

Classic Poetry Series

**Ulrich von Liechtenstein**  
**- poems -**

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# Ulrich von Liechtenstein(1200 - 1275)

Ulrich von Liechtenstein (1200–1275) was a medieval ministerialis and minnesinger, author of noted works about how knights and nobles may lead more virtuous lives, and a powerful leader in the 13th century Eastern Alps. He was born in 1200 at Murau in the Duchy of Styria, located in the present-day State of Austria. His family, a cadet branch of the Bavarian Aribonids named after Liechtenstein Castle near Judenburg, was not affiliated with the Austrian House of Liechtenstein.

## <b>Life</b>

Details of Ulrich's life are difficult to ascertain, for much of what scholars know relies heavily upon information gleaned from his often-fictional, self-styled autobiographical work the *Frauendienst* (trans. *Service of Ladies*). Separating fact from stylized hyperbole has proven difficult for historians.

From age 12 on, Ulrich received noble training as a page to a lady of much higher station than he then another four years as a squire to Margrave Henry of Istria , son of Duke Berthold IV of Merania, he was knighted by the Babenberg duke Leopold VI of Austria in 1222. Ulrich is documented as a Styrian Truchsess in 1244/45.

When Philip of Sponheim, the Archbishop-Elect of Salzburg, was deposed by Pope Alexander IV for refusing to take holy orders, Philip raised an army to defend his title. In 1250, Ulrich agreed to fight for Philip's cause in return for Philip's arranging a beneficial marriage of Ulrich's son, Ulrich II, to Kunigunde of Goldegg and Philip added a dowry of 400 Salzburg pounds to the agreement. In return Ulrich I agreed to provide Philip with 100 fighting men for his cause. In August 1252 Philip's forces decisively defeated his enemies at the Battle of Sachsenburg on the Drava, and Ulrich was one of seven who mediated the ensuing peace.

Leader of the Styrian nobility, Ulrich had a hand in absorbing the duchy into the possessions of Rudolph of Habsburg after the ducal House of Babenberg had become extinct in 1246. It is possible that Ulrich was one of the noblemen taken prisoner by King Ottokar II of Bohemia in 1269. He owned three castles, besides Liechtenstein another at Strechau near Lassing in the Enns Valley and the third at his birthplace Murau. When his son Ulrich II married, Ulrich bestowed upon the couple the castle of Murau along with twenty vassals and revenue.

Many aspects of his life are unrecorded, but some genealogy survives. He had a

brother named Hartnid who served as Bishop of Gurk from 1283 to 1298 and a brother named Dietmar IV of Liechtenstein-Offenburg, who had a son name Gundaker. Besides Ulrich's son, Ulrich II, he had a daughter named Diemut (who married Wulfing of Trennstein), a son named Otto II and a son-in-law named Herrand II of Wildon by an unnamed daughter.

Ulrich died on 26 January 1275 . He was buried in Seckau in modern-day Austria.

### <b>Works</b>

Ulrich wrote his stories at a time when knightly ideals were just being promulgated from Western Europe. He outlines rules for knights, ministeriales, and free nobles to follow to lead honorable and courtly lives. There are several instances where he places the (unfree) ministerials and the free nobles in one category separate from the knights to point out the nobility of his own estate.

### <b>Frauendienst</b>

Ulrich is famous for his supposedly autobiographical poetry collection Frauendienst (Service of the Lady). He writes of himself as a protagonist who does great deeds of honor to married noblewomen, following the conventions of chaste courtly love. The protagonist embarks on two remarkable quests. In the first quest, he travels from Venice to Vienna in the guise of Venus, the goddess of love. He competes in jousts and tourneys and challenges all the knights he meets to a duel in the honour of his lady. He breaks 307 lances and defeats all comers. The noblewoman, however, mostly spurns his affections and demands more deeds and even mutilation for even the honour to hold her hand. In the second quest, he takes on the role of King Arthur ("Artus"), with his followers becoming Arthurian Round Table characters. Regrettably, the first two pages of the beginning have been lost to time. The protagonist, Ulrich, wanders through Styria and Austria in the guise of King Arthur inviting all knights to "break lance" (that is, to joust) three times with him for honor's sake. In this disguise he attended many tournaments. The story illustrates how a worthy knight-errant was supposed to wander about defeating opponents in honorable combat. The story intersperses some songs and courtly advice to knights and some admonitions to greedy nobles and faithless squires . The collection was finished in 1255.

### <b>Frauenbuch</b>

Frauenbuch was a dialogue set in 1240, published in 1257, lamenting the decay of chivalric courtship.

## <b>Popular culture</b>

The hero of the 2001 film *A Knight's Tale*, played by Heath Ledger, assumes the title "Ulrich von Liechtenstein" when he poses as a knight. As "undefeated" in jousts, this was a worthy name to take. The name also proved to work well in the plot and provided the necessary contrast to the hero's true name, William Thatcher. However, the character claims to come from Guelders, which was not in Austria but rather in the Low Countries (now in the Dutch province Gelderland). Also, the film is set in the second half of the 14th century, not the 13th century, so it is possible that William was referring to a knight he had heard of.

# Lady Beauteous, Lady Pure

'Lady beauteous, lady pure,  
Lady happy, lady kind,  
Love, methinks, has little power,  
So proud thy bearing, o'er thy mind.  
Didst thou feel the power of love  
Then would those fair lips unclose,  
And be taught in sighs to move.'

'What is love, then, good sir knight?  
Is it man or woman? say;  
Tell me, if I know it not,  
How it comes to pass, I pray.  
Thou should'st tell me all its story,  
Whence, and where, it cometh here,  
That my heart may yet be wary.'

'Lady, love so mighty is,  
All things living to her bow;  
Various is her power, but I  
Will tell thee what of her I know.  
Love is good, and love is ill,  
Joy and woe she can bestow,  
Spreading life and spirit still.'

'Can love banish, courteous knight,  
Pining grief and wasting woe?  
Pour gay spirits on the heart,  
Polish, grace, and ease bestow?  
If in her these powers may meet,  
Great is she, and thus shall be  
Her praise and honour great.'

'Lady, I will say yet more;  
Lovely are her gifts, her hand  
Joy bestows, and honour too;  
The virtues come at her command,  
Joys of sight and joys of heart  
She bestows as she may choose,  
And splendid fortune doth impart.'

'How shall I obtain, sir knight,  
All these gifts of lady love?  
Must I bear a load of care?  
Much too weak my frame would prove.  
Grief and care I cannot bear;  
Can I then the boon obtain;  
Tell me, sir knight, then, how and where.'

'Lady, thou should'st think of me  
As I of thee think,- heartily.  
Thus shall we together blend  
Firm in love's sweet harmony,  
Thou still mine, I still thine.'

'It cannot be, sir knight, with me;  
Be your own, I'll still be mine.'

Ulrich von Liechtenstein