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MIRRORS AND VIOLENCE IN THE WORKS OF NEIDHART AND WITTENWILER

INTRODUCTION

Many readers of Neidhart will agree with Carla Bullinger's assertion that:

Delving into Neidhart's work is like walking into a house of mirrors. One is confronted with a multiplicity of mirrors and reflections no matter in which direction one turns . . .¹

This paper will examine the association of Neidhart's mirrors with various forms of violence. It will also consider the extent to which these configurations are subsumed into the Wittenwiler's Ring, a narrative standing in a complex intertextual relationship with Neidhart's songs.² Detailed discussion of these two authors will be preceded by an introductory discussion of the ways in which mirrors may play a part in violent interactions.

Given the hermeneutic polyvalence of these objects, there will inevitably be some tension between literal and metaphorical violence, and between the various forms of metaphorical violence. For example, the famous motif of the ‚Spiegelraub‘ [mirror theft] in Neidhart's songs constitutes a clear example of literal violence (theft and destruction of personal property); however, on a metaphorical level, the event may also signify rape (with the mirror standing for sexual integrity) and/or the destruction of a particular cultural framework (with the mirror standing for the genre of ‚Minnesang‘ which provides members of the aristocratic audience with an idealised reflection of their own elite status). Furthermore, the analysis will also draw on the concept of symbolic violence, as used by Bourdieu to describe the way in which unjust power relations within society become entrenched as under-privileged or marginalised groups are made to internalise the hostile discourses of the dominant.³ In particular, it will be argued that symbolic violence is enacted through the deployment of what one might call the 'satiric' mirror. This paradigm, whereby the aggressor uses his own mirror to mock and dominate his victim(s), stands in opposition to

¹ Bullinger, Carla Marlene, *Friderun's Mirror and the Critics' Discontent: A Neidhart Problem Revisited*, 1996, Proquest Dissertations Publishing, p. 98.

² *Die Lieder Neidharts*. ed. by Edmund Wießner, 4th revised edition by Paul Sappeler, Tübingen 1984 (Altdeutsche Textbibliothek 44); Heinrich Wittenwiler, *Der Ring*. ed. by Horst Brunner based on the text by Edmund Wießner, Stuttgart 1991 (Universal-Bibliothek 8749).

³ Cf. Bourdieu, Pierre, *Reproduction interdite. La dimension symbolique de la domination économique*, in: *Etudes rurales* 113-114, 1989, pp. 15-36; Bourdieu, Pierre and Wacquant, Lïc J. D., *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Chicago 1992, pp. 164-168; Kraus, Beate, *Gender and Symbolic Violence: Female Oppression in the Light of Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Social Practice*, in: *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Craig J. Calhoun, Edward LiPuma, and Moishe Postone, Chicago 1993, pp. 156-177; Karen Morgan and Suruchi Thapar Björkert, „I'd Rather You'd Lay Me on the Floor and Start Kicking Me.“ *Understanding Symbolic Violence in Everyday Life*, in: *Women's Studies International Forum* 29.5, 2006, pp. 441-452.

that of the broken or violated mirror, whereby the aggressor targets a mirror belonging to the victim.

Of these two, the paradigm of the broken mirror is perhaps the most readily understandable. On a literal level, the violent appropriation and destruction of any piece of property will be distressing for the owner, whilst the reflective quality of the mirror means that its loss may also take on a stronger, figurative meaning. In modern times, the shattering of a mirror is widely interpreted in terms of collective cultural or existential trauma;⁴ and, as will be shown, the works of Morungen and Neidhart also associate the broken mirror with trauma, i.e. with an event which the lyrical persona must constantly revisit, repeat and re-enact.⁵

Within the paradigm of the satiric mirror, the nature of the violence depends in part on to whether the victim is to be directly confronted with his or her own reflection, or whether the aggressor will merely tilt the mirror in such a way that he can see things that the victim cannot.

It may seem odd that making somebody look into a mirror should be deemed an act of violence. On a literal level, the experience of visual reflection is usually brief and ephemeral, with little lasting impact. However, the viewer might dislike his or her own appearance and be distressed at being confronted with it, however fleetingly. Figurative modes of reflection may have a more lasting impact, with didactic texts often construed as mirrors enabling readers to identify their own moral blemishes. Whilst such moral mirrors may be useful to those who want to use them, but they are potentially disagreeable, and even humiliating, for those who do not. Furthermore, not all mirrors are designed to work in the same way. The *vita* of Agnes Blannbekin, for example, contains a scene in which God and the devil hold up rival mirrors to her, providing very different reflections of reality.⁶ Just as literal mirrors may be shaped so as to distort, so figurative mirrors may differ markedly in their mode of representation.

A form of violence may also ensue even if the victims are not confronted with their own image. Even a neutral, literal mirror can afford the aggressor certain strategic advantages. For example, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (IV.781-782), Perseus is able to kill the Medusa because he looks at her reflection in his shield. However, for the purpose of the current discussion, it is the angling of the figurative, satiric mirror which is of particular interest. This is best explained by reference to the opening scene of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen*, the famous nineteenth-century fairy-tale, which foregrounds the devilish nature of satiric distortion:

He was a terribly bad hobgoblin, a goblin of the very wickedest sort and, in fact, he was the devil himself. One day the devil was in a very good humor because he had just finished a mirror which had this peculiar power: everything good and beautiful that was reflected in it seemed to dwindle to almost nothing at all, while everything that was worthless and ugly became most conspicuous and even uglier than ever. In this mirror the loveliest landscapes looked like boiled spinach, and the very best

⁴ Cf. Lepper, Marcel, *Der zerbrochene Spiegel: Zur Vorgeschichte einer Metapher*, in: LiLi, *Zeitschrift Für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 35.2, 2005, pp. 143-52 .

⁵ For the application of trauma theory to medieval texts, see Trembinski, Donna, *Trauma as a Category of Analysis*, in: *Trauma in Medieval Society*, ed. by Wendy J. Turner and Christina Lee, Leiden / Boston 2018 (*Explorations in Medieval Culture* 7), pp. 13-32.

⁶ Cf. Weiß, Bardo, *Die deutschen Mystikerinnen und ihr Gottesbild: Das Gottesbild der deutschen Mystikerinnen auf dem Hintergrund der Mönchstheologie*, Paderborn 2004, pp. 338-339.

people became hideous, or stood on their heads and had no stomachs. Their faces were distorted beyond any recognition, and if a person had a freckle it was sure to spread until it covered both nose and mouth.

„That's very funny!“ said the devil. If a good, pious thought passed through anyone's mind, it showed in the mirror as a carnal grin, and the devil laughed aloud at his ingenious invention. All those who went to the hobgoblin's school – for he had a school of his own – told everyone that a miracle had come to pass. Now, they asserted, for the very first time you could see how the world and its people really looked.⁷

The devils decide to fly up and scoff at God as well; however, God will not let himself be mocked, and the mirror breaks into thousands of icy shards. For Andersen, the broken mirror is thus intimately connected with the satiric mirror – as will also prove to be the case for Neidhart and for Wittenwiler.

Certain aspects of this nineteenth-century passage are particularly helpful for the analysis of these medieval authors. First, the devils' enjoyment does not necessarily require the victims to see themselves reflected; whilst any resulting distress might have been deemed a bonus, the devils also take pleasure in the distortion of landscapes which now look like boiled spinach, but which, being inanimate, are incapable of internalising this humiliation. Secondly, the collective enjoyment of this distortion is significant: it is not just one devil who is enjoying himself with the mirror, but a whole group. Thirdly, one might wonder who is really being reflected in the mirror. Ostensibly the devils are tilting the mirror away from themselves to look at the world and its inhabitants – but that which is reflected in the mirror is arguably themselves, the grotesquely distorted bodies and erratic combination of limbs corresponding to traditional representations of devilry. Finally, whereas the devils here aim to encompass God and every aspect of his creation in their mockery, most satirical writers are more selective. In the works of Neidhart and Wittenwiler, social standing becomes the determining factor, with the mirror angled specifically against the peasant class.

NEIDHART

Middle High German courtly literature of the classical period (ca. 1180-1220) is widely understood as having a representational function: its evocation of an idealised and exclusively aristocratic universe offers the recipients a flattering reflection of their own elite status.

However, this reflective framework is soon problematised. Heinrich von Morungen's song *Mir ist geschehen als einem kindelîne* [It happened to me like to a small child] describes the persona's anguished realisation that he has fallen in love with his own image and, failing to understand the nature of reflection, has broken the mirror that enabled this process (MF 145,1-4)⁸ Whilst this song poses numerous interpretational challenges, it is often read as a meditation on the failings of ‚Minnesang‘ itself, with its inverted and narcissistic mirror-

⁷ Andersen, Hans Christian, *Sneedronningen*, trans. by Jean Hersholt, quoted from Andersen.sdu.dk (https://andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheSnowQueen_e.html), accessed 25.08.2022.

⁸ MF = *Des Minnesangs Frühling*, 36th edition by Karl Lachmann, Carl von Kraus, Hugo Moser and Helmut Tervooren, Stuttgart 1977.

logic.⁹

Courtly literature also articulates fear of external intrusions into the hermetic perfection of aristocratic life, with the peasant Other making occasional appearances – for example, Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein* features a peace-loving herdsman who questions the point of knightly exertion.¹⁰ In the course of the thirteenth century, however, the peasant Other not only becomes more evident, but also more aggressive and more dangerous: *Helmbrecht* by Wernher der Gartenaere recounts the life of a peasant who tries to combine a life of violent crime with the outward trappings of knighthood.¹¹ At the same time, one also finds hints of apparent downward assimilation, as when Walther von der Vogelweide's persona complains that *die stolzen ritter tragent dörpelliſche wât* (L 124,25 [Proud knights wear peasant clothing]).¹²

Thirteenth-century ‚Minnesang‘ also sexualises the non-aristocratic domain, with Walther making the provocative suggestion that the highest-ranked ladies are not necessarily the most worthy recipients of love-service.¹³ Building on Walther's tentative attempts to vary the terms of *hohe minne*,¹⁴ Neidhart launches a new form of erotic lyric, in which an aristocratic persona ventures into the peasant milieu in search of sexual fulfilment. However, there are significant disadvantages to wooing outside the courtly sphere. Whilst Neidhart's persona claims some amatory success, most songs focus on his inability to assert himself amongst the peasants. Günther Schweikle provides a useful reminder that the *dörper* in the songs should be seen as „Kunstfiguren“ [literary constructs] and „Verhaltenstypen“ [behavioural types],¹⁵ rather than as realistic representations of the peasant class; however, he goes too far in presenting the terms *dörper* / *dörperlich* as ethically orientated, but fundamentally class-neutral, perjoratives (meaning „unhöfisch“ [uncourtly] rather than „außerhöfisch“ [non-courtly]).¹⁶ The *dörper* may be literary constructs, but their Otherness is

⁹ Cf. Huber, Christoph, Narziß und die Geliebte. Zur Funktion des Narziß-Mythos im Kontext der Minne bei Heinrich von Morungen, in: Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte 59, 1985, pp. 587-608; Speckenbach, Klaus, Gattungsreflexionen im Morungen-Lied *Mir ist geschehen als einem kindelîne* (MF145,1), in: Frühmittelalterliche Studien 20, 1986, pp. 36-53.

¹⁰ Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein*, 7th revised edition by G. F. Benecke, Karl Lachmann, and Ludwig Wolf, Berlin 1968, 418-564.

¹¹ Wernher der Gartenaere, *Helmbrecht*, 10th edition by Fridrich Panzer, Kurt Ruh, and Hans-Joachim Ziegeler, Berlin / Boston 2012 (Altdeutsche Textbibliothek 11).

¹² Cf. Bernd Volkmann, *Owê war sint verschwunden. Die „Elegie“ Walther von der Vogelweide. Untersuchungen, Kristischer Text, Kommentar*, Göttingen 1987 (Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 483), pp. 303-343. Volkmann argues that the *dörperliche wât* refers to penitential garments, rather than to mere changes in fashion; however, even if this interpretation is accepted, it is still the case that Walther's persona is lamenting the supposed fact that clothing no longer serves as a clear marker of social difference.

¹³ Cf. Bauschke, Ricarda, Walther von der Vogelweide, in: *Handbuch Minnesang*, ed. by Beate Kellner, Susanne Reichlin and Alexander Rudolf, Berlin / Boston 2021, pp. 698-711, here 701-703.

¹⁴ Cf. Ortmann, Christa, Die Kunst „ebene“ zu werben. Zu Walthers „Aller werdekeit ein füegerinne“ (L. 46, 32), in: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 103, 1981, pp. 238-263.

¹⁵ Schweikle, Günther, *Dörper oder Bauer. Zum lyrischen Personal im Werk Neidharts*, in: *ibid.*, *Minnesang in neuer Sicht*, Stuttgart 1994, pp. 417-439, here 425.

¹⁶ Schweikle, *Dörper*, p. 431.

framed in terms of social as well as moral inadequacy. As a group, they remain distinct from badly-behaved aristocratic figures such as Hartmann's Oringles or Wolfram's Urjans.

A particular leitmotif in Neidhart's songs concerns Engelmar's theft, and possible destruction, of a mirror belonging Vriderune, the persona's beloved. This episode is described most extensively in Sommerlied (SL) 22, but is referenced in many Winterlieder (WL), often as a comparator for other unhappy occurrences. In the peasant world, women are subjected to constant harassment, the mirror being just one of a number of thefts. Other objects taken away from women include a doll's cradle (SL 22.VId), a stylus (WL 9), a ball (WL 10), a ring (WL 18), a piece of ginger (WL 24), and a head scarf and floral wreath (WL 27).¹⁷ These objects typically lack the symbolic complexity of the mirror. Some of them, however, may be indicative of a luxurious life-style and of inappropriate courtly pretensions. Violence against women is also referenced in other ways; for example, the peasant who steals the ring also sprains the wrist of the woman in question (WL 18.IV.10). However, although the persona sometimes goes so far as to suggest that other antagonists are even worse than Engelmar (e.g. in WL 24 and 27), it is the ‚Spiegelraub‘ that is constantly referenced and lamented.¹⁸

Although Neidhart goes much further towards narrativization than do earlier ‚Minnesänger‘, questions remain as what actually happens to Vriderune and her mirror. As Ekkehard Simon puts it:

Although the poet seems obsessed with Vriderun and her mirror, he only tells us about Engelmar's crude theft *that* it happened but never why or how.... most of our questions are never answered: Where did this mirror come from and why was Vriderun selected to receive it? Was it a present properly befitting only a courtly lady that the Reuentaler, violating convention, gave to Vriderun? Is it a symbol of narcissism by which Vriderun is attracted to her own reflection? Or does this glass of fashion represent self-recognition or self-awareness? Neidhart never answers these questions.¹⁹

SL 22 states that the mirror was attached to Vriderune's girdle by a valuable silken cord (VIe); and that Engelmar snatched it from the side at a point when the persona was absent, attending to domestic business (V). WL 32,V suggests that the mirror remains in Engelmar's possession, whilst the 15th century manuscript c insists that Engelmar shattered it, *do er mit seinem kolben das scho^en glas durchstach* (c 117.XVII [when he penetrated the beautiful glass with his rod]).²⁰

Even without the explicit reference to penetrative violence in c, the ‚Spiegelraub‘

¹⁷ However, according to SL 17.VII.3-7, a girl steals a pair of boots from the persona. Cf. Lienert, Elisabeth, Spiegelraub und rote Stiefel: Selbstzitate in Neidharts Liedern, in: Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Geschichte 118, 1989, pp. 1-16, here 3.

¹⁸ Cf. Lienert, Spiegelraub, pp. 4-7.

¹⁹ Simon, Horst, Neidhart von Reuental, Boston 1975 (Twayne's world author series 364), pp. 47-48. On the unanswered questions, see also Laude, Corinna, Walthers Enzwischen und Neidharts Spiegelraub. Beobachtungen zur poetologischen Funktion von Leerstellen im Minnesang, in: Der mittelalterliche und neuzeitliche Walther. Beiträge zur Motivik, Poetik, Überlieferungsgeschichte und Rezeption, ed. by Thomas Bein, Frankfurt am Main 2007 (Walther-Studien 5), pp. 213-232, here 226-232.

²⁰ Cf. Mück, Hans-Dieter, Ein „politisches Eroticon“. Zur Funktion des ‚Spiegelraubs‘ in Neidharts Liedern der Handschrift c (MGF 779), in: *Minne ist ein swaerez spil*. Neue Untersuchungen zum Minnesang und zur Geschichte der Liebe im Mittelalter, ed. by Ulrich Müller, Göppingen 1986 (Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 440), pp. 169-207.

must signify the rape of Vriderune. This sexual interpretation of the episode is evident from the fourteenth-century Tuchlauben frescoes in Vienna, which shows Vriderune lying on the ground, while a man uses his right hand to claim her mirror, and his left hand to pull up her dress. Another man looks on.²¹ Such an assault would undoubtedly have been distressing to the victim; however, the songs tend to focus less on her and more on the grief that this event causes for the persona. Again, it is not unreasonable that a man should be distraught at having been unable to prevent the rape of his beloved. However, the grief is universalised in such a way as to suggest that this is about something other than compassionate indignation:

nu ist in allen landen niht wan trûren unde klagen
sît der ungevüege dörper Engelmar
der vil lieben Vriderûne ir spiegel nam (WL 34.V.3-5)²²

Instead, the mirror seems to signify something that has been taken from ‚us‘, the courtly audience, not because a woman has been assaulted, but because a male peasant has dared to trespass onto the sexual territory claimed by a male aristocrat: *Vrômuot ist ûz Ôsterrîche entrunnen / wir mugn uns ir und Vriderûnen spiegel wol verkunnen* (SL 27.VIII.1-2 [Joyfulness has drained away from Austria; we no longer have access to it or to Vriderune's mirror]; my underlinings); or: *si wellent sîn / tumber, danne der uns Vriderûn ir spiegel nam*. (WL 14.II.9-10 [they may well be more foolish than the one who took Vriderune's mirror away from us]; my underlinings). Gerd Kaiser draws convincing parallels between this and Morungen's broken mirror; and the ‚Spiegelraub‘ is now generally associated with the failure of a wider cultural framework.²³

Given this enormous symbolic weighting attached to the broken mirror, it is perhaps surprising that the songs make no reference to Vriderune ever using the mirror to look at herself or the world. Of course, the mere possession of a mirror might hint at internal reflective processes; and, given the foregrounding of social differences in Neidhart's songs, reflection on questions of class and identity might seem particularly pressing for Vriderune. Earlier literary scholars such as Frederick Goldin and Ulrich Gaier argue that the mirror has granted her a false view of herself as a courtly lady, and that by confiscating it, Engelmar successfully reclaims her for the peasant world.²⁴ However, given the unmistakable motif of sexual assault, any interpretation which seeks to justify Engelmar's deed in terms of the breaking of a spell, or the restoration of social order, is deeply problematic. Furthermore, in the case of all the other, supposedly courtly, objects that are taken from the women in Neidhart's songs, it is difficult to interpret the behaviour of the men as a necessary social

²¹ Cf. Vavra, Elisabeth, Zur Neidhart-Ikonografie, in: Neidhart und die Neidhart-Lieder. Ein Handbuch, ed. by Margarete Springeth and Franz Viktor Spechtler, Berlin / Boston 2018, pp. 375-399, here 382.

²² [In all the lands there is now nothing but grief and lamentation, ever since the uncouth peasant Engelmar deprived the lovely Vriderune of her mirror.]

²³ Kaiser, Gert, Narzißmotiv und Spiegelraub. Eine Skizze zu Heinrich von Morungen und Neidhart von Reuenthal, in: Interpretation und Edition deutscher Texte des Mittelalters. Festschrift für John Asher zum 60. Geburtstag, ed. by Kathryn Smits, Werner Besch and Victor Lange, Berlin 1981, pp. 71-81. Cf. Schulze, Ursula, Grundthemen der Lieder Neidharts, in: Springeth and Spechtler (eds.), Neidhart, pp. 95-116, here 105.

²⁴ Goldin, Frederick, Friderun's Mirror and the Exclusion of the Knight in Neidhart von Reuenthal, in: Monatshefte für deutschen Unterricht, deutsche Sprache und Literatur 54, 1962, pp. 354-359; Ulrich Gaier, Satire. Studien zu Neidhart, Wittenwiler, Brant und zur satirischen Schreibart, Tübingen 1967, pp. 83-84.

corrective. The male peasants are just as guilty of courtly pretention as the female ones and their snatching of the objects is more readily understood as attention-seeking harrassment.

WL 16 stands out for evoking a harrassment scene in which a mirror is used for its actual reflective purpose. This mirror is not the same as the one taken by Engelmar, and the woman in question, referred to only as *diu guote* [the good one], is not the same person as Vriderune but appears to represent a secondary love-interest for the persona. Nonetheless, the persona establishes a reflective relationship between the two mirrors by commenting on their similarity: *oben in dem knoppe lit ein spiegel glas, / dem gelîch alsô daz Friderûnen was.* (III.8-9 [On top of the pommel lies a mirror, like the one that belonged to Vriderune]). However, whilst the ‚Spiegelraub‘ conforms to the paradigm of the broken mirror, WL 16 draws on that of the satiric mirror deployed for the infliction of symbolic violence.

The events set out in this song are broadly as follows: a *getelinc* [peasant], whom the persona refuses to name, possesses a sword *alsam ein hanifswinge* (III.5 [like a hemp-scythe]), the pommel of which contains an inlaid mirror. The *getelinc* asks a girl to look at her own reflection in his mirror (III.10: *daz si sich dar inne ersæhe* [that she should look see herself in it]). This girl, however, is more effective than Vriderune when it comes to defending herself. She refuses the man's request point-blank, telling him *in einer smæhe* (IV.2 [mockingly]) that she is unimpressed by his pretentions (IV.4: *ich bekenne iuch niht an iuwer hovescheit sô kluogen* [I am not convinced by your fancy courtliness] and that she would rather lose everything she owns than look in his mirror. She also tells him that she has three good mirrors of her own at home (IV.7) He, however, keeps pestering her: *schiere sprach er aber: „vrouwe, luoget her!“ / alsô müete si der gouch mit sîner hoppenie.* (IV.9-10 [Immediately he repeated, „Lady, look here!“ In this way the oaf hassled her with his lumbering nonsense.]) The eventual outcome is not reported; instead, in the fifth and final strophe, the persona switches attention back to himself and to his broader dislike of the peasants: *die tumben getelinge tuont mir aller leideclîch. / swaz ich tuon, ich kan si bî der guoten niht erleiden.* (V.3-4 [The foolish peasants all annoy me. No matter what I do, I cannot bear them near the good one.])

Whilst the woman's objection to the *getelinc* is unusually forceful, it is perhaps understandable that she does not want to see her own image on the end of a long, phallic object. Also, given the association of mirrors with affective relationships, she may simply be telling him that she already has three lovers and does not need him as well. According to Goldin, however, the *getelinc* is actually in the right here. On his account, Neidhart's persona has previously won her, as he won Vriderune, „by falsely reflecting his own courtliness upon her“.²⁵ The *getelinc* now supposedly restores the status quo by forcing the girl to confront her true peasant identity.

This parallels Goldin's and Gaier's view of the ‚Spiegelraub‘ as bringing about Vriderune's liberation from the spell of false, reflected courtliness. The problem with this interpretation is that the *getelinc* himself is implicated in false courtliness. He uses the flattering but misleading term *vrouwe* when seeking to engage with the woman (IV.9); and the mirror which supposedly serves to make her see the truth is located on an exaggeratedly long sword. The girl too specifically repudiates his claims to courtliness (IV.4). It is clear, however, that the *getelinc* wants to control the way in which *diu guote* sees herself. There may be a sociological dimension to this; i.e. he may want her to buy into a false reality in which he is socially superior to her and in which she should be honoured by his attentions; and it may be that his mirror, had she looked, would in fact have exposed the hollowness of her own courtly aspirations. However, the main purpose of the pestering is not to restore social order, but rather to make the woman see herself as he sees her (i.e. as an available

²⁵ Goldin, Friderun's Mirror, p. 357.

sexual object). Even if this *getelinc*, unlike Engelmar, does not resort to actual violence, the pressure applied to the woman to internalise this role amounts to symbolic violence.

On a meta-poetic level, the *getelinc* and Engelmar both serve as reflections of Neidhart's own problematic persona. In holding up a critical or satiric mirror to a particular social class, this persona is ostensibly seeking to distinguish himself from his unworthy adversaries, but in fact becomes more fundamentally aligned with them. In most forms of didactic literature, the didactic voice will challenge inappropriate behaviours from a position of safety and authority. Satire, however, works differently. As Fredric Bogel puts it, satire is „a rhetorical means to the production of difference in the face of a potentially compromising similarity, not the articulation of differences already securely in place.“²⁶ Similarly, Michael Seidel notes that:

[In satire . . .] the urge to reform is literally overwhelmed by the urge to annihilate. The satirist . . . is implicated in the debasing form of his action – he is beside himself and beneath himself, something of a beast. . . The satirist is deeply implicated in satire's degenerative fictions precisely because he thrives as the chronicler of degenerative norms.²⁷

This accords entirely with the way in which the persona, described by Gaier as an undistinguished „Krautjunker“ [country squire],²⁸ reveals himself to be no better than the *dörper* whom he lambasts. He shares not only their selfishness and sexual aggression, but also their propensity for stealing. On the literal level, he too uses theft as a form of sexual harassment: in Winterlied 9, it is he, and not any of the *dörper*, who takes the stylus from a (so-called) *vrouwe*. Meanwhile, Carla Bullinger has suggested that the more fundamental ‚Spiegelraub‘ is committed, not by Engelmar, but by the persona himself: in poetological terms, he is guilty of ‚stealing‘ the mirror of classical ‚Minnesang‘ from Morungen and other ‚Blütezeit‘ poets.²⁹ Whether he then breaks this socially validating mirror and puts something entirely different in its place, or whether he transforms it into the mocking mirror of satire is a moot point; but the two modes of using mirrors to inflict violence are intimately connected.

This raises the question of who is being mocked in Neidhart's satiric mirror. Whilst the male *dörper* are presented extremely negatively, and the female ones somewhat patronisingly, Neidhart was not composing poetry for peasants. The primary target of mockery in these songs must be the persona himself who repeatedly compromises his own aristocratic status, first by willingly descending into the peasant world, and then by failing to assert himself there. Furthermore, given that the implicit audience has joined him imaginatively on this journey of descent, they too are the target of mockery. Direct questions to the audience along the lines of *sach ab iemen den, der Vriderûn ir spiegel nam?* (WL 26, V.7 [Did anyone see the one who took Vriderune's mirror from her?]), or *sâht ir den, der Vriderûn ir spiegel nam?* (WL 31, VII.12 [Did you see the one who took Vriderune's mirror]) effectively encourage them not just to visualise Engelmar, but also themselves, within the ambiguous social space occupied by the persona.

The Neidhart frescoes in the house on Tuchlauben 19 in Vienna go a step further in allowing members of the upper classes (patrician if not aristocrats) to observe at close hand a distorted version of the peasant world. Elisabeth Vavra draws attention to the grotesque

²⁶ Bogel, Fredric V., *The Difference Satire Makes. Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron*, Ithaca / London 2001, p. 42.

²⁷ Seidel, Michael A., *Satiric Inheritance: Rabelais to Sterne*, Princeton 1979, pp. 3-4.

²⁸ Gaier, *Satire*, pp. 32, 43, 78.

²⁹ Bullinger, *Friderun's Mirror*, pp. 92-98.

nature of the representations, particularly in the *dörper*-brawl on the north wall:

Auf ihre bäuerische Herkunft verweisen die derben Physiognomien, die defekte Ritterkleidung (Beinschienen in Kombination mit nackten Füßen), die überlangen Schwerter und die gänzlich unritterliche Weise, in der die Auseinandersetzung ausgetragen wird.³⁰

Nonetheless, despite their deficiencies, these figures have effectively been brought into the elite social space on the first floor of Tuchlauben 19; and the viewers who rely on the contrastive peasant to affirm their own identities are arguably compromised by association.

Do Neidhart's songs enact symbolic violence against the peasant class if these people are unaware of how the poet is tilting his satiric mirror at them? Similarly, given that they would not have been invited to socialise in the Tuchlauben house, does it matter that members of their class are grotesquely distorted on the upstairs walls? They arguably remain unscathed by the satiric mirroring, just as the people mocked in the hobgoblin's school do not necessarily experience their own reflection in the devilish mirror. On one level, they remain unscathed by the satiric mirroring, just as the people mocked in the hobgoblin's school do not necessarily experience their own reflection in the devilish mirror. On another level, however, this tilting of the satiric mirror clearly does matter, as it contributes to wider discourses about identity, hierarchy and class.³¹ These same discourses, albeit in modified form, inform Wittenwiler's fifteenth-century peasant satire – and continue into the modern age.

WITTENWILER

Wittenwiler's *Ring* does not fit easily into any established genre. It is a satirical epic that recounts not only the scurrilous events leading up to a wedding in the peasant village of Lappenhäusern, but also the apocalyptic war ensuing from a post-wedding brawl. It is relevant for this discussion because it features not only a distorted view of peasant life, but also a broken mirror, and a warped, but curiously desexualised, **Her** Neithart, the sole representative of the courtly world.

Whereas in Neidhart's songs, the female *dörper* are seen as desirable, and only their male counterparts as crude and obnoxious, Wittenwiler's text does not discriminate by gender: in Lappenhäusern, the women are as grotesque as the men. The main protagonist, Bertschi, is a foolish young peasant, whose love-interest, Mätzli, is both ugly and unchaste. The text not only recounts how she allows herself to be seduced by the village doctor, but also provides an explicit description of how she discovers the joys of masturbation while locked up in the cowshed (1564-1634).

The *Ring* falls in three parts. The first one (55-2622) describes the peasants' attempt to organise a tournament under the supervision of Her Neithart; the second one (2623-6457) focuses on how Bertschi wins the hand of Mätzli and obtains the permission of the villagers for the wedding to go ahead; and the third one (6458-9699) on the wedding itself. During

³⁰ Vavra, Neidhart-Ikonografie, p. 382. [The crude physiognomies, the defective knightly apparel (greaves in combination with bare feet), the excessively long swords and the entirely unknightly mode of engagement all testify to the peasant provenance of these figures.]

³¹ For a general discussion of the way in which mirrors and mirroring metaphors assist the construction of personal and social identity in the Middle Ages, see Horst Wenzel, *Spiegelungen. Zur Kultur der Visualität im Mittelalter*, Berlin 2009, pp. 64-79. For the tilting of the mirror in pictorial art, see also the contribution by Marius Rimmel in this volume.

the celebrations, Else's mirror breaks by accident, and shortly afterwards, Eisengrein deliberately scratches the hand of another girl whom he desires. This behavior enrages the girl's uncle and the ensuing conflict escalates until most of the population has been killed. Only Bertschi survives to become a religious hermit.

Although Wittenwiler's peasants are uniformly presented as foolish, ugly and sexually depraved, the narrative stands in a complex intertextual relationship to a wide range of earlier medieval texts, including ‚Minnesang‘ and courtly romance. Much of the humour depends on the peasants' grotesquely unsuccessful attempts to appropriate elements of aristocratic or learned culture (tournaments, courtly love service, elegant letter-writing and formal disputation). The text's engagement with courtliness is paradoxical: although it thematises the irrelevance of courtly values in the world of Lappenhäusen (or in the wider contemporary world), its communicative effectiveness is predicated precisely on the readers' familiarity with these same ideals and conventions.

In the decades following the composition of Neidhart's songs, the two central and interlinking motifs (of the knight's descent into the peasant world and of the breaking of a peasant girl's mirror) go their separate ways, only to be partially reunited in the *Ring*. By this time, the figure of Neidhart has developed into a stock character largely dissociated from the historical poet: as **Neidhart Fuchs**, he is construed as the sworn enemy of the peasants, a mindset usually explained by reference, not to the ‚Spiegelraub‘, but to the events of the ‚Veilchenschwank‘, in which the peasants thwart his attempts to enjoy the favours of a courtly lady.³² By contrast, the motif of the broken mirror finds its way into two short comic narratives about peasant weddings, *Meier Betz* and *Metzen hochzit*. In *Meier Betz*, a possible source for Wittenwiler, the connection between mirror and carnage is much more direct than in the *Ring*, given that the wedding brawl in that work is triggered precisely by the breaking of a mirror. During the dance, one peasant inadvertently drops his trousers while dancing, trips in them, and causes a pile-up of bodies – and in the general fracas, a girl named Guot finds that her mirror has broken. Troll, the man who had bought it for her, is incensed and the conflict takes off from there (291-314).³³ *Metzen hochzit* is thought to feature a similar chain of events, although the text is fragmentary.

In Wittenwiler's *Ring*, Her Neithart is first introduced as one of the twelve companions of Bertschi who engage in a tournament organized as part of Bertschi's courtship of Mätzli. No explanation is offered for Her Neithart's involvement. Whereas the narrator knows the identity of all the others, the knight's arrival introduces a note of uncertainty:

Des lesten namen ich enwaiss;
Doch cham er auf den selben chraiss
Geritten mit eim fuchszagel.
Ich wän, es wär der pauren hagel,
Her Neithart, trun, ein ritter chluog,

³² For further details, see Böckmann, Jörn, Literarische Neidhart-Rezeption im deutschsprachigen Raum, in: Springeth and Spechtler (eds.), Neidhart, pp. 275-290; Jöst, Erhard, Das Schwankbuch Neidhart Fuchs, in: Springeth and Spechtler (eds.), Neidhart, pp. 337-351; Andrea Grafetstätter, 'Die Neidhartspiele', in: Springeth and Spechtler (eds.), Neidhart, pp. 353-373.

³³ Der Bauernhochzeitschwank. Meier Betz und Metzen hochzit., ed. by Edmund Wießner, Tübingen 1956 (Altdeutsche Textbibliothek 48). Both texts are included in the Reclam edition of the *Ring*.

Der allen törpeln hass truog.

(155-160)³⁴

This Neithart is no poet and has no interest in wooing peasant women; instead, his linguistic dexterity is deployed solely to manipulate and humiliate the male peasants in various ways. Furthermore, he disappears after the tournament, whilst the mirror incident occurs much later, at the wedding of Bertschi and Mätzli.

Unlike *Meier Betz*, in which the accidental breaking of a mirror results in a major fight, the *Ring* specifically dissociates the mirror incident from the final cataclysmic battle. Otherwise, the build-up to the mirror incident follows the same comedic pattern. During the dance, Schabenloch trips over his own trousers and causes a whole line of people to topple over. Else's mirror breaks in the process, and the situation seems to turn nasty. However, the tension then resolves in unexpected laughter – for, as the narrator notes, the time has not yet come for fighting: *es was nicht zeit / Das sich derheben scholt ein streit* (6245-6246 [It was not yet time for a fight to start]).

The mirror incident is thus strangely anti-climactic, not least given the presence of Her Neithart earlier in the text. Whilst things do subsequently go very wrong, Wittenwiler deliberately strips the mirror incident of its hermeneutic complexity – not least because this text does not require euphemistic symbolism in order to narrate sexual violence. The explicit details in the account of the gang-rape of the Nissinger women by the men of Lappenhäuser are a case in point:

Hiet die praut nür einen man,
 Kützeldarm i'r vier gewan.
 Annen ars der ward zerriben:
 Sei hiet der gesellen mer dann sibem. . .
 Die wöscherin so reudich was,
 Daz sei von inen allen gnas. (7088-7091,7096-7097)³⁵

Furthermore, the Lappenhäuser are not the sort to be distressed by the symbolic breaking of any reflective framework. Even in Neidhart's songs, the existential crisis ensuing from the ‚Spiegelraub‘ does not affect the peasants themselves (apart from Vriderune, insofar as she has been raped). Instead, it is the non-*dörper*, the persona and his implied audience, who are bereft. Of course, the *dörper* are *dörper* precisely because they cannot engage with actual courtly values or literature, desiring only the external markers of aristocratic life – and the same goes for the Lappenhäuser. Corinna Laude highlights the complete failing of literary culture within Lappenhäuser, drawing attention not only to the cacophonous nature of Bertschi's singing to Mätzli, but also to the increasingly drunken and nonsensical songs at the wedding.³⁶ If an existential crisis is to affect such a group of people, who affirm their collective identity by bellowing *Daz wir leben ane si-inn / . . . ane-e-e sinn* (6269-6270 [That we live without any sense . . . without any sense]), this has to be brutally tangible in its effects.

³⁴ [I do not know the name of the last one; but he rode up into this gathering with a foxtail as his emblem. I believe he was that scourge of the peasants [pauren], Her Neithart, a clever knight, who hated all peasants [törpeln].]

³⁵ [Whilst the bride only had one man, Kützeldarm had four. Anna's arse was rubbed raw: she had more than seven bed-mates. . . The laundress was so mangy that she was the only one to be spared.]

³⁶ Laude, Corinna, „Daz in swindelt in den sinnen...“. *Die Poetik der Perspektive bei Heinrich Wittenwiler und Giovanni Boccaccio*, Berlin 2002 (Philologische Studien und Quellen 173), p. 159 and pp. 178-185.

Hence it takes the literal carnage of part III before the solitary survivor Bertschi is able to make even a tentative move towards reflection.

In referencing the world of ‚Minnesang‘, Wittenwiler thus makes two key decisions. First he (re-)introduces an intradiegetic Neidhart character – but a debased, schwank-Neidhart who is largely dissociated from the complexities of the ‚Minnesang‘ persona. Secondly, he dissociates the mirror incident from the closing carnage, which is triggered by a simpler act of sexual aggression: Eisengrein's scratching cannot be interpreted in terms of literary reflection. These choices underscore the differences, rather than the similarities, between the two literary worlds. Lappenhäusen is so entirely cut off from true courtliness that the dynamic tensions characterising the Sommer- and Winterlieder are no longer possible: instead, we get a Neidhart who is no ‚Minnesänger‘, and a mirror which nobody really cares about because literary reflection is valued as little as virginity.

This raises the question of the function of this distorted mode of representation: who is actually being mocked in the satirical mirror? Wittenwiler is not writing for a peasant audience any more than Neidhart was. Furthermore, unlike Neidhart, Wittenwiler does not place his own persona inside the peasant world, choosing instead to comment from a position of apparent distance and disengagement. Admittedly, the prologue to the *Ring* famously casts all sinners as figurative peasants: *Er ist ein gpaur in meinem muot, / Der unrecht lept und läppisch tuot.* (43-44 [As I see it, a peasant is a person who lives wrongly and behaves like a fool.]) To that extent, *gpaur* does become a moral rather than a sociological category, potentially encompassing not only Her Neidhart, but also members of Wittenwiler's intended audience – much as Schweikle sees the *dörper* as „einen überständischen Verhaltenstypus“ [a behavioural type not tied to any particular class].³⁷ Frank Fürbeth argues that the prologue is not part of the original conception of the work;³⁸ but even without it, the village of Lappenhäusen, located in the valley of Grausen, works well as a metaphor for the fallen world.³⁹ Mostly, however, the satire focuses on specific and literal class differences, mocking the peasants for not only for their supposedly intrinsic crudeness of appearance, taste and manners, but most of all for their misguided attempts to imitate the practices of those whom they have been taught to regard as their betters.

However, the satiric mirror is sometimes tilted in a way that cannot fail to include the readers. One example relates to the over-energetic way in which female peasants supposedly dance. Whilst Neidhart merely states that *Vriderûn als ein tocke / spranc in ir reidem rocke* (SL 22.IV.4-5 [Vriderune leapt like as doll in her flouncy dress]), thereby hinting at her status as a marionette to be manipulated by the authorial persona, Wittenwiler foregrounds the increasingly disshelved state, and apparent sexual availability, of the peasant women at the wedding. They leap so high that one can see their knees (6400-6403); Hilde's breasts pop out of her low-cut dress (6404-6407); and Hüdlein becomes so ‚hot‘ that she rips open her dress, leaving nothing to the imagination:

Hüdellein der ward so haiss,
Daz sei den kittel vor auf raiss;
Des sach man i'r die iren do
Und macht vil mängeu hertzen fro;

³⁷ Schweikle, *Dörper*, p. 425.

³⁸ Fürbeth, Frank, „unter den Augen des Dichters“? Überlegungen zur Rekonstruktion der Urfassung von Heinrich Wittenwilers *Ring* anhand seiner verlorenen Überlieferung, in: *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 146, 2017, pp. 198-249.

³⁹ Cf. Conrad Eckart Lutz, *Spiritualis Fornicatio. Heinrich Wittenwiler, seine Welt und sein „Ring“*, Sigmaringen 1990 (Konstanzer Geschichts- und Rechtsquellen 32), pp. 305-306.

Seu schreuwen all: „Sei wil ein man:
Sei hat ein maul und har dar an.“ (6408-6413)⁴⁰

The other peasants are clearly delighted with this exposure, comparing Hüdlein's vagina to a bearded mouth; in other words, these figures, who are supposedly immune to the *vreude* caused by a real courtly celebration, have their hearts made *fro* by naked girls jumping up and down. However, this passage is of course also constructed for the pleasure and titillation of the patrician readership, who, even as they are encouraged to despise the crudeness of the peasant response, will also be visualising every detail of the women's exposed bodies. The difference between lustful peasants and lustful patricians is thus (partly) obliterated: as far as the women are concerned, both groups are guilty of looking and laughing. As in *The Snow Queen*, the distorting mirror may be pointed away from the spectators, and yet there is ultimately little distinction between those who enjoy the mirror from a position of assumed superiority and those who are reflected on the mirror's surface.

CONCLUSION

This paper has used Andersen's fairy-tale to identify two separate reflective paradigms (the broken mirror and the satiric mirror) and to examine the interplay between them in the works of Neidhart and Wittenwiler. In Neidhart's work, multiple forms of mirroring are used to negotiate social anxieties. On a literal level, a mirror is a prestige object suggestive of courtly status. However, it also serves as a cipher for bodily integrity and for the right to one's own self-image and is thus readily associated with the way in which literal and symbolic violence may deprive a (typically female) victim of these. Whilst WL 16 describes the attempted use of a literal mirror to make a girl see herself in a particular way, Neidhart's persona also uses mirroring to create an ambiguous imaginative space in which he, and his equally compromised aristocratic audience, may view themselves alongside the mocked and distorted members of the peasant class. This imaginative space finds its literal equivalence in the reception room of the Tuchlauben house.

Whilst for Neidhart, the broken mirror has poetological ramifications linking it to classical ‚Minnesang‘, Wittenwiler largely abandons this aspect; instead, his fresh juxtaposition of Her Neithart and the broken mirror only highlights the irrelevance of earlier discourses. Nonetheless, in the *Ring*, the tilting of the satiric mirror towards a particular social class still compromises those who derive enjoyment from the spectacle – this mode of reflection may oblique, but still functions as an effective moral leveller. In other words, what the devils see in the mirror is essentially themselves.

⁴⁰ [Hüdlein was so hot that she tore open her gown at the front, so that one could see all that she had. This put many people in a very good mood. They shouted, „She wants a man; she's got a mouth with hair around it.“]

