



## The Gosling | Daz Genselin

### Text Information

Author | Anonymous

Language | Middle High German

Period | 13th Century

Genre | Narrative poetry

Source | Munich, University Library, 2° Cod. ms. 731, fol. 91v–93v

Collection | Gender, Sex and Sensuality: Writings on Women, Men and Desire, Prank or Be Pranked: Comedy, Wit and Satire

URL | [sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/gosling/](http://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/gosling/)

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### Introduction to the Text

*The Gosling* is a typical example of the Middle High German tradition of *mären*: short narrative texts written in rhyming couplets, often telling humorous stories spiked with sexual jokes and sideswipes against specific social groups, most frequently clerics. In this way, *mären* are similar to the French *fabliaux* and the Italian prose *novelle*.

*The Gosling* was probably composed in the second half of the thirteenth century CE, and its author is unknown. The text tells the story of a young monk who leaves his monastery for the first time, encountering an outside world about which he is entirely ignorant. Never having seen a woman before, he innocently asks his abbot about those that they meet, and the abbot, trying to suppress the monk's instant fascination, tells him that these creatures are called "geese". The abbot's plan fails as the naive monk is soon seduced by a village girl. Unaware of his wrongdoing, he reveals his sexual encounter to the abbot, who recognizes the calamity caused by his white lie.

The motif of the young man inexperienced in the ways of the world is widespread in European medieval literature. It is central to the various medieval versions of the legend of Barlaam and Josaphat (for example, Rudolf von Ems's *Barlaam und Josaphat*, also in Middle High German, composed c.1220/30) and is frequently used as a moral anecdote in sermons and exemplary literature (for example, Jacques de Vitry's *Exempla*, no. 82). Although commonly found in texts intended to educate their listener, the motif's humorous potential did not escape medieval authors and audiences and there are a large number of burlesque medieval stories about young men who have never seen women before and yet are instantly attracted them. For example, both the early fourteenth-century Italian text *Novellino* (specifically story no. 14) and Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* (composed in 1358; see specifically the introduction to the fourth day) tell variants of this story.

*The Gosling* is a relatively early example of this narrative tradition. With regard to its verse form, sexual humor and undertones of anticlericalism, it represents central characteristics of the *mären* tradition and provides an introduction this literary genre.

### Introduction to the Source

Multiple variants of this text are transmitted in six manuscripts that were written between the early fourteenth and mid-fifteenth centuries CE. The manuscript that our translation is based on was composed in Würzburg (in what is now southern Germany) around the year 1350 CE. In the scholarship, it is known as manuscript E.

Please note: You will see that the manuscript images embedded in the text panel (if you click "Go to Text") do not always match our edition of the medieval text. This is because these images are not of manuscript E (which has not yet been digitised), but of a slightly earlier manuscript which also contains *The Gosling*: Heidelberg Cod. Pal. germ. 341. This manuscript is available to view in its entirety here. Although the two manuscripts generally agree, there are some variations. This is a common feature of medieval texts, which are often slightly modified when they are recopied, whether by mistake (i.e. when the scribe makes an error) or deliberately (i.e. when the scribe makes an alteration).



### About this Edition

We have translated *The Gosling* according to Klaus Grubmüller's edition of manuscript E (Munich, University Library, 2° Cod. ms. 731, fol. 91v–93v). His edition is published in: *Novellistik des Mittelalters. Texte und Kommentare*. Deutscher Klassiker-Verlag im Taschenbuch, 2014.

### Further Reading

Boccaccio, Giovanni, *The Decameron*, translated by Wayne A. Rebhorn. Norton, 2013.

- See the introduction of the fourth day of stories for a variant of The Gosling.

Chinca, Mark, "The Body in some Middle High German Mären: Taming and Maiming," *Framing Medieval Bodies*, edited by Sarah Kay, Miri Rubin. Manchester University Press, 1994, pp. 187–210.

Il Novellino. *The Hundred Old Tales*, translated by Edward Storer. George Routledge & Sons, 1925.

The fourteenth tale is a variant of The Gosling.

- The fourteenth tale is a variant of The Gosling.

The Exempla, or *Illustrative Stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry*, edited by Thomas Frederick Crane. Folk-Lore Society, 1890.

- Exemplum no. 84 uses the trope of the inexperienced young man for moral instruction.

Young, Christopher J., "At the End of the Tale. Didacticism, Ideology and the Medieval German Märe," *Mittelalterliche Novellistik im europäischen Kontext: Kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*, edited by Mark Chinca, Timo Reuvekamp-Felber, Christopher J. Young. Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2006, pp. 24–47.

Wailles, Stephen L., "Social Humor in Middle High German Mären," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik*, vol. 10, 1976, pp. 119–148.

Wailles, Stephen L., "Mären," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, edited by Joseph Reese Strayer, vol 8. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1987, col. 126–133.

- Short lexicon article on the literary genre.



## The Gosling | Daz Genselin

Ich hort sagen ein mer  
wie ein kloster wer  
rich unde erbuwen wol  
als von reht ein kloster sol  
5ir gasthus und ir spital  
heten niht gesatzu mal  
wan zuo welhen ziten der man  
geriten oder gende kan  
der vant daz ezzen ie bereit  
minneclich und unverseit  
gap man swaz si mohten han.  
also solten noch diu klôster stan.  
ouch hort ich mer von in sagen  
ir kloster daz wer underslagen  
daz die munich und ir gemach  
selten ieman fremder sach  
und seit daz selbe mer  
das manic munich da wer  
der selten fur daz kloster kan  
Nu was dar inne ein junc man  
der het siniu jar vertriben  
daz er dar inne was beliben  
sit daz er was ein kindelin  
des muost im unbekant sin  
swaz lebt in dem lande  
wen daz er ors nach sage erkande  
daz man die solde riten  
Do kam ez zuo einen ziten  
daz der apt solt riten  
des wolt er nicht biten  
und wolt schaffen des klosters dinc  
in bat der selbe jüngelinc  
daz er in fuort durch daz lant,  
daz im würde erkant  
der site von dem lande  
des er vil klein erkande.

I heard a story told  
of a splendid  
and well-built monastery,  
as a monastery should be.  
5 Their lodgings and their infirmary  
did not have limited meal times  
for whenever someone arrived  
on horseback or on foot  
he always found a meal prepared.  
10 Charitably and willingly  
they gave whatever they had.<sup>1</sup>  
Would that monasteries were still this way!  
I also heard something more about them:  
that their monastery was isolated  
15 so that strangers seldom saw  
the monks and their quarters.  
The same story also tells that  
there were many monks  
that seldom left the monastery.  
20 As it happened, a young man lived there.  
He had spent all his years there.  
since he was a child,  
staying inside the monastery.  
He couldn't have known  
25 what dwelled in the land.  
He had only heard tell of horses:  
that one could ride them.  
There came a time  
when the abbot needed to ride out.  
30 Without delay,  
he wanted to attend to the monastery's affairs.  
The same lad asked him  
to take him along through the countryside  
so that he would learn about  
35 the land's customs  
of which he knew very little.



der abt der gewert  
den münich des er begert,  
wan er in einveltigen sach.  
in disem sinne das geschach:  
er gedâht, wirt im erkant  
beide liut unde lant,  
sô mac man im enpfelhen wol  
swes ein man pflegen sol.  
45er wirt uns ein vil nützer man.  
alsus fuort er in von dan.  
sîn knehte niht vermiten,  
mit ir herren sie do riten.  
ir pfert giengen schon enzelt.  
do si komen an daz velt  
swaz in vihes wider gie  
der münich nimmer verlie  
er sprach ie wie ist daz genant  
der abbet der seit imz zehant  
swie sin name sôlt sin  
ez wer rint schaf oder swin  
daz tet er im zuo rehte kunt  
Do komen sie in kurzer stunt  
zuo einem hove do sie hin wolten  
und ouch da beliben solten  
do sie der meier gesach  
er lief gein in unde sprach  
got wilkommen lieber herre min  
und alle die mit iu hie sin  
als man in die ors empfie  
der abte unt der münich gie  
zuo einem fiur an ir gemach  
alsô schier daz geschach,  
man zôch in abe sa zehant  
ir schuohe unde ir obergewant.  
Nu het der wirt ein schoenez wip  
und ein tochter, der lip  
was ze wunsche wol gestalt,  
sie was wol zweinzic jar alt,  
die ouch dort her giengen,

The abbot granted  
the monk what he desired  
as he saw that he was ignorant.  
40 That transpired for this reason:  
he thought: "Should the lad learn  
about both land and people,  
one could trust him with  
the duties that need to be fulfilled.  
45 Then he will become a very useful man for us."  
With that he led him from there.  
His pages didn't hesitate  
to ride with their master.  
Their horses cantered nicely along.  
50 Once they reached the countryside,  
the monk never neglected to ask about  
whatever animal crossed his path.  
"What's that called?" he would ask.  
The abbot readily told him  
55 what its name was.  
Whether cattle or sheep or swine,  
he informed him correctly.  
After a short while they came  
to a farmstead to which they were headed  
60 and intended to stay.  
When the reeve saw them,  
he approached them and said:  
"God bid you welcome, my dear Sir,  
and all those here with you."  
65 After the horses had been taken care of,  
the abbot and the monks went  
to rest by the fire.  
Right away,  
someone promptly took  
their shoes and coats.  
Now, the host had a beautiful wife  
and a daughter whose body  
was everything one could wish for.  
She was about twenty years old.  
The two women also came there and welcomed the gentlemen.



der abbet hiez sie sitzen nider.  
da warn si niht wider.  
sie sazen nider an die stat.  
der münich den abbet aber bat  
daz er in wizzen lieze  
wie diu creature hieze  
do sprach der abbet zuohant:  
"diz sint gense genant."  
dô sprach der münich: "crêde mich,  
sô sint die gense siuberlich.  
wie kumt daz wir niht gense hân?  
die möhten sich vil wol begân  
an unser klôsterweide."  
des lachten si dô beide  
des wirtes tohter und sîn wîp.  
si wundert sêre daz sîn lîp  
was sô rehte minneclich  
unt daz er niht verstüende sich  
wie ein wîp er genant.  
den apte vrâgten si zehant  
ob der herre sinnic wer.  
dô seit er in diu mer,  
als ir ê hant vernumen,  
wie der münich dar was kumen c  
und wie er erwachsen wer.  
als dô daz selbe mer  
des wirtes tohter bevant,  
dô gedâhte si zuohant:  
"er ist ein sô hêrlich man,  
dêst wâr, ob ichz gefüegen kan,  
ich versuoch ob er diu wîp  
erkenne ir namen under ir lîp."  
der rede si gedagt,  
ir gedanc si niemen sagt  
des si gedâht hete.

The abbot asked them to be seated.  
They were not averse to this.  
They sat down on the spot.  
80 But the monk asked the abbot  
to tell him  
what these creatures were called.  
The abbot replied readily:  
"These are called geese."  
85 The monk said: "My goodness!  
Geese are lovely.  
Why don't we have geese?  
They would fit in nicely  
on the pasture at the monastery."  
90 Both the host's wife and daughter  
laughed at that.  
They were very surprised that he  
was so handsome,  
yet didn't know  
95 what a woman was called.  
Straight away, they asked the abbot  
whether the gentleman was right in the head.  
Then he told them the story  
that you have just heard  
100 about how the monk had come to the monastery<sup>2</sup>  
and grown up there.  
When the host's daughter had listened  
to this story,  
she immediately thought:  
105 "He's such a gorgeous man.  
Truly, if I can make it happen  
I will test whether he knows women  
in name and in the flesh."  
She kept her musing to herself;  
110 she told no one of the thoughts  
that she had formed.



Nû wart ez alsô spete  
daz die herren slâfen solten gân:  
nû wolt der meier des niht lân  
er hiez in betten nâch irm sît:  
dô was ouch sîn tohter mit;  
si schuof daz disem jungen man  
wart gebettet wol hin dan  
von den andern verre,  
dar umbe daz der herre  
möht haben sîn gemach.  
nâch sînem willen daz geschach.  
Dô man die herren geleit,  
der wirt hiez gereit  
allez daz gesinde slâfen gân,  
den herren ir gemach lân.  
der münich niht slâfen mahte;  
er het manige ahte,  
wie ieglich dinc wer genant  
daz im des tages wart erkant.  
diu juncfrowe ouch ungeslafen lac  
mit gedanken der si pflac  
wie daz würde vollebrâht  
daz si dâ vor hete gedâht.  
dô die liute entsliefen über al,  
dô stuont si ûf ân allen schal  
und sleich zuo sînem bette dar.  
als ir der münich wart gewar.  
er sprach zuohant: “waz mac daz sîn?”  
Si sprach: “Ich binz, daz junge genselîn,  
und hân vrostes vil erliten:  
herre, ich wolt iuch gerne biten  
daz ir hin under liezet mich,  
in der minne, daz ich  
iht ervrûer, wan hie ist ez kalt.”  
dô waz der münich einvalt  
daz er si zuo im hin under lie.

It was now so late  
that it was time for the gentlemen to go to bed.  
The reeve now insisted  
115 that beds be prepared for them as was befitting.  
His daughter was also present.  
She arranged it so that the young man  
had his bed  
far from the others  
120 so that his master  
could be comfortable.  
It was done according to his wishes.  
Right after the gentlemen had been shown to their beds  
the host commanded  
125 that all of his household should go to sleep  
so that the gentlemen would be left in piece and quiet.  
The monk was not able to sleep.  
He had many thoughts  
about what each thing was called  
130 that he had encountered that day  
She also lay awake  
turning over in her mind  
how to accomplish  
what she had thought of earlier.  
135 After all the people around them had fallen asleep,  
she got up without a sound  
and snuck over to his bed.  
When the monk noticed her,  
he said straight away, “What might that be?”  
140 She said: “It’s me, the little gosling.  
I’ve been suffering dreadfully from the cold.  
Sir, I would really like to ask you,  
to permit me to slip under the covers  
out of the kindness of your heart,  
145 so that I don’t freeze to death.”  
The monk was so naive  
that he let her slip under the covers.



in der minne daz ergie  
dô si dar under zuo im kam,  
dô konde dirre junge manx  
mit ir lützel noch vil  
daz man do heizzet bettespil.  
dô konde siz ein wênic baz.  
mit guoter fuoge schuof si daz  
daz er in kurzer stunde  
des selben spiln begunde.  
der mûnech die gans brûht  
mit flîze, wan in dûht  
im were wol und dennoch baz.  
alsô lange treip er daz  
unz si des tages sich versach.  
dô stuont si ûf unde sprach:  
“nu sült ir nimmer verjehen  
des von uns zweien ist beschehen.  
würde ez dem abte kunt,  
man tet uns beide sâ zestunt  
den vil grimmeclîchen tôt.”  
vil tiure si im daz gebôt  
daz erz geseite nimmer man.  
daz lobt er und gie si von dan  
an ir heimlîch.  
ir muot was fröudenrîch  
daz si was dannân kumen unt dar  
daz ir dâ nieman wart gewar.  
Dô si kam an ir gemach,  
dar nâch vil schier daz geschach  
daz ûf begonde gân der tac.  
das nâch ouch vil unlange lac  
der abte und der mûnich dâ.  
si schuofen ir dinc iesâ  
durch daz si wârn kumen dar.  
dô si daz geschuofen gar,  
zuohant si wider heim riten.

That was done out of kindness.  
When she joined him under the blanket,  
150 this young man knew  
next to nothing  
about how to play so-called bed games with her.  
She knew a little bit more.  
With great skill she  
155 quickly got him  
playing the same game.  
The monk dealt with the goose  
eagerly, because it seemed to him  
that he was feeling good and would soon feel even better.  
160 He carried on with it  
until she noticed the break of day.  
Then she got up and said:  
“You must never tell anyone  
what has happened between the two of us.  
165 If the abbot ever found out,  
we would both immediately suffer  
a gruesome death.”  
With great urgency she commanded  
that he never tell anyone about it.  
170 He swore to that and she then retired  
to her chamber.  
She was full of joy  
that she had gone there and back  
without anyone noticing.  
175 Soon after  
she came to her chamber,  
the day began to dawn.  
The abbot and the monk  
did not stay in bed much longer.  
180 They dealt with the affairs  
for which they had come there.  
As soon as they had done this  
they rode home again.



die klôsterliute niht vermiten,  
dô si heim wâr kumen,  
der mûnech wart her genumen  
und frâgten in zehant  
wie im geviel daz lant.  
dô begunde er in verjehen  
daz er wol hete gesehen  
vil dinge in dem lande  
des er ê niht erkande.  
des gelachten si vil,  
sîn rede was ir aller spil.  
doch pflac er der kûndekeit  
daz ir keinem wart geseit  
wie im des nahtes ûf der vart  
diu junge gans ze teil wart.  
daz hal er sêre, als si in hiez;  
nieman er daz wizzen liez.  
Nû was ez vor der hôchzît  
die in dem winter gelîf,  
diu wîhennaht ist genant.  
der abte besant zuohant  
kelner unde koche.  
er sprach: "uns nâhet ein woche  
daz wir singen müezen und lesen.  
nû sült ir der herren flîzic wesen  
daz ir uns ein wirtschafft gebent.  
sô die liute mit arbeit lebent,  
so sol man ir pflegen dester baz."  
die herren lobten alle daz.  
Der junge mûnich stuont dâ bî.  
Er sprach: "sît daz iuwer wille sî,  
daz wir vollez ampt süllen hân,  
sô sült ir nimmer verlân,  
mûge ez an iuwer staten sîn,  
so schaffet, lieber herre mîn,  
daz iedem man ein gans werde:  
sô wart ûf der erde  
nie keinen liuten baz."

Once they had arrived home,  
185 the brothers could not resist  
taking the monk aside  
and eagerly asking him  
how he had liked the country.  
He began to tell them  
190 that he had actually seen  
many things in the country  
that he hadn't known before.  
They laughed a lot at that.  
His tale entertained them greatly.  
195 He was clever enough  
that he didn't tell any one of them  
during the night while on the trip.  
how he had partaken of the goose  
He didn't say a word, as she had told him.  
200 He let no one know about that.  
Now at that time, it was before the feast day  
which takes place in winter  
and which is called Christmas.  
The abbot immediately summoned  
205 cooks and cellarers.  
He said: "There is a week approaching  
when we must sing and read.  
Now, you should be attentive to the gentlemen  
by preparing a banquet for us.  
210 The more tedium in people's lives,  
the better they should be taken care of."  
The gentlemen all praised that.  
The young monk stood there with them  
and said: "Since you wish us  
215 to hold full high mass, my dear master  
you should not fail  
if it is in your power  
to provide  
every man with a goose.  
220 Then no one on earth  
will ever have had it better."





der abbet vienc der rede haz:  
er hiez in swîgen. daz geschach.  
dar nâch er aber schier sprach:  
"gense daz ist ein wirtschafft,  
ob aller wirtschafft ein überkraft  
die in der werlt ieman gewan."  
der abt sprach zuo dem jungen man:  
"bruoder, tuot die rede hin.  
wâ hin haben ir iuwern sin  
und iuwer witze getân?  
nû mügt ir iuch doch wol verstân  
daz wir niht fleisches ezzen.  
ich will mich des vermezzen  
5ir müezt der rede buoz enpfân."  
er hiez in balde dannan gân.  
des getorst der münich lâzen niht.  
er sprach iedoch: "waz mir geschiht,  
guot weren gense, der sie mac han,  
guot unde wolgetan."  
hie mit wart er hin vertriben.  
die andern alle dâ beliben  
und schuofen um ir lipnar.  
dar nâch satzten si gar  
beide ir singen unde ir lesen,  
wer des meister sôlt wesen.  
dî daz allez wart gesat,  
der abt im gewinnen bat  
aber disen jungen man.  
er fuort in von den liuten dan  
an sîn heimlich.  
er bat in fliziclich  
daz er im verjehe  
dâ von diu rede geschehe  
daz er der gense begert.  
der münich in des gewert.

The abbot became angry at these words.  
He bade him to be silent, and the monk was silent.  
But a second later he said:  
225 "Geese! That's a feast!  
The most almighty of feasts  
that anyone in the world has ever enjoyed."  
The abbot said to the young man:  
"Brother, be silent!  
230 Where have you left your sense  
and your reason?  
Now, you should know  
that we don't eat meat.  
I will demand  
235 that you do penance for your words."  
Immediately after that, he ordered him to leave.  
The monk didn't dare to object,  
but he spoke: "No matter what happens to me,  
geese would be good. For him who is able to have them,  
240 they are good and fine."  
At these words, he was thrown out.  
The others all stayed there  
and busied themselves with their nourishment.  
Afterwards they agreed on  
245 their chanting and readings  
and who should be responsible for them.  
When this was all agreed upon,  
the abbot asked for  
the young man to be brought to him.  
250 He took him away from the others  
to his room.  
He asked him fervently  
to tell him  
the reason why he said  
255 that he desired geese.  
The monk granted him that.



dô er sô tiur wart gemant,  
dô verjach er im zehant  
reht der gense wârheit,  
als ich iu ê hân geseit,  
wie er die gans hin under lie  
und sich die naht mit ir begie.  
dô daz der abbet bevant,  
trûreclichen er sprach zehant:  
"leider mir, ir sît betrogen:  
ich hân iu selbe verlogen.  
crêde mich ez was ein wîp.  
iuwer sinnelôser lîp  
hât bî wîben gelegen.  
ich solt iuwer baz hân gepflegen,  
sô het ich reht getân."  
buoze hier er in empfân.  
daz geschach nâch siner bet.  
doch wen ich er im unreht tet:  
wan swaz er sünden dâ gewan,  
dâ was der apt schuldic an.  
het er im die wârheit  
ungelogen und âne spot geseit,  
er het sich lîhte baz behuot.  
spot und lûge ist selten guot:  
si sint sünde und ouch ân êre.  
waz sol ich dâ von sagen mære  
denne ich hân alhie getân?  
ez ist mîn geloube und hân den wân  
daz ze Swâben noch der mûnich sî  
vil lîht zwên oder drî  
die diu wîp erkennt baz.  
gedienten die ir meister haz,  
die bûezen ouch, daz ist mîn rât.  
hie mit die rede ein ende hât.

When he was so strongly urged,  
he told him without hesitation  
the whole truth about geese  
260 as I have told you before:  
how he lay with the goose  
and spent the night with her.  
When the abbot discovered this  
he replied right away with sadness:  
265 "Alas, you have been betrayed.  
I myself have deceived you.  
Believe me, that was a woman.  
Your ignorant body  
has lain with a woman.  
270 I should have taken better care of you,  
then I would have behaved dutifully."  
He commanded him to do a penance.  
The monk did as he was ordered,  
but I think he was treated unfairly.  
275 For, whatever sins he committed there,  
the abbot was to blame for them.  
If he had told him the truth  
honestly and without lies,  
the monk would have guarded himself better.  
280 Mockery and lying are seldom good;  
they are sins and they are also without honour.  
What more shall I say about this  
than what I have already said?  
It is my belief and my assumption  
285 that in Swabia there might still  
easily be two or three monks  
who have a better understanding of women.  
If they annoy their superiors,  
they should also do penance. This is my advice.  
290 Here the story ends.



## Critical Notes

### *Translation*

*Line 11* "Milte" (roughly: "generosity") is regularly portrayed as a key virtue in medieval German courtly literature. Here it is related to the Christian ideal of caritas ("charity").

*Line 100* The literal translation of the Middle High German would be: "how the monk had come there". This refers to his youth at the monastery. To clarify the reference, we specified the "there" in our translation.