



King Rother and His Bride: Quest and Counter-Quests (Studies in German Literature Linguistics and Culture)

Thomas Kerth

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King Rother, a twelfth-century bridal-quest epic, occupies an important place in the history of German literature. The earliest surviving and structurally most sophisticated of the so-called minstrel epics, verse narratives once assumed to have been recited by itinerant minstrels before a courtly audience, it has its roots in German folklore and documents the transition from orality to the culture of the book. The text belongs to the subgenre of the perilous bridal quest, in which the disguised wooer deceives the bride's father and abducts her with her consent. This simple quest structure is doubled, if the wooer must win his bride a second time from her father, who has rescued her. The bride is almost always a passive figure in these events, the main conflict being the disparity in status between the wooer and his prospective father-in-law. King Rother is structurally complex, as the present study is the first to recognize: the quest structure is doubled not only in the wooer's second quest, but also in the bride's own actions -- including her use of deception in a parallel quest for her wooer. This underscores her equality in status, which is her essential qualification to be his wife. The study includes an important English-language summary of scholarship on King Rother, on the minstrel epics, and on the bridal quest. Thomas Kerth is Associate Professor of German at Stony Brook University.

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