

Medieval Manuscript Evidence Versus Modern (Mis)Interpretation: *Diu Klage*

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The grandiose Middle High German heroic epic, the *Nibelungenlied*, composed around 1200 and copied in a large number of manuscripts far into the early sixteenth century, concludes with the tragic observation that all of the Burgundian and Hunnish heroes in the epic have become victims of their destiny: the warriors are all dead, and nothing remains to be done with their history but to sum up the events leading to this Armageddon.¹ The subsequent lamentations and mourning, however, do not receive the poet's real attention, for he has assigned barely three stanzas to the final consideration of what has taken place, and why this horrible battle had to rage against all reason and human values. In no more than two lines the poet mentions that the sole survivors, King Attila and his liegeman Dietrich, began to cry (2377, 3f.), joined by their friends and relatives. In the last but one stanza we hear that all the men's honor was lost through their death, and that the survivors experienced deep grief and pain (2378, 1f.). The glamorous court festival to which the Burgundians had been invited has been terribly crushed, and there is no reason to feel joy (2378, 3f.). Finally, the poet admits that he has nothing else to tell, since all that happened after the last Burgundian had succumbed to his destiny was that knights and ladies cried, along with the squires and the dead warriors' friends (2379, 2f.). In other words, the *Nibelungenlied* poet sees his function only in retelling what happened in the lives of the Burgundians and the Huns, almost in the vein of a chronicler. Once no more facts are to be reported, he also finishes his account: "herewith the story has come to an end" (2379, 4).

This is an astonishingly abrupt conclusion for such a monumental tragedy when the anonymous author breaks off after more than 2300 stanzas with only these brief remarks and leaves the audience behind without exploring the traumatic experience of a massive slaughter of warriors. A twentieth-century reader might ask why the really important part of the narrative is left out, why only political and military events are discussed, but not their psychological impact on the survivors.² Moreover, basically an entire world has passed with

¹ Cf. *Das Nibelungenlied*, ed. Helmut de Boor (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1956); for a critical review of the relevant scholarship, see Werner Hoffmann, *Mittelhochdeutsche Heldendichtung* (Berlin: Schmidt, 1974).

² For a psychological reading of the *Nibelungenlied* see Winder McConnell, "Repression and Denial in the *Nibelungenlied*," *Sô wold ich in fröiden singen. Festgabe für Anthonius H. Touber zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Carla Dauven-van Knippenberg and Helmut Birkhan. *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 43-44 (1995): 363-74.

the death of the Burgundians, and this is, in the poet's words, *der Nibelunge nôt* (2379, 4), the Nibelungs' suffering. Would we not be justified in charging that the epic poem avoids dealing with the horrendous consequences, since its focus rests exclusively on the development of the tragic conflict and its explosion into murderous battle at the court of the Hunnish king? Otfrid Ehrismann postulates that the *Nibelungenlied* represents an ideological concept of human history that does not make sense. He theorizes that the poet had resigned and saw no alternative to the massive slaughter leading to the Armageddon at the Hunnish court. The figure of Dietrich, however, supposedly represents, in a subtle fashion, the one and only character within this monumental poem who might know a way to return to happiness and hope; in other words, he would stand in as a counterpoint to the apocalypse leading to *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation).³ This optimistic reading would be difficult to sustain in the face of the absolutely negative view expressed at the end of the epic poem and in the face of the author's obvious unwillingness or incapability to see beyond the battlefield. In other words, the *Nibelungenlied* implies that no continuation is possible, that human history has come to an end, although the narrator points out that Dietrich had pleaded for Hagen's and Gunther's lives and requested forgiveness from Kriemhild, even though all of his own warriors, except for those two men, were killed (2355).⁴ With this kind of conclusion no more discussions seem to be necessary or even possible; the protagonists have passed away, and with them human history and culture. In short, the *Nibelungenlied* almost acts as an epitaph, as a somber voice which pessimistically looks backwards with no hope for the future.⁵

However, the history of the story is not marred by the sense that the end of human life has come and that total desperation has set in, as we might believe at first sight. Instead, medieval audiences in the later centuries were obviously well informed about the continuation of the *Nibelungenlied*, at least as far as one poet discussed it.⁶ Though hardly appreciated by modern German medievalists, and certainly largely unknown by scholars of other medieval disciplines, another poem was written which, probably in reaction to the heroic epic, paints a very grim picture of the survivors' reaction to the terrible news that all their loved ones are dead, and actually had, what is much worse, killed each other. This poem, commonly known as *Diu Klage* (The lament), investigates a new side of

³ Otfrid Ehrismann, *Nibelungenlied. Epoche—Werk—Wirkung. Arbeitsbücher zur Literaturgeschichte* (Munich: Beck, 1987) 206.

⁴ For a positive evaluation of Dietrich's role, see Edward R. Haymes, "Dietrich von Bern im *Nibelungenlied*," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 114 (1985): 159–65. His arguments in favor of this theory are not fully convincing, however, because, after all, the conclusion of the *Nibelungenlied* is extremely bleak and does not promise much, if any, hope.

⁵ Theodore M. Andersson, *A Preface to the "Nibelungenlied"* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987) 143.

⁶ See Lutz Mackensen, *Die Nibelungen: Sage, Geschichte, ihr Lied und sein Dichter* (Stuttgart: Hauswedell, 1984) 181; Werner Hoffmann, *Das Nibelungenlied* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1992) 126.

the historical events described in the heroic text, that is, the consequences of human actions and their impact on the survivors.⁷ Through highlighting the suffering and sadness, there arises the possibility of rejuvenation and healing, and only when laments are given adequate words, does the narrative offer an alternative to the deep sense of tragedy which had permeated the *Nibelungenlied*.⁸

Unfortunately the *Klage* has received only short shrift from modern scholarship. It was either lambasted as a very mediocre attempt to present the subsequent events of the *Nibelungenlied* or was only mentioned fleetingly.⁹ Over the last hundred and eighty years or so a number of voices have nevertheless been raised to comment on this text because of its close connection with the famous *Nibelungenlied*, but practically all of them expressed dismay over its poor literary quality, at times even working themselves up to outrage because of the allegedly excessive sentimentality of the piece, which is so entirely in contradiction to its model.¹⁰ In the introduction to his English translation, Winder McConnell clearly outlines why *Diu Klage* has found practically no friends among Germanists: "With its immoderate use of the *flagellum Dei* tradition, the *Chlage* is hardly a work that will impress the modern reader.... However it may be judged from an aesthetic point of view, the *Chlage* represents the first known reaction to the *Nibelungenlied*, or, to put it another way, the genesis of the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* [history of its adaptations; A.C.] surrounding the great epic."¹¹

Diu Klage was translated into English only once before and only in parts, namely in the 1814 edition by Henry W. Weber. August Zeune wrote the first New High German translation shortly thereafter, which was printed in its second edition in 1836.¹² An adequate modern German translation does not yet exist; its

⁷ *Diu Klage. Mit den Lesarten sämtlicher Handschriften*, ed. Karl Bartsch (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964; rpt. of the edition Leipzig 1875). The English translations will be taken from *The Lament of the Nibelungen (Diu Chlage)*, trans. and introd. Winder McConnell (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994).

⁸ Some scholars have argued that *Diu Klage* might have been written even before the *Nibelungenlied*; see Michael Curschmann, "Nibelungenlied und Nibelungenklage. Über Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit im Prozeß der Episierung," *Deutsche Literatur im Mittelalter. Kontakte und Perspektiven. Hugo Kuhn zum Gedenken*, ed. Christoph Cormeau (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1979) 85–115. Even in such a case, however, we would have to refer to the earlier, oral versions of the *Nibelungenlied* (perhaps in version B), and then could argue that, if *Diu Klage* influenced the copying of the epic poem (version C), this would have affected only later reworkings of the *Nibelungenlied*.

⁹ Alois M. Haas, *Todesbilder im Mittelalter. Fakten und Hinweise in der deutschen Literatur* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989); Haas discusses the *Nibelungenlied*, but ignores *Diu Klage*. For a full discussion of *Klage* scholarship, see Hans Szklenar, "Die literarische Gattung der *Nibelungenklage* und das Ende *alter mære*," *Poetica* 9 (1977): 41–61.

¹⁰ Maurice O. C. Walshe, *Medieval German Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962) 258.

¹¹ McConnell xxiii.

¹² Henry W. Weber, ed., *Die Klage: The Lament. Illustrations of Northern Antiquities, from the Earlier Teutonic and Scandinavian Romances* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1814) 211–13; *Nibelungennoth und Klage nach*

absence also indicates the low esteem enjoyed by the *Klage*. Despite the fact that this poem represents an important, though highly unexpected, response to the *Nibelungenlied* and a valuable attempt to rewrite its historical, ideological, and political orientation, it was placed outside the walls of the rigid and subjective literary canon.¹³ Helmut de Boor, one of the most articulate critics, charged that *Diu Klage* represents the ultimate decline of the Stauferian culture, a turning away from true heroism and manly virtue to effeminate lamenting and crying: "This heir to the *Nibelungenlied* understood little of its greatness."¹⁴ Since de Boor's literary history appeared in 1966, not much has changed in scholarly opinion.¹⁵

In a previous study, I have argued that this negative school of thinking which has harshly discredited *Diu Klage* as an unimaginative, little-developed, even mawkish poem seems to be based on rather erroneous assumptions and overly conservative criteria for the open-minded evaluation of medieval German literature. Instead of criticizing the (presumably) clerical author of this poem for having failed to live up to the aesthetic and ethical norms of the *Nibelungenlied*, one should be looking at *Diu Klage* as a literary forum to deal with grief, to express mourning, and to show the profound emotional effects the death of an entire army of heroes has on the survivors, that is, both their families, friends, and relatives. *Diu Klage* can be interpreted, in this sense, as an important vehicle to carry out *Trauerarbeit* (coming to terms with grief) along the lines of Sigmund Freud's theory.¹⁶ Its anonymous author makes a valiant attempt to compensate for the deficiency of the *Nibelungenlied* by way of extensive descriptions of the ensuing lamentation, weeping, and crying. At a close examination, *Diu Klage* treats nothing but the process of mourning; it is a piece of consolation literature, closely related to the genre of the *planctus*, but as such it is also a puzzling exception in medieval German literature. Going one step further, I suggest to examine *Diu Klage* as a literary forum for the discussion of feelings and, consequently, of a new type of human society in which feelings play a major role. Moreover, I will take a close look at the manuscript tradition for *Diu Klage* in order to support the thesis that late-medieval society, although still impressed by

ältester Gestalt in ungebundener Rede, trans. August Zeune, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Nicolai, 1836). The date of the first edition cannot be determined with bibliographical reference works that are commonly available.

¹³ For a broader discussion of the literary 'canon' and 'canonicity,' see *Canon and Canon Transgression in Medieval German Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1993).

¹⁴ Helmut de Boor, *Die höfische Literatur. Vorbereitung, Blüte, Ausklang* (Munich: Beck, 1966) 168; my translation.

¹⁵ Frank Tobin, "Middle High German," *A Concise History of German Literature to 1900*, ed. Kim Vivian (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1992) 45; McConnell, *The Lament* xi.

¹⁶ Albrecht Classen, "Diu Klage—A Modern Text From the Middle Ages?," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* XCVI.3 (1995): 315–29. André Schnyder, "Die Trauerarbeit des Witwers. Vorläufiger Versuch, ein altbekanntes Werk neu zu sehen," *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft* 4 (1986/87): 25–39, was the first to utilize the Freudian term and concept in medieval studies.

the heroic epic, also perceived and, indeed, accepted alternatives to it, and highly valued the follow-up poem for its own sake.

Actually, medieval literature offers many examples of mourning scenes, be it in Pfaffe Konrad's *Rolandslied*, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Willehalm*, Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*, or Hartmann von Aue's *Erec* or *Iwein*.¹⁷ Moreover, we find much consolation literature (*consolatio*) that is often coupled with or even identical to the so-called *planctus*. *Diu Klage* somehow seems to fit into this tradition, although no *communis opinio* has yet been established as to its proper interpretation and literary category.¹⁸ The reason why so much room is given in these medieval literary texts to the lamenting of the death of beloved friends and relatives is obvious—experiences in the crusades, in feuds, and in many other violent conflicts took their heavy toll. Interestingly, by the early thirteenth century the Middle High German poets expressed an increasingly negative view of those military campaigns and advocated peaceful settlements, new communicative channels for the establishment of an harmoniously functioning society, and searched for ways for the individual to achieve fulfillment of love and happiness.¹⁹

The message expressed in *Diu Klage* is very clear: the heroic ideals have failed because heroic society has collapsed under its own weight. The communicative links have not functioned, and instead of negotiating and deliberating among each other, the heroes had been conditioned by envy, jealousy, hatred, and hostility against each other. The poem is exclusively focused on the experience of pain and describes how the few surviving protagonists realize what disaster has struck them. In addition, we gain insight in how they cope (or do not cope) with the terrible news, that is, *Diu Klage* serves as a literary model to members of the courts, showing them how to deal with such indescribable pain and sadness. Irrespective of the traditional enemy-friend opposition, all dead warriors are lamented and their honors are highlighted. Only Hagen, who was largely responsible for this Armageddon, is not lamented; instead, people curse at him when they find his corpse, and back in Worms the members of the royal council identify him as the culprit (191).

¹⁷ See Urban Küsters, "Klagefiguren. Vom höfischen Umgang mit der Trauer," *An den Grenzen höfischer Kultur: Anfechtungen der Lebensordnung in der deutschen Erzähldichtung des hohen Mittelalters*, ed. Gert Kaiser (Munich: Fink, 1991) 9–75; Richard Leicher, *Die Totenklage in der deutschen Epik von der ältesten Zeit bis zur Nibelungen-Klage* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1977; rpt. of the 1927 ed.).

¹⁸ Szklenar 41–61; G. T. Gillespie, "Die Klage as a Commentary on *Das Nibelungenlied*," *Probleme mittelhochdeutscher Erzählformen. Marburger Colloquium 1969*, ed. Peter F. Ganz and Werner Schröder (Berlin: Schmidt, 1972) 153–77.

¹⁹ See Stefan Hohmann, *Friedenskonzepte. Die Thematik des Friedens in der deutschsprachigen politischen Lyrik des Mittelalters* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1992); Gert Althoff, "Genugtuung (*satisfactio*). Zur Eigenart gütlicher Konfliktbeilegung im Mittelalter," *Modernes Mittelalter. Neue Bilder einer populären Epoche*, ed. Joachim Heinzle (Frankfurt/M.: Insel, 1994) 247–65.

The more the individual heroes are mourned and the louder the survivors grieve, the more a strong sense of the need for the establishment of a new society becomes noticeable. The grief in itself functions to produce a powerful cleansing effect, but also demonstrates the profound emotions affecting both the relatives and friends when they find the corpses or receive the tragic news back in Pöchlarn and Worms. Before the messenger Swemmel informs the Margravine, Lady Gotelind, about her husband's true destiny, she relates her nightmarish dream with the grave imagery and thus proves to have prophetic visions (139). Mourning is thus attributed a powerful poetic force and reveals the true character of the survivors. Considering that these women—and there are practically only women left at the Burgundian courts²⁰—display such heart-rending lamentations, we may assume that the poet advocated a radical transformation of the heroic society, where death was an acceptable part of the warrior's life, to a society which was to be dominated by more "human" values and in which grieving for the deceased person was one of the highest forms of paying respect.

Instead of ridiculing Attila, Margravine Gotelind, and Queen Ute for being unable to sustain the pain imposed on them—all three eventually succumb to the pain and pass away—we should appreciate the poet's attempts to rewrite the literary history and to infuse it with "modern" ethics. Gotelind exclaims, for instance: "A pity that I, poor woman, was ever born. How much happiness I have lost which I believed was mine. All of that joy must now take its leave of me because of my sorrow" (147). Moreover, the mourning does not only involve a few individuals, but the entire community of survivors. And in their shared grief they begin to perceive new forms of human interaction creating a true community of mourners. Rumolt, for instance, after having expressed his pain and regret that Gunther did not listen to his warning prior to the expedition to the Hunnish court, turns to the assembly of mourners and reminds them of the tasks lying ahead of them: "Regrettably, all of our lamenting will be of no help to us. But see to it that our young lord is crowned" (193). The grief itself becomes the catalyst for a new world, and that is the greatest contribution of the *Klage* poet to medieval literature. The clearest signal for this return to human ideals and ethics, that is, for an end to the heroic tradition with its idealization of the superhuman race (exemplified in the figures Brünhild and Siegfried), is given by Dietrich when he finally decides to leave King Attila's court and to attempt to regain his own power (4114ff.). He no longer wants to be in "exile," a roaming knight, and desires to find his own home (197, 4134f.).

²⁰ In Vienna, Pöchlarn, and Worms, the governments were taken over by the wives during their husbands' absence; only in Worms do we hear of a male heir, Gunther's son. Although the nobles from all over the country arrive to hear the horrible news about the slaughter at King Attila's court and then to participate in the state council, we may assume that the queen mother will continue to wield the actual power.

Certainly, the old generation has passed away, all the previous rulers have died and are replaced by their wives and children. But these “old men” had also been perpetrators in the name of feudal loyalty and had, either voluntarily or forced by their vassallage, participated in the final battle leading to their own apocalypse. Moreover, as Bishop Pilgrim perceptively observes, the Burgundians’ greed for gold and power, their envy and jealousy led them to their own unavoidable doom. His advice to Brünhild back in Worms is informed by a deep sense of humanistic spirit and an understanding of the conditions of human life: “I cannot give her better advice—for I wish her well—than to keep her lamenting within moderation. We simply have to let go of those who daily are taken from us by death” (165). *Diu Klage*, in other words, presents the full extent of suffering which might be possible in the span of a human life, and also indicates a philosophical concept of how to deal with this suffocating pain.

As somber and peculiar as these messages might sound, they were, however, not an entirely new approach in the history of Western literature, as we can tell from many famous works dating back to antiquity which treated the same theme but were much better received by modern critics than *Diu Klage*. Catastrophic experiences often have inspired authors to explore these themes in their texts and to argue against the causes and thus to change society. Antiwar literature is a gloomy genre, often apocalyptic and filled with desperation. At the same time these texts send clear signals and outline *ex negativo* how to overcome these military conflicts and how to search for peaceful interaction. One of the most dramatic examples is Euripides’ tragedy *The Women of Troy*, first performed in 415 B.C., shortly before the Athenians embarked on a disastrous military campaign against Sicily.²¹

Euripides obviously opposed these undertakings, sympathized with the innocent victims, and expressed his strong disapproval and misgivings about the campaigns through his drama *The Women of Troy*. This is not a drama in the common sense of the word, but rather a display of emotions in the face of heartrending pain and suffering. Hecuba, the old wife of King Priamos, has become a slave, and she realizes step-by-step what cruel fate has struck her and her people. The play is a magnificent display of mourning, a devastating account of the misery and waste of war.²² Euripides does not want to demonstrate, though, ways in which crimes against mankind will be punished, but rather reflects on the consequences of violence and war. These consequences affect both victors and the defeated, which means that wars in general are to be condemned

²¹ For more detailed commentary, see Richmond Lattimore, “The Trojan Women,” trans. with introduction by R. L., *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, ed. by David Grene and R. L., vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955–59) 608–10; Werner Biehl, *Euripides Troades* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1989).

²² Death and suffering were important themes in classical literature; see Werner Portmann, “Sterben/Tod. Antike,” *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte. Hauptthemen in Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. Peter Dinzelsbacher (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1993) 231–44.

and that it is the poet's task to formulate, through the dramatic performance, people's rejection of war as a means to achieve political and economic ends.

What, then, is the relationship of *The Women of Troy* to the medieval German epic poem *Diu Klage*? And would we actually be justified comparing both texts with each other? Are there meaningful similarities, and if so, can we interpret the later text in light of the earlier? Obviously the situation in both poems is very much the same, as an entire people has been slaughtered, and only a few survivors are left to lament their loved ones. And both times the literary work has no other intention but to express strong disagreement with warfare, violence, and slaughter because these phenomena cause havoc and kill life without solving any problem. In both texts the mourning women are vivid testimonies to this painful experience, and their laments are warning signals never again to provoke war.²³

Politically, however, the conditions after the slaughter are different in *Diu Klage* in comparison to Euripides' tragedy. Here Hecuba laments the loss of her family and cries over the terrible destiny which her daughters have to accept. Whereas the women of Troy face a life of slavery and will have to depart from their homeland, the medieval epic goes far beyond the traditional dichotomy of friends versus enemies. In *Diu Klage* the situation has changed dramatically because no enemy is left; they all have killed each other, both friend and foe. The laments concern both enemies and their own soldiers, and the crying and mourning indicate that a new stage in humanity has been reached. The absolute degree of pain is transforming the next generation, and there is hope, indeed, that the traditional war mentality will disappear. If a society wants to survive, as we hear at the end of *Diu Klage*, then civil wars, murder, and violence have to be stopped, and all forms of revenge must be eliminated (203, 4295ff.).

In other words, *Diu Klage* outlines strategies for preventing such horrible battles in the future.²⁴ Euripides, on the other hand, explores the pain and suffering of those who are the victims of war with the intention to speak up against war as such and to warn about its extremely frightful and destructive consequences. Both the classical drama and the medieval epic poem are remarkable antiwar statements and share the same human values, that is, values pertaining to the death of a beloved person. The similarities here between *Diu Klage* and Euripides' drama are striking and demonstrate that the medieval poem shares many values with world literature. *Diu Klage* should rank highly within the canon of medieval German literature because of its powerful philosophical

²³ For an overview of the history of emotions in the Middle Ages, see Urban Küsters, "Freude, Leid und Glück. Mittelalter," *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte* 307–17.

²⁴ Werner Schröder, "Das Leid in der Klage" (1957/58); rpt. in W. S., *Nibelungenlied-Studien* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1968) 182–225; Max Wehrli, "Die Klage und der Untergang der Nibelungen," *Zeiten und Formen in Sprache und Dichtung. Festschrift für Fritz Tschirch*, ed. K.-H. Schirmer and B. Sowinski (Cologne: Böhlau, 1972) 96–112, here 110.

and ethical message, and because of its author's boldness in dealing with such a difficult and yet so important topic in human life.²⁵ The question is, did the medieval audiences appreciate this poem in a similar vein as classical and modern audiences have enjoyed *The Women of Troy*? Or are the twentieth-century critics correct in their claim that the heroic text reveals a "tendency to overemphasize affections and emotional actions"?²⁶

The manuscript tradition contradicts this modern interpretation, indicating that this text was considered valuable and meaningful enough to be copied many times throughout the centuries. All the major *Nibelungenlied* manuscripts with a complete version of this epic also contain a version of *Diu Klage*.²⁷ Contrary to claims made in literary histories and encyclopedia entries,²⁸ the so-called Piarist manuscript from the late fifteenth century (today kept in the Austrian National Library, Cod. Vindob. 15478) illustrates the fact that *Diu Klage* enjoyed an equal recognition with the *Nibelungenlied*. The Piarist manuscript—which contains the following texts: *Dietrichs erste Ausfahrt*; II. *König Anteloy (Antelan)*; III. *Ortnit*; IV. *Wolfdietrich*; V. *Nibelungenlied*, Part I; VI. *Nibelungenlied*, Part 2; VII. *Lorengel*—seems to indicate that by the time the scribes copied the various texts into this manuscript, *Diu Klage* had already lost its appeal and was not deemed worthy to be included. Significantly, however, several stanzas from the *Klage* poem were also included (2127–29), providing additional information about the origin of several heroes at Attila's court not mentioned in the *Nibelungenlied*.²⁹ The *Klage* stanzas, simply incorporated in the *Nibelungenlied*, demonstrate that at least certain narrative elements of this lament poem were still known at the end of the fifteenth century, providing additional information about the events leading to the catastrophe.

We must therefore conclude that this text was as much appreciated by late-medieval audiences as the *Nibelungenlied*, again indicating that the heroic tradition comes to an end here and that a new cultural attitude emerges. For the *Klage* portrays a new kind of social interaction via the negative evaluation of the

²⁵ There is no way to demonstrate a direct link between both texts, particularly because Euripides does not seem to have been well known, if at all, in the Middle Ages; see Ernst-Richard Schwinge, "Einleitung," *Euripides*, ed. E.-R. S. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968) ix. For the genre of the "lament poem," see William H. Race, "Lament," *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T.V. F. Brogan, et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 675.

²⁶ Angelika Günzburger, *Studien zur Nibelungenklage. Forschungsbericht—Bauform der Klage—Personendarstellung* (Frankfurt/M.: Lang, 1983) 183; see also Kurt Getzuhn, *Untersuchungen zum Sprachgebrauch und Wortschatz der Klage* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1914).

²⁷ See Werner Hoffmann, *Das Nibelungenlied* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1992) 73–75, 126; McConnell, *The Lament* xvif.

²⁸ Werner Hoffmann, *Nibelungenlied* 126f.; Henry Kratz, "The *Nibelungenlied* and the *Klage* (circa 1200)," *German Writers and Works of the High Middle Ages: 1170–1280*, ed. James Hardin and Will Hasty (Detroit: Gale Research, 1994) 244.

²⁹ *Das Nibelungenlied nach der Piaristenhandschrift*, ed. Adelbert von Keller (Stuttgart: Litterarische Verein, 1879).

bloody events at King Attila's court. This interaction is based on a different concept of community, one in which communication plays a major role.³⁰ In the *Nibelungenlied*, actions had provoked counteraction, and murder had led to an Armageddon. Deception and plots had triggered disastrous consequences, and little did the protagonists know of how to interact with others by using language skills, negotiation strategies, and mutually shared religious ideals to find compromises, to settle issues, and to search for peace.

In the *Klage*, the opposite direction is taken: the effects of the battle are lamented, grief is given extensive expression, the cause of the tragedy is repeatedly and intensively discussed. Certainly, the few survivors search, to some extent, for the culprit and try to explain the reasons for the catastrophe. The Master of the Kitchen, Rumolt, ruminates aloud about what could have convinced Kriemhild to seek such exorbitant revenge: "I could see from the pain she felt that she was forever contemplating how they might be killed for what they had done" (191). Blame is redistributed, and the pain resulting from the slaughter is fully recognized. At the same time some of the bystanders also reprimand the court to limit the lamentations and to take the necessary steps to renew the social order (193).

Rüedger's daughter Dietlinde has to take over the responsibility of ruling the country despite her great mourning over the loss of her parents—the mother had died, succumbing to her own pain (203). In Worms, Gunther's son is crowned and enthroned despite the unfathomable grief experienced by everybody, thus causing a new glimmer of joy: "The court and the assembled company were thus able to enjoy some happiness" (195). At the same time, Brünhild repents her harsh words and her insulting of Kriemhild, thereby indicating how past events could have been avoided and how future conflicts should be avoided (189).

To conclude, the *Klage* poet fully acknowledges the pain felt over the enormous loss of men and the destruction of the Hunnish court. He shares the grief of the widows and orphans, but also outlines ways in which to end the mourning and to overcome the past. The text does not provide us with real actions, except for descriptions of how the thousands of corpses are found and buried, how the sad news spread from East to West, and how the family members react when they are informed about the tragedy. The *Klage* also does not fully explain how and why the events surrounding Kriemhild and Hagen had developed, except for a few discussions about the responsibility of Hagen by the narrator, Hildebrand, Bishop Pilgrim, and Rumolt. Instead, the focus rests on the emotions experienced by the survivors. The crucial question is how to

³⁰ For a global overview and the theoretical framework for this interpretive approach, see my study "Kommunikation im Mittelalter. Prolegomena zu einer neuen Bewertung der mittelhochdeutschen Literatur," *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 27 (1993): 17–51.

respond to such a tragedy, and what relevance grieving and mourning have both in terms of private and public values.

The *Klage* author clearly opposes the heroic tradition represented by the *Nibelungenlied* and introduces a new approach to human history. As we can tell from the rich manuscript tradition, the various audiences throughout the centuries reacted positively to the message contained in the text, obviously because *Diu Klage* gave expression to profound experiences and emotions. What better role could we attribute to a poetic text but to do just that. From this perspective, literary historians have done great injustice to this short epic poem. Germanist scholarship, fixated on its traditional literary canon, has relegated this short lament poem to the dark background of the medieval world where allegedly sentimental and meaningless works of art are condemned to oblivion.³¹ As I hope to have demonstrated here, this negative judgment is not justified. Particularly today, at the end of the twentieth century, after many similar experiences either in Nazi Germany or in Kampuchea under the rule of the Khmer Rouge, we are certainly in a position to appreciate the ethical and literary accomplishments of the *Klage* poet. Human suffering finds powerful expression in this hitherto ignored epic poem, and in this sense *Diu Klage* occupies a very special niche in medieval literature.

³¹ Joachim Bumke, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im hohen Mittelalter* (Munich: DTV, 1990) 205.