Summary. Tannhäuser’s “crusade song” has given rise to controversial interpretations: it has been read as an autobiographical account of the poet’s experience on the expedition organized by the Emperor Frederick II in 1228-29, and it has been interpreted as an allegory of man’s earthly existence; for some scholars the poet expresses profound concern for his sinful life, and willingly takes the cross to gain eternal reward, for others his aim is to ridicule the pro-crusade propaganda conducted by the Church.

This paper tries to show that a possible key to our understanding of the poem may be provided by a comparison with Walther’s Elegy. Tannhäuser’s poem may thus be regarded as a work originating from a sort of dialogue between Tannhäuser and his predecessor established in order to undermine an ideology on the holy journey which is felt to be no longer adequate. In such a way the poet can effectively lead the audience towards a reflection on the sense of the missions overseas in the first half of the 13th century and the formation of a critical stance.

In the corpus of lyrics preserved in the collective manuscript known as “Codex Manesse” and ascribed to the thirteenth-century poet Tannhäuser, the so-called Kreuzlied (‘crusade song’) has given rise to controversial interpretations. Indeed, this poem is highly problematic, for without doubt it contains many ambiguities and unexpected elements that bewilder the contemporary reader.

A possible key to our understanding of the poem may be provided by a comparison with the Elegy by Walther von der Vogelweide. A few connections between the two texts have already been made by a number of scholars. For the most part however, it has been argued that such affinities are, at most, marginal or may simply be due to the fact that both poets are dealing with a very common set of themes. On the contrary, my contention here is that the links between the two songs are close enough to assume that Tannhäuser’s intention was to “reply”, as it were, to Walther’s Elegy.

1 MS C, Heidelberg, Universitätbibliothek, cpg 848.
A complete analysis of Tannhäuser’s crusade song would be beyond the scope of this paper, which simply attempts to answer two questions pertaining to the theme of this conference:

a) Is it possible to consider Tannhäuser’s poem as a sort of “rewriting” of Walther’s Elegy?

b) If this were the case, how would the recognition of such an intertextual relationship affect our interpretation of the text?

Before answering these questions, it is perhaps necessary to present the content of the poem and, in doing so, to touch upon some crucial matters.

1. Tannhäuser’s poem consists of 5 loosely connected strophes, each one virtually complete in itself.

It opens with a description of the pleasures of those knights who find themselves in Apulia and go hunting, riding, or walking with lovely women. As we learn from line 7, which shifts the focus from the “others” to the individual, the narrator does not take part in such pleasant activities:

\[ \text{der fröude ist mir zerunnen} \quad \text{‘such joy is over for me’} \]

This idea is repeated in line 9:

\[ \text{Des darf man mich niht zihen} \quad \text{‘I can’t be rebuked for this’} \]

and specified in the following lines, with further seven negative sentences. The reason for this exclusion is found in the last hemistich (l. 16), when the speaker states:

\[ \text{ich swehe uf dem se} \quad \text{‘I float on the sea’} \]

It is significant that no further information is given about this voyage. Or rather, the unexpected use of the verb \textit{sweben} (‘float’) suggests that the narrator feels he is being aimlessly carried along by the water: consequently, this journey by sea seems to be entirely lacking in both a purpose and a destination.

In the second strophe the narrator speaks of his difficult life in general: a restless life, drifting from place to place, at the mercy of the wind. This is the most problematic part of the whole poem, for it contains several lines that have given rise to critical controversy, a point we shall discuss later on.

\[ \text{Quotations are from Siebert’s edition [1934 (1980: 119-121)].} \]
The third strophe describes the dangers of this voyage: a terrifying storm off Crete, the oars broken, the sails torn away by the winds and the cries of the crew that cause the speaker great anguish are all described. It should be observed that whereas the description of a storm is normally found in epic, it is a new element in a lyric poem. As we shall see, this unexpected naturalism has been interpreted in entirely different ways.

In the following strophe the emphasis is on the hardships suffered on board: the food is inedible, the water is murky, the wine is undrinkable, and the stench which comes up from the hold of the ship is certainly not a good companion during the journey.

In the last strophe the contrast is once again drawn between the pleasant life of the man who lives on land, who can ride wherever he likes, and the hard life of the man at sea, who must wait for favourable winds. The speaker subsequently lists the names of the 12 winds and concludes by saying that he would not have learnt them if he had remained ashore. Finally, we are informed of the reason for this voyage (l. 79):

\[
durch\ got\ ich\ vuor\ von\ lande\ ‘to\ serve\ God\ I\ left\ land’
\]

This is the only clue in the text that reveals the kind of journey the poem deals with: it is, apparently, a pilgrimage or a genuine crusade. However, if we compare it to other poems which treat essentially the same subject (more or less directly), we cannot help but notice that this is a highly unusual text. In order to appreciate its innovative features, it is necessary to consider the place that Tannhäuser’s poem occupies in the landscape of German crusade songs.

2. It is evident that Tannhäuser’s poem stands somewhat apart from the very first crusade songs composed in Middle High German, such as those by Friedrich von Hausen or Albrecht von Johansdorf. In these poems, belonging to the late 12th century, themes dealing with crusades and love usually occur together. Indeed, the poets do not speak so much of the rigours that a crusade implies, but rather of the pain caused by leaving the loved one behind. The principal focus is on the ethical dilemma of the Christian knight, torn between service to his lady and service to God, as we can see in these lines by Friedrich von Hausen:

\[\text{\textsuperscript{4} Cf. Lang (1936: 118).}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{5} We are only aware of crusade songs in Middle High German just before the third crusade led by Frederick Barbarossa (1189). This is considerably later than in Latin, Old Provençal and Old French. Cf. Böhmer (1968: 13); Theiss (1974: 8).}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{6} Ingebrand (1966: 5); Theiss (1974: 5).}\]
MIN herze und MIN lip diu wellent scheiden,
diu mit ein ander wären nu manige zît.
der lip wil gerne vehten an die heiden,
sô hât iedoch das herze erwelt ein wîp
Vor al der welt.

‘My heart and my body, which have long been united,
want to part. My body is eager to fight against the hea-
then, but my heart has chosen a woman above all the
world’.

Needless to say, Tannhäuser’s text is also very different from those poems
that advance propagandist arguments in favour of participation in a crusade,
such as those by Heinrich von Rugge or Hartmann von Aue. The following
lines by Hartmann, for example, constitute an exhortation to free the Holy
Land by reminding the knights of their duty to God. They must undertake the
journey overseas, and for the sake of God they must offer the very life they
have received as a gift from Him:

Nu zinsent, ritter, iuwer leben
und ouch den muot
durch in, der iu dâ hât gegeben
beidiu lip und guot.

‘Now, pawn your life and courage, knights, for the sake
of the One who has given you both life and goods’.

By the early 13th century, the attitude towards crusades has changed signifi-
cantly. Of course, some poets are still deeply concerned about the need for new
enterprises, which are seen as an opportunity to expiate their sins and to attain
eternal reward. As we shall see, Walther von der Vogelweide is one of the
foremost representatives of those poets who idealistically praise the crusading
spirit. On the whole, though, in the first decades of the new century it becomes
clear that the religious fervour which had stirred the first crusaders has, to a
great extent, faded: by this time disappointment and scepticism prevail.

7 Cf. Hölzle (1980: 103-105), who acknowledges as crusade songs only those poems that ex-
licitly exhort the audience to set sail for the Holy Land.
8 He exhorted his audience to take the cross in the following songs (following Lachmann’s
traditional numeration): 13,5 ff., 76,22 ff., 14,38 ff. (the so-called Palästinalied), and 124,1 ff.
(the so-called Elegy). Cf. Wentzlaff-Eggebert (1960: 234-246); Ingebrand (1966: 175-231);
Ladenthin (1983); Volkmann (1987); Salvan-Renucci (1995); Bachofer (1997); Scholz (1999:
160-169).
Freidank, for example, is a poet and a crusader who gives us extraordinary evidence of the difficult situation he has personally witnessed in the Holy Land. In his *Akkonsprüche*, which is a collection of epigrammatic statements written between 1227 and 1229, Freidank bitterly tells us of the miserable life of the crusaders in Acres (Akko): a life made up of disease, swindles, and moral decay. He also informs us of the general indignation towards the hostility of the clergy and the irresponsible decisions of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who deprived the crusade of its salvific function by placing the Holy City under interdict:

10

157,17-20

*Daz kriuce man für sünde gap,*  
*z'èrlæsen daz vil hêre grap;*  
*daz wil man nú mit banne wern.*  
*Wie sol man nú die sêle ernern?*

‘We took the cross to expiate our sins, to free the Holy Sepulchre. Now they want to keep us away from it by banishment. How shall we now save our soul?’

In such a situation, he wishes that he had never come to the Holy Land:

159,13-15

*ich selbe wolte her wider niht*  
*durh die untriwe, diu hie geschiht.*

‘I would never come here again, because of the lack of faithfulness that is found here’.

In his verses, then, disappointment and bitterness have completely replaced any religious enthusiasm for the mission overseas. A similar disenchantment can also be observed in Neidhart’s songs. The poet, who writes as if he were in the Holy Land, recounts the crusaders’ hard lot, laments that he himself had to leave, and longs for home:

12,24-25

*hey wære ich dort!*  
*bî der wolgetânen læge ich gerne an mînem rûme.*

‘Oh, were I only there! I would dearly like to lie in my room beside the beautiful one’.

10 Quotations are from Bezzenberger [1872 (1962)].  
12 It has been noted that Neidhart’s verses might refer either to the crusading expedition of Leopold of Austria in 1217-18, or to that of the Emperor Frederick II in 1228-29; however, it does not necessarily imply that the poet actually took part in a crusade. Cf. Böhmer (1968: 56) or Schweikle (1990: 60, 88). Quotations are from Haupt / Wiessner [1858; 1923 (1986)].
Only a fool, he states, would favour remaining far from home over sailing back:

13,1  
\textit{Er dunket mich ein narre,}
\textit{swer disen ougest hie bestät.}
\textit{[...]

13,7  
\textit{nindert wäre ein man baz dan dá heime in sîner pharre}

‘He who remains here in August seems a fool to me. [...] 
Nowhere could a man be better off than at home in his parish’

Neidhart could not express more explicitly the senselessness of the expedition. It is quite clear that Tannhäuser’s poem shares significant elements with these verses by Freidank and Neidhart, so much so that he has been grouped with them in the so-called “younger generation”.\textsuperscript{13} In their works the tone is predominantly sceptical and there is no attempt whatsoever to portray the mission overseas as a way of saving one’s soul. Nevertheless we must not overlook the fact that Tannhäuser’s poem, in focusing on the dangers of the voyage and neglecting to mention the Holy Land, the aims of the expedition or the military and political events connected to a crusade, is distinctly unusual. Nor does it overtly criticize the mission overseas. These puzzling omissions have been taken by some critics as evidence to support the theory that Tannhäuser’s poem cannot really be said to belong to the “crusade song” genre. Now, before proceeding to a comparison with Walther’s \textit{Elegy}, let us briefly review some of the most significant opinions about the meaning of Tannhäuser’s poem and its purpose.

3. The traditional interpretation of the poem tends to regard it as a crusade song in which the young knight Tannhäuser tells of his personal experience on the expedition organized by the Emperor Frederick II in 1228-29. The assumption that the journey referred to in the text is precisely this crusade is based largely on two facts: in his \textit{Leich} V Tannhäuser states he has been to Jerusalem; and the only enterprise (amongst those that Tannhäuser may have joined) in which crusaders reached the Holy Places is in fact the expedition undertaken by Frederick II. The foremost proponent of this critical approach to the poem is Siebert (1934). For Siebert the text allows us to draw precise inferences about the time

\textsuperscript{13} Böhmer (1968: 33 ff.).
TANNHÄUSER’S CRUSADE SONG: A REWRITING OF WALThER’S ELEGy?

and place of its composition. Tannhäuser’s crusade song is defined as his first work to have reached us, since historically verifiable references in his other poems span from 1245 to approximately 1266. Siebert then maintains that in his late twenties the poet set sail from Brindisi after spending a pleasurable period of time in Apulia and probably reached Jerusalem on March 17, 1229. The use of the present tense in the fourth stanza, the indication of the days spent after the storm, and the like, lead Siebert to conclude that Tannhäuser wrote his crusade song in 1228, during the voyage to Jerusalem; or, more exactly, while the ship was east of Crete.  

Like Siebert, the Italian scholar Anna Martellotti (1981) maintains that the realistic description of the voyage is founded on the personal experience of Tannhäuser, whom she believes to be a “crusader” and a member of the Emperor’s entourage. But she suggests that Tannhäuser’s autobiographical account of the journey shows that he manifestly rejects this expedition, and intends to mock the pro-crusade propaganda conducted by the Church. The early dating of the poem and the unusual insistence on realistic details have been the subject of much debate. Some critics have objected that the content and style of the poem indicate a later composition. The reference to a wandering life, for instance, leads Margarete Lang (1936: 114) to suggest that it was composed after the death of the poet’s patron, Frederick of Austria, in 1246. Furthermore, she proposes a symbolic interpretation of the realistic details, so that the poem reveals itself to be the expression of a wandering existence [Lang (1936: 119)].

Much scholarship perceives both realistic and allegorical elements in the poem. Wentzlaff-Eggebert (1960: 314-315), for instance, states, on the one hand, that Tannhäuser’s crusade song is a highly realistic description of the crusaders’ fate in the expedition of 1228-29, and on the other, he maintains that the poet equates the crusade to the journey of life. Similarly, Wolfgang Mohr (1960) argues that much of what might appear realistic is only superficial, and in fact conceals metaphorical meanings. For example, the storm is a literary topos and points to the difficulties of life; the term suten (a loan word from Italian sotto ‘underneath’), used in l. 59 to indicate the hold of the ship, may also stand for ‘hell’; and, if taken figuratively, the twelve winds named by the poet may represent temptations or the vices of men. Hence, Mohr views this poem as the first example of “allegorical naturalism” in German poetry, and contends that its true theme is not a crusade,
but the allegory of the sea of life: the poem is essentially a description of Everyman at the mercy of fate [Mohr (1960: 354)]. According to Mohr, the allegorical meaning of the poem is clearly brought to the fore in the second stanza, which he therefore moves to the end of the composition. Many other critics also share an allegorical reading of the poem, albeit with minor differences. For John Thomas (1970: 1; 33-35), the poem is a “Spruch cycle” in which “the analogy to life, with its hardships, sins, punishments, and rewards is obvious”. Thomas, for whom Tannhäuser is primarily a humorist, claims that the poet treats the traditional crusade song in a manner that his audience did not expect, thus producing a humorous effect. Among the scholars who reject a literal interpretation of the poem we might also cite Maria Böhmer (1968), who reads the text as a representation of man’s sinful life on earth. In more recent years, the allegorical reading seems to have become the predominant one, for it can be found in critical work on Tannhäuser as well as in handbooks and anthologies. A remarkable interpretation of the poem has been given by Roswitha Wisniewski (1984: 106), who sees parallels with St Paul’s voyage and shipwreck found in Acts 27. In her opinion, the sea is symbolic of hell, and the adverse forces the poet has encountered during the voyage allude to his sinfulness. She goes so far as to conclude that Tannhäuser’s willingness to set off on a crusade to serve God is a sign of his conversion and makes him “a follower of that Saul who became Paul”.

The variety of critical opinions briefly presented here requires a number of considerations. As far as the literal interpretation is concerned, it need hardly be said that this poem tells us nothing about either the date when it was written or the poet’s biography, even though the use of the present tense may suggest that he depicts himself as actually sailing to the Holy Land. Indeed, it is methodologically mistaken to identify the narrator with the real author. Tannhäuser is a poet and for poetical reasons he may be simply adopting the role of a crusader, and describing the suffering which would be experienced by anyone who undertook such a journey. Moreover, in Tannhäuser’s corpus of poems there is nothing to indicate that he really was a knight and went on a crusade. Not even the famous illustration of the poet in the Manesse manuscript, in which he appears as a knight of the Teutonic Order, can be produced

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17 This shift has been accepted by Böhmer (1968), but rejected by other critics, e.g. Wachinger (1995: 605).
18 Tannhäuser’s poem is defined as an allegory of man’s earthly life for example in Müller (1993: 542) or Schweikle (1995: 144). Heinz Kischkel (1998: 281-282) agrees with the allegorical reading of the poem, but with the qualification that it is not so much a metaphorical representation of life in general, but of the poet’s life in particular.
19 For a discussion of this matter see Cammarota (2005: 283-286, with bibliographical references in notes 15 and 16).
as evidence of Tannhäuser’s social status. On the contrary, it has been assumed that this portrait was inspired by his crusade song, or by the later legend attached to the poet’s name, or, as I have previously suggested, it may have served as a way of correcting Tannhäuser’s image as a libertine. Therefore, the attempt to regard the poem as an autobiographical account of Tannhäuser’s journey to the Holy Land – whether accepted or refused – is not based on particularly solid foundations. Interestingly, the actual participation of the poet in a crusade is also taken for granted by some of those scholars who read the poem as a *mare vitae* allegory. Wisniewski (1984: 105), for example, who interprets Tannhäuser’s readiness to go on the holy journey as a symbol of the poet’s effort to reject his sinful life, accepts the assumption that the young knight Tannhäuser joined the expedition of 1228-29. But if his *conversio animi* took place in his youth, we are faced with an apparent contradiction: in fact the inevitable question arises as to why Tannhäuser, redeemed from sin like St Paul, praised sensual love and boasted of erotic adventures in his songs that followed. Hence, it appears that the need to read Tannhäuser’s poem as a historical document capable of revealing significant information on the poet’s life is so strong as to be practically irresistible.

Yet, rejecting the need to derive any exact biographical data about the “real author” does not automatically imply the alternative reading of the poem as an allegory of the sea of life.

Firstly, it is difficult to deny that in the poem Tannhäuser stresses his appreciation of the material delights of this world, as he does in most of his other lyrics. Secondly, those phrases that seem to point to the poet’s awareness of his sins and a sincere concern for his after-life are by no means self-evident. The allegorical interpretation is essentially based on the second strophe, and, in particular, on the image contained in the last line:

{TII}

\[ \begin{align*}
   & Ich bin ein erbeitsælic man, \\
   & der niene kann beliben \\
   & wan hiute hie, morn anderswan, \\
   & sol ich daz iemer triben. \\
   & Des muoz ich dicke sorgen, \\
   & swie frelich ich da singe, \\
   & den abent und den morgen, \\
   & war mich daz weter bringe, \\
   & Daz ich mich so gefriste uf wazzer und uf lande \\
   & daz ich den lip gefuore unz uf die selben stunt. \\
   & ob ich den liuten leide in snœdem gewande, \\
   & so wirt mir diu reise mit freise vil wol kunt. \\
   & dar an sold ich gedenken,
\end{align*} \]

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Die wile ich mich vermac.
in mac im niht entwenken,
ich muoz dem wirte gelten vil gar uf einen tac.

‘I am a tormented man, who can never rest: who is here today and tomorrow there. I shall always live like this. Though I sing happily, I must often worry, both day and night, about where the wind will take me; how to proceed, on land and sea, how to save my life every day. If I offend people with shabby clothes, then the journey with horror reveals itself to me. I should think of this, as long as I can. I cannot avoid him. I must pay the innkeeper his bill one day (or: until the last day).’

This strophe can in fact be viewed as the expression of an existential crisis. The narrator feels as if he is drifting from place to place. Even if he sings happy songs, his life is difficult and is dependent on wind and weather. His clothes offend people and he has to struggle on a daily basis to save his life on land and sea. However, a reading of these lines as the sincere concern of a repenting soul for his salvation proves somewhat problematic. Scholars have seen religious reference both in the image of the narrator’s shabby clothes that offend people and in the image of the wirt (‘landlord, innkeeper, host’) to whom he has to pay his debts.

As to the former, Singer (1922b: 303) has suggested a reference to the biblical parable of the “Marriage Feast” after Matth. 22,1 ff. Since a man attended the feast without a wedding garment, the king ordered him to be cast into the darkness outside, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. By refusing to wear the wedding garment, which represents the pure, blameless character which Christ’s followers must possess, the guest insulted his lord and showed no desire to honour him; he was therefore unworthy to enter the heavenly kingdom.

As to the latter image, the “innkeeper” is usually conceived as either God or the devil. According to this interpretation, then, Tannhäuser is considered to

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21 Curiously, this interpretation requires three emendations in the verse Ob ich den liuten leide in snœdem gewande, so that it reads: Ob ich dem wirte leide in snoedem brutgewande (‘if I offend the host with this shabby wedding garment’). Cf. Singer (1922a: 39; 1922b: 303).

22 Mohr (1960: 352); Wentzlaff-Eggebert (1960: 315); Böhmer (1968: 91); Thomas (1970: 33); Paule (1994: 290). The alternative hypothesis of the landlord being the devil (the innkeeper of hell) has been posited by Mohr (1960: 353), who notes a similar use of this image in Walther’s poem L 100,24 and in Wolfram’s Willehalm (38,2ff.). He is followed by Birkhan (2003: 218). Lang (1936: 115-116) interprets the “wirt” on a literal level as the captain of the ship to whom the crusader has to pay his due (in which case it constitutes a further difficulty on board), but she also sees a reference to God. For Martellotti (1981: 123) the referent might be the pope, who excommunicated those who did not honour their oath to take the cross.
be expressing a profound consciousness both of his sins and for the necessity of expiation as well as preoccupation for the inevitability of the Last Judgement and the fear of being excluded from the heavenly kingdom.

There is, in fact, another possible implication in this image that, to my knowledge, has not been taken into account by criticism. The referent of the “innkeeper” may be “death”, which is probably viewed as impending by a seafarer in a desperate situation. A somewhat similar use of the term wirt occurs in Freidank’s Akkonsprüche. In order to stress that the crusade has been achieved at the cost of many lives, Freidank represents the cemetery as an innkeeper who is glad to receive such a large number of guests. No further implications of metaphysical nature are involved here:

156,19-23  
sô slîchet maneger über daz  
zem frîhof, derst ein sælic wirt;  
dem manic gast ze teile wirt  
der tuot dâ daz beste,  
er enpfâhet alle geste.

‘And so many crawl as far as the cemetery, this blessed host. To him many a guest are allotted. He does his best: he hosts all the guests’.

Similarly, the narrator in Tannhäuser’s poem may be worrying about death closing in, without any concern for his sinful life or the Last Judgement. This interpretation of the image is therefore not only possible, but it seems to me that it also fits in well with the general content and tone of the poem. Conversely, the attempt to compare Tannhäuser with St Paul or to discern allegorical implications even in such small details as the narrator’s clothes or in such concrete details as the twelve winds or the hold of the ship seems to me, frankly, implausible. As we shall see, the innovative use of realism in this lyric need not be explained as allegory, but may fulfil the function of establishing a contrast to Walther’s idealism.

4. I will now concentrate on some of the most significant elements that link Tannhäuser’s poem to the so-called Elegy, and we shall see whether they should be regarded as accidental, as has been argued, or, as I believe, intentional.

Although Walther’s poem cannot be dated with any certainty, it is usually taken to be his final work composed with the purpose of inspiring participation in the crusading expedition of 1228-29. The author, who portrays himself as an old man who laments the transitory nature of life and contemporary evils, has no doubts as to the righteousness of the Christian cause.

4.1. A distinctive feature which is present in both texts is an original means of handling the topos of the futility of earthly possessions.

We should bear in mind that crusade preachers, as well as poets, recommended to those who were taking the cross that they gave up the attractions of the world and concerned themselves with their spiritual life. As Hartmann says, the conversio animi is the basis on which participation in a crusade is predicated.

MF 209,25 Dem kriuce zimet wol reiner muot
und kiusche site
‘A pure mind and virtuous behaviour befit the Cross’

We may also think of Heinrich von Rugge’s exhortations to reject ‘the stupid earthly delights’ (die bloeden gir MF 97,2), and not to behave like those who pursue worldly pleasures (vil maneger nach der werlte strebet MF 99,13). He also criticizes the attitude of a ‘wicked man’ who, rather than leaving for the Holy Land, thought it better to stay at home and pass the time pleasantly with ladies:

MF 98,28 Sô sprichet lihte ein boeser man,
der <..> herze ne gewan:
‘wir suln hie heime vil sanfte belîben,
die zît wol vertrîben vil schöne mit wîben’
‘A wicked man, who does not have a <manly> heart, speaks in this careless way: “we would be better off staying peacefully at home, and having a nice time with ladies”’

Rugge therefore incites his audience to go on a crusade as a means of obtaining ‘a high reward’ (ein vil grôze gewin MF 99,19).

24 This dating is based on the phrase uns sint unsenfte brieve her von Rome komen (‘unpleasant papal letters have arrived from Rome’, II,9), which is usually believed to indicate the excommunication letters sent to Frederick II in 1227 for failing to honour his oath to lead a crusade. Volkmann (1987: 180-182); Bachofer (1997: 9).
Walther uses this *topos* in an original way, for he transforms it into the remembrance of things past and a melancholic meditation on the decay of present times. The world, as the poet had known it in his youth, is gone forever. Things have changed to such an extent that they are no longer recognizable.

The contrast between two situations, one entailing a state of *happiness* and the other a *loss of happiness*, is the main theme in Tannhäuser’s work too. Like Walther, Tannhäuser treats this subject in a very personal way: they both make extended use of the first person singular, since they both lament the loss of their own happiness.

As it seems to me that Tannhäuser’s strategy consists in recalling some elements in Walther’s poem in order to negate them, or invert their meaning, we shall now look at the differences.

First of all, we note that instead of juxtaposing past and present, as Walther does, Tannhäuser juxtaposes land and sea. In the first strophe of Tannhäuser’s poem, Apulia represents a place of delights enjoyed by those at home, a *locus amoenus* which is in contrast with the hardships of the life at sea. This shift allows Tannhäuser to adopt Walther’s meditative attitude while at the same time adapting it to a new situation.

Then, Walther states that merriment has now disappeared from society (dâ ist nieman vrô ‘nobody is happy’ II,4), mentioning that even the young are miserable:

As Tannhäuser implicitly contradicts these statements by listing all the pleasant activities of those who have remained on shore and can still enjoy themselves. Hunting, riding, walking with beautiful ladies, and the other courtly activities are depicted as sources of joy. And, as we have learnt from line 7 (quoted above), this is exactly the type of joy the speaker has been deprived of once he has set off.

But the most important difference lies in the opposing attitude towards the joy
of this world. From his powerful meditation on the vanity of the worldly life, Walther moves on to blame those who only seek temporal pleasures, in a way which reminds us of Heinrich von Rugge:

\[ \text{W II,16} \quad \text{swer dirre wunne volget, der hät jene dort verlorn} \]

‘Whoever pursues the joy of this world has lost that other one’

Conversely, Tannhäuser does not condemn the attractions of worldly pleasures as distractions from the seeking of God and eternal joy. Indeed, it is quite clear that he looks back with regret on such a comfortable life.

\[ \text{T I,1} \quad \text{Wol ime, der nu beizen sol} \]
\[ \text{ze Pülle uf dem gevilde!} \]

‘Lucky is the man who can hunt in the fields of Apulia’

The same idea, it will be recalled, is repeated in the last strophe:

\[ \text{T V,1} \quad \text{Ahī wie saelic ist ein man,} \]
\[ \text{der für sich mac geriten!} \]

‘How lucky is the man who can ride as he pleases’

Therefore, while both poets lament the loss of happiness, Walther is deeply concerned with the life to come, whereas Tannhäuser is clearly tied to the earthly life.

4.2. In the two poems the voyage is differently related to the poets’ state of mind. Walther suggests that the journey across the sea would be the only remedy to his suffering and anguish, a means of forsaking the things of this world and of striving to arrive at a more lasting gain, the true home in heaven. Thus, to him the sea-journey is desirable, it is liep (‘dear, precious’):

\[ \text{W III,15} \quad \text{möhte ich die lieben reise gevarn über sê} \]

‘If I could go on the dear journey across the sea’

Conversely, the narrator in Tannhäuser’s poem, who really does find himself in the situation in which Walther wishes he were, realizes that the journey is, in reality, nothing more than a source of horror and terror:

\[ \text{T II,28} \quad \text{so wirdet mir diu reise mit freise vil wol kunt} \]

‘then with horror the journey reveals itself to me’
The internal rhyme reise-freise (‘journey-horror’) leaves us in no doubt as to the harsh disappointment of the narrator. And when Walther exhorts the knights to leave:

\[ W \text{ III,7} \quad \text{dar an gedenken, ritter, } \text{ez ist iuwer dinc.} \]

‘think about it, knights, it is up to you’.

the narrator in Tannhäuser’s poem replies in a sceptical tone:

\[ T \text{ II,29-30} \quad \text{dar an sold ich gedenken, } \\
\text{die wile ich mich vermac} \]

‘I should think about it, as long as I can’

He would even like to escape the terrifying experience that this journey entails, but he states bitterly that he has no way out:

\[ T \text{ III,47-48} \quad \text{in mahte im niht entwichen, } \\
\text{ich muos ez allez liden, } \text{als der niht anders mac.} \]

‘I could not escape. I had to bear everything such as one who has no choice’.

In short, whereas Walther’s unhappiness prompts him to yearn for a sea-journey that would save his soul, Tannhäuser blasphemously considers this very journey the principle cause of his suffering.

4.3. Another striking example of the way Tannhäuser takes up one element in Walther’s poem in order to reverse its meaning can be seen in the different use of the antithesis we – wol.  

Walther opens and closes each strophe with the exclamation of suffering owê. The poet laments personal as well as public issues: he expresses sorrow for his former youth, for the unhappiness of young people, and for the decay of the world. In the last strophe he claims that leaving on a crusade would be the only solution to his anguish. In fact, if he could only go to sea, his cry of woe might turn into one of exultation:

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26 This similarity between the two poems has been very well described by Anna Martellotti (1981: 110-111), but, once again, its significance as a deliberate response to Walther’s work is underestimated.
'If I could go on the dear journey across the sea, I would sing in exultation and no longer cry of woe, (no longer cry of woe)'

In contrast, Tannhäuser opens his poem with the exclamation of joy wol. As we have seen, though, the reference is not to those who are at sea, but to those who are on land and can still enjoy courtly pleasures. Like Walther, again, he uses the word we at the end of his poem, but this time with reference to his own unfortunate situation:

'T, how woeful is my lot!' (how woeful is my lot!)

This is the hard lot of one who has gone to sea for the love of God (durch got ich fuor von lande V,79) but has not attained the rich reward that Walther wished he had gained (sô wolte ich nôtic man verdienen rîchen solt) ‘I, poor man, would like to gain a rich reward’ III,11). The only meagre reward that the narrator in Tannhäuser’s poem can rely upon is the knowledge of the names of the winds.

4.4. The rich reward that Walther aspires to is clearly the salvation of his soul, as he explicitly affirms:

‘I, poor man, would like to gain a rich reward. But I do not mean land or the gold of the rich. I would like to carry eternally the same crown that a soldier may obtain with his spear’.

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27 Editors have added the refrain niemer mê ouwê after the third strophe. For an explanation of the reason for this emendation cf. Volkmann (1987: 248 ff.).

28 selbe is the reading in the Codex Manesse, which has been emended to saelden krone (‘the crown of salvation’) by Lachmann, followed by the majority of scholars. Cf. Volkmann (1987: 240 ff.).
The reward Tannhäuser wishes for is, on the contrary, of a concrete type, linked to the comfortable life he renounced when he boarded a ship that he finds disgusting in every respect. In the second part of the fourth strophe the author supplies us with a realistic picture of the difficult conditions he has to experience on the ship. He complains about the stench coming up from the hold of the ship; instead, he would prefer the perfume of roses. And he complains about the food and drink: the water is murky, the bread is hard, the meat is too salty and the wine is undrinkable. Furthermore, eating peas and beans fails to put him in a good mood. Reduced to such a miserable condition, the reward he desires from God is better food and drink:

\[ T \ IV,63-64 \quad \text{wil mir der hohste lonen,} \\
\quad \text{so wirt daz trinken süeze und och die spise guot.} \]

‘if the Almighty wants to reward me, then drink will be sweet and food will be good’.

It has been assumed that the list of revolting food and drink has a devilish reference and is antithetical to “heavenly nourishment”, which the narrator hopes to obtain.\(^{29}\) Frankly though, considering the general content of the strophe, I believe these words to be quite literal and to mean quite simply what they say. The seafarer misses a pleasant life, and the hardships described on board are not willingly suffered in view of a higher reward, nor are they the occasion to expiate one’s sins and attain eternal life. On the contrary, they are both aimless and useless. This interpretation sheds light on the omission of religious thoughts in the poem, which has normally been taken as evidence that it is not a crusade song. Rather, this omission suggests that in Tannhäuser’s view the crusading expedition has completely lost any religious motivations and it is no longer a way to save one’s soul.\(^{30}\)

4.5. The supposition that Tannhäuser meant to take up certain elements in Walther’s poem in order to imbue them with a new significance may be supported by some formal affinities.

\(^{29}\) For Mohr (1960: 351) this popular representation of Paradise as the land of Cockaign has parallels in a sermon by Tauler. A different interpretation of ll. 63-64 has been provided by Kischkel (1998: 282), who reads these statements as aggressive and cynical behaviour arising from the sense of powerlessness of one who has lost his social status.

\(^{30}\) See the above-mentioned lines by Freidank (§ 2), in which the poet complains that the interdict imposed on Jerusalem by the patriarch has caused the crusaders’ sacrifice to be in vain.
Today it is generally agreed that for his *Elegy* Walther chose the archaic long line with a caesura in the middle. Each strophe is composed of 16 lines, grouped in rhyming couplets.31

Some scholars claim that Tannhäuser is following Walther’s example in using long lines.32 If this were the case, it would be a striking coincidence, since the long line is typical of the *Nibelungenlied* (*Song of the Nibelungs*) or, moving beyond epic poems, it belongs to the beginnings of the “Minnesang” tradition: it can be found, for example, in the poems by Der von Kürenberg. Later, the long line is largely abandoned, and the four-beat line becomes the dominant type.

Actually, there is no real consensus about the metrical structure of Tannhäuser’s poem. While Bartsch (1914) and Singer (1922a) present long lines, some of which have rhyme caesura,33 the critical edition of Jürgen Kühnel in Müller’s anthology (1993) prints short lines throughout. An intermediate position is adopted by Siebert (1934), who keeps long lines when there is no rhyme at the caesura, but otherwise divides them into four-beat lines.34 Thus, each stanza has a combination of lines of different length, with regularly alternating rhyme. The *Aufgesang* (ll. 1-8) is made up of two *Stollen* of four short lines each with the rhyme arrangement *abab* and *cdcd*.35 The *Abgesang* (ll. 9-16) is made up of four long lines followed by three short lines and a final long line. The rhyme arrangement in the *Abgesang* is *efef* and *ghgh*.

If we accept this description proposed by Siebert, it is in fact possible to claim that Tannhäuser follows, at least in part, the unusual metrical form adopted by Walther in his *Elegy*. In addition, we can find a few examples in which the two texts show exactly the same pattern: anacrusis, three syllables with a feminine ending in the first half-line and three syllables with a masculine ending in the second half-line. Let us compare these verses:

\[
\text{W II,3} \quad \text{die kunnen niuwan sorgen,} \quad \text{owê, wie tuont si sô?}
\]

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31 On the other hand, following Lachmann some scholars maintain that the line is made up of 6 stressed syllables without caesura; e.g. Schweikle (1998: 774). On the question of the metrical structure of the *Elegy* and the debate on this theme see Volkmann (1987: 59-99).
32 Wentzlaff-Eggebert (1960: 314); Mohr (1960: 345); Böhmer (1968: 86).
33 More recently, long lines are accepted also by the scholars mentioned in note 32 and Sayce (1982: 326).
34 See the strophe quoted in paragraph 3 (pp. 103-104).
35 In the first *Stollen* lines 1 and 3 end in a stressed syllable, while in the second *Stollen* all lines end in an unstressed syllable.
Unfortunately, we are unaware of melodies\textsuperscript{36} but, in any case, these parallelisms make it reasonable to suppose that – in some verses at least – Tannhäuser meant to echo Walther’s rhythm. Of course, this hypothesis is open to dispute. But let us look at the following example. At the end of the first and second stanza in Walther’s poem we find this unrhymed half-line, used to isolate a key statement:

\textit{W I,17} \quad \textit{iemer mêre ouwê}

At the end of the first strophe in Tannhäuser’s poem we read:

\textit{T I,16} \quad \textit{ich swebe uf dem se}

Now, apart from the fact that in Tannhäuser’s poem the line begins with an unstressed beat (anacrusis), it is worth noting that both lines have three accented syllables with a masculine ending, both insist on the sounds /i/ and /e/, and both have the same final sound. Formal similarity here is more than a hypothesis and hardly seems accidental.

We can imagine that similarities in the metrical form might lead the audience to listen to one text while having another one – a famous one – in mind; and this would inevitably lead the audience to draw a comparison between their different contents. In the above-mentioned example, Walther’s verse expresses deep suffering, while Tannhäuser’s states that he is floating on the sea without any clear goal. If we connect the two statements, Tannhäuser’s verse acquires new semantic value. Indeed we may infer the following reasoning: the narrator’s aimless journey overseas is the cause of all his suffering (see § 4.2.).

5. I might add a few further examples of more or less overt ties between the two texts. But I shall now turn to the questions I asked at the beginning.

a) Is it possible to read Tannhäuser’s poem as a sort of “rewriting” of Walther’s Elegy?

Of course, each of the connections we can trace in the two works might seem irrelevant, marginal or accidental if considered in isolation. But taken in conjunction they cannot easily be explained away: in fact, they make it dif-

\textsuperscript{36} For the importance of melodies as a vehicle of meaning and the heuristic value of modern attempts to reconstruct them see Springeth / Müller (1998).
ficult not to reach the conclusion that Tannhäuser’s work intentionally “re-
plies” to Walther’s *Elegy*.

Tannhäuser seems to recall Walther’s statements in order to offer his audience a different perspective on them. Walther’s idealism is countered by Tannhäuser’s realism and his enthusiasm by Tannhäuser’s disenchantment. In opposition to Walther’s hierarchy of values, which derives from a sincere Christian devotion, Tannhäuser posits his own set of values, in which worldly delights are not necessarily to be condemned.

Viewed in this light, Walther’s *Elegy* is not simply a source of inspiration for Tannhäuser’s work, and Tannhäuser’s work does not simply feed on allusions to Walther’s *Elegy* as well as to other prior texts, as traditionally thought. As we have seen, it is the interplay of repetition and difference that links Tannhäuser’s poem to his antecedent, thus charging it with a special significance. For these reasons, I believe that Tannhäuser’s poem can qualify as a sort of “palimpsest”, to use Genette’s metaphor: it is a text in which we can somehow recognize the presence of the previous text (“hypotext”). In other words, it is a work originating from a sort of dialogue established between Tannhäuser and his predecessor in order to undermine an ideology on crusades which is felt to be no longer adequate. Tannhäuser’s text, therefore, has the meaning it does because of its relationship to Walther’s *Elegy*. Now, whether we can call this operation “rewriting” proper depends on how widely or narrowly we define this notion.

b) The second question I asked was: How does the recognition of such an intertextual relationship affect our interpretation of the text?

If we admit that Tannhäuser’s poem is – at least in part – a reply to Walther’s work, we have a further reason for rejecting any attempt to regard it as an autobiographical description of Tannhäuser’s journey to the Holy Land. All the concrete details we find in the poem do not necessarily entail a personal experience; rather, they may function as a means of creating a contrast to the idealism which characterizes Walther’s poem. After all, it is not important to decide whether the account of the voyage is first-hand experience or simply imagined. What is important is that this poem reveals Tannhäuser’s disillusioned opinion about the crusades.

Consequently, the allegorical interpretation loses persuasiveness as well. Tannhäuser’s poem does not seem to me a meditation on his life or on human life in general, nor can I sense any sincere religious concern in any of his

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37 Reference is to his study *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré* (1982).

38 For some scholars any text is a mosaic of more or less direct and explicit citations, any text is the absorption and transformation of another, therefore all writing is a rewriting. Other scholars, instead, find this notion insufficient and admit as rewriting only those texts that entail a strong tie to chronologically prior texts, the trace of which is discernible in the text. Cf. Moraru (2001: xii ff.).
verses. Those first-person reflections contained chiefly in the second strophe can be seen as part of the consequences of the “crusade” event. It seems only natural to me that one whose life is in danger may feel confused, lost, powerless, and fearful of death. In addition, this expression of the narrator’s existential crisis offers another parallel to Walther’s poem. But whereas Walther’s meditation leads him to find a solution in the crusade, which is a means of attaining spiritual salvation, Tannhäuser’s reflections derive from the terrifying and disappointing (even if fictitious) experience of the crusade, which deprives him of earthly joy without offering a higher reward. Moreover, the surprising omission of any attempt to present the enterprise overseas as a way of saving one’s soul becomes a powerful vehicle for ideological criticism.

In conclusion, I think that Tannhäuser’s poem can be legitimately held to be a “crusade song”, albeit a very particular and original one. Considered in the light of the intertextual relationship to Walther’s poem, Tannhäuser’s work is a “multidimensional space” in which two opposing views on crusades meet and clash. In such a way the poet can effectively, although obliquely, lead the audience towards a reflection on the sense (or senselessness) of the expeditions to Palestine in the first half of the 13th century and the formation of a critical position. A more explicit condemnation might have not had the same impact on an audience that to a large extent still accepted the official discourse on crusades.
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