





This is to certify that the  
thesis entitled  
**The Cessation of Meisterlieder**  
**Production in Hans Sachs**

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**Larry LeRoy George**

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Stuart A. Gallacher  
Major professor

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## ABSTRACT

### THE CESSATION OF MEISTERLIEDER PRODUCTION IN HANS SACHS

By

Larry LeRoy George

In his Problems in German Literary History Archer Taylor points out that in 1556 Hans Sachs wrote 158 Meisterlieder and in 1557 only 25. Some theories have been advanced suggesting reasons for this apparent sudden curtailment of productivity. Among them, such theories as that as the death of his wife, who died in 1560, caused this sudden change, are not only incorrect but show a definite lack of research to corroborate such a view.

We should find a solution to the problem for a number of reasons. Foremost perhaps, is the fact that with this change not only did Hans Sachs change his direction, but he also, with his departure from the ranks of the faithful, spelled the death knell for Meistergesang in general. Secondly, it will give us a better insight into the history and real significance of Meistergesang as a genre in the sixteenth century. Thirdly and as the final point, it will give us insight into the motivations of Hans Sachs with

regard to his literary activity in a number of genres and also point up possible solutions as to why he treated the same material in a number of different genres.

In order to offer an adequate solution to this problem, a comprehensive and detailed study of all aspects of Sachs' life, his literary activities with regard to Meistergesang, Spruchdichtung, and the stage as well as the effect of his historical surroundings upon him and his native city Nuremberg had to be made.

Through this detailed treatment of these areas, it is shown that there was no one isolated cause for Sachs' sudden shift, but that it was the result of a number of interrelated events which led to Sachs' change of emphasis. These factors may be categorized into two areas. First and foremost, Sachs' curtailment of production of Meisterlieder was brought about by his inclination to follow the "Mode seiner Zeit." Secondly, his strong desire to express more personal feelings and to convey didactic messages to the more general public caused him to shift to different media more suited to this type of personal feeling and didacticism.

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By

Larry LeRoy George

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## INTRODUCTION

In his Problems in German Literary History Archer Taylor points out that in 1556 Hans Sachs wrote 158 Meisterlieder and in 1557 only 25. Some theories have been advanced suggesting reasons for this apparent sudden curtailment of productivity. Among them, such statements as the death of his wife, who died in 1560, caused this sudden change, are not only incorrect but show a definite lack of research to corroborate such a view.

We should find a solution to the problem for a number of reasons. Foremost perhaps, is the fact that with this change not only did Hans Sachs change his direction, but he also, with his departure from the ranks of the faithful, spelled the death knell for Meistergesang in general. Secondly, it will give us a better insight into the history and real significance of Meistergesang as a genre in the sixteenth century. Thirdly and as the final point, it will give us insight into the motivations of Hans Sachs with regard to his literary activity in a number of genres and also point up possible solutions as to why he treated the same material in a number of different genres.

In order to offer an adequate solution to this problem, we need to make a comprehensive study of all



aspects of Sachs' life, his literary productivity, and the effect of his historical surroundings upon him and his native city, Nuremberg. Through this detailed treatment of these three areas, it will be shown that there was no one isolated cause for Sachs' sudden shift, but that it was the result of a number of interrelated events which lead to Sachs' change of emphasis.

## LIFE

It is of prime importance to look at Hans Sachs' life, because it illustrates that due to his rank in society and his upbringing and education, that regardless of his natural and developed gifts, he was destined to play a role, great or small, in the history of Meistergesang in Nuremberg.

Sachs, the son of a tailor, was born in Nuremberg on November 5, 1494. As was the custom for a child in his surroundings, at the age of seven he began to attend one of the four Latin Schools in Nuremberg (Easter, 1501). Here, Sachs obtained the rudiments of an education as he attests in his "Summa all meiner gedicht" in 1567.

Darrin lert ich puerila,  
Grammatica and Musica  
Nach ringem brauch derselben zeit;  
Solchs alls ist mir vergessen seit,<sup>1</sup>

His instructor, a certain Fridel, was also a Meistersinger and evidently influenced young Sachs in this area, for Sachs later employed, on several occasions, melodies composed by Fridel.

In 1508 Sachs was apprenticed to a cobbler with whom he worked for three years. It was during this time that he was more fully introduced into the art of Meistergesang. However, as tradition demanded in 1511 he departed

on his "Wanderschaft." His five years of wandering saw him in Frankfurt, where he passed his qualifying examination in the art of Meistergesang, as well as in Erfurt, Leipzig, and for a time at the court of Kaiser Maximilian I serving as a huntsman.

Upon his return to Nuremberg in 1516, his two chief concerns were to make his "master piece" and then to marry, for these were the two primary requirements for becoming a master. The second condition was fulfilled in 1519 when he married Kunigunde Kreutzer aus Wendelstein.<sup>2</sup> His parents gave him a house on Ratsgasse, apparently the one he had been born in, and his wife brought a good dowry along.<sup>3</sup>

The early years of marriage put tremendous financial burdens on Sachs for his wife bore him five children in eight years, which necessitated his working more and writing less than he might have desired.

In 1520 Sachs became a "Meister" in the cobbler guild. He pursued his trade diligently and even traveled to the Frankfurt Fair with his goods. His providing for his family consumed a great deal of his time through 1542. On the fourteenth of June, 1542, he purchased a new house on the Spitalgässlein, now called Hans Sachsengasse, from Hannsen Polzinger for 610 gulden.<sup>4</sup> He lived in this house until his death. The purchase of this new house indicated that his financial circumstances were improved and that he was now relatively well off.

Since all of his activities with regard to literary pursuits were always done in his spare time, this advancement to a better status in his personal financial affairs would surely have a positive effect upon the amount of writing which he could produce.

Having remained very active in both the literary and cobbler spheres, the stress of such a life caused him as early as 1554 to complain of his health. "Wurt schwach mein Gedächtnis und auch mein sinnreicher Einfluss wart machtlos und entwich."<sup>5</sup> To be sure as time progressed he began to complain more and more about the infirmities of old age. Despite this fact he resolved to continue writing and still plied his trade at this juncture. This is substantiated by his comments in his introduction to his first volume of printed materials which appeared in 1558.

Sollichen schaden zur fürkhommen, hab ich meins alters im 63 jar alle meine gedicht, so ich bissher inn zway unnd vierzig jaren neben meiner handarbeyt volend hab, in meinen büchern besichtigt unnd auss den selben allen die fürnembsten erwelet unnd verfertiget in dieses buch zusammen zu trucken, . . .<sup>6</sup>

However, during 1558 he appears to have given up his cobbler activities for in the second set of volumes he had published, he states, that he is "gewesener Schuhmacher."<sup>7</sup> Thus, he must have felt himself too infirmed to continue to work for a living.

He continued to complain of the problems of old age in 1559. In his long "Klagespräch über das schwere Alter" of that year, he lamented the weakness of his limbs, the partial loss of hearing and other infirmities of old age.



In the end of March, 1560, Sachs lost his wife of forty years, Kunigunde Kreutzer. At the same time he had also outlived his seven children. At this juncture, "wurde er Dichtens und Schreibens verdrossen, weil auch, wie er sagt, das Alter ihn Schwer gefesselt und überladen het."<sup>8</sup> However, after the death of his wife, he did remain busy compiling his works for publication by Georg Miller in Augsburg, and in 1560 he completed his "Generalregister" which included 5400 works written as of the time of compilation.

Yet, for only a year and five months did Hans Sachs withdraw into his house. After the death of his first wife, he had no real desire to hide behind books, but rather resolved to marry Barbara Harscherlin, the widow of the tub-thumber Jacob Endres.<sup>9</sup> They were engaged on August 12, 1561 and married September 2 of the same year. Rudolf Genée comments about the change in Sachs at this time.

Jedermann freute sich, dass der treffliche Mann wieder unter Menschen kam und dass er ein neues junges Eheglück gefunden hatte.<sup>10</sup>

This comment implies that Sachs had become a semi-recluse after Kunigunde's death.

Barbara Harscherlin, who had been married for eleven years, had six children, the youngest was only six months old at the time of her husband's death. She was almost forty years old. This marriage, however, had an almost magical effect upon Sachs. Paul Landau remarks in his Hans Sachs,

Der gealterte Dichter fand hier noch einmal ein volles Eheglück, ja einen letzten späten Frühling, der in seinem Gemüt und Schaffen reiche Früchte trieb.<sup>11</sup>

The new family did indeed reawaken Sachs' talent and having children around the house seemed to have been especially beneficial for Hans Sachs was a strong family man.

Only two of his own children survived childhood and both predeceased him. When his daughter died, her husband, much to the chagrin of Sachs, left with the children. His wife then died and he was alone. However, his remarriage changed all that and gave him a renewed birth both physically and poetically.

Jedensfalls [after remarriage] sprudelt jetzt der "Quell der Poesie" wieder lebhaft, und die "des Schreibens verdrossene Hand" fliegt wieder mit dem flinken Gänsekiel über Papier, reiht Reim an Reim und füllt Seite auf Seite.<sup>12</sup>

Hans Sachs died on the nineteenth of January, 1576, in Nuremberg.

## MEISTERGESANG

### A Brief History of the Genre's Development

A statement of exactly which characteristics exemplify the Meistergesang has been attempted by many notable critics. The essential elements that all agree upon are as follows. Foremost, the elaborating of the already complicated metrical system of medieval lyric poetry upon which it is based. Second, the use of source material in a didactic manner with the expressed intent of moralizing.<sup>13</sup> Finally, the employment of these materials by "zunftmässig verbundenen bürgerlichen Genossenschaft."<sup>14</sup> Generally speaking, it signaled a "bürgerlich" and realistic approach in literature. A new Weltanschauung and a new appraisal of the life of the late middle ages was displayed.

Meistergesang belongs to a limited historical period, extending roughly from 1300 to 1700.<sup>15</sup> In its early phases it is nothing but Minnesang rendered in popular terms. To be sure, during the earliest stages of development in the fourteenth century, the "Meister" were the people's troubadours, who employed satires and sermons more than their predecessors, i.e., prior to 1300.

Meistergesang was a product of special economic and social conditions. The Meistergesang belongs to the



period which saw the greatest flowering of southern Germany with regard to trade and merchant wealth. At this same time the German guilds were rising to power, these artisans and tradesfolk took over the leading role in the production of Meistergesang.

Unter allen bestehenden Handwerken waren es in erster Reihe die Schuhmacher und die Weber, bei denen der Meistergesang besonders beliebt war.<sup>16</sup>

By limiting the practice of the genre to the guilds, Meistergesang was cut off from popular energy and becomes the private art of a few. Likewise, due to this close affiliation with the guilds, when the decline of the southern German cities and guilds set in, the Meistergesang likewise suffered reverses.

As the members of the guilds associated in groups, Meistergesang, which had become soulless and uninteresting in the hands of the early Meistersingers, was given a new variety but along definitely described lines. In these guidelines, everything was provided for except poetical inspiration. At this point, however, the gatherings of the Meistersinger were still relatively free and no "Sing-schule"<sup>17</sup> in the later sense really existed.

However, out of these free gatherings the bodies of the Singschulen did grow. They were highly regulated groups, whose members had to adhere to the statutes as formulated by the school to which they were a member. This limitation to a selected group and the confining restriction



of the school's statutes had a distinct effect as Curt Mey points out.

Wenn dadurch auch im Anfange eine Verknöcherung eintrat, welche sich nach der zweimaligen Blüte wiederholte und schliesslich zum Untergang des Meistergesanges führte.<sup>18</sup>

In this period from 1470-1555, which Archer Taylor classifies as the second epoch of Meistergesang, the rules concerning form, content, and structure have become so firmly established that a revolt arises against the various schools' dictatorial rules concerning both form and content. To be sure, this defiance of the accepted standard opened the way for Meistergesang to achieve its climax in Hans Sachs.

While it is granted that the ill-regulated individual originality of the earlier history of the Meistergesang needed some regulation, the gradual implementation of elaborate rules and subsequent changes provided anything but a salutary effect in the long run.

The first school of Meistergesang, which definitely had written statutes, was in Strassburg and was founded in 1492. Others maintain that the school in Augsburg stemming from 1450 was the first, but its manner of procedure seems to have been of the more general kind, denoting the first period of the epoch.

After the curtailment of Luther's activities, the number of Singschulen began to diminish and they lasted longest in Protestant areas.

Und thatsächlich blühten auch die Schulen in den Städten, in welchen die Reformation eingeführt wurde, länger als in den katholisch bleibenden Orten, in denen es mit der Meistersingerkunst bald ganz und gar zuende ging.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, the number of Meisterlieder retained in manuscript form diminishes from decade to decade until we have practically nothing from the period after 1550.

Adam Puschmann, who was a pupil of Hans Sachs, laments the decline of the art of Meistergesang even before Hans Sachs' death. In 1561 Puschmann writes,

. . . die Meistersinger zu Nürnberg nichts anderes trieben als Hader und Zank, dass ein jeder sich gänzlich verständnislos am liebsten seine eigene Tabulatur zusammenbauen möchte, und dass die Schule aller Gelehrten, zu aller Verständigen überhaupt zu werden drohe; manche Meister hätten dazumal gerade so in der Tabulatur herumgewühlt, wie die Schweine in den Rüben.<sup>20</sup>

These comments by Puschmann are dated within the final and fading stage of Meistergesang. With the essential cessation of production by Hans Sachs after 1555, the art severely declined. Efforts to revive the genre proved futile.

### Form

Meistergesang, which was not intended for public singing and was forbidden to be published, is an art form of many rules, essentially "ars technica."<sup>21</sup> Bert Nagel maintains that

Meistersang ist ein Dichtungstypus von ausgesprochen regelhaft-rationaler Prägung; ein technischer Könnenskunstbegriff, . . .<sup>22</sup>

The rules controlling this art form were first compiled and codified under the title of "Tabulatur" at the end of the fifteenth century.

As we can ascertain from the Tabulaturen and Meisterlieder available, the structure is based upon that of the Minnesang. Each poem consisted of a number of stanzas, which in turn each had two Stollen which were identical in form, in length and number of lines and melody. The two Stollen were followed by an "Abgesang" of a different structure and melody. The music was an essential ingredient in the Meistergesang and perhaps of prime importance. However, when we find stophes of 66 to 100 lines, it is obvious that this purity of form was only evident on paper and not by the listener.

During Meistergesang's second stage of development, Hans Folz led a revolt against the prescribed standards of Meistergesang. Feeling that other meters and melodies besides those of the old masters were valid, he suggested to the Meistersingers in Worms that henceforth only he who composed a new melody would obtain the title of Meister. Rebuffed in his native city, he traveled to Nuremberg, which was a more culturally advanced and cosmopolitan city, and thus more apt to be persuaded to change.

Hans Folz's suggestions were accepted in Nuremberg and helped to lead to the greatest flowering of Meistergesang. Yet, the new rule became an equally tyrannous

convention, and finally brought about the decay of the genre through imposing a desire for new and ever more fantastic inventions. To be sure, the point has been made that

The acceptance of the rule that a Meistersinger won recognition only by inventing a new metre and a new tune complicated the metrical structure of the Meisterlieder enormously and rendered Meistergesang an ingenious game rather than a means of poetic utterance.<sup>23</sup>

The fact that Adam Puschmann almost never used a metrical pattern twice in his 169 Meisterlieder readily illustrates how much of a game writing Meisterlieder had become.

#### Choice of Subject Matter

Initially, the true Meistersingers dealt predominantly with religious material and only to a minor extent concerned themselves with secular topics. In essence, they were lay preachers, who gave renditions of the scriptures, while attaching a moral.

At the instigation of Hans Folz the "Stoffkreis" was expanded beginning about 1500. At this juncture serious secular themes were added to the religious and could be used at the "Hauptsingen."<sup>24</sup> The singers still avoided all expression of personal feelings or emotion.

Similarly, except for their interest in the Reformation, the Meistersinger paid almost no attention to the great social and economic changes which were going on about them. To be sure, the Meistersingers realized perfectly well that their choice of subjects did not elicit popular

approval and interest, but they did not choose to change their ways.<sup>25</sup>

With the advent of Hans Sachs popularity this changed to some extent. In W. Sommer's Die Metrik des Hans Sachs we read that

. . . Sachs ist der erste, welcher neben ähnlichen religiösen Stoffen nun auch weltliche zu behandeln begann.<sup>26</sup>

This is not quite accurate as Hans Folz and others had expanded the content, but with them the themes remained serious. Sachs, however, was innovative in that he introduced new material, especially from medieval legend, fables from Renaissance and contemporary anecdote, which he handled with humor and narrative skill.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, Sachs did not make a sudden break with past tradition, but moved away from the old standard slowly. This fact, that a gradual change is taking place, is evident in Sachs' change of subject matter. Indeed,

anfangs seine Thematik: ein Bürger sucht die "Geheimnisse" der Gottheit und des Sakraments zu ergründen, singt das Lob der heiligen Jungfrau,  
. . .<sup>28</sup>

Sachs initially treats the standard themes, then follows the path of Folz and abandons the conventional and narrow-sighted position of the Singschule. Then in the late 1540's he brings in experiences from his wanderings and draws upon the store of antique literature which was appearing in German translations at this time.

Sachs' General Attitude and Approach  
to Meistergesang

Meistergesang reached its height of development and began to decay both in the era of Hans Sachs. There is good reason for both these developments. As Eugen Geiger notes,

Mit Hans Sachs beginnt der Niedergang des reinen Meistergesanges, da er nicht mehr Nur-Meistersänger ist. Im Gegensatz zu früheren Meistersängern spielen bei ihm die weltlichen Stoffe eine grosse Rolle.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, Sachs was moving away, markedly so in his later writings, from the original religious materials which constituted the main body of subject matter for the genre.

Indeed, Geiger goes on to say,

Hans Sachs hat, . . ., mehr weltliche als geistliche Meistergesänge gedichtet; nicht weil ihn die Reformation von den geistlich-biblischen Stoffen wegführte: das Gegenteil ist der Fall.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, except for the Reformation Hans Sachs would probably have more pronouncedly divorced himself from the standard content of Meistergesang.

As far as the form is concerned, it has been noted that essentially the Meistersingers played a game with form, with syllables as the counters. The form, which became an end in and of itself, often became so complicated that for the uninitiated, it was necessary that they work on the forms as a geometrical puzzle in order to gain a meaningful analysis.<sup>31</sup> Exactly this high degree of adherence to the standardization of line length, rime, etc. led to alteration of subject matter and especially deletions



of certain parts to make a given topic fit within the metrical confines of the work. Geiger states,

Immer sehen wir, wie die Form den Meister zwang, seine handgreifliche Alltagsmoral in den Meistergesängen zu kürzen.<sup>32</sup>

This would be especially confining to Sachs, to whom the moral and didactic intent of literature was so important.

Hans Sachs wrote thirteen new tunes for Meistergesang. Nine of the thirteen date from 1527 or earlier and the last new tune was composed in 1546. Thus, his most creative period with regard to Meistergesang lies well before his most productive.

Two additional points need to be made. First, that when Sachs returned to Nuremberg after his Wanderschaft, the Singschule was in an advanced state of decay.<sup>33</sup> Sachs became the leader of the school, drew up rules of composition and procedures for meetings, invented new melodies, and enlarged the subject matter. Secondly, it was by his indefatigable energy that he returned Nuremberg to its preeminence in this genre.

#### Sachs: 1516-1540

Hans Sachs states that he wrote over 4400 Meisterlieder according to the rules of the Tabulatur. This may well be the case, but his adherence to some of the rules diminished as time passed. Initially, Sachs, as those before him had done, adapted a part of the Bible both verbally and metrically into Meistergesang. The adaptations

were quite literal and only seldom does one find a free rendition.<sup>34</sup>

The period of Sachs creativity in this genre up to the Reformation is very well summarized in Zur Entwicklung und Bedeutung des dt. Meistergesangs im 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts.

Bei jenen liegt der Schwerpunkt der Forderung an den Sänger in der Menge des praktischen und theorethischen Wissen; der Dichter soll über eine umfassende Bildung verfügen, er soll über theologische Dinge, über die Hierarchie von Kirche und Staat, über das Leben jedes Standes das Nötige wissen, um jedem Publikum genügen zu können; und er soll durch poetische Neuschöpfungen sich die Unsterblichkeit zu sichern suchen.<sup>35</sup>

This point of view, which was followed by Hans Sachs in his twenties, was changed through Sachs' interest in the Reformation.

Now, the Meistersinger assumes the role of preacher and teacher, who endeavors to make the public susceptible to the moral teachings of Christianity. The Meistersinger is now to form his songs with content from the Bible or history and through their rendition illustrates what is to be considered evil and what is to be considered good.

This change from the first ideal to the second is characteristic for the development of the content of Meistergesang from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century; at the same time, however, for the development of Hans Sachs himself, who with the main body of his productions belongs to the second ideal.<sup>36</sup>

Yet, at the same time, Sachs' conversion to Protestantism brought about other problems. His "Spruchdichtung" and his dramatic works became more immersed in theology and thus became a public weapon in the war of theology that was raging at this time.

A careful study of Hans Sachs' own general register shows that he had no apparent strong interest in one particular genre but was active about equally in all that were popular at the time. Evidently the event which helped to limit his production for some time to come to Meisterlieder was the censorship imposed upon him and his fellow writers by the city council of Nuremberg.

Nachdem ihm die städtliche Obrigkeit 1527 die konfessionelle Publizistik verboten hatte, stand sein Schaffen ganz im Dienst des Meistersangs, der Erbauung und geselligen Unterhaltung.<sup>37</sup>

Sachs' great activity in Meistergesang is definitely a case of applying wisdom over valor under such a censorship.

Therefore, the religious productions maintained an upper hand until 1536. The time from 1527-1536 has been called the time of Sachs' "Bibelparaphrase."

Von nun ab war die Sache der Reformation die Sache des Meistergesang. Auf Jahrzehnte war fast der ausschliessliche Stoff ihrer Lieder die Luthersche Bible, die ganz systematisch, Buch für Buch, Kapitel für Kapitel, Wort für Wort, in die meisterlichen Strophe und Reimschemata hineingezwängt ward und so mit die weiteste Verbreitung in den bürgerlichen Kreisen fand.<sup>38</sup>

However, after the withdrawal of the censorship the preponderance of the secular Meisterlieder (1536-1552) begins.

During this period the last three of Hans Sachs' new tunes are produced. The "Spruchweisse" and the "Rosenton" (1541) are both somewhat epic in tone. Again this would be consistent with the movement away from pure Meistergesang.

Sachs: 1540-1561

Hans Sachs bought a new house in 1542, which would seem to indicate that he was doing well at his trade and was now well enough off to devote more of his time to Meistergesang.

We now come upon a paradox. Sachs wrote his last new tune in 1546.<sup>39</sup> Whether it be only coincidence or not, for in Victor Michels' work on the theater of Nuremberg, we find the following comment.

Am 13. August 1546 findet sich, soweit ich die Rathsverlässe durchgesehen habe, zum letzten Mal von zahlreichen früherer Jahre die Notiz, dass den Meistersingern auf Sonntag eine Singschule erlaubt sei.<sup>40</sup>

This, of course, can mean one of two things. First, that the public had lost so much interest in Meistergesang that there was no longer a basis for public performances. The second is that the mayor considered these performances as a usual event and no longer bothered to enter them in the protocol.

As tempting as it is to accept the former, we are confronted with the fact that Sachs' most productive years in the production of Meistergesang were 1547 and 1548 with 351 and 417 songs respectively.<sup>41</sup> The fact must always be

kept in mind that the number of performances open to the public was at all times restricted.

On the other hand, it would also be convenient to claim that after 1548 he appeared to have sensed the impending death of Meistergesang and summarily changed genres. This, however, is not the case. His production did decline markedly from 1548 to 1549 as in 1549 he produced only 178 Meisterlieder. In the next six years, however, his productivity fluctuates from a high of 302 in 1554 to a low of 158 in 1556. The average for this six year span is 227.<sup>42</sup> During these, his most productive years, the Meistergesang with secular content played a greater role being about equal in number to those of religious orientation.

Yet, already in 1554 while Sachs is having his fourth most productive year of Meisterlieder writing, he complains of physical weakness. We read that

Es ist sehr auffallend, dass er schon 1554, also da seine dichterische Kraft und Thätigkeit im höchsten Masse sich zu steigen begonnen hatte, über seine zunehmende Schwäche klagte, und zwar in einem Meisterlied.<sup>43</sup>

Let us then take a look at this Meisterlied. It is entitled "Zal und sum meiner gedicht auf dise zeit." Composed in the "hohen tagweis Hans Sachsen," it dates from December 31, 1554.

Als ich, Hans Sachs, alt ware  
zwei monat sechig jare,  
wurt schwach mein gedechtnuss  
und auch mein sinnreicher einfluss  
wart machtlos und entwickte.

Verstopft wurde die quellen  
 der artlichen einfellen,  
 vernunft wurt schwach und blöd,  
 lust und begir wurt schwach und öd  
 zu höflichem gedichte:  
 Da beschloss ich, mein leben  
 in stille ru zu geben,  
 forthin zu leben frei,  
 mussig von aller poetrei.<sup>44</sup>

In this first section Sachs laments his physical weakness and feels that further poetic endeavors are too demanding for him. Therefore, he will cease to write and live his life free from the demands of poetry. But in the Meistergesang the goddess of art appears to him and reminds him of his duty to Meistergesang. Sachs replies and mentions all his poetic endeavors and that now he only wishes some respite from all his creative labors.

mein bitt ist, ir göttin,  
 das ir mich zehen wolt forthin  
 quit ledig aller pflichte  
 Weil ich euch dinet habe  
 bis in mein alter grabe,  
 das mich nun merklich krenkt  
 all mein kraft mir zu grunde senkt.<sup>45</sup>

Yet, despite his request Terpsychore<sup>46</sup> replies that the gods and goddesses will help him and guide his course and that his fame will increase.

zu hant der traum verschwunde,  
 darvon ich auferwacht.  
 das geschah gleich in der jaresnacht,  
 als man der minderen zelet  
 vier und funfzig erwelet,  
 da bis bar machet ich  
 und das vierzehnte buch warlich  
 beschloss mit dem gedichte.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, as is readily evident, Sachs is feeling the weakness of advanced age and wishes to be free of his responsibilities to Meistergesang but feels that he is so involved that he must continue. It should be noted that a 34.4 percent decrease in his production of Meisterlieder occurs from 1554 to 1555. Then there is an 18 percent decrease from 1555 to 1556.<sup>48</sup> In the midst of this decrease of productivity, which was to lead to a complete curtailment of Meisterlieder production, Sachs was elected Merker<sup>49</sup> in the Nuremberg school. While serving in this capacity, the chief office of the school, he also influenced Adam Puschmann to devote himself to the cause of Meistergesang. However, this might not show so curious a contradiction as Archer Taylor and others think. It was a very time consuming task to be a Merker and all evidence points to the fact that the Merker was not allowed to perform at the Hauptsingen or Festsingen. In Hans Sachs' Das Gernerkbüchlein, which contains the minutes of the Nuremberg Singschule from 1555-1561, he never has his own name written down as a presenter of a Meistergesang during this whole time span.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, it would appear that the Merker was not allowed to perform, which is a logical deduction due to the importance of his judging the songs being presented. Therefore, Sachs could now only write his Meisterlieder for his own satisfaction. He could not present them before his peers and they could not be published.

As the number of his productions decreased, he does not write generally in fits and starts as might be expected but rather writes less frequently. Now instead of writing at least once almost every day, he now writes only every four, five, six, or seven days. On occasion, he will write a few days in a row and then not for quite a while, but this is not his general procedure. Already in November and December of 1556 this infrequency of production is discernible. Likewise, this is the case in 1557.

Sachs again complains about the physical infirmities in the poem introducing his second volume of collected works. The Spruch which was written on his birthday in 1557, but which did not appear in print until 1558, is very informative.

Als fünfzehundert jar  
 Und acht und fünfftizig war  
 Nach des Herrn geburt  
 Warhafft gezelet wurt,  
 Am sechzehenden tag  
 Februari ich sag,  
 Ich gentzlich an gebruch  
 Het gar das erste buch  
 Meiner gedicht beschlossen,  
 Da wurd ich gleich vertrossen,  
 Weil mich das alter gar  
 Auch uberfallen war  
 Mit viel geprechligkeit,  
 Wie solichs bringt die zeit.  
 Derhalb ich mir zu letzt  
 Gentzlich und gar fürsetzt  
 Fort hin nichts mehr zu dichten,  
 In ein senfft stille rhu.<sup>51</sup>

This is much the same complaint he uttered at the beginning of the Meisterlieder written in 1554. However, as in 1554, a goddess asks him not to cease writing.



Wir tugend allgemein  
 Bitten dich: las nit ab!  
 Weil du hast Gottes gab  
 Und der göttin Muse,  
 Uns mit gedicht bey-sthe  
 Wider die schnöden laster,  
 Alles unraths ziechpflaster! <sup>52</sup>

It is very interesting to note, moreover, that when the goddess suggests he start writing again, Meistergesang is not one of the genres she suggests employing.

Das lass dich irren nicht!  
 Fach wider an und dicht  
 Heilsam zu Gottes glori  
 Zuchtlehr, warhafft histori,  
 Lieblich, artlich comedi  
 Und auch traurig tragedi  
 Und ander sprüch dergleichen! <sup>53</sup>

Once again Sachs recommits himself to poetic endeavors.

Wil ich fort meine tag  
 Dichten, dieweil ich mag.  
 Stund auff und mich anricht  
 Und macht diss new gedicht  
 Zu eim glücksellig anfang,  
 Diss buch zu eim eingang,  
 Darin ich in der still  
 Mit der zeit zamlen wil  
 Etlich neue gedicht  
 Gleicher art zu-gericht, <sup>54</sup>

In 1559 he again is complaining about the same general problems in the Reimrede which introduced his fourteenth volume of Sprüche. This work was written three weeks before his sixty-fifth birthday and he laments again over the "schwach gebrechlich Alter,"<sup>55</sup> and also that "je länger je härter schwächet, so dass der liebliche springende Quell der Poesie ganz langsam, träg und unlieblich"<sup>56</sup> took its course.

Evidently, he felt that his life or creativity was drawing to an end of some kind, because on July 12, 1560 Sachs began compiling his "Generalregister."<sup>57</sup> In addition, he wrote "Die suma meiner gedicht als man zelt 1560" on July 17th of that year.<sup>58</sup>

With the death of his wife in 1560, Sachs stopped writing completely. He was involved at this time compiling and editing his works for publication but was producing nothing new. He wrote an average of 1-5/7 Meisterlieder a year for the years from 1560 until 1566 and none whatsoever after 1566.<sup>59</sup> To be sure, his creativity was rekindled in 1562, after he remarried. Nevertheless he stepped down as Merker in 1561 and apparently having given up his trade at about the same time, these conditions caused him to cut himself off from the genre completely.

In essence, a number of factors related to Meistergesang and Hans Sachs' role in its development have been treated in this chapter. First, in the general history of the genre, it was shown that Meistergesang's development was dependent upon the flowering of trade and guild life in southern Germany. Concurrently with the guilds' development, Singschulen emerged, which were highly regulated groups, whose members had to adhere to the statutes formulated by the schools. Yet, while the number of Meistersingers was increasing, fewer and fewer Meisterlieder were published until after 1550 practically none appeared in

print. Second, the form, which was essentially "ars technica," was regulated by the rules of the Tabulatur.

Folz's new rule, that only he who composed a new melody would become a master, did bring about a marked change in melodies used, but this new rule became an equally tyrannous convention which eventually rendered Meistergesang an ingenious game rather than a means of poetic utterance.

Thirdly, subject matter was initially religious but at Folz's instigation serious secular themes were added.

Sachs went even further by introducing other new materials and handled them with humor and narrative skill. Geiger feels that Sachs is here moving markedly away from pure Meistergesang, because of the non-religious content. However, Sachs still felt very confined as the strict form made him greatly shorten his moral endings. Fourth, in the period 1516-1540 Sachs was active in all genres but due to the censorship imposed upon him, his choice of genres was essentially limited to Meistergesang. Fifth, as early as 1554 in "Zal und sum meiner gedicht auf dise zeit" Sachs is feeling the weakness of advanced age and wishes to be free of his responsibilities but feels that he is so involved in the Singschule that he must continue to write Meisterlieder. Yet, his number of Meisterlieder decreased 34 percent from 1554 to 1555 and 18 percent from 1555 to 1556. In 1555 he was elected Merker, which even more severely limited his possibilities for expression in

this genre. Finally, he wrote of his growing weakness again in 1557 and 1559 and in 1560 drew up his "General-register" which would seem to indicate that his work was coming to an end of some kind.

## SPRUCHDICHTUNG

"Spruchdichtung" or occasional verse, which existed side by side with Meistergesang, grew in importance as the Meistergesang began to decline and eventually overwhelmed it. This development or change is also readily evident in the development of Hans Sachs. The reasons for the change are numerous.

Perhaps of foremost importance was the content. During his early wanderings Sachs had written several love poems in the form of Meistergesang. Their content was not of a suitable nature for that genre, and a few years later Sachs did not include them in his listings of Meisterlieder. Spruchdichtung, however, availed him of a vehicle with which to present his personal feelings and abundant observations. Consistent with the above, Emil Weller writes

Seiner Natur entsprachen viel mehr Schwank, Fabel und Fastnachtspiel, Formen, in denen seine lebensvolle Beobachtung, seine Fähigkeit zur Darstellung des Realistisch-Genrehaften zur Geltung kamen, und in deren Behandlung sich das Zurücktreten traditionsgebundener Volkstümlichkeit zugunsten freier, humorvoller Gestaltung beobachten lässt.<sup>60</sup>

The slight bit of irony and/or humor contained herein was also part of Sachs' general manner and he readily used the same approach in literature.

Of almost equal importance in Sachs' disposition toward writing occasional verse, was his desire to teach. To be sure, he retained the moralizing conclusions, which were one of the basic characteristics of the Spruch in the Middle Ages. In this regard, it was mentioned above that due to the adherence to form in Meistergesang that the moral often was compressed into a few lines. The moral, which was so important to Sachs, did not suffer the same fate here.

Häufiger freilich ist eine äusserliche, nichts Neues hinzuzufügen die Verbreitung des Liedes im Spruche. Das zeigt sich besonders bei den Moralen, die im Liede kaum je mehr als zwanzig, im Spruch aber nicht selten sechzig, je hundert Verse einnehmen. Aber auch im Hauptteil setzt der Spruch häufig an die Stelle der gedrängten Stoffvermittlung des Liedes gegenständliche Ausmalung; aus einem "alten, armen Manne" macht er einen "armen Bettelmann mit grauen Haar und gebogenem Rücken, der sich auf Krücken stützen muss."<sup>61</sup>

Weller goes on to list other occasional verses and Meistergesänge that may be compared.<sup>62</sup>

Next, a factor of great significance was the relative importance given to form and to content. It will be remembered that form was of prime importance in Meistergesang and that the content was to be adapted to fit the selected form. Quite the opposite was the case in occasional verse as Rudolph Genée points out.

Ein wesentlicher Unterschied zwischen der Volkstümlichen Poesie des Hans Sachs und seinen Meisterliedern ist aber darin zu erkennen, dass in den letzteren der Stoff sich den Versformen anbequemen musste, dass er nur für diese benutzt wurde, während bei seinen in den altdeutschen Reimpaaren geschriebenen Dichtungen das stoffliche Interesse der erste Zweck war.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, content is of prime importance here.

An additional point which must be made is that Hans Sachs did not stumble upon Spruchdichtung only later in his life. Eberhardt Lämmert points out that Nuremberg was an important center of Spruchdichtung in the fifteenth century.<sup>64</sup> Sachs found that through Spruchdichtung he could reach a greater audience than through Meisterlieder which was only presented occasionally before limited groups and was not published.

The freeing of content as with regard to subject matter treated and the permissibility to employ strong personal emotions were also motivating factors in Sachs' writing of Spruchdichtung. For example, when in 1523 he wished to be polemical, he employed the Spruch as the form for the "Wittenbergische Nachtigal." The content was of prime importance and he wanted to reach as many people as possible. A second excellent example is found in the spring of 1560 when, after the death of his first wife, he writes a Spruch relating her great importance for him and during it she appears to him in a dream. Here, strong personal emotions are expressed, which are not a proper content for Meistergesang.

The Schwank, which belongs in the Spruchdichtung group, also enjoyed great popularity at this time. Pauli's collection appeared in 1522 and Rollwagenbüchlein in 1555. Especially after 1550 the number of Schwank collections

increased greatly which shows an increased public interest at this juncture.

Sachs enjoyed writing these little tales in his strict Knittelverse and the moral here was once again very important. Sachs started writing Schwänke in 1527 and continued to produce them in a fairly erratic pattern up until 1555. Then in 1555, he wrote 15 Schwänke, the most he had ever produced in one year. His productivity in this genre took a slight dip in 1556 to 10, but then he followed with 18 in 1557. In 1558 and 1559 he wrote 42 and 41 Schwänke respectively. Due to the death of his wife, he only wrote one in 1560 and one in 1561. However, once his creativity was rekindled we find a total of 102 Schwänke listed from the years 1562 and 1563. During the span from 1564 until 1569 he writes a few Schwänke each year, about the same volume as before 1555.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, Sachs was more strongly attracted to Spruchdichtung for a number of reasons. Primarily, the more open content availed him of a vehicle with which to present his personal feelings and abundant observations and, to be sure, the content and not the form was of prime importance. Directly involved herein is also the permissibility to employ strong personal emotions. Secondarily, the didactic message was clearer here, as the moral was greatly expanded. Finally, Sachs felt that he could reach a much greater audience through Spruchdichtung than through Meistergesang.



## DRAMA

### Importance and Development in Nuremberg

The importance of the stage and its possible role in the cessation of Meisterlieder production was noted long ago. Archer Taylor noted that

It has often been suggested that the success of the Meistersinger in writing and presenting plays turned their attention from the composition of Meisterlieder. . . . the first public dramatic performance in Nuremberg is said to have occurred before 1550, and this date falls just before the waning of Meistergesang.<sup>66</sup>

To see if this point has any validity with regard to Hans Sachs, we must look at the history of development and role played by the stage in Nuremberg from 1500 on.

The stage enjoyed a great popularity in Nuremberg at the turn of the sixteenth century. This fact is attested to again and again. For example, in The Origin of the German Carnival Comedy we read of this period that

Nuremberg through wealth the most flourishing, through industry and art the most cultured town of the Germany of the period, situated in the heart of the country was the cradle of the comic drama.<sup>67</sup>

Yet, despite this popularity the records show that early in the 1500's that a decrease of interest was shown with regard to theatrical performances.

Theodor Hampe in Die Entwicklung des Theaterwesens in Nürnberg suggests two major reasons for this gap. First and of prime importance is the role that censorship played at this time. All evidence would indicate that "Spielverbote" had been imposed by the city council. Second that there was no dramatic genius present at the turn of the sixteenth century with the ability to transform the stage into a new, a more meaningful form.<sup>68</sup>

Sachs, himself, was also directly affected by the censorship imposed by the council.

Auch Hans Sachs hatte sich Ratsverweise und Mahnungen zugezogen, als er 1527 in Verbindung mit Osiander seine "Auslegung der wunderlichen Weissagung von dem Bapstumb" herausbrachte. . . . Es ist also sehr wahrscheinlich, dass die strenge Handhabung der Zensur ihn auch bewogen hatte, vom biblisch-polemischen Drama Abstand zu nehmen.<sup>69</sup>

Sachs did not stop writing plays due to the censorship imposed upon him, but the plays that he did write from 1530 through 1554 were not for performance. This, however, was also the general situation, for while we do find the listings of Puppet plays in the city records, we find very, very few listings of dramatic performances during the same time span.

The first sign of a revival of the stage's popularity in Nuremberg did not arise through the efforts of Hans Sachs or other Meistersingers, but as a result of the school system. Humanism had been and was still filtering up from Italy and the better educated sought to elevate

the level of theater in Germany by use of classical standards. Leonard Kulmann, the rector of a Latin School in Nuremberg in the 1540's, made just such an attempt. His performances, which escaped censorship, motivated Sachs to start work in this area again himself about 1545.

In the area of Fastnachtspiel,<sup>70</sup> what Sachs put before his public in the late 1540's and 1550's was essentially the fifteenth century Shrovetide play. He did make scenic simplifications, however, and also eliminated to a great extent the bawdy vocabulary.

Initially Sachs had a hard time freeing himself from the traditional form. Yet, as his talents developed, he proved to be not only a great master of the genre but an important innovator as well. Ekehard Catholy agrees with this as stated in Fastnachtspiel.

Fast sämtliche Arbeiten betonen, dass das Fnsp. durch Hans Sachs von seiner ursprünglichen Obszönität befreit und in den Dienst moralischer Unterweisung gestellt worden sei.<sup>71</sup>

This agrees in essence with the point that van Abbé makes.

Sachs, on the other hand, sterilized everything he touched. The old themes remained--even the old full-blooded language remained--but the almost sacramental obscenity had departed.<sup>72</sup>

The strong moral or didactic element so strongly evident in these little farces was, without doubt, one of the basic reasons that the form appealed to Hans Sachs.

In his "Generalregister" Hans Sachs designated 85 of the 200 plays he had written as Fastnachtspiele. The

coming shift to the Fastnachtspiel was evident in a circular letter "Gespräch mit der Fasnacht," which he wrote in 1540. In this letter Sachs pleaded for a clean Fastnachtspiel, and wishing to set a good example, applied his own talents to the genre.<sup>73</sup>

Hampe had divided Sachs' Fastnachtspiele into three groups. Group one, which consists of 14 plays, is characterized by the fact that they open and close with a short informal address to the spectators. Eleven of this group were written before 1546 and the last in 1551. Group two, which is by far the largest of all the groups, opens and closes with a soliloquy or a dialogue. This group, which numbers 48 in all, were markedly different in dramatic technique from group one. These plays were not so spontaneous as those of group one and also did not create an illusion. Rather the setting of the plays and the place of performance are distinctly separated. Here, the actor tries to create a theatrical illusion. The plays in group two date from 1550 through 1559. The smallest group, group three, which consists of only three Fastnachtspiele, is characterized by the formal dialogue which opens the play and the formal epilogue which closes it. These three plays are of minor importance for our consideration. One was written in 1552 and two in 1557.<sup>74</sup>

The division by groups not only has a structural importance, but also has relevance to subject matter treated.

Before 1550 Sachs' Fastnachtspiele were more abstract and subjective. The little plays were being strongly influenced by the allegorical poetry which still prevailed in the early part of the sixteenth century. However, after 1550, and to be sure, it was the case from 1550 to 1560 which marked the climax in Hans Sachs' activity as a writer of Fastnachtspiel, he becomes more concrete and realistic in the treatment of his subject matter. He now treated particular types of characters or groups of characters and points out their weaknesses or foibles.

#### Reasons for Turning to the Theater

A prime basis for the renewed interest in the theater was the fact that the interest in public performances of Meistergesang was decreasing. However, instead of speaking about general developments of Meistergesang and the theater, the advice of Constantin Kooznetzoff will be adhered to.

Alle bedeutenden Singschulen ausser Iglau haben im Laufe ihrer Geschichte Theateraufführungen veranstaltet. Auf die Frage aber, ob das Komödienspielen eine offizielle Tätigkeit der Meistersinger war, lässt sich keine allgemeingültige Antwort geben. Die Frage muss nicht nur für jede Schule einzeln gestellt und beantwortet werden, sondern auch für jede Epoche in der Geschichte der betreffenden Schule.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, let us take a look at the theater life in Nuremberg.

Most researchers agree that in the 1550's a very active theater life was going on in Nuremberg. This theatrical activity was carried on by the artisans and the

soul of the group was Hans Sachs. After agreeing on this point, the scholars fall into disputes as to whether or not a Meistersinger stage existed. Witkowski maintains rather than the production of the plays being a corporate activity, that it was the concern of individuals. Hampe, on the other hand, thinks that a stage under the direction of the Singschule did exist. A clarification of this point is not necessary here. The point is that the theater was enjoying a great resurgence in Nuremberg.

A question which should be studied is whether or not the Singschule as a group endeavored to produce Fastnachtspiele. Theodor Hampe thinks not.

In den beiden Hauptberichten, den Schriften Puschmanns und Wagenseils, steht kein Wort davon, und grundsätzlich dem Denken beider nur eine lyrisch-musikalische Kunstübung innerhalb der Schule der Meistersinger erlaubt.<sup>76</sup>

However, Hans Sachs' Meisterlied dated December 3, 1550 and entitled "Das neu jar" would appear to indicate quite the opposite. In this Meistergesang he describes the varying genres in which the Meistersingers are active. In the third strophe we read,

Auch wöllen wir ein andre jar  
Da ein Comedj halten.<sup>77</sup>

Determining whether or not this was a performance sanctioned by the Singschule, however, is not so simple.

From Sachs' own writings we know that he was an actor as well as a dramatist. Furthermore, in The Origin of the German Carnival Comedy by Maximilian Rudwin we read that:

he organized a theatrical company for the production of his own plays, and by personal participation in the performance of his pieces advanced the stage of his day to some extent.<sup>78</sup>

Yet, there were three troupes operating from 1550-1561 and each had as its leader a Meistersinger. These three troupes were directed by Hans Sachs, Jörg Frölich and Ambrosius Österreichischer.<sup>79</sup>

The answer to the problem stated above is easily solved by studying the city council's protocol and the Meistersinger protocol for the years involved. The pertinent dates from the two protocols follow.

- 1556: Erste Singschule: "auf suntag nach obersten" (12. Januar).  
 Zweite Singschule: "auf den gulden suntag in der fasten" (1. März).  
 Spielzeit: vom 18. Januar bis zum 17. Februar.
- 1557: Erste Singschule: "auf suntag nach obersten" (10. Januar).  
 Zweite Singschule: "auf den guelden suntag in der fasten" (14. März).  
 Spielzeit: vom 26. Januar bis zum 7. März.
- 1558: Erste Singschule: "auf obersten" (6. Januar).  
 Zweite Singschule: "auf suntag vor lichtmes" (30. Januar).  
 Dritte Singschule: "auf suntag oculi" (13. März).  
 Spielzeit: vom 2. bis zum 27. Februar.
- 1559: Erste Singschule: "auf suntag oculi" (26. Februar).  
 Spielzeit: vom "neuen jar an bis uf den weissen sonntag" (12. Februar).
- 1560: Erste Singschule: "auf obersten" (6. Januar).  
 Zweite Singschule: "auf den gulden suntag in der fasten" (10. März).  
 Spielzeit: vom 2. Februar bis zum 2. März.<sup>80</sup>

Initially in the Meisterlied "Das neu jar" we saw that the stage was an accepted form of expression for the Meister-singer. In the information quoted above, it is shown that from 1556 through 1560 the Singschule did not convene during the "Spielzeit." Obviously, the school was not convened so that members could pursue their activities with regard to Fastnachtspiele presentations. Yet, whether or not these were performances sanctioned by the Singschule remains an open question.

Constantin Kooznetzoff does an admirable job in clearing up this problem. Reading the city council's resolutions for the year 1561, he noticed that only the troupe of Jörg Frölich performed that year and the performances were to run from January 23 through February 23. Yet, the second meeting of the Singschule was to be held on the second of February, that is to say in the middle of the "Spielzeit." From this and the dates above concerning the performance times of Sachs' troupe, he concluded that the troupe of Hans Sachs was the official theater troupe of the Nuremberg Meistersingerschule. Unfortunately, it is impossible to make his case more solid, because the records for the years 1562 through 1575 have been lost.

Thus, we have arrived at the point of being able to state that theatrical presentations were performed as an official activity of the Nuremberg Singschule and that there was only one official troupe, that being Hans Sachs'.



Sachs stepped down as the leader of the troupe in 1561 and a certain weaver Veit Fesselmann took over for him. Fastnachtspiel without the magnetic personality and driving force of Hans Sachs soon started to decay once again.

### Tragedies and Comedies

Hans Sachs was the first writer of Fastnachtspiel who also wrote tragedies and comedies. With regard to dramatic worth, these works are not so important as his Fastnachtspiele but do help to illustrate his great interest in the theater from 1545 through 1560.

As opposed to his Fastnachtspiel, these works are more serious in tone and more formal in structure. Subject matter also sets the tragedies and comedies apart. For example, from 1547 on he wrote at least one play each year based upon the Bible and from 1550 through 1558, when his dramatic productions were at their height, this number increased. To be sure,

Er verfasste etwa 50 biblische Dramen; sie entstanden alle erst, nachdem Luthers Bibelübersetzung erschienen war, mit der er sich eifrig beschäftigte.<sup>82</sup>

Yet simultaneously with the biblical productions, Sachs was producing plays based on material from the literature of the Middle Ages and other sources.

The major significance here, however, is that this shows his general activity in the realm of the theater, which commenced about 1545, reached its height in the early 1550's and faded out at the end of the same decade.



To be sure, in the forward to his third volume of works he takes leave of the theater. After relating the reasons for his printing of his plays, he concluded as follows:

Guthertziger leser, nimb also an mit  
gutem geneigten hertzen diss mein letztes  
buch, darmit ich mein 66 jar und alter  
mit Gottes gnaden nun zu rhu setzen wil!

Anno Salutis 1561, am 16 tag Augusti.<sup>83</sup>

In summary, the stage enjoyed great success in Nuremberg at the turn of the fifteenth century but began to decline due to the lack of dramatic genius and a rigid censorship imposed by the city council. Stage activity was revived about 1540 in the school system. Here, Humanism was active and sought to elevate the level of theater in Germany by use of classical standards. Their success prompted Sachs to again write Fastnachtspiele for public performance. The strong didactic element in the Fastnachtspiel appealed to Sachs and he improved his models by scenic simplification and by eliminating to a great extent the bawdy vocabulary. His impending shift to Fastnachtspiel is already evident in his circular letter "Gespräch mit der Fasnacht," which he wrote in 1540. Next, he was further motivated in this direction by the decreasing interest in the public performance of Meistergesang. Two additional points were made. First, it was shown above that theatrical presentations were performed as an official activity of the Nuremberg Singschule and that there was only one

official troupe, that being Hans Sachs'. Finally, the fact that Hans Sachs was the first writer of Fastnachtspiele who also wrote tragedies and comedies helps to illustrate his great and consuming interest in the theater and his waning interest in Meistergesang from 1545 to 1560.

## HISTORICAL INFLUENCES

The history of Meistergesang in Nuremberg runs almost parallel with the development, flowering and decline of the city and with the role of the artisan classes. Therefore, it is useful and informative to briefly survey the history of the city and the clues that may be found herein indicating why Hans Sachs stopped writing Meisterlieder.

During the fifteenth century Nuremberg, which was one of the cities on the great overland trade routes, was a center of arts and crafts rather than of large scale industry and finance. It was a "free city," which meant that it made its own laws, sent representatives to the provincial and Imperial diets, and acknowledged no political obedience except to the emperor, who was too indebted to them for financial or military aid to attack their liberties.<sup>84</sup>

With the beginning of the sixteenth century, a general economic decline beset Germany. The main reason for this development was that the commerce of south Germany and the Rhineland was in decay, both because of the shift of trade to the Atlantic and because the Dutch controlled the mouth of the Rhine to their own interests. Additionally,

of extreme importance for the Meistergesang, also at this time throughout Europe the town-and-guild framework was being attacked by the new capitalists. Weaving, weavers being one of the bulwarks of the Singschulen, was one of the first crafts affected.

Yet, despite this overall decline, Nuremberg remained in a relatively stable condition until the middle of the sixteenth century. Luther commented upon the city, writing:

Nürnberg leuchtet wahrlich wie eine Sonne, Mond  
und Sterne, und gar kräftiglich andre Städte beweget,  
was daselbst im Schwange geht.<sup>85</sup>

Another called Nuremberg

Auge und Ohr Deutschlands, da man alles sieht und  
hört, das wo anders nicht hindringen kann.<sup>86</sup>

As mentioned above, Nuremberg stood foremost in the artistic and poetical activity of the time. Due to its centralized location, it became a center between streams of progress from west to east, and north to south: the line of movement crossed here. These events reacted powerfully upon the minds of the citizenry and the city was very spiritual.

The development of Meistergesang was also directly linked to the development, flowering, and decline of the guilds. The development and flowering of the guilds closely paralleled that of Nuremberg itself, for when the guilds began to decline, such a decline was also readily evident of Nuremberg itself.

In the period of development the industrial classes formed closed societies, almost guilds for poets and verse-craft became one of the Incorporated Trades. In these societies, which were formed in Nuremberg as early as 1493, the poets had to compose according to prescribed rules. The art of poetry was treated in the same way as weaving and bootmaking. Due to the artificial emphasis on form, a prize was given for the work with the fewest mistakes in technique, passion and true personal feeling were gradually eliminated from their poetry. Each year these societies had to obtain permission from the city council to maintain their singing schools. While this permission was usually granted, it was sometimes refused, on the ground that the Masters' songs were too lascivious or polemical.<sup>87</sup>

The singing societies usually held meetings once a month after the afternoon services on Sunday in the Church of St. Catherine. Public performances, which took place three times a year, were held at Christmas, Easter and Pentecost.

Nuremberg's and perhaps the whole of Germany's history took a turn for the worse when Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian died in 1519. To be sure, Maximilian, who was a patron of both literature and art, was partly responsible for the good works of this period.

Charles V, his successor, was not the great patron of the arts that his predecessor had been and did not add

to but helped to destroy the degree of peace and prosperity that existed within the empire. Since Charles was having troubles with the Pope, the free cities and other self-governing bodies within the empire initially were rather susceptible to Luther's ideas. However, in 1529 he settled his quarrel with the Pope and renewed his loyalty to Rome. Thus, now there was increased tension between the Protestant and Catholic factions. During this period of strife Nuremberg tried to remain neutral, and as mentioned above, used censorship as one of its weapons in following a middle path. The judiciousness of this decision with regard to the Meistergesang in particular, is seen in the fact that ". . . in Mainz gar von ca. 1536-1562 ein Singeverbot . . ." <sup>88</sup> was in effect.

Of special importance for Nuremberg and its Meistersingers was the Schmalkalden League and its demise. This league, named for a town in Hesse, was formed in 1531 by a number of Protestant princes and delegates. While founded as a defense league, it came to spearhead the opposition to the imperial regime. The league grew in strength up to 1546, when Charles began his campaigns against it. Upon defeating the league, Charles was at the height of his power. He was now anxious to seize supremacy both in political and religious matters. In line with this, in 1548 he appointed a commission which published the "Interim." This document established a half and half religion for all



not of the Roman Catholic faith. In effect, the Papacy was thereby partially reintroduced and some of Luther's work thereby undone. While this move engendered much ill feeling in Nuremberg, the Council nonetheless accepted the "Interim."

However, despite Charles' victory in this limited area, the Holy Roman Empire remained a disintegrating mass as a civil struggle continued between the Catholic and Protestant states, the latter aided by France. This struggle was ended by the Peace of Augsburg 1555. The Peace of Augsburg was a great victory for Protestantism, in that it sealed the right of the secular authorities to decide the religious observance of their subjects (*cujus regio ejus religio*). Thus, after initial success, Charles failed to preserve religious unity in Germany and abdicated his many crowns and retired to a monastery in 1556.

Nuremberg had other direct problems during the early 1550's. Albert Alcibiades, Markgraf of Brandenburg, continually attacked and harassed the city until defeated in 1557. Therefore, in certain sections of Germany, battles had been raging on and off for almost twenty years at the time of the Peace of Augsburg.

With regard to Nuremberg's overall stance, during Hans Sachs' critical period in Meistersang, we read the following in Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century.

By the 1550's, to be sure, Nuremberg had seen her best days as a leading manufacturing and mercantile city. Though she was able to maintain her eminence for another century or so and her political independence until 1806, the later sixteenth century saw the beginning of her gradual demise as a center of power and influence.<sup>89</sup>

Generally speaking, therefore, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the overland trade routes were declining in importance and concurrently with this development the town-and-guild framework was being attacked by the new capitalists. This was very important since the development, flowering, and decline of the guilds was closely paralleled by the development, flowering, and decline of Meistergesang. During the 1550's art and literature suffered general setbacks first with the death of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian (died 1519) who was a patron of both art and literature and by the naming of Charles V as his successor who was not only not a great patron of the arts but also helped to destroy the degree of peace and prosperity that existed within the empire. To be sure, it has been shown that the restrictive censorship, which was one of the city council's policies in Nuremberg, grew out of a desire to steer a middle course between Charles and the Protestant activists.

## CONCLUSION

Generally, Hans Sachs to a great extent follows the literary fashions of his time, while also being influenced by his personal life and the historical circumstances. As noted above, Sachs was introduced into the art of Meistergesang by a certain Fridel (see page 3), an instructor in the Latin School which Sachs attended. In 1508 Sachs was apprenticed to a cobbler. Since Meistergesang had years before become an incorporated trade, mainly practiced by cobblers and weavers, it would have been an oddity for Sachs' contact with the genre not to have increased at this time.

During his Wanderschaft, which follows his early apprenticeship, Sachs was still not encumbered by the rules of the Singschule and wrote love songs and songs about his experiences which he later excluded from his list of Meistergesang. Upon his return to Nuremberg Sachs set out to become a Meister in his trade and also renewed his activity in the local Singschule.

After marrying Kunigunde Kreutzer in 1519, the couple had five children in eight years, which caused Sachs to write less and work more than he might have desired. During the next two and a half decades a number of

of changes are discernible. As Sachs' financial circumstances slowly improved he devoted more time to his literary pursuits. After his Wanderschaft Sachs wrote Meisterlieder in the conventional manner, both with regard to form and content. Then, however, he followed Folz's lead and also employed serious secular topics. At the same time, Sachs was busy writing polemical Sprüche in defense of Protestantism. This fact along with his equally polemical plays caused Sachs to run afoul of the city council and his productions were censored. The policy of censorship was employed from 1527 up to 1545 by the Nuremberg city council as it tried to tread a middle ground between the activist Protestants and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. This censorship had a marked effect upon the development of Sachs' Sprüche and upon his composition of Fastnachtspiele. It also, as was mentioned above (see page 33), had a decided effect upon the whole theatrical life in Nuremberg.

With all other current genres being in disfavor because of the nature of their content, Sachs turned more strongly than ever before to Meistergesang. He now expanded even further by adding topics from classical literature and his own experiences and wanderings. As far as form is concerned, however, the genre still remained "ars technica." Because of his strong activity in the Meistergesang at this time, Sachs was able to significantly revive the Singschule in Nuremberg which had been in a state of decay in 1516 upon his return from his Wanderschaft.

Sachs' emphasis within Meistergesang seemed to have been steadily shifting. At first he treated standard materials and was more innovative with form, having composed nine of his thirteen new tunes before 1527. Then in 1527 he shifted to treating Luther's Bible and to be sure through 1536 was essentially concerned with paraphrasing what was in the new edition of the Bible. However, from 1536 to 1552 the preponderance of his Meisterlieder were secular in content. Thus, from 1536 on he was moving further and further away from true Meistergesang.

Already in 1540 Sachs wrote his circular letter "Gespräch mit der Fasnacht" in which he pleaded for a clean Fastnachtspiel. This shows a continuing interest in the theater and when the opportunity presented itself, his interest shifted strongly to this area.

Two forces were causing a two-pronged change of interest to develop as we approach the mid-point in the sixteenth century. On the one hand, interest in public performances of Meistergesang is decreasing. This slacking of interest is reflected in the fact that the number of Meistergesänge retained in manuscript form diminishes from decade to decade in the sixteenth century until we have practically nothing from the period after 1550. The second is the curtailment of a restrictive censorship in Nuremberg, which had a terrible effect upon the theater life in that city. Theatrical activities now increased and Sachs was caught up with the new desire for theatrical performances.

On December 31, 1554, in "Zal und sum meiner gedicht auf dise zeit" Sachs already is complaining about the weakness of advanced age and wishes to be free of his responsibilities to Meistergesang, but feels that he is so involved that he must continue. Despite his resolve his production of Meisterlieder decreased 34 percent from 1554 to 1555 and 18 percent from 1555 to 1556. A great part of this decrease is associated with the fact that Sachs became Merker in the Nuremberg Singschule in 1555. This, the most important of positions within the school, was a very time consuming task and all evidence points to the fact that the Merker was not allowed to perform at the Hauptsingen or the Festsingen. Thus, Sachs could now only write his Meisterlieder for his own satisfaction as he could neither publish nor present them.

Restricted in this way in this channel of his productive activities meant simply that other avenues of expression would have to be cultivated. This happened for, concurrently with the decline of Meisterlieder production, a sharp increase took place in his writing of Sprüche, Fastnachtspiele and Schwänke. Two additional reasons must be reckoned with in this upsurge of the above genres. Foremost is the fact that in these genres content is of prime importance. Sachs was tired of having to sacrifice content to form and wanted to be a teacher for the greater masses and not just for a select few. Secondly, as Meisterlieder were decreasing in popularity these three genres

were all increasing in public interest. A definite reason for this increased interest was their essentially polemical content. As mentioned above, after 1550 the number of Schwänke collections increased greatly, which shows an increased public interest. Sachs' most productive years for Schwänke were from 1550 to 1560 and 1562 and 1563, the very years in which his number of Meisterlieder was markedly decreasing.

Similarly, the span from 1545 to 1560 shows Sachs' steady turn to the theater. His years of greatest emphasis here are from 1550 to 1560 and especially the span from 1552 to 1558 when he was also active in the production and the performance of his theatrical writings.

Finally, Sachs did not relinquish his position as Merker until December, 1561. The reason behind this late move may be that he felt indebted and responsible to the school and the genre as has been indicated in quotes from a Meisterlied and two Sprüche on pages 20 through 24. When he did relinquish this position, that act marked his final break with the genre.

In sum, Sachs' curtailment of production of Meisterlieder is brought about first and foremost by his inclination to follow the "Mode seiner Zeit." Secondly, his strong desire to express more personal emotions and to convey a didactic message to the more general public caused him to shift to different media more suited to this type of personal expression and didacticism.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Hans Sachs, Meistergesänge-Fastnachtspiele-Schwänke, Hrsg. Eugen Geiger (Stuttgart, 1967), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Gero von Wilpert, Deutsche Dichterlexikon (Stuttgart, 1963), p. 499.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Landau, Hans Sachs (Berlin, 1924), p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Ernst Karl Julius Lützelberger, Hans Sachs: Sein Leben und seine Dichtung, Zweite Aufgabe (Nürnberg, 1876), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, 102, Hrsg. Adelbert von Keller (Tübingen, 1870), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Edmund Goetze, "Sachs, Hans," Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie, 30 (Leipzig, 1890), p. 120.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>9</sup> Landau, p. 84.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Sachs und seine Zeit (Leipzig, 1894), p. 369.

<sup>11</sup> Landau, p. 84.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>13</sup> Archer Taylor, The Literary History of Meistergesang (Menasha, 1937), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Bert Nagel, Meistersang (Stuttgart, 1962), p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Genée, p. 255.

<sup>17</sup> A "Singschule" was an association of singers which was usually founded on a religious basis. The schools developed elaborate rules based on the techniques of the masters, and soon came to consider any infringement of these rules to be morally wrong. The typical school held meetings in a church. In the future the word "Singschule" will be used without quotation marks.



18 Der Meistergesang in Geschichte und Kunst (Leipzig, 1901), p. 81.

19 Ibid., p. 21.

20 Ibid.

21 Nagel, p. 17.

22 "Das Brauchleben der Meistersinger," Archiv für Kulturgeschichte, 25 (1934), p. 60.

23 Taylor, p. 27.

24 The "Hauptsingen" was the most formal of the singing contests which the Meistersingers held. The "Hauptsingen" was very solemn and religious, learned or serious secular themes were used. Held in church after the service, the Merker watched for any infringement of the rules. As M. O'C. Walsche states on page 273 in Medieval German Literature, "the singer whose performance showed the fewest faults was awarded a chain adorned with medals or a silken chaplet, while those whose faults were many were liable to be fined or might even be expelled."

25 Taylor, p. 115.

26 Halle, 1882, p. 95.

27 Roy Pascal, German Literature in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (London, 1968), p. 48.

28 Geiger, p. 195.

29 Der Meistergesang des Hans Sachs (Bern, 1956), p. 196.

30 Ibid.

31 Clair Hayden Bell, "A Glance into the Workshop of Meistergesang," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXVIII (1953), p. 630.

32 Geiger, p. 198.

33 Goetze, p. 115.

34 R. Weber, Zur Entwicklung und Bedeutung des dt. Meistergesangs im 15. und 16. J., diss. (Berlin, 1921), p. 47.

35 Ibid., p. 45.

- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Bert Nagel, "Der deutsche Meistergesang," Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift, XXII (1934), p. 323.
- 38 Weber, p. 113.
- 39 Landau, p. 73.
- 40 "Zur Geschichte des Nürnberger Theaters im 16. Jahrhundert," Vierteljahrschrift für Litteraturgeschichte, 3 (1890), p. 29.
- 41 Geiger, pp. 96-97.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Genée, p. 362.
- 44 Lützelberger, p. 91.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 In Gero von Wilpert's Sachwörterbuch der Literatur (pp. 707-08), we read that Terpsichore is "Muse des Tanzes, der Kitharamusik und später der (Chor-) Lyrik."
- 47 Lützelberger, p. 91.
- 48 Geiger, pp. 96-97.
- 49 The "Merker" stood at the top of the ladder in the Singschule's hierarchy. There were usually three and they were elected officials. They were responsible for calling the singers together and for the procedure at the sing in general. When a singer performed, the three Merkers were enclosed in a judging booth, the three Merkers were to check the performance of the singers. One of these Merkers should be well informed in grammar and Lutheran German to make sure that no mistakes were made in this regard. Another checked the strophic structure or tonal pattern of the song, in particular the rime scheme, while a third counted the syllables of the line and checked the performance for metrical or grammatical offences against the rules of the "Tabulatur."
- In addition to their responsibilities during the Hauptsingen, it was the custom for the Merkers to indicate to the singers in advance, the length of stanza to be employed at the next program, whether short, long, etc. Moreover, it was also the practice in many a school for the singer to announce in advance to the Merkers the melody and the Biblical text that he would employ. In this way,

the Merker, knowing the program in advance, could prepare himself for the analysis of the various songs to be performed before hand. Finally, the supremacy of the Merkers is to be noted in this quote from Bert Nagel.

Über allen aber thronen allmächtig die Merker, denen die gesamte künstlerische Wertung und Zensur untersteht-Ihr Urteil ist unwiderruflich.

<sup>50</sup> Das Gemerkbüchlein des Hans Sachs (1555-1561) nebst einem Anhang: Die Nürnberger Meistersinger-Protocolle. Hrsg. Karl Drescher (Halle a. S., 1898).

<sup>51</sup> Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, 110, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-26.

<sup>55</sup> Genée, p. 364.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 364-65.

<sup>57</sup> Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, 225, p. 565.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Geiger, pp. 96-97.

<sup>60</sup> Der Volksdichter Hans Sachs und Seine Dichtung (Nürnberg, 1868), p. 20.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., z.b. Schw. III 8 (Lied:II 222 (Spruch) (2 Verse Moral gegen 46.) III 16: II 241 (14 Verse Moral gegen 26); III 19: I 90 (20:30) III 41: II 244 (13:62); III 65: I 46 (14:41); III 68: I 6 (20:102); III 71: II 224 (5:22); usw.

<sup>63</sup> Genée, p. 275.

<sup>64</sup> Eckehard Catholy, Fastnachtspiel (Stuttgart, 1966), p. 17.

<sup>65</sup> Geiger, pp. 96-97.

<sup>66</sup> Meistergesang, pp. 30-31.

<sup>67</sup> Maximilian Rudwin, The Origin of the German Carnival Comedy (New York, 1920), pp. 54-55.

<sup>68</sup> pp. 41-43.

<sup>69</sup> Constantin Kooznetzoff, Das Theaterspielen der Meistersinger in Der Deutsche Meistergesang, Bert Nagel, Hrsg. (Darmstadt, 1967), p. 454.

<sup>70</sup> van Abbé describes Shrovetide Plays (Fastnachtspiele) as "Short comedies played out by a small number of actors made merry at the expense of the everyday life of the common people. The themes are the eternal ones: married discontent, conflicts of temperament, the usual vices, harmless deceit, and the eternal triumph of the quickwitted over the gullible." Drama in Renaissance Germany and Switzerland (Australie, 1961), p. 5.

<sup>71</sup> p. 51.

<sup>72</sup> van Abbé, p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Rudwin, p. 57.

<sup>74</sup> Hampe, pp. 528-29.

<sup>75</sup> pp. 495-96.

<sup>76</sup> Hampe, p. 252.

<sup>77</sup> Victor Michels, p. 33.

<sup>78</sup> p. 59.

<sup>79</sup> Kooznetzoff, p. 457.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp. 460-61.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 457.

<sup>82</sup> Hugo Holstein, Die Reformation im Spiegelbild der Dramatischen Litteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts (Nieukoop/b. DeGraaf, 1967), p. 70.

<sup>83</sup> A. v. Keller and E. Goetze, Hrsg. Hans Sachs. Bd. 10 in Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart. Bd. 131 (Tübingen, 1902), pp. 6-8.

<sup>84</sup> Will Durant, The Story of Civilization. Part VI. The Reformation (New York, 1957), p. 297.

<sup>85</sup> Landau, p. 39.

86 Ibid.

87 Cecil Headlam, The Story of Nuremberg (London,  
1927), p. 222.

88 R. Weber, p. 32.

89 Gerald Strauss, p. 147.

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