

THE PROBLEMATIC MARRIAGE IN WOLFRAM'S *WILLEHALM* *

There are many centres of particular and obvious concern to the poet in Wolfram's *Willehalm*. Some of these may be identified quite simply by his expansion of his source material, and his additions to it. Into this category fall the themes of "war" and "marriage". Book VIII which is devoted to the second part of the war, i.e. the second battle, represents almost in its entirety an original and independent creation by Wolfram. Similarly, the two love scenes between hero and heroine in Books II and VI respectively, are new (92.16-105.30; 279.1-280.12). The two themes of war and marriage are intimately linked, in that one is the motivation of the other — Willehalm's and Gibeur's union leads to war. It is no ordinary war which is portrayed here, no war with a single denomination, but a war of dual significance. On the one hand it is a war of religion, a conflict between Islam and Christendom, on the other, it is a family feud of immense dimensions, involving two dynasties. While the war depicted here is thus of a highly intricate pattern, the marriage, which has been its cause, does not answer to a simple formula either. It is not a marriage arranged between two noble families, with primarily dynastic considerations in mind, and with a view to territorial advantages, as was the practice in the reality of the middle centuries, far from it. It is a marriage that flies in the face of convention and social acceptability, a love match which unites two individuals, not only of two different cultures, but of originally two different faiths.

During the course of the twelfth century, marriage, the concept of it, and also its practice, underwent a gradual change. On account of its huge

* Conferência realizada na Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, no âmbito do "Mestrado em Estudos Alemães", em Maio de 1999.

importance within the aristocracy, and the greater and yet greater interest which the Church took in the matter, the subject of marriage had moved to the forefront of social consciousness. It was chiefly because of the conflict of the two views of marriage that it had done so, that of the Church on the one hand, and that of the aristocracy on the other.

The aristocracy saw it as a purely practical matter. It was a convenient way of conveying property. It effected the annexation of territory, of castles, manors, land with its serfs and revenues, bridges with their toll, rivers for navigation, farms with their produce and livestock, forests for hunting deer, and capital in the form of treasure. Moreover, all this could be done with little cost to one of the parties, and without bloodshed, as it did not involve a campaign and a conquest, but merely a contract. The two individuals whom this contract joined for life, mattered little. The contract was drawn up and agreed between two heads of houses, between the senior fathers of two noble families. By the early twelfth century this was the standard model of aristocratic marriage.

The Church, however, took a different view. It did not look upon marriage as being of no more than secular concern. It did not concede that it was simply a form of the transfer of property, practical in essence. It insisted on its spiritual implications. Marriage had been ordained by God. He had joined Adam and Eve together. Marriage had been instituted by Him to contain sexuality, and for the purpose of procreation. Ever watchful of the dignity of the individual, the Church pointed to the fact that the marriage bond was no mere transaction, but that it united two human beings. It insisted that they must consent to it, and insisted on this increasingly as time went on.¹

Thus two interpretations of marriage collided at the threshold of the twelfth century, and it is easy to see why the subject of marriage was to become a focus of interest for many years to follow. The demand for 'consensus' had injected a difficulty, and even though it was often ignored, or reduced to a formality, the awareness of it would not go away. Quite the contrary, it came to be proclaimed by the great poets by implication as an

¹ DUBY, Georges — *Medieval Marriage. Two Models from Twelfth Century France*, Transl. by Elborg Forster, The Johns Hopkins Symposia in Comparative History 11. Johns Hopkins U.P. 1978; Chapter I. Two Models of Marriage: The Aristocratic and the Ecclesiastical, pp.1-22. BROOKE, Christopher N. L. — *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, Oxford U.P. 1989.

essential feature in the pursuit of happiness. Hartmann and Wolfram celebrate the inwardness of marriage, while Gottfried does so inversely by deploring the lack of it.

Wolfram's interest in marriage documents itself at many points of his work. In his *Parzival* there are fourteen betrothals and marriage arrangements, while his French source has none. Of these fourteen unions four are given particular prominence, that of the hero, that of the secondary hero, Gawain, and the two marriages of the hero's father.² In his fragmentary *Titirel*, hero and heroine are waiting for marriage, and even in his Dawn Songs the theme of unhappy marriage may be safely assumed as the likely background to some of them. In his *Willehalm* then marriage is allotted a major role in the narrative, but not only that, a particular character is stamped upon it. It is portrayed as a love match, a feature fully developed and underlined in two freely and specifically invented love scenes.

All this means that Wolfram pondered the question of marriage many times, enquired into the meaning of it, assessed its problems, weighed up its demands, and formulated views on it. Considering the degree of his preoccupation with the subject, and the fact that he quite deliberately threw it into extraordinary prominence in his last work, it is strange to have to discover that this marriage in *Willehalm* has aspects that are problematical. Its depiction looks unfinished, unedited perhaps. Is this part of the overall fragmentary nature of the whole of the work? Did Wolfram mean to rework it, delete its difficulties, and place new accents? Was he prevented from doing so through external circumstances, such as the loss of the patron's interest, ill health, even death? Did he quite simply run out of time? Or did he feel incapable of dealing with the unevenness and discords of the given narrative, resigned in the face of the task, and left it as it is? Finally, did he perhaps decide quite deliberately to leave all problems unresolved, thereby giving the total image of this union a particular meaning?

There are problems in the background to the marriage, in the constellation of the two marriage partners, in the absence of normally expected attitudes, in the disregard of social norms and social order, and in

² WYNN, Marianne — *Wolfram's Parzival. On the Genesis of its Poetry. Mikrokosmos, Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft und Bedeutungsforschung* 9, Frankfurt a.M. 1984, p. 317 ff.

the validity of the marriage. All of these represent matters of concern for the modern reader, but there can be no doubt that the medieval listener was equally puzzled, and very likely much more keenly concerned than any one in the twentieth century might be.

Taking first the marriage as the union of two individuals. Both Giburc and Willehalm are sharply profiled with a good deal of detail. They reveal themselves in speech where occasionally much can be inferred. They are also characterised by action, as it is not stereotyped. Furthermore there is direct description. So we have a fairly full portrait of each.

Giburc is no longer young. This is an aspect of her situation of which she is acutely aware, and which causes her some anxiety. She reveals this already in the first love scene. Her beauty has faded, she says. Once she was beautiful, but is no longer so. As Willehalm is about to leave for the sophisticated royal court at Munleun, she pleads with him not to pay attention to the pretty French women there, who will make him their target and offer marriage to him, in return for his service-at-arms. She reminds him of her sacrifice for him, having given up a position of immense power as queen (104.1 ff.).

Giburc is indeed in a precarious position, both sexually and socially. Her looks have diminished and with it her erotic desirability. She is presumably too old also to bear children, and Willehalm has none. How precarious it is she lets slip in her extraordinary reference to the possibility that he might consider a mercenary, or even feudal link with a French noblewoman (104.15-17). Is the new marriage bond not valid in her eyes? Could he set her aside? She has no kin to protect her, no possible champion, but is totally dependent upon Willehalm.

How old is Giburc? Her previous marriage to Tybalt cannot have been consummated before she was twelve, or older. The age of twelve was considered the marriageable age for girls in the Middle Ages. She may have expected her first child when she was fourteen, or at a later stage. She had several children by her first husband. One of them, Ehmereiz, plays a considerable part in the work. The others receive mere mention and are not named (310.9-11). Ehmereiz appears on the battlefield during the first battle in a group with fourteen other kings, seeking to be the first of them to fight a joust with Willehalm (28.25 and 72.17). He is clearly fully armed which means that he is a knight. This indicates that he is at least fourteen years old, or older. Squires were able to take the accolade from the age of fourteen years onwards. If he is the eldest of her children,

and there could be older ones, this would make Giburc, at the very least, into a woman of circa thirty years, and very likely more. By medieval standards this, in the case of a woman, was most certainly considered old.

So much for Giburc's looks and age, and her reactions to both. Now the sacrifice that she made for this marriage and which she emphasises in the first love scene, must be considered. What was her social position in the East? How much power did she wield?

She was a member of a hugely powerful clan. She has one unnamed sister and twelve brothers. Eleven of these fight bravely on the battlefield. Each one of them appears to be a king (32.9-26; 441.21-23; 442.14-23) Terramer, her father, is the overlord of all Moslems, the ruler of nine kingdoms, and the Protector of Baldac. He is powerful enough to lay claim to the crown of Rome (338.15-340.11; 443.24-30) and to aspire to the destruction of Christianity. He gave Giburc in marriage to King Tybalt (354.23 ff.) whose territorial possessions include the cities of Arabi and Kler, and Sibilje to which he lays claim. On his marriage he also became ruler of the country of Todjerne which Terramer gave to his daughter as her dowry (221.2-26). Todjerne is described as her portion, her inheritance. Presumably it is her allodial land (221.24). It is not possible to assess how much actual, independent power Giburc possessed in her earlier life. Powers vested in women were rare, and mostly short-lived, until they married, or remarried. She may never have had direct power as a liege-lady, but she certainly had call on an immeasurable amount of derived power, through her vast clan, and through her royal husband. This meant protection and riches, both of which she has now sacrificed. Her father stresses her loss and her present poverty (354.14-22). She is now powerless, helpless, and poor; a cataclysmic change has overtaken her life. Thus Giburc brings many burdens into this new union, both for herself and for Willehalm.

Willehalm's situation is not without problems either, nor is his personality. His background and past are totally different from those of Giburc. Wolfram refers to him as St. Willehalm in the prologue, but in the prologue only (4.3-18). He is never mentioned in this manner in the main narrative. We are dealing here with a curious duality. There is the Willehalm of the fictional reality, and Willehalm, the saint, of historical reality. As the latter is never mentioned again, we must content ourselves with looking upon him as being beyond the extant, fragmentary text. We do not know whether Wolfram intended to fit these two figures together

and to mould them into one. So the Willehalm who concerns us in the context of the marriage, is the Willehalm of the narrative only.

His father, the count of Narbonne, disinherits all his sons. No exception is made for Willehalm, the eldest. He recommends that they should seek their fortune as Free Lances, to offer their services to the Emperor Charlemagne, or to other feudal lords, or perhaps to find a rich marriage through their military skill (5.25-6.18). Willehalm is a margrave; he is referred to variously as *margrav* and *markis*. Margrave was generally the description and title given to a particularly highly skilled, courageous, and ruthless band of warriors who patrolled the marches. They were champion fighters and guardians of the borderlands. So his very title already says something about the character of the man. Further support for this aspect of his personality is lent by his sobriquet *ehkurneis* (e.g. 11.25; 45.9), short-nosed. He lost the tip of his nose in battle. According to his own testimony he has fought many campaigns for Charlemagne and his son, and is feared by the princes whom he held in check. He is a commanding figure at court, has forced the princes to acknowledge Louis's kingship, and placed the Roman crown on Louis's head. He is a king-maker (145.1-146.13). In one of his campaigns he devastated Tybalt's country and occupied and annexed it (8.2-7). His brutality and ungovernable temper are witnessed in three episodes: when he threatens the king (145.1-146.13), when he attempts to cut off his sister's head (147.11-24), and when he beheads the humbled and helpless Arofel, and commits the ultimate crime according to the chivalric code, by robbing the corpse (81.11-82.8). Wolfram describes him as *zornbaere* (147.18), as being in a rage, when he falls upon his sister. So his temper and his aggressiveness are formidable and forbidding. They evidently find an outlet in a career demanding fierce and constant fighting. He has become an outstanding warrior, yet has remained poor.

He is the eldest of seven brothers. Allowing two years between the birth of each of them, he might have been twelve years of age when the last one was born. When the sons were then disinherited by the father, and sent out into the world, this last one must have been at least a squire, ready to become a knight. In other words, he must have been fourteen. This makes Willehalm twenty-six years of age when he leaves his father's demesne.

Seven years pass before Willehalm sees parents and brothers again, so he says before the king (146.8-11). Into this span of time falls his

marriage to Giburc. They have not been together long. During the siege of Orange, between the first and second battle, when Willehalm appears at court, he is approximately thirty-three years old, roughly the same age as Giburc. He stands in curious contrast to Giburc's first husband, Tybalt, whom her father describes as handsome (*klar* 354.26), generous (*milte* 354.25), without blemish (354.27-355.2), rich, and *süeze* (354.24), sweet natured. Not all these qualities could be said to apply to Willehalm.

Looking at the widely disparate situations from which the two protagonists moved towards one another, and into a close alliance, taking into account also their differing temperaments, the question to be asked is, whether the contemporary audience found the portrayal plausible. Does the combination of the many contrasting facets of situations and personalities augur well for a love match? It is difficult to answer this question. The likelihood would be, that the listeners' reactions might have been mixed, some embracing the poetic argument wholeheartedly, others hesitantly, and others not at all. From the viewpoint of normal dynastic marriage arrangements, however, they would have been united in noting two major obstacles here. In the first place Willehalm does not derive any material gain from the marriage. Giburc's lands and other possessions are in the process of being reclaimed by the Moslems (8.15 ff.). She herself gives away her dower *Todjerne*, assigning it to Tybalt and her son *Ehmereiz* (221.24-26). So this union has not enriched Willehalm. He remains poor. Moreover, the woman he has chosen is on the threshold of infertility. For a man who has as yet no legitimate sons, no heir, this makes no sense. Within the context of aristocratic marriage policy therefore, such a contract would be looked upon as highly unlikely, not to say impossible.

While the marriage depicted here clearly does not pass muster, when the standards which prevailed in the real world, are applied, its credibility as a love match has further problems still. We do not know in detail how the two met. All we know is that Willehalm was Tybalt's captive. There is no description of their early meetings, when they first came face to face, nor does Willehalm confess to an initial falling in love which might have led to their subsequent marriage, quite the contrary. Willehalm's own testimony reveals no early emotional susceptibility vis-à-vis Giburc. He seduced her, so he says, to punish Tybalt, paying him back in like coin, i.e. requiting Tybalt's adultery with the queen of France, with Giburc's adultery with himself (153.26-30) — a devastating statement of cold brutality, made, moreover, in public, before the assembled royal court of

France. It not only reduces Giburc to the mere instrument of his revenge, but proclaims it as a fact to the world at large. Most extraordinarily he makes this disclosure after the first love scene.

Giburc, on the other hand, does fall in love with her prisoner, relinquishing untold riches and power, and exchanging a civilised and gentle husband for a fighter of unpredictable temper. So it appears that the love the two lovers bear one another is of uneven calibre, stable with one, volatile with the other.

The problem of credibility also afflicts the depiction of attitudes and behaviour. Giburc is presented not only as a wife and lover, but also as a mother. She herself says that she left behind *schoeniu kint*, lovely children (310.9-11). It is true that the bond between mother and child was, on the whole, not a subject of particular concern within the medieval community, nor was it seen as a link that society must respect. Children were considered highly moveable. They were given to monasteries and convents at the age of eight, or even earlier, and often never visited again. They were sent as pages at the same age to remote courts, and never returned to their families. Little girls were dispatched to castles and manors far away, to be married to one of the sons there at some future date. Often they were sent away as tiny infants even, so they might in the course of time, become used to the way of life of their future family. Normally they would be accompanied by a group of their own servants from home. Nevertheless, they would find themselves with a family that would eye them critically, and in surroundings quite unknown to them, where customs, and even language or dialect, might be unfamiliar. In the case of serfs who were tied to the soil, and even in that of ministeriales, families were split up when the land came to be divided among different owners. So it would seem that little account was taken of the mutual attachment between mother and child. However, Wolfram differed in this from most of his contemporaries, and differed strongly. He gives striking prominence to the deep feeling which runs between mother and child in three cases in his *Parzival*. Schoette, the hero's grandmother, is grief-stricken when her younger son, Gahmuret, the hero's father, is forced to leave her. She pleads with him, "will you no longer stay with me?" and movingly reminds him of her recent widowhood (10.18-30). When he is not to be dissuaded from leaving, she asks him at least to tell her when he will be back, calling him "my darling son" (P.11.1-22; 11.20 *süezer man*). Belakane, Gahmuret's first wife, kisses her baby son repeatedly, so Wolfram says. Finally,

Herzeloide, Parzival's mother, also showers kisses on her baby son and talks to him in terms of endearment. In the end, she comes to be so passionately linked to her child that she tries to hide him from the world, so as not to lose him. When he then leaves her, and at their parting moves out of sight, her heart breaks, and she dies. Wolfram comments on her death in panegyric tones, and celebrates her as a mother (P.128.16-129.1).

If Wolfram had such deep empathy as regards the emotions which bind a mother to her child, why is it that he brushes them aside in the case of Giburc? Beyond cursory reference, Giburc does not dwell upon her loss.

Equally problematic is Giburc's stance in relation to her severance of her family ties. She sees it chiefly as a sacrifice (310.9-14), but within the tradition of Germanic custom it is also a betrayal. According to this tradition, a woman belonged to her clan forever. Whether she remained in it, or married and joined another, mattered not. The blood bond was deemed to be more binding than the marriage bond. Duty to the kin came first. When Willehalm's sister is on the threshold of betrayal, by encouraging her husband to deny her own family their desperately needed armed support, her own brother makes an attempt to cut off her head. In her case this is narrowly prevented. Kriemhilt in the *Nibelungenlied*, however, does not escape this fate. When seen to have been treacherous, in that she enticed her clan into their own destruction, she loses her life. Hildebrand cuts off her head. The same fate should by Germanic standards of kinship obligation be Giburc's. The Moslems are indeed not Germanic warriors, but in an age where authenticity in fiction was neither practised, nor expected, Wolfram's audience would automatically have applied the Germanic code of ethics whereby they lived. That they did live by it, is shown by the fact that Wolfram deliberately changed a gesture in the context of the encounter between brother and sister. While, in *Aliscans*, Guillaume comes to court hiding his sword under his cloak, Willehalm, in Wolfram's narrative, not only displays his weapon openly, but places it pointedly across his knees (140.26-141.8). The gesture is a well established one in the Germanic catalogue of symbolic attitudes. He who performs it, claims the right of judgement, and at the same time threatens death.³ Willehalm's sister is saved, in the first instance through the intervention of their mother, but also, and chiefly, because she thinks better of her earlier unwillingness

³ WYNN, Marianne — *Hagen's Defiance of Kriemhilt*, in: *Medieval Studies*, Fs. Frederick Norman, London 1965, pp. 104-114.

to stand by her kin, and finally acknowledges her obligations to the family into which she was born. Giburc, on the other hand, repudiates her family by steadfastly remaining in what is now the enemy's camp. She has linked her life with those who are planning to destroy her clan. She knowingly fails in her duty to the blood bond, and thus offends against a fundamental tenet of Germanic unwritten law. According to it, she is dangerously culpable. Her penalty should be death. It is unthinkable that Wolfram's audience would not have drawn this selfsame conclusion.

Similarly, difficulties as regards audience reaction and acceptance are raised by her adultery. Adultery was viewed as an offence of extreme gravity, when committed by a woman. In the case of a husband, society generally turned a blind eye, but where a wife was concerned the matter was looked upon with the greatest possible seriousness. It called for exemplary punishment, and there were cases where a woman paid for it with her life.⁴ The offender could be excommunicated, or exiled, and the future marriage between the adulterous parties could be prohibited. There was a view also that "adultery constituted the second most serious offence after heresy".⁵ The Church took an inexorable and stringent attitude towards adultery, and society followed suit. Once the offence was discovered some form of public humiliation would inevitably follow.⁶

Wolfram was well familiar with this stance of society, and describes it in his *Parzival*, Book III. Jeschute, innocent as she is, is not caught in adultery, merely unjustly suspected of it. Yet her husband decrees a separation of bed and board, and forces her to ride out with him in search of her supposed paramour (P.136.24-138.1). She is not permitted any clothes, other than the shift in which he finds her (P.131.17 and 136.29/30). In the course of time, this covering is reduced to shreds. She is thus compelled to roam the countryside on horseback, virtually naked, exposing her nudity to the public gaze (P.256.11 ff.).

So, at the very least, an adultress had to endure public disgrace and ridicule, and the odium of society. Giburc, strangely enough, is shielded

⁴ BUMKE, Joachim — *Liebe und Ehebruch in der höfischen Gesellschaft*, in: *Liebe als Literatur: Aufsätze zur erotischen Dichtung in Deutschland*, ed. by Rüdiger Krohn, Munich 1983, pp. 26-45, here p. 26, and *Höfische Kultur: Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter*, 2 vols., Munich: DTV, 1986, II, p. 551.

⁵ BRUNDAGE, James A. — *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, Chicago and London 1987, p. 208.

⁶ *ibid.*

from this, and seems exonerated, for there is, curiously, no authorial comment on her adultery. Wolfram is silent on this point. That she is perceived as an adultress, certainly by her own family, is made plain in passing and indirectly. Tybalt, so the description runs, laments the loss of wife and social prestige (8.6 *ere*). In the eyes of the world he is a cuckold. The adultery, this momentous step in Giburc's past, is, moreover, by no means of an ordinary kind. Its sequel is abduction, in this case in the form of elopement, and its prelude was the devastation of her husband's territory (8.6-7). The man with whom she flees, has laid waste her country. She releases the captive from his prison, and escapes with him (298.14-23).

Like adultery, abduction was the subject of extreme social censure. It had been the scourge of previous centuries, was common in the Carolingian period, and continued to worry the aristocracy still in the twelfth century, although by that time its frequency had declined.⁷ As in the case of adultery, penalties could be severe. In the late eleventh century canonists might insist, among other punishments, on excommunication. Some maintained that the kidnapper must not be allowed to marry the abducted woman. If the victim was married, the punishments exacted were especially harsh.⁸

In the view of Wolfram's contemporaries, both adultery and abduction struck at the very fabric of the social order. Abduction, in particular, involving property as it did, was seen to endanger its stability. It can therefore be said that both hero and heroine had committed universally castigated, indeed feared, social offences, condemned by clergy and laymen alike. One cannot but wonder how Wolfram's listeners came to terms with the tempestuous past of his two leading characters, conditioned as they were to reject actions such as theirs, as indefensible.⁹

⁷ WYNN, Marianne — *The Abduction of the Queen in German Arthurian Romance*, In: *Chevalier errants, demoiselles et l'Autre: höfische und nachhöfische Literatur im europäischen Mittelalter*, Fs.Xenja von Ertzdorff, ed. by Trude Ehlert, Göttingen 1998, pp. 131-144.

⁸ BRUNDAGE — *Op. cit.*, pp. 209-10

⁹ On the importance of the theme of adultery for the interpretation of the work in general, and the characterisation of Giburc in particular, vid. the seminal essay by Werner Schröder, 'deswar ich liez ouch minne dort'. Arabel-Gyburgs Ehebruch, In: *An Arthurian Tapestry*, Fs.Lewis Thorpe, ed. by Kenneth Varty (published on behalf of the British Branch of the International Arthurian Society), University of Glasgow 1981, pp. 308-327.

Finally, a problem of fundamental importance as regards Giburc's second marriage is, whether in the eyes of Wolfram's contemporaries, this marriage could be considered valid. The validity of the second marriage hinges upon the validity of the first. Giburc and Tybalt were legally married; there can be no doubt about that. There are precise indications of this in the text: Giburc's father had arranged the marriage and had given her a dowry. Furthermore, basing the timespan of it on the age of one of her children, it had been a long marriage, of fifteen years, or more. Christian medieval Europe acknowledged a marriage contract between Moslems to be as binding as that between Christian partners. How was this marriage dissolved before she married Willehalm?

The possibilities of divorce were severely restricted in the society of the High Middle Ages. Marriage had come to be looked upon as indissoluble.¹⁰ According to the Decretum of Gratian of about 1140, a divorce could be obtained on the grounds of consanguinity, or affinity, but his firm recommendation was that the Church should authorise it only rarely. In any event, neither the impediment of blood relationship, nor of relationship by marriage, would apply in the case of Tybalt and Giburc. Gratian still allowed other grounds for divorce, such as non-consummation of marriage, defects in the consensus, and impotence, but again none of these could be made to relate to Giburc's first marriage.¹¹

Nor did her conversion to Christianity free Guiborc legally. Centuries ago already, long before Wolfram embarked on composing his fiction, St. Ambrose, one of the four Latin doctors of the Church, held that baptism wipes out sin, but does not dissolve marriages. It was a view to which the Church continued to cling and which Gratian modified only partially, according to the situation in which the marriage partners found themselves. In a mixed Moslem/Christian marriage the Christian could plead for a separation, so that he could practise his religion, but on no account was remarriage to be allowed during the lifetime of the Moslem partner.

There remained still the possibility of separation on the grounds of adultery. After all Willehalm accuses Tybalt publicly of having committed adultery with the queen of France. Yet again, Gratian insisted that in the

¹⁰ GOODY, Jack — *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe, Past and Present* Publications, Cambridge U.P. 1983, p. 211 ff; BROOKE — *op. cit.*, p. 52.

¹¹ BRUNDAGE — *Op. cit.*, pp. 242-5.

case of adultery, remarriage of either party should not be permitted, while the other spouse was still alive.¹²

So according to Canon Law, Giburc was not, and could not be, divorced, and there was no way whereby she could remarry. Within the perspective of the real world she remained married to Tybalt. The devout lay public of the thirteenth century is unlikely to have perceived her situation in any other way. It is just possible that Wolfram may have hinted at the irregularity of the union of Willehalm and Giburc. Throughout the narrative she is referred to as the *künegin*, the queen, and only twice as the *marcgravin*, the marchioness (292.27; 295.24) which should be her title now, if her second marriage was indeed legitimate.¹³

There is thus much unevenness in the portrayal of this most important marriage in Wolfram's later work, and the question remains — why is it, that the poet left this strange incompleteness? There are, to be sure, obvious and mundane excuses available for it. Writers often treat aspects of their work in a cavalier fashion, and leave loose ends. Critics are familiar with this phenomenon of literary composition. Moreover, the details of fiction become particularly complex and difficult to handle, when an author plans, and tries to manage, a huge canvas of intricate connections and emotional cross-references, as Wolfram does in his *Willehalm*. It would be entirely understandable, if he had passed over a number of conflicting and open-ended minor details, had forgotten about them, or simply did not trouble about them. What is *not* understandable, however, is that he left major contradictions and discords, when it came to the matrix of the plot. The singularity of these dissonances must have astounded his audience.

He took great liberties with the received text, adding at will, giving it new centres of gravity, and infusing it with a new world of thought. Why then did he stop short of reshaping the given narrative when he reached its core problems? After all he totally remodelled the figure of Giburc herself. She bears superficial resemblance only to her counterparts

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Marlis Schumacher (Die Auffassung der Ehe in den Dichtungen Wolframs von Eschenbach, Heidelberg 1967) disposes studiously, but unconvincingly, of the problems of adultery, divorce, and legality of a second 'marriage' in Giburc's career; cf. pp. 26-30; 143-171; 187. She was not the only Wolfram commentator who found these questions somewhat embarrassing. For a survey of attempts to grapple with Giburc's adultery, vid. SCHRÖDER, Werner — *op. cit.*

in the chansons de geste, the stereotype of the Saracen princess who falls in love with a Christian knight and follows him without being greatly troubled by misgivings and qualms.¹⁴ Wolfram's imagination has refashioned this blueprint into an individual of emotional depth and impressive intellectual powers, highly articulate, riven by conflicts, and suffering in consequence. So why does he leave her in a network of disharmonies? Most puzzling of all in this enquiry is, that by the simplest of editorial interventions, he could have achieved an adjustment that begged no further questions — he could have deleted the first marriage.

The alteration would have disposed of the difficulties of adultery, of the lack of maternal response, of the unfortunate implications of ageing, and of the dubiousness surrounding the validity of a remarriage. Giburc's seduction by Willehalm and her subsequent elopement with him would still have unleashed the war, need not have changed the basic pattern of her personality, and would have given her marriage a watertight legitimacy.

It is not the critic's brief to rewrite a masterpiece, yet he is permitted to ask why its imperfections have been allowed to remain. The easy answer is that this was due to circumstances beyond the artist's control. He may have died. He may have lost his patron. He may have run out of time for a variety of reasons. The much more difficult answer to justify is that Wolfram left everything quite deliberately the way it is. If he did, then this adds another dimension not only to the portrayal of Giburc, but also to himself. It makes her into a free spirit of near unbelievable courage and stamina, into a woman, highborn, yet willing to live openly in an irregular union, after adultery and elopement. It makes Wolfram's tolerance, well documented by Giburc's famous speech, stretch even further, through his act of giving such a woman the moral imperative of his last great work.

This is a mere suggestion, no more than a conjecture. It cannot be proved.

Marianne Wynn
University of London

¹⁴ Cf. CLIFTON-EVEREST, John — *Wolframs Parzival und die chansons de geste*, In: *Ir sult sprechen willekomen. Grenzenlose Mediävistik*, Fs. Helmut Birkhan ed. by TUCZAY, Christa — *Ulrike Hirhager und Karin Lichtblau*, Frankfurt a.M. 1998, pp. 693-71. For a discussion of the special role of the Saracen princess in the chansons de geste, vid. KAY, Sarah — *The Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance*, Cambridge U.P. 1995, Chapter I: The Problem of Women: Price or Gift?, pp. 25-48.