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The Masquerade of History: Herman Bote's *Schichtboik*

Priscilla Hayden-Roy

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In medieval city chronicles of northern Germany we find an interesting instance of polysemy in the word “schicht,” which is used to mean both “history” and “uprising”.¹ This semantic overlap suggests a strong association in the contemporary imagination between the processes of historical change and the manifestation of disorder. This association is reflected in the practice of city chronicle writing in the medieval and late medieval period, which frequently was undertaken in the aftermath of an uprising.² The chronicle documented the legitimacy of the restored order, and served the specific purpose of perpetuating the city’s present legal status, in the same way a legal document could. An extension of the council’s interests, the chronicle made sense of the uprising by relating it to a present, lasting and eternally valid *Rechtszustand*.³ Histories of the *schichten* thus contributed to the stabilization process following an uprising, by documenting the passage out of the medium of change and into the changeless state of *Recht*. The *schicht*—both the history and the uprising—concluded with the reestablishing of order.

In the discussion below I would like to explore what the implications of this polysemy might be for a German city chronicler of the late medieval

¹ Jacob Grimm, Wilhelm Grimm: *Deutsches Wörterbuch*. Vol. 14. Leipzig 1893, p. 2633 f; K. Schiller, A. Lübben: *Mittelniederdeutsches Wörterbuch*. Vol. 4. Münster 1931, p. 85 f.

² Wilfried Ehbrecht: Bürgertum und Obrigkeit in den hansischen Städten des Spätmittelalters. In: *Die Stadt am Ausgang des Mittelalters*. Ed. Wilhelm Rausch. Linz/Donau 1974, pp. 275–302, here p. 281; Johannes Bernhard Menke: Geschichtsschreibung und Politik in deutschen Städten des Spätmittelalters. In: *Jahrbuch des kölnischen Geschichtsvereins* 33 (1958), pp. 1–84; 34/35 (1960), pp. 162–194; here pp. 82–84, 184–187.

³ Heinrich Schmidt: Die deutschen Städtechroniken als Spiegel des bürgerlichen Selbstverständnisses im Spätmittelalter. Göttingen 1958, pp. 36, 61–62, 111–117; Menke: Geschichtsschreibung und Politik, pp. 181–183.

period, by looking at a specific example, Herman Bote's *Schichtboik*.⁴ This work relates the history of six uprisings that occurred in the medieval Hanseatic city of Brunswick between 1292 and 1514. As the city tax collector and the son of a councilman, Bote was well-informed regarding city politics. This combined with his considerable literary skills—Bote is the author of numerous historical and didactic works, and most recently has been put forward as the author of the anonymously published chapbook, *Em kurtzweilig Lesen von Dil Ulenspiegel*⁵—made him a uniquely well-qualified chronicler of Brunswick's *schichten*. The *Schichtboik*, like Bote's other works, reflects the political and social views of a loyal supporter of the city order, who attempts to justify this order in the face of forces threatening it from within and outside its walls. Although the work apparently was not commissioned by Brunswick's city council, it is likely that they are Bote's desired readers. Bote's purpose in writing the *Schichtboik* was to admonish the council to work for the "common good"⁶ and thereby uphold the Hanseatic city order, its political privileges, trading rights and financial stability, lest the city fall prey to the territorial princes. Already in the foreword we read the cautionary warning, "weset vorsichtich," that Bote reiterates throughout the *Schichtboik*. Bote appeals to the authority of tradition, both civic and religious, in arguing conservatively for the preservation of the old, "holy" order.

In the course of this paper I shall examine: first, how Bote's diction reflects the polarity between the eternal, "holy" order and the historical realm of the *schichten*; second, how he conceptualizes the *schicht* as masquerade or what I would like to call here *Eulenspiegelei*, and finally, how Bote, in his concern to perpetuate order, begins to undermine the concept of civic order

⁴ Herman Bote: *Das Schichtboik*. In: *Die Chroniken der niedersächsischen Städte*. Braunschweig. Vol. 2. Ed. Ludwig Hänselmann. Göttingen 1962 (=Die Chroniken der deutschen Städte vom 14. bis ins 16. Jahrhundert. Vol. 16.), pp. 299–493; references hereafter to *SB*.

⁵ *Ein kurtzweilig Lesen von Dil Ulenspiegel*. Ed. Wolfgang Lindow. Stuttgart 1978; references hereafter to *TE*. Bote's authorship of the work was first put forward convincingly by Peter Honegger: *Ulenspiegel*. Ein Beitrag zur Druckgeschichte und zur Verfasserfrage. Neumünster 1973.

⁶ "Sunderliken to bedenckende unde vorttoserren dat ghemeyne ghut" (*SB*, p. 299).

based on a corporative structure and the voluntary oath, replacing it with the concept of *Obrigkeit*, where the council maintains order through force. We will see that in so doing, Bote unwittingly lets masquerade infiltrate the holy order, which in turn renders the boundary between eternal order and temporal disorder porous, and opens up the possibility of writing history as a continuous narrative.

I

Bote's chronicle typifies late medieval city chronicles in the strongly polarized diction he employs in depicting persons and qualities that tend to preserve order in Hanseatic Brunswick vs. those which do not. The city's *Recht*, the laws and privileges that guarantee its free status vis-à-vis the princes, and which protect the trading rights that preserve the "common good," is in the mind of the late medieval city chronicler a divine institution. Preservation of the city constitutes piety;⁷ those upholding this *Recht*—meaning both rights and laws—are typically designated as pious.⁸ *Recht* is defined and anchored in the voluntary oath, which obligates the burgher before God to an order with claims to divine legitimacy. The most blessed state for the city is one of concord—where council and burgher are united single-mindedly in their shared purpose of guarding and preserving "dat ghemeyne ghut." Bote conceives of concord as a sort of protective wall of common will circumscribing the city and its institutions, where individual interests are subjected to the whole. Thus the moral categories of humility and neighborly love are particularly important components of the civic piety that generates concord.

Perhaps nowhere else are the full dimensions of concord better visualized in the *SB* than in the processions performed in honor of Brunswick's patron saint, Auctor. Clergy, councilmen and guildsmen processed

⁷ Schmidt: *Die deutschen Städtechroniken*, pp. 37, 86–89.

⁸ The following examples are representative: "Dut sulfte vorvoren ander vrome lude ock dede ander huse bewarden der schichtmekers, dat se seggen dat se uth oren husen gingen unde drogen hernesche under den hoyken [...]. So wart dat van den vromen luden vormeldet, de de borgermester upweckeden" (*SB*, p. 343 f); "Frome lude, de dusse vorrederie markede, warnden de borgermester davor" (*SB*, p. 354; emphasis mine).

around the city walls annually, bearing the saint's relics in a ritual meant to ward off danger from the city.⁹ The procession inscribed a holy circle, as it were, around the city, creating an image of impervious integrity, of concord. Not surprisingly, we find that the restoration of concord was often celebrated with a procession. In 1446 the council narrowly averted a violent uprising by a faction of the guilds, who were attempting to acquire the privileges of the patricians and wealthier guilds for themselves.¹⁰ The council decided to commemorate the patron saint's gift of restored concord by having a new coffin for St. Auctor's remains built of silver and gold, and to institute a second, new festival procession with the coffin. The procession was preceded by the renewal of oaths of fidelity to the council. Here the sign—the words of the oath and the ceremony—achieves sacramental significance as the manifestation of divine presence within the civic order. Sign and signified coalesce, lifting the city back into the stasis of eternal order.

Discord, on the other hand, arises when self-interest takes precedence over the common good. When pride, hatred, envy, or partisan behavior take root, this opens the door to uprisings. The protective wall of common will fragments, becoming permeable and susceptible to invasion, most frequently by the princes. Writes Bote in the introduction to the *SB*, addressing the leaders of the city:

Mysterious it is, and a [case of] great forgetfulness, that the honorable people in the great, powerful cities, which have been freed from the princes and granted privileges, should regard these things so little and so lightly and not consider that much evil arises in the cities by [such] contempt and neglect. In particular the common good must be considered and promoted: when the common good is guarded assiduously and the authorities of the cities feel kindly towards one another, I believe that God will not allow any discord or doubting to

arise among them. But self-interest and envy are strong among the patriciate; they are partisan, so that secret hate takes a strong foothold, and after years—maybe ten, twenty, or thirty years—discord arises among them. By casting pearls before the swine, someone can vent his anger on his enemy. But then it comes about that both parties lose life and goods, frequently at the same time bringing the city under the control of the princes.¹¹

As the etymology of the word "twydracht" suggests, discord arises when "two-ness," or a principle of division, asserts itself over the holy number "one," in medieval theology associated with the unity of being in God. While Bote never engages in theological speculation concerning the numerical symbolism of *Eintracht* and *Zwietracht*, it is apparent that theological assumptions associated with two-ness and one-ness inform his depiction of Brunswick. City history is a series of discordant deviations from the blessed and honorable state of civic unity, of concord. Through discord the "sin of change," the *schicht*, is initiated. Those who in promoting their own interests bring about discord and disorder are conceived of as betrayers; drawing on the Biblical parable, Bote also likens them to those who cast

ⁿ "Wunder is dutte unde grot vorgettenheyt, dat de erbaren lude in den groten mechtigen steden, dede van den fursten gefriget synt unde bepribleyget, dusse dinghe so ringhe unde weynich achten unde bedencken nicht, dat van vorach-tinge unde vorsumenisse vele quades in den steden upkumt. Sunderliken to bedenckende unde vortosetten dat ghemeyne ghut: wan dat gemeyne guth so flidigen geachtet worde, unde de oversten der stede sick under malckandere leyff hedden, ik befrochte my, dat got neyne twydracht ane twyvele dar lete manghet komen. Over de egene nuth unde affgunst de is sere in den steden mangk den slechten, dat se partigeschen syn, so dat de hemelicke hat so sere ingrest, dat na jaren, over teyne, twintich edder drittich jaren, under one upsteyt eyne twidracht myt hulpe der soghen, wan dar de perlen werdet voregegoten, uppe dat he synen moyd an synem hetelere mach kolen. unde kumt denne ock vaken unde vele, dat eyne myt synem vyende vorlust lifft unde ghud, unde bringet vaken de stede in de wait der fursten" (*SB*, p. 299). English translations of *SB* are mine; I have consulted Ludwig Hänselmann's very free modern German adaptation (*Das Schichtbuch. Geschichten von Ungehorsam und Aufruhr in Braunschweig 1292–1514*. Braunschweig 1886), a compilation of several Brunswick chronicles, for assistance.

¹² See introduction (*SB*, p. 299; see above, note 6); Bote also uses the image in discussing the *schicht* of 1374: "Gy rede der stede, borgermestere und radmanne, dede dat reygemente in den steden hebben, weset voresichtich, dat de perlen nicht werden vor de soghen geghöten" (*SB*, p. 311).

⁹ Bertolt Meyers, Abbot of St. Aegid in Brunswick, states in his chronicle of the uprising of 1446: "so fro [=oft] alsedenne sunte Autoris ghebeente wert umme de stad gedraghen, syn de inwoners seker van oren vianden." (*Die Chroniken der niedersächsischen Städte*. Braunschweig. Vol. 2, p. 515 f; also cited by Schmidt: *Die deutschen Städtechroniken*, p. 94.)

¹⁰ "Schicht der unhorsem borger" (*SB*, pp. 332–348).

pearls—the city order—before the swine.¹² In other parts of the *SB* Bote compares them to the Jews who betrayed Christ.¹³ Nor is there any doubt in Bote's mind as to what force inspires this sin. In the first *schicht* he writes that the devil entered the party of twelve and their guildmasters as they conspired against the council to turn control of the city over to the Welfian Duke Henry.¹⁴

While Bote typically refers to the members of the council as “erbar,” his preferred designation for those in opposition to the council is “schalck.”¹⁵ Interestingly, this is also the byname most frequently given to that principle of discord and division, Till Eulenspiegel; in both cases the term marks its bearer as a transgressor against the holy order. “Schalck” had a considerably more negative meaning at the close of the Middle Ages than it does today, as can be seen, for example, in Luther's translation of the “polluti” (Vulgate, Jer. 23:11) as “scheike,” and the “serve nequam” (Vulgate, Mat. 18:32) as “Schalkknecht.”¹⁶

¹³ In the uprising of 1374 the citizens gather around councilman Til Boring's house, prior to leading him to his execution; they are “alse de jodden umme unsen heren Jhesum in Caphas huse” (SB, p. 313). In the Ludeke Holland *schicht* (beginning in 1488) the “party-brothers” gather to read together the recess just approved, which instituted the Twenty-four as an advisory body to the council. Bote describes them “alse de jodden in Caphas huse in der stillenfridagesnacht” (SB, p. 360). See also reference to betrayal (*yorredereye*; SB, p. 394). In the Ludeke Hollant *schicht* we find an interesting twist: when the inner council (*kokenrad*) is too casual about the threats coming from Holland's party, Bote exclaims, “O Judas, wu vorredestu dinen heren!” (SB, p. 354). Here the city itself becomes the analog to Christ; it is being betrayed by the *kokenrad*. Cf. Schmidt: *Die deutschen Städtechroniken*, p. 78, who observes this same diction applied to territorial princes who threaten the city order.

¹⁴ “To sunte Michaelis dage vor de duvel in dusse twolffe unde ore gyldemestere, unde worden des to rade, dat se wolden hebben eynen huldigen heren. Unde gyngen sammeliken hen to dem hertogen in de borch, so dat se sick myt hertogen Hinrike vorbunden unde vorstrickeden” (SB, p. 304 f). On the demonization of protest movements, see Ehbrecht: *Bürgertum und Obrigkeit*, p. 280.

¹⁵ “Dusse blotgirigen schelcke” (SB, p. 377); “so hedden de schelcke alle myt dem stricke betoghen worden” (SB, p. 396). Bote also coins the word “schalckkrangk” (SB, p. 461), meaning feignedly ill. This association of *schalck* with dissimulation and masquerade will figure importantly in the discussion below.

¹⁶ Hans Wiswe: *Sozialgeschichtliches urn Till Eulenspiegel II. Eine Nachlese*. In: *Eulenspiegel-Interpretationen. Der Schalk im Spiegel der Forschung 1807–1977*. Ed.

Because change is conceived as deviation from an ideally static order anchored in the divine will, Bote must impose a narrative structure of banishment and restoration onto the material in the *SB*. The state of concord cannot incorporate into itself historical change or development. The *schichten* can interrupt timelessness; history sporadically invades eternal stasis. But the chronicler's task is to relate how again and again the city is drawn out of the medium of time and restored to an eternal order. The narrative of restoration interferes to varying degrees with Bote's treatment of his material. The most frequently cited case of this interference is at the end of the very significant *schicht* of 1374.¹⁷ The uprising—the bloodiest in the *SB*—is considered today a landmark in Brunswick constitutional history, since it brought about a lasting change in the make-up of the council. Permanent representation from the guilds was established; the new council also restricted the practice of cooptation by the patricians and more prestigious guilds.¹⁸ But according to Bote the *schicht* comes to an end when the council was restored, “so tovoeren was” (SB, p. 317; “as it had been previously”). Restoration of the old order is the required telos of Bote's *schichten*, since “history” is synonymous with “uprising,” the history ends only with the end of the uprising, with the restoration of the holy, eternal order.

II

How, then, does Bote conceive of the mechanism of discord? If concord is constituted in perfect signification, then discord arises with the possibility of a false sign, of masquerade. “Me schal so eynen nicht holden so me one suth” (SB, p. 394). Don't judge by appearances—thus Bote introduces his

Wemer Wunderlich. Munich 1979, pp. 176–178; see also Wemer Wunderlich: “Till Eulenspiegel” Munich 1984, pp. 79–85.

¹⁷ Already Ludwig Hänselmann noted that Bote's statement was incorrect (SB, p. 317, n. 7).

¹⁸ Matthias Puhle: *Die Braunschweiger ‘Schichten’ (Aufstände) des späten Mittelalters und ihre verfassungsrechtlichen Folgen*. In: *Rat und Verfassung im mittelalterlichen Braunschweig. Festschrift zum 600jährigen Bestehen der Ratsverfassung 1386–1986*. Braunschweig 1986, pp. 237–251, here pp. 240–246.

discussion of the barkeeper Ludeke Erekes, a man known for his loyalty to the council, but who then became involved with two others in a conspiracy against the council. Mistaken identity, or the disjunction between sign and signified, consistently triggers the invasion of history into the holy order. The presence of an imposter destabilizes the relationship between sign and signified by challenging the established order's monopolistic claim to proper signification. For the narrator there is never any question that the imposter's signs are false, indeed recognizably so. But the temporary displacement of signs in the historical interludes of the *schicht* is able to occur because of the semiotic confusion generated by the imposter. In the Ludeke Hollant *schicht*, for example, Bote compares the city to a foolish ass that deposes its true leader, the lion, from the throne, and replaces him with an imposter, the cat. While the cat may resemble the lion in its shape, says Bote, it is very unlike him "in its nature, its strength, and in its nobility."¹⁹ But because the imposter bears a passing resemblance to the legitimate ruler, his invasion of the city order is at least temporarily successful. The reference to the cat alludes to the main actor in the *Schicht*, Ludeke Hollant, the spokesman for the group of twenty-four guildsmen who gradually take over the powers of the council. Hollant was a member of the furrier guild, which was traditionally represented by a cat. Bote relates that at the height of his power Hollant received a coat of arms from the Welfian Duke William, after which he considered himself to be descended from the royal house of David. Notes Bote bitterly: "de kattenkoppe mochte he do nicht mer seyn" (SB, p. 376). For Bote, Hollant's signs of nobility are false, merely covering over his true cat/furrier being. Bote's social conservatism is evident here: one's social status is equivalent with one's true being. Changes in status wrought through history (*schichten*) are conceived as false signs, mere temporary cloaks obscuring one's true being, which will present itself as a true, concordant sign only when the old, eternal order is restored.²⁰

¹⁹ "Ach du grave slyme essele, du dumme kumpan, drifst du deck sulven uth dynem wesende in de vorbistemisse und heipest der katten uppe dynes koniges stol, des lauwen, boren. Wuwol dat du so mendest, dat de katte dem lauwen gelick were an itliken ledematen, dat is wol so, over se sint gelick in ytliken dingen, sunder gar ungelick in der natur unde an der starcke unde in deme eddeldome" (SB, p. 349).

Reading the SB leads one to suspect that the deliberate creation of semiotic ambiguity constituted the incipient phase of political resistance and change. In a world where the repetition of ritual served to anchor again and again the temporal order in an eternal foundation, the Imitation of these rituals and Symbols by the "unholy," those not vested with privilege, constituted a challenge to authority. Generally, the first action taken by a resisting group was to swear an oath among themselves.²¹ This immediately created a crisis of legitimacy: for by imitating/repeating the oath-taking process, one put forward an alternative *Recht*, and *Recht* itself became ambiguous. Resistance groups frequently underscored this state of ambiguity by engaging in symbolic imitations of privileged ritual. In the first *Schicht* (1292) Bote discusses an uprising by the guildmasters, who, after swearing allegiance to their cause for a ten-year period,²² formed a twelve-man body which gradually usurped the functions and powers of the council. As a first step towards prociaiming their legitimacy, the Twelve established a regular meeting place, the "Pallas," which served as an imitation *Rathaus*. Writes Bote: "dar gingen se uppe to rade unde to richte" (SB, p. 302; "they went up there to counsel and to judge"). After the Twelve had been in power for some time, the day of St. Auctor's festival arrived. The ritual procession, in which council and clergy processed together with Auctor's remains, traditionally was followed by the councilmen's feast. The Twelve decided to hold an imitation feast, "dem Rade towedderen," writes Bote, and to make the offense entirely clear, they also fished in the waters reserved for the council.²³ When the council then came to them in their "Pallas," requesting "in a humble

²⁰ When decrying Brunswick's folly in exchanging the lion for a cat, note that Bote says "du [drifst] deck sulven uth dynem wesende in de vorbistemisse" (SB, p. 349, emphasis mine)—here Bote clearly associates "being" with the old order.

²¹ See SB, pp. 302, 334, 352. Cf. Ehbrecht: *Bürgertum und Obrigkeit*, p. 280.

²² "So makeden de gyldestere under sick eyen bunt unde vorstrickinge myt loften unde eden, teyn jar langk eyn by deme anderen to blyvende" (SB, p. 302).

²³ "Do kernen de gildernester rnyt oren twolfen unde beiden ore sunderlike laghe dem Rade towedderen, unde Stegen in des Rades watere unde leten darinne fysschen, unde slogen rum up, unde wur se dem Rade konden wat towedderen don, dat deden se myt erneste unde frevele" (SB, p. 302).

and friendly manner," writes the ever-partisan Bote, that the two groups should advise in concord—"wente twigerleyge rad, eyn tigen den anderen, dat brochte nicht ghudes in" (SB, p. 303; "for two councils, one against the other, would come to no good"), the Twelve protested, "neyn neyn! sie wolden so oren pallas nicht laten" (55, p. 303; "no, no, they didn't want to leave their Pallas"). They weren't about to give up this symbolic challenge. On the contrary, they promptly upped the ante by electing their own burghmaster and scribe, and creating their own seal.²⁴

Resistance manifests itself here in the non-sanctioned reiteration of holy signs, creating ambiguity, a state of semiotic flux, that makes the oath-inscribed city porous and susceptible to invasion and replacement of one symbol-bearer by another. The forms of resistance in this *schickt* range from the carnivalesque imitation feast—all the way to imitation *Rathaus*, *Bürgermeister*, and seal. But the underlying structure of symbolic doubling is common across the scale.

It is interesting to note here the parallel structure in the *TE* episodes. Typically Till invades the normal order by means of masquerade: he pretends to be something he is not, and very often his prank rests on a sort of verbal masquerade. Promising, for example, to sift flour in the moonlight, as his master, the baker, has instructed, he proceeds to hold the flour sifter out the window, letting the flour fall—in the moonlight, to be sure—onto the muddy courtyard. Only after the damage is done, is it clear that Till was an imposter, at which point the baker banishes the *schalck* from his premises, and order is restored.²⁵ Bote based one of the Till episodes on an occurrence also reported in the *SB*, and we see here again how imitation is used to provoke and challenge authority. In the *SB* incident,²⁶ a conspiracy has been formed against the council. The conspirators have created their own symbols of authority, including a banner bearing the image of a rabbit. Ernst Bock, a supporter of the council, decides to humiliate the conspirators. He catches a cat and sews over it the skin of a rabbit. He

then lets the imitation rabbit free near to where the conspirators are convening. They are fooled, and chase eagerly after the "rabbit." They recognize their error only as the terrified cat, meowing pitifully, seeks refuge from its pursuers by climbing a tree. The conspirators are angry. They realize the prank was designed to shame them, they are convinced that the burghermasters were responsible, and agree to pursue their seditious plans with renewed vigor. In the *TE* prank,²⁷ Bote intensifies the problems of masquerade, false identity, and symbolic ritual. He sets the prank in Leipzig in the carnival season, the night before Lent was to begin. The furrier guild was planning a traditional pre-Lenten feast, a ritual anchored both in the religious calendar and in the social life of the guild itself. Till decides to play a prank on them, in order to pay them back for what he considered to be unfair treatment by a furrier in Berlin. He knew that the furriers were particularly keen on eating wild game at their feast. In the spirit of carnival, Till dresses up as a peasant, and in this masquerade sells the cat—also in costume—to the unsuspecting furriers. When the identity of the cat becomes apparent, the furriers determine to kill the culprit who had so insulted their honor. But Till's masquerade saves him. Writes Bote, "Aber Ulenspiegel het sein Kleider außgezogen und sich verandert, das sie ihn nit kanten."²⁸

In both the *SB* and the Till episode, masquerade serves as a means of threatening honor. The facsimile invades and pollutes the symbolic ritual of the group. If the group itself can be fooled by the facsimile, this calls into question the reliability of their symbols. The possibility of a double, an imitator, makes the group's honor, its legitimacy within the city order defined by *Recht*, ambiguous. For this reason both the conspirators in the *SB* and the furriers in *TE* are resolute in identifying and punishing the prankster. His punishment would remove the ambiguity by establishing the illegitimacy of the prankster, thereby restoring the group's honor and the validity of its symbols.

²⁴ "Unde satten do unde koren egen burmestere, egen schrivers, egene seggele" (SB, p. 303).

²⁵ *TE*, pp. 60–62.

²⁶ *SB*, p. 340.

²⁷ *TE*, p. 160 f.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

It is no accident that Bote would set the Till prank, which depends on multiple masquerades, in the carnival season. In carnival we find the problem of signification being dramatized within the closely confined parameters of a festival, of playful or non-serious behavior. Carnival creates a moment of ambiguous signification when citizens don devils' masks and create a world upside-down. Because carnival was closely controlled, it did not generally represent a threat to order. But in the *SB* it is clear that the moment of semiotic flux created by carnival could be exploited by those wanting to challenge *seriously* the city's order.

In the *Schicht* of 1446,²⁹ a group of the guilds, chiefly the drapers, potmakers and furriers, joined together with some of the patricians in opposing the council. The conspirators engage throughout the *schicht* in carnivalesque actions designed to provoke the council, but at the same time sufficiently playful that the perpetrators can maintain their innocence. Bote notes that the first thing the conspirators did as a way of firing up enthusiasm for their cause, was to hold a feast and to run through the street wearing devils' masks (*schoduvcl lopen*), a practice common in Northern Germany at carnival and before Christmas.³⁰ Later they created a general uproar in the city by dancing between clothframes and clattering with their spinning wheels (*wulbogen*), beating on pots, and "making such a racket throughout the city, that no one could hear (anything else)".³¹ In the midst of the turmoil the conspirators voiced their criticism of the city order:

And many of the party brothers, especially the potmakers, took up rakes and hoes, ran with them into the streets and cried that they would tear up the hops; the gardeners should plant cabbage so they could buy a lot of it for a farthing. The other group called out that the Einbeck beer was too expensive; its price should be lowered to make it affordable for the poor people, and the poor people should get as

good beer as the rich, otherwise they would hack the kegs in the beer cellars to pieces.³²

But they restricted their rabble-rousing to the nighttime, where the darkness masked their identity, and when reprimanded by the authorities, their excuse was, "We did nothing wrong and wished to harm no one."³³ Outside the context of carnival, carnivalesque behavior represented a potential threat to the city's order. Masquerading as masquerade, the conspirators could provoke the council and at the same time point to the masks, the carnivalesque paraphernalia, and claim they meant nothing serious by it.

By the time carnival arrived, the council had a real cause for anxiety, as word had spread that the conspirators had formed a plan to overthrow the council. As mentioned earlier, they had made a banner depicting a rabbit. The plan was to cry out, "Hu hase hu" (*SB*, p. 337), as they proceeded to throw out the council. With the city on edge, the conspirators took advantage of the carnival season to express yet another ambiguous challenge to the council. The servants (*knappen*) of the conspiring guilds fixed paper tags onto the hats of the girls with whom they went dancing through the streets of Brunswick. On the tags were painted little axes, beneath which was written, "Ick hauwe, ick hauwe" (*SB*, p. 338). The blacksmith servants, whose guild was loyal to the council, felt particularly insulted by the slogan and decided they would pay back the offense. They, along with the cobbler servants, hid axes and knives under their cloaks, planning to ambush the dancers as they came by and "chop and stab, so that the rhymes with the axes should fall off them."³⁴ It never came to

²⁹ *SB*, pp. 332–348.

³⁰ *SB*, pp. 332, 336; see Grimm: *Deutsches Wörterbuch*. Vol. 8, "schauteufel," p. 2378.

³¹ "Se [...] lepen schoduvcl unde danseden in den lakengespannen, unde snarden myt den wulbogen, unde de beckenslegere snurden unde schurden myt den becken, dat belderde de stad dorch dat neymet horen konde" (*SB*, p. 336).

³² "Ock vele der pertiebrodere, sunderliken de beckensleger, de nemen hercken unde krauwele, unde lepen darmede uppe der strate unde repen: 'se wolden de röden uthriten unde de hoppenrancken, de gardeners scholden dar kol planten, dat se vele koles konden vor eynen ferling kopen.' de ander pert de repen: 'dat Embeckes beer dat were to dure, me scholde dat mynner setten, dat arme lude ok Embeckes beer drincken konden, unde me scholde dem armen so ghut beer tappen also dem riken, edder se wolden de vate in dem beerkelre entwey hauwen'" (*SB*, p. 337).

³³ "Se en hedden nicht quades vorhanden unde wolden neymede neyn leyd don" (*SB*, p. 337).

³⁴ "So wolden se uppe den dans hauwen und steken, dat one de rym myt der barden scholde entvallen" (*SB*, p. 338). The German is ambiguous: "myt der barden" could modify "rym"; it could also be understood adverbially: "so that with axes the rhymes

blows that night between the two groups, because the guildmasters of the blacksmiths and cobblers, having gotten wind of the planned ambush, informed the burghermasters, who came and requested the servants to let the others dance.³⁵ The servants then were "obedient,"³⁶ notes Bote, and went their separate ways.

The incident illustrates well how carnival offered opposition groups an opportunity to express their challenge to authority. The challenge of the little painted axes hangs in the balance between serious and non-serious discourse, depending on whether one "reads" it as masquerade, a playful sign with no serious signification, or as a serious sign anticipating a violent deed. But in its very ambiguity the masquerade opens a channel for invasion and violent upset. The response of the smiths and cobblers illustrates how this invasion could take place. The council averts violence by defining the action of the conspirators strictly as play: "Let the others *dance*," is their order to the smiths and cobblers.

The smiths and cobblers did not let things rest here, however, and came up with a plan to insult the conspirators as they felt they had been insulted. Again the preferred method is imitation: they, too, pinned slogans on their caps, such as: "Now you're wearing rhymes, soon you'll be tending swine," or, "I huff, I puff."³⁷ And when the time came to celebrate the next feast, the cobbler and smith servants decided they would wear the slogan "blode hase" (SB, p. 339; "stupid rabbit") pinned to their sleeve as they danced the sword dance in town. The sword dance traditionally was associated with both masquerade and rowdiness: the carnivalesque situation of ambiguous signs provides the opportunity for oppositional po-

should fall off them." The blacksmiths thus devised a punitive prank that was grafted onto the carnivalesque slogan of the conspirators: their painted axes are replaced by real axes, which do not just say "I hack, I hack," but actually do it.

³⁵"De [mestere van den smeden unde schomekeren] ginghen to den borgermestere unde seden one dusse dinghe, unde ginghen hastigen semptliken to dusen smeden unde schoknechten, unde beden se demodigen, dat se tofreden weren unde leten se dansen" (SB, p. 338).

³⁶"De knechte weren behorsem unde gingen enwech unde leten se dansen" (SB, p. 338).

³⁷"Nu drage gy ryme, hima hode gi swine"; "Ick puste, ick blase" (SB, p. 338).

litical expression. Again the council intervened, fearing that an uprising would occur, which the conspirators would use to seize power. They forbade the sword dance, and again the cobbler and smith servants were "obedient," writes Bote.³⁸

The authorities in medieval Brunswick carefully regulated carnivalesque activities because of their potential to spawn disorder.³⁹ This is because disorder begins, as we have seen, when order, the relationship between sign and signified, is destabilized or threatened. Imitation of symbolic ritual or the masquerade of carnival creates this moment. A shift in power can occur if the masquerade can displace the original sign and claim legitimacy for itself: it then becomes "serious," and the original sign is banished or destroyed. In Bote's preferred narrative of restoration, such shifts in legitimacy do not occur: the old order always is eventually restored, the impostors always unmasked and banished. The dissidents are by nature incarnations of Till Eulenspiegel, whose only intent is to disrupt and perpetrate *Eulenspiegelei*, acts of violence against a holy order.

III

Ultimately the defense of the council Bote puts forward in the *SB* begins to undermine the corporative structure of the city based on the voluntary oath. Let us consider again the uprising of 1446, the "*schickt* of the disobedient burghers". Bote introduces this *schicht* with the following animal analogy:

O what a bad shepherd is he who allows the insidious wolf to run among his animals, where he brings them to ruin and kills them. O you thoughtless shepherd! Don't you know that a wolf is never a good sheepdog? He's a thief and a robber, and has no regard for the sheep,

³⁸"Also weren de knechte dem Rade behorsem unde leten oren dans na" (SB, p. 339).

³⁹Interestingly, Bote notes that under Ludeke Hollant's regimen all masquerade and rowdiness was forbidden, including during carnival, because the regime feared an uprising (SB, p. 369). The implication is that Hollant's regime was so weak (and so close itself to being a carnivalesque "world upside-down") that it could not contain the potential disorder of carnival.

that they are useful and good for people and the world. Sheep and other animals are tended badly by wolves, although it often occurs in the cities that wolves are put in with the sheep and allowed to run about like a sheepdog. Thus the city comes to eternal ruin, because the wolves become so vicious that they destroy and kill sheep and shepherd. For this reason, you leaders of the city, be careful and hold your subjects under force, and do not allow them free will, because free will and unpunished misdeeds turn subjects into clever, biting wolves. Do not believe the oaths and vows of the common person. They are like the tame wolf, who's not so tame after all: his father's nature still motivates him. And if the burgher is not held under force and within the regimen, this leads to a disobedient burgher.⁴⁰

Bote draws his analogy of the wolves and the sheep in all probability from the New Testament reference to wolves as false prophets: "Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Mat. 7:15). Those who threaten the rule of the council are by definition dangerous impostors; again we see Bote's conservative view of the social order in identifying the city rulers as "shepherds"—legitimate rulers—and all pretenders to their power as wolves in disguise. Bote proposes that the legitimate order can be maintained only through force; granted any "free will," their subjects immediately will try to overthrow the regimen. Any appearance of orderliness on the part of the subjects is just that—mere appearance, a false sign obscuring but superficially the true sig-

⁴⁰ "Och, wat is dat eyn bose quat herde dede den sluperen wulff let lopen motwilligen mangk sin fee, dat he dat vorder ve unde to dode make. O du lose herde, weystu nicht, dat de wulff neynghut schaperhunt en is? he is eyn deylf unde eyn rover, unde achtet nicht de schape, dat de deme mynschen unde der weride nutte unde ghut don. Myt wulffen wart offel gehot noch Schape efte ander ffe, wuwol dat yd vaken schud in den steden, dat me de wulffe set by de schape unde let se darby lopen alse schaperhunde. So kumpt denne de stad darvan in ewich vordarff, wente de wulffe werdet so overdadich, dat se de schape unde den herde tosamede vernichtet unde to dode bringen. Hiramme, gy oversten der stede, weset vorsichtig unde holdet juwe undersaten in dwanghe, unde latet one nicht oren frigen willen, wente de frige wille unde ungestraffet offeldat de maket uth den undersaten slubetsche wulffe. Lovet neynen meynen luden noch ede unde loffte, se sint alse de tarne wulff: de is so sere nicht geternet, synes vaders art dat roret one. unde wan de borger nicht in dwange sin unde in reygemente, dat maket ungehorsem borger" (SB, p. 332).

nification, the true being of the subject. By nature "untameable," their rapacious character must express itself once the strictures of force are lifted. For this reason Bote argues that the oaths and vows of the common people—and by them he must mean here all those excluded from rulership—are unreliable. They are false signs, masquerade, *Eulenspiegelei*. To trust them is as foolish as trusting Till's ambiguous language: it inevitably leads to destruction.

In his determination to provide the council with unshakable legitimacy, Bote is forced to drive a wedge into the original foundation of city order, the oath. Traditionally the oath played a critical role not only in the maintenance of city order but also in changing it. Ehbrecht has argued that the uprisings in late medieval Hanseatic cities probably constituted a legitimate form of civic dialogue and change.⁴¹ They seem to follow predictable patterns, including oath-taking and public demonstration in the form of the "banner-loup". Schilling has suggested that the uprisings were understood to be a return to a "gemeindlich-genossenschaftliche[r] 'Urzustand'" necessitated by what the citizenry considered a constitutional breach on the part of the council:

Die politische Gewalt lag während dieses Urzustandes wieder bei der Gemeinde. Ja, indem die Bürger—häufig auf Glockengeläute hin—"wehrender Hand," d.h. bewaffnet, auf dem Marktplatz zusammenliefen und sich gegenseitig einen Eid schworen, konstituierte sich die bürgerliche Gemeinde neu im Wehr- und Schwur verband.⁴²

But this shift of authority away from the council is precisely what Bote believes must be avoided. His solution, to disqualify the oath of those socially excluded from council membership, insures that resistance to the *oversten* never gains legitimacy.

With this conclusion, however, the notion of a divine civic order seems to be yielding to a more secular notion of order perpetuated through

⁴¹ Bürgertum und Obrigkeit, pp. 282–284.

⁴² Heinz Schilling: Gab es im späten Mittelalter und zu Beginn der Neuzeit in Deutschland einen städtischen "Republikanismus"? In: Republiken und Republikanismus im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit. Ed. Helmut Koenigsberger. Oldenbourg 1988 (=Schriften des Historischen Kollegs 11), pp. 101–143, here p. 111.

force.⁴³ For the state of concord has been redefined: no longer the harmonious integration of sign and signified, it now is necessarily tainted by the presence of unreliable oaths, of *Eulenspiegelei*—which we know to be the mark of *schichten*, and of history itself. Concord has become mere appearance, the forceful imposition of law and obedience onto an essentially discordant citizenry. While appealing to the traditional, divine source of legitimacy, at the same time Bote supports a more modern view of authority within the city, a view that appeals to princely power for its model.⁴⁴ In so doing he offers a means for preserving the city's order *within* history.

Bote was apparently unaware of this inner contradiction in the *SB*. But it comes close to the surface of his consciousness, I believe, in the narrative form Bote finally gave his work. After having related the *schichten* in accordance with his absolute moral/theological categories, Bote then wrote an appendix, "Von der pagemunte,"⁴⁵ in which he explains the financial causes of discord in Brunswick. "Von der pagemunte," considered to be a peculiarly "modern" part of the *SB*, discusses roughly the same

⁴³ Recent historical studies have found a development of the concept of the council as *Obrigkeit* in many German cities in the late medieval period, including in Brunswick. See Ehbrecht: *Bürgertum und Obrigkeit*, pp. 275–302. Ehbrecht has argued that this development is reflected in Bote's *SB* (*Die Braunschweiger 'Schichten'. Zu Stadtkonflikten im Hanseraum*. In: *Brunswick 1031 Braunschweig 1981. Die Stadt Heinrichs des Löwen von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*. Ed. Gerd Spies. Braunschweig 1982, pp. 37–50), as has Joachim Ehlers (*Historiographie, Geschichtsbild und Stadtverfassung im spätmittelalterlichen Braunschweig*. In: *Rat und Verfassung im mittelalterlichen Braunschweig*, pp. 99–134; here p. 118; *Hermen Bote und die städtische Verfassungskrise seiner Zeit*. In: *Hermen Bote. Braunschweiger Autor zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit*. Ed. Detlev Schöttker, Werner Wunderlich. Wiesbaden 1987, pp. 119–131).

⁴⁴ Joachim Ehlers has observed this appeal to the old to justify the new: "Bote steht in diesem Prozeß ganz auf selten des so verstandenen 'modernen' Rates;

was er als altes Herkommen preist, ist nichts anderes als die Rückprojektion bestimmter politischer Ziele aus seiner Zeit in die Vergangenheit." (Hermen Bote und die städtische Verfassungskrise seiner Zeit, p. 128.) Bote's emphasis on "obedience" throughout the *SB*, as well as his impersonation of city authority in the form of a lion ("Wente [=denn] eyne lauwe is eyne konigk aller dère" [SB, p. 349]; my emphasis) both point towards this princely view of authority.

⁴⁵ *SB*, pp. 409–450. "Von der pagemunte" ("On Currency") actually follows the fifth *schicht* (Ludeke Hollant's); Hänselmann (*Chroniken der niedersächsischen Städte*.

time period as covered in the *SB* (it begins a little later with events in 1412), but in the form of a continuous narrative of economic history. In the transitional paragraph between the *schichten* and this economic history Bote writes:

In this book [the *SB*] I have described the discord in this city of Brunswick. As to the cause of this discord, anyone can check this [by looking at] those places where "discord" occurs. But in particular it has also come about and is related to the penny and groschen, and how bad currency came to be circulated in Brunswick, and how the Brunswick penny thereby lost value.⁴⁶

Bad currency and the Brunswick penny's loss of value again are Problems directly relating to the destabilization of sign and signified. With currency one sees most clearly how value can be exchanged: currency itself is based on the principle of exchange. The Brunswick penny was not able to compete successfully, was devalued, and the Brunswickians themselves came to prefer foreign currencies to their own. Value thus is not anchored in eternal norms, but is fluid, changing, and therefore conceivable only in historical terms. As a narrative of continuous change and exchange, "Von der pagemunte" submerges Brunswick entirely into the temporal realm; it is an historical account unpunctuated by the silences of eternal stasis between the *schichten*. The narrative of exchange forms one explanation for developments within Brunswick, the narrative of restoration another. Bote does not attempt to form a synthesis between the two narratives: they exist side by side, and are indicative of the inner contradiction within the work itself,

Braunschweig. Vol. 2, p. 278 f.) has suggested that Bote originally ended the book here at about 1510, and then added later the sixth *schicht*, "Uployp von twen schoten" (*SB*, pp. 451–468), which discusses events occurring in 1513–14.

⁴⁶ "Eck hebbe in dussem boke geschreven de twidracht de in dusser stad Brunswick is gewesen. Wurvan unde ut wat orsake de twidracht tokam, mach eyne iderman naproven in densulften worden de de twidracht inhouden, doch besonderen is se ock gekomen unde mede angehanget van dem muntepennigk unde krossen, so de quade pagemunte is to Brunswick ingestegen, unde noch deyt, unde de brunswicksche pennigk darmede gevellet is" (*SB*, p. 408).

which in turn is symptomatic of the transition period in which Bote lived. The *SB* reflects the uneasiness of a late medieval mind, whose categories of the divine and demonic, of truth and duplicity, are absolutely divided, but which increasingly is confronted with the fragility, even the arbitrariness of order as it takes shape in history.