawn to Heinrich's idiosyncratic use of one particular word: *schande*, 'disgrace'. This recommended itself as a clue to Heinrich's narrative intentions both because it is an important part of the vocabulary of values in many Arthurian romances and because Heinrich is notably fond of it. The word occurs 106 times in about 30,000 lines: by comparison, it is found 17 times in *Lanzelet* (9,000 lines) and thirteen in *Wigalois* (13,000 lines). In fact, proportionally Heinrich uses *schande*, with its derivatives and compounds, more frequently than any other author of Arthurian romance in the thirteenth century. It is an important factor in his portrayal of the dominant figures in the poem, Arthur and Guinevere, Kay and Gawain. And some of Heinrich's uses of the term show a marked deviation from the norm of romance vocabulary. Defining the nature and extent of the difference should shed some light on Heinrich's narrative strategy.

In order to do so, it is necessary to have a clear idea of how disgrace is generally treated in the German Arthurian romance. I have catalogued all occurrences of the terms *schande* and *schan* in thirteenth-century

German Arthurian poems, and here present an extremely abbreviated summary of relevant findings.⁵

The meaning of the word schande is both 'public proclamation of dishonor', and also 'the state of someone whose dishonor has been or deserves to be so proclaimed'.⁶ Thus it is usually, but not always, a matter of public record. In these poems schande is essentially objective. It is something that happens to you. It can be given and received; there is rarely any argument about whether a given action, state or utterance constitutes schande or not; giver and recipient agree on the criteria. Prominent sources of disgrace include defeat in battle, cowardice, treachery, lack of generosity, bad manners, ignorance, poverty, and lowly birth. There is no necessary association between disgrace and guilt, and the disgraced individual is often the object of sympathy, as in the reactions of Arthur's court to the condemnation of Iwein or Parzival.

As subject of a sentence, schande occurs only in impersonal construction in combination with verbs such as geschehen (e.g. Erec 115 f., 'mir ensi vor iu geschehen / eine schande also groz') and berait sin (e.g. Erec 4099 f., 'dem sol ere abe gan / unde schande sin bereit'). It is the object of such verbs as gerechen, erlân, vervân, vorhten, and erwerben. It is not personified. (These examples are drawn from Erec, but apart from Crône other Arthurian poems of the thirteenth century follow the same pattern.)

There is, however, a particular type of scene which introduces a variation on the standard infliction of disgrace. This is the 'testing object' episode, represented in Middle High German by scenes in Lanzelet, the Mantel fragment, Jûngerer Titurel, and - most abundantly - Diu Crône. Parallels in Old French are provided not by Chrétien but by lais such as Lai du Cor and Lai du Cort Mantel.⁷ Characteristically, in such scenes someone hostile to the court sends an object which reveals the disgrace of those who come into contact with it. The women of the court are afflicted with scham for shortcomings in the realm of minne, while the men suffer schande for more generalised failings (as in courage or good manners). The hero and his lady, perhaps also Arthur, emerge unstained. Kay is the spokesman, and he delights in detailing the lapses which lead to public downfall. The faults revealed here are never unintentional flaws like ignorance or poverty, and the disgraced person receives correspondingly little sympathy.

With this in mind, let us turn to Heinrich's poem to see how he uses the term.⁸ It does not occur at all in the general prologue, which is made up of aphorisms on kunst, sin and rede. When Heinrich turns to his ostensible subject, the life history of Arthur, he stresses two things: his hero's freedom from all traces of disgrace, and his good fortune. Vrouwe Saelde is his

protector (412) and his advisor (448). The significance of fortune and of the goddess vrowe Fortune has been clearly recognised by recent critics; as we shall see, it is not irrelevant for Heinrich's treatment of schande.⁹ Arthur's honour is lauded to the skies, particularly his generosity; his birth in the bountiful month of May signifies milte, and ensures 'Daz er, âne der werlde schanden, / le minre wûrde gemeilet' (264f.). Again, he is contrasted with those who are not sorry to see the back of their guests, 'An den diu schande sô gesiget, / Daz ez sie cleine bewiget' (455f.).

We already note some special features in Heinrich's treatment of disgrace; he combines it with an active verb, gesigen, and pictures it metaphorically as a blot or stain. Arthur is preserved from its taint by his tugent and his saelde - and it is not at all clear whether he owes his tugent to the gift of Dame Fortune or owes fortune's favour to his virtue.

The episode which follows the introduction of the court is one of the two main Testing Object scenes in the poem; the other, which parallels this in many respects, occurs near the end. There is an abrupt reversal of the expectations created by the prologue. Arthur has been set up as a paragon of virtue, and his knights have won their places at court 'mit tugent-rîcher tât / Âne schanden meil' (630ff.); now they and their ladies are to be exposed to massive disgrace and humiliation. Only Arthur himself emerges unscathed, and this fact is so remarkable that it causes silence to fall over the whole court. The ladies, in whose service Heinrich avowedly writes, come off worst of all.

The episode is precipitated by the approach of a dwarf who challenges Arthur to accept the testing cup in order to preserve his reputation. Arthur feels obliged to acquiesce, 'Daz in an werlt êren / Dehein site mohte verkêren, / Dâ von sîn liumet valschaft / Schine von der schanden kraft' (1046ff.). It is a form of blackmail to which Arthur's court is traditionally vulnerable; he yields to similar arguments in lwein, and is criticised for so doing in Jûngerer Titurel.

In the debacle which follows, Kay is the spokesman and sets the tone. His role in Diu Crône is greater than in parallel scenes in other poems: he has more to say, his accusations are more extreme, and his humiliation is the very embodiment of schande; after each knight fails in the test, 'Keiŕ daz verkêret / Zuo schanden unde zuo spot' (2287f.). In a lengthy condemnatory speech, Arthur calls him the companion of Schanden hort und êren vlust (1744). And when he fails at the cup test, to everyone else's delight, Heinrich tells us (2539ff.):

Diu Tugent an der Schande rach,
Swaz si ir ie tet ze leide,
Als ich iuch bescheide,
An ir ingesinde.

Here Tugent and Schande are rhetorically pictured as opponents, with Kay as a member of Schande's household. Like Frau Saelde or Frau Minne, schande is a powerful and active mistress. The implication is that schande, here represented by Kay, is unfairly attacking the virtuous. This is not consistent with the actual accusations which Kay makes, because no one challenges their truth. But Kay's obvious malice, as well as the king's condemnation of him and his ultimate disgrace, makes us perceive the other members of the court as victims.

It is also true that Kay's words are presented as jests, and are received as such to the accompaniment of covert laughter, thus leaving open the possibility of exaggeration or falsification. He mocks even Arthur, who has behaved with propriety and passed the test. His schimpf and spot are relished by his auditors. If we look ahead to a later scene, we find Arthur teasing one of his knights, Aumagwin, about his failure in a joust. Aumagwin is indignant, but Arthur instructs him (5297ff.):

Swaz ich iu rede mite,
Daz ist in schimpfe getân,
Des ensült irs niht vûr ûbel hân.

Evidently, because his words are spoken in jest, they do not count as a serious affront to Aumagwin's honour.

When Kay himself fails the test, in spite of the appropriateness of his disgrace Heinrich attributes it to ill fortune (2564ff.):

Alsô wart er geschendet
Daz er dar an ernendet
Und sîn ie begunde,
Wan von unheiles gunde
Moht er sîn niht bringen ...

And Kay himself, speaking of his chances of success in a single combat with the dwarf, links disgrace to the turn of Fortune's wheel: 'Lige ich unden, er swebe obe / An der Saelekeite rade; / Wan swâ ich mich überlade / Mit schanden, daz ist min schade' (2776ff.).

The actively malevolent nature of schande is most evident in the treatment of Gawain's failure at the cup test. Gawain is the true hero of the poem and Kay's polar opposite. Several times on his subsequent journeys he will prove himself to be free of all disgrace (as when he sleeps in a testing bed or reaches a testing island), but on this one occasion Arthur is the one to be exalted, and therefore Gawain must fail.

The cause of his downfall is presented as a tiny flaw; he once spoke ill of a lady in jest ('Daz doch in schimpfe geschach', 2002). Again schimpf appears as a mitigating factor. The author represents it as grossly unfair that Gawain should suffer disgrace for such a minor infringement: 'Dar an was reht wilde' (2047). The personification of schande is strongly marked in this passage. First Heinrich points out that 'Diu Schande vrönes weges gert' (2017); disgrace actively seeks unmerited mastery. When Gawain suffers disgrace, 'Dô wachet Schande und slief daz Heil' (2030). The opposition of schande to heil rather than the more usual êre or tugent suggests an identification between schande and unheil. The characterisation continues: 'Wie möht diu schande gewinnen / Dehein sô vestez obetach, / Sie waere ie doch inne swach' (2062ff.). Here schande takes on some of the characteristics of the Frau Welt personification.

The emphasis on unheil and unreht in this portion of the testing scene has the effect of exonerating Gawain of guilt. In contrast to Kay, who richly deserves the humiliation he suffers, Gawain is largely an innocent victim. Thus Heinrich dissociates him from the culpability of the court as a whole.

Guinevere is another who just barely fails the test – the wine she spills is scarcely visible. Furthermore, her shaming is brought about Von ungelückes lôz (1280), again implying a mitigation of responsibility. The same has already been said of the Queen of Lanphuht, who drank first; her failure is called dirre ungelückes krac (1233). The actual nature of the ladies' trespasses against love remains vague, and seems less important to the poet than the portrayal of their discomfiture.

The examples listed above are not the only ones in this episode in which schande occurs personified or with an active verb; we find also von der schanden kraft (1049), Den, die schande merket (1716), slâfet schande dô von (2252), schanden gwîn (2454), and muoz diu schande vürder schaben (2491). Disgrace is repeatedly brought before us as a force hostile to man, just as Saelde is a beneficent one. This use exists side by side with the more conventional meaning of schande as the state of one who has been publicly found wanting in a quality which society admires.

In this part of the poem Arthur himself has appeared in a good light, untouched by *schande* except as a motivation for accepting the test, though he has no defence against Kay's mockery. In the immediately-following episode, however, he is at the centre of a situation fraught with possibilities of disgrace. The premise is shared by many Arthurian romances: an outsider arrives at court to claim Guinevere, either by prior right as a suitor or to fulfil Arthur's promise to grant a boon. Gawain is absent, and the court is unable to prevent the abduction.

Heinrich has shaped the episode differently (his immediate source is not known). Guinevere initiates the conflict by her mockery of Arthur when he seizes a brand from the fire to warm himself. She taunts him with the existence of a knight so warm-blooded by nature that he rides about the forest in winter clad only in a tunic. This is the first source of disgrace for Arthur; the second is in his encounter with the warm knight, Gasoein (or, in another manuscript, Gasozein), whom he seeks out deliberately. Gasoein comes off as the more mannerly in their encounters and appears to be in control of the situation.

At the beginning of the episode, both Arthur and Guinevere are afflicted by disgrace. Arthur uses it as a kind of weapon to punish his wife (5092ff.):

... ich geschende
 Sie, mac ich alsô vil;
 Ez wirt ir ein hertez spil,
 Daz sie mich sô geschendet hat ...

He spares her in the end only because he does not want to tarnish his good name. The author does not commit himself on the question of the queen's earlier relationship with Gasoein, but he does condemn her for her words to Arthur (3432ff.):

Daz sie sich sô sêre
 Wider ir selbes êre
 Dô het übersprochen
 Und sô gar zebrochen
 Wîbes zuht unde ir scham.

In the second half of the episode, however, Heinrich uses language which tends to exculpate Guinevere. When she has chosen Arthur over Gasoein, Heinrich introduces the next segment (11037ff.):

Swaz geschehen sol, daz geschicht:
 Des enmohte sich Gînôver niht
 Dises lasters behûeten.
 Sô Heil wil wûeten,
 Sô hât Ungelûcke stat,
 Swâ ez sich denne nider lât,
 Sam an der kûnegin geschach.
 Wie gar Ungelûcke brach
 Da vûr der Saelden reht!

There is a pronounced note of fatalism here. The queen is shown at the mercy of the opposing forces of heil, ungelûcke and saelde; she can do nothing to control them. The phrase der Saelden reht even suggests that good fortune is a natural right and bad fortune a perversion of it.

A similar interpretation of Guinevere's fate is found in lines 11189 ff.:

Daz diu in solhem kumber hie
 Was wider Saelden huote,
 Gînôver diu guote,
 Des was Gelûcke ze schelten,
 Daz ez sô kunde gelten
 Manec tugent, die sie begienc ...

She herself describes her fault (that is, her insulting words to Arthur) in almost the same terms in which the poet excused Gawain in the testing cup scene: 'Nu stirbe ich niwan umb ein wort, / Daz in vrôuden geschach, / Dâ ich ez widern kûnec sprach' (11204ff.). In fact, that is not why she is being threatened with death (the reason is that her brother suspects her motives in choosing Arthur), but neither she nor Heinrich draws attention to that fact. In her mind she is an innocent victim, ân schulde (11211). She prays to God to send her help, and he does - in the person of her would-be seducer, Gasoein.

The seduction scene provides further opportunities for schande and for musing on human responsibility (in particular, the culpability of women). Gasoein is neither blamed nor excused for his less than courtly behaviour; no judgement is passed on him at all. The poet deals at some length, however, with Guinevere's failure to resist his blandishments. He explains why she initially agrees to accompany Gasoein (11445ff.):

Daz ez alsô muoste geschehen.
 Natûre wil niht übersehen:

Swaz ir aller beste zimt,
 Dar nâch sie die girde nimt,
 So diu vorht ir gesellet ist,
 Wan wîbes broede unde genist
 An swachen dingen hanget . . .

In exploiting this sensational situation, Heinrich combines some of the effects of a damsel-in-distress story (where the victim is innocent) with an exposé of the frailty of womenkind. For this an erring Guinevere who is dissociated from responsibility for her acts is very useful.

The Arthur-Guinevere-Gasoein triangle is resolved very abruptly after Gawain's return to court. An inconclusive combat between Gawain and Gasoein is followed by Gasoein's confession that he has been lying all along. He is reconciled with Arthur and married to the sister of Gawain's beloved. This sudden conclusion is either the crowning stroke of cynical condemnation of the court and its empty values, or an admission of Heinrich's lack of interest in verisimilitude when reconciling plot strands. How we interpret it will depend on our estimate of Heinrich's skill and intentions as a whole. His treatment of disgrace and responsibility suggests that he is exploiting a number of distinct effects, rather than coordinating them into a coherent unity. Having milked the situation for all he can get from it in drama, pathos, sexual innuendo and satirical humour, he wishes to wipe the slate clean. We are not meant to look back and note the contradictions in Gasoein's behaviour and characterisation.

Apart from the final testing glove episode, which I will not consider in detail because of its similarity to the opening one, there is one more Arthurian scene in which *schande* plays a role. Here Gawain is believed to be dead because a strange knight has delivered the severed head of his double, Aamanz. Heinrich welcomes the opportunity to show off his rhetorical skills in several extended mourning speeches. The chief mourners are Kay and Amurfina, Gawain's beloved. Because the audience of the poem is already aware that Gawain is alive and well, the intended response to this passage must be admiration of the poet's technique, rather than any identification with the characters' emotions. Heinrich may also be inviting us to note the exaggerated violence of the court's grief, which certainly oversteps the bounds of *mâze*, but this is not stated.

As is common in expressing great anguish, Kay accuses God of capricious cruelty. Amurfina goes further: she condemns 'Got, Saelde und vrou Minne' - an unlikely trinity - for murdering Gawain in spite of his devotion to them. The notion of devoted service to *Saelde* is a curious one in itself, and further corroborates Heinrich's conception of Fortune as a

positive force for good, opposed to unheil or schande. Amurfin goes on to say: 'Nu hât diu Schande, des sie gert, / Al die werlt, an widerstrît, / Sît er hie tât lît' (17226ff.). Again schande is portrayed as a malevolent force. Now that Gawain, the embodiment of virtues and favourite of fortune, is dead, disgrace holds sway everywhere over mankind. All three powers invoked by Amurfin (God, Fortune, Love) are stronger than man and control him, and disgrace too is portrayed as sharing a measure of that power.

In these examples, we have noted an essential difference between Heinrich's portrayal of disgrace and that of other romance authors. The picture must be balanced by awareness of the cases in which Heinrich follows the established models, as he usually does in the adventures of Gawain away from the court. The disgrace with which the hero is threatened often directly parallels that in an earlier Arthurian poem, since Heinrich borrows so freely: as in Parzival, Gawain feels shame at being found naked in the magic bed (20850); as in Iwein, he fears disgrace when forced to choose between two binding obligations (16315). It is in the Arthurian scenes (which, in Diu Crône, are largely scenes of erotic innuendo) that disgrace takes on the characteristics of an uncontrollable force inimical to mankind. The diminution of human responsibility which this entails could be paralleled in Heinrich's treatment of sælde and minne. There are inconsistencies in all these cases. Sometimes the hero is responsible for bringing disgrace on himself, sometimes he is the victim. Fortune sometimes seems to control him and at other times is obliged to favour him because of his excellence.¹⁰ But there is no instance in which a sense of personal responsibility or guilt leads to corrective action (revenge, self-proving) as it does in some other Arthurian romances.

It is tempting but unnecessary to discard Heinrich as morally shortsighted.¹¹ We must consider the effects he aims for. The lack of thematic continuity between episodes reflects his absorption in the individual scene, where he strives to achieve maximum effect through material abundance and rhetorical ornament. His is the poetry of reaction, and reaction to many different literary modes. It is to his advantage to be able to dissociate one scene from another, and exculpation (particularly of his chosen hero, but also of Guinevere) assists him in doing so, as does the neutralising power of schimpf. Within the realm of schimpf - a world dominated by Kay - all insults, however deadly, can be forgiven and forgotten in time for the next act.

The choice of Gawain as the hero figure also makes sense in this context. There is no question of development for him; he already exists, with his qualities well defined, and is a paragon from the beginning.¹² It is characteristic of Heinrich's treatment that even those of Gawain's

READING MEDIEVAL STUDIES

achievements which are not recounted until later in the poem are given as part of his history in earlier portions. For a hero who is 'given', the time sequence is not of primary importance.¹³ And the movement from initial recognition of the hero through humiliation to vindication and ultimate reinstatement at Arthur's court is necessarily absent. If we regard it as a constituent of the romance genre that its hero achieves his goals by his own innate qualities, aided by God and good fortune, Heinrich's work is bound to mark a variation in type. The element of fatalism can be permitted a larger place.

The domination of the concept of schande in certain scenes, combined with the notion of a fateful force, cuts both ways. It may render characters guiltless, but it may also make them appear weak and out of control - which is the burden of Heinrich's critique of women. By treating the court's disgrace in this way, Heinrich leaves open for himself (as for Kay, who may represent the poet's persona in the poem) the possibility of dismissing the situations he has set up as not really counting. Indeed, the conclusion of his poem, in which he follows lofty claims for his work with a prayer that God might send him to Heaven and give his wife a Swabian as a husband, tends to the same effect. He could say with Arthur:

Swaz ich iu rede mite,
Daz ist in schimpfe getân
Des ensült irs niht vür übel hân.

ANN G. MARTIN,
PURDUE UNIVERSITY.

READING MEDIEVAL STUDIES

NOTES

1. This article is based on a paper presented to the International Courtly Literature Society at Kalamazoo, Michigan, in May 1982.
2. Lewis Jillings, Diu Crone of Heinrich von dem Türlin. The Attempted Emancipation of Secular Narrative, Göttingen 1980, p.12.
3. Fritz Peter Knapp, 'Virtus und Fortuna in der "Krone"', ZfdA, 106, 1977, 254.
4. See the study by Christoph Cormeau, 'Wigalois' und 'Diu Crone': Zwei Kapitel zur Gattungsgeschichte des nachklassischen Aventiureromans, Zurich 1977, esp. pp.165ff.
5. For a fuller consideration of the significance of schande in German romances, see my dissertation, 'Schade' and 'schande' at Arthur's Court: A Study in the Language of Ignominy in German Arthurian Literature to 1300, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1979.
6. A more detailed discussion of the concepts of honour and shame in medieval German literature can be found in G.F. Jones, Honour in German Literature, Chapel Hill 1959, esp. Chs. 2 and 4.
7. Philip E. Bennett, ed., Mantel et Cor. Deux Lais du XII^e Siècle, Exeter 1975.
8. Citations are taken from Heinrich von dem Türlin, Diu Cröne, ed. G.H.F. Scholl, Stuttgart 1852; repr. Amsterdam 1966.
9. Recent studies of fortuna in Diu Cröne include: Helmut de Boor, 'Fortuna in mittelhochdeutscher Dichtung, insbesondere in der "Crone" des Heinrich von dem Türlin', in Verbum et Signum. Festschrift Friedrich Ohly, Munich 1975, II, 311-28; Alfred Ebenbauer, 'Fortuna und Artushof/Bemerkungen zum "Sinn" der "Krone" Heinrichs von dem Türlin', in Österreichische Literatur zur Zeit der Babenberger/Vorträge der Lilienfelder Tagung 1976, Vienna 1977, 25-49; and the article by Knapp (see note 3).
10. On the inconsistency in Heinrich's presentation of fortune, see Knapp, 263.

READING MEDIEVAL STUDIES

11. Cf. the judgement of E. Gölzow: 'es fehlt aber seiner eiteln, oberflächlichen Natur an planvoller Gründlichkeit und sittlichem Ernst' (Verfasserlexikon, 1st ed., s.g. 'Heinrich von dem Türlin').
12. Cormeau, p.130.
13. Cormeau, p.132.