In Kunstauffassung der frühen Meistersinger (1936)¹, Heinz O. Burger proposes that the sole contribution of the early Meistersänger to poetics was to raise Frauendienst to a religious plane, and that in conceiving their relationship to the vrouwe (or wlp) on a basis similar to that of their Italian contemporary Dante, the early Meister had essentially created a Germanic dolce stil nuovo. Resting his conclusions on evidence drawn from the Karl Bartsch edition of the Kolmarer Meisterlieder (1862)², Burger sees in the vrouwe the instrument and source of inspiration for the poetic production of the early Meister; in the metaphorical allusions to the Virgin Mary, he sees a reflection of the concept underlying the dolce stil nuovo, i.e., a synthesis of Frauenminne and Gottesminne³. Meistergesang thus overcomes the misogyny of earlier clerics like Notker Labeo, for whom the female was „ein Tier mit Zöpfen,” and St. Bernard, for whom she was „ein vermummter Dreck”⁴.

Burger’s point that the early Meister saw an inner connection between reines wlp and the Immaculate Virgin (see, for example, Frauenlob’s point of view in the Würzburg Krieg KB 59) is well taken; that the poet’s relationship to the wlp and the Virgin is one and the same with respect to poetics is another matter. The Kolmarer poets, in contrast to the Minnesänger, wrote almost as indefatigably about their Kunst as they did about the Virgin Mary. Yet, in spite of innumerable specific pronouncements on Kunst, many of which occur in KB, none of the citations and references Burger uses to support a dolce stil nuovo come from poems even obliquely concerned with Kunst. Moreover, the following verses from the Kolmarer Liederhandschrift (80vb 39–57) illustrate that some of the Meister shared with Notker Labeo and St. Bernard suspicions regarding the integrity of the woman⁵:

Adam den ersten menschen den betrog ein wyp
Samsones lip
war von eim wyb erblendet
kung dauid war geschendet
Von wyben wart kung salomon an gottz rich gepfendet
Abslon sin schone halff in nit durch wyp wart er betöret
Wie lystic alexander was
ym gschach alsus
Virgilius trög wyp mit falschen sytten
oliferinus verschynyten
war vnd auch aristotiles von einem wyb gerytten
Troye die stat vnd auch das lantz durch wybe wart zerstöret
Kung constantin gschach alsam
Partzfal von wyb grosz sorge nam
Artus in scham
von wyben kam
der wilder ysmahel wart zam
daz macht der reynen wybes stam
Was schat es dann ob mich ein wip
auch hiczet vnde fröret
Similarly, one of the Meister advises (52ra 159–165):

Wer nu sin wyp zu vil gespart
daz sie dann uber yn wil wesen frauwe
Vnd er sich dar an nit bewart
sie gyt nit vff sin trauwe
Er sol sie by dem nacken fahen
sol sie mit eynem knuttel slahen
und ey vnd ey daz man sin manheit vff sym
rucken schauwe

Although, as the above citations indicate, KB provides some evidence for a more realistic and partly negative image of the woman, it is understandable – with the preponderance of poems reflecting the attitudes of hohe Minne – how Burger arrives at his conclusions. However, he errs in positing a poetic on the basis of the poems in KB, for in so doing he limits his evidence to less than 20% of the poems in the manuscript (187 of a total of 940 poems), the selection criteria for which remain uncertain ⁶. What these criteria were is irrelevant; what is important is that many poems focusing on Kunst do not appear in KB, and that a definitive understanding of the salient aspects of early Meistergesang and Meister poetics cannot be derived solely from the poems in that work. The following study of one aspect of these poetics is based on the Kolmarer manuscript, and includes evidence drawn from not only the poems appearing in KB, but from many additional KM poems concerned with the creative processes of Kunst which do not appear in KB ⁷.

The poets of KM are agreed on the divine origin of Kunst or rechte Kunst (146ra 35; 369va 47–50). God is the first Meister ⁸, the One whose art adorned the heavens with the stars and planets (146ra 25–32), who created the heavens, earth, and man with Meisterschaft (78rb 2–47) ⁹. From Him the seven liberal arts (59ra 37–40) and their power and wisdom are derived (464ra 175–177). In some poems the divine origin of Kunst is traced through the Virgin Mary who bore the Word, as the following from 527ra testify ¹⁰:

das wort her von dem vatter kam
daz wort die menscheit an sich nam
daz ewig wort daz wart geborn
al von der maget frys

And it is from the Word that Kunst comes:

daz wort ist aller kunst ein stam
wann alle kunst vom worte kam
daz wort ist aller kunst ein berg

Another poet sings: „der kunsten hort daz ewig wort/ kam in dich junc-fraw pya” (71ra 53–54). In 456ra 17 the Virgin is equated with logic. One poem relates that the Angel Lucifer had once owned a book which he lost.