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Writing New Readers in Adolf Muschg's *Der Rote Ritter. Eine Geschichte von Parzival*

I: Introduction

One distinctive features of courtly romances composed by, or in the tradition of, Chrétien de Troyes is the foregrounding of the subjectivity of the narrator, together with his quasi-oral role in mediating the story-line.¹ This aspect of medieval romance provides a particular challenge to modern writers seeking to adapt the material for a readership more familiar with the reception of literature through a private process of internalisation.²

The vibrant persona constructed by Wolfram von Eschenbach not only repeatedly foregrounds his own speaking role (e.g. *Parzival* 824,1: *welt ir nu hæren fürbaz?*), but also dissociates himself programmatically from the written word (*Parzival* 115,27: *ine kan decheinen buochstap*).³ Furthermore, Wolfram's narrative material simultaneously celebrates and problematises the process of reading: whilst the Grail in *Parzival* communicates the will of God in written form, Sigune in *Titirel* becomes fatally obsessed with reading the incscription on the Brackenseil. Albrecht, a thirteenth-century adaptor of this material, seems to have regarded the combination of a garrulous Wolfram-narrator with a fundamental ambivalence towards human literacy as a hallmark of the source narratives: his *Jüngerer Titirel* enhances the orals aspects of the Wolfram-narrator by placing him in ten dialogues with vrou Aventure (where *Parzival* has only one),⁴ whilst on the level of the protagonists, engagement with written texts becomes more clearly associated with transience, fallibility and death.⁵

¹ Cf. Ridder (2002).

² For reading and writing as competing of literary reception even in the Middle Ages, see Scholz (1980) and Green (1994); Green (1994: 186-194) argues for an »intermediate« mode of reception for the works of Hartmann von Aue and Wolfram von Eschenbach.

³ Cf. Green 1994: 387 (note 171): »The present consensus seems to be that 115, 27 is no autobiographical confession, but an affirmation by Wolfram, in which he sets himself apart from Hartmann and Gottfried, that as a lay author he belongs to the cultural world of medieval laymen.« Cf. also Kästner/Schirok 2000 and Stolz 2004.

⁴ Cf. Volting 2007: 75-96.

⁵ Cf. Volting 2007: 17-18. On the wider association of writing with death, see Harpham 1987: 6.

Der Rote Ritter (RR), Adolf Muschg's 1993 adaptation of *Parzival*, takes the radical step of entirely dispensing with the Wolfram-narrator.⁶ He is replaced by a range of other narratorial devices, including the three interconnected eggs Pekadî, Kapidê and Dipekâ, described as »Agenten dieser Erzählung« (I.11, 104) – for, as the main third person narrator puts it, »Jemand muß diese Fabel doch erzählen« (I.11, 104).⁷ Nonetheless the title and sub-title of the last, empty chapter (»IV.25. DER LESER Worin die Hauptperson dieses Buches ihr Geheimnis verrät und das Hundert voll macht (*hic et ubique*)« (1006)), underscores the fact the starring role in this text is no longer to be assigned to an idiosyncratic narrator-figure, but rather to the implied reader who has just completed a significant process of literary internalisation.⁸

Furthermore, Muschg's novel expresses enormous interest in literacy of the characters, constantly commenting on who can (and cannot) read, and on what their reading choices are. It is noteworthy that the very first figure to have his literacy affirmed is Lähelîn, the »Gegenspieler« (IV.11, 872) representing the transition from the medieval to the modern world: »Als er aus dem Kloster der Toten Brüder kam – da hat er lesen und schreiben gelernt – wollte er auch wie Gott werden.« (I.2, 27).⁹ Gawan is also singled out for his literacy and fluency in composing letters (notably in chapters I.10 and III.8-12). Otherwise, there is repeated emphasis on the presumption that knights cannot, and cannot be expected to, read – a topos serving partly to refer back to the Wolfram-narrator's apparent denial of his own literacy in *Parzival*.¹⁰ That being said, members of the Grail community need to be able to read at least their own name on the stone – and Trevrizent is assigned the role of imparting basic reading skills to those who need it. Female figures are more likely to be able to read and to engage in private reading; this applies not only to Muschg's Sigûne (who, as a member

⁶ For Muschg's recognition of the »Alterität« of his source text, see Obermaier 1997: 468.

For a succinct overview of RR in the context of modern *Parzival*-reception, see Schulze 2011: 786-793.

⁷ On the eggs and other narratorial devices in RR, see Obermaier 1997: 480-482; Pannitschka 2008: 102-105; Mutzbauer/Sośnicka 2013; Schmitz-Emans 2015:139-140.

⁸ Cf. Obermaier 1997: 486-487; Classen 1996: 323-327; Mutzbauer/Sośnicka 2013: 159.

⁹ On the figure of Lähelîn, see Obermaier 1997: 473-476; Pannitschka 2008: 82-84. In this article, circumflexes on long vowels in personal names is used to designate figures in RR (as opposed to corresponding figures in medieval texts).

¹⁰ RR insists on the fact that Gahmuret »natürlich« did not write the letter to Belakâne himself and that he was »selbstverständlich« illiterate (I.17, 183). In Wolfram's *Parzival*, by contrast, the letter to Belakane is written by *ir mannes hant* (55,18).

of the Grail family, has been taught by Trevrizent), but also to Orgelûse and to Belakâne.¹¹ Finally, many of the figures are presented as consumers of medieval literature, enjoying access to the same narratives that are typically studied by German medievalists today: Hartmann's *Erec* and *Iwein*, Gottfried's *Tristan*, Veldeke's *Eneasroman* and the *Nibelungenlied*. This focus on reading choices within the diegesis enables Muschg to retain some of the intertextual polemics of the source text.

This article will start with an examination of how intertextuality is handled in RR, before proceeding to discuss the reading practices of two main protagonists, Sigûne and Parzivâl. Whilst Sigûne's reading ability is clearly derived from Wolfram's original storyline, even raising the question of Parzivâl's literacy represents a striking innovation on the part of Muschg.¹² Nonetheless, as this article will argue, Parzivâl emerges as a healthier and more successful reader than Sigûne, precisely because he does not turn to literature for specific answers to existential questions.

II: Intertextuality in RR

In *Parzival*, intertextuality often takes a personal turn, with numerous jibes directed at Hartmann von Aue and his narrative world.¹³ In RR, by contrast, the glaring absence of the Wolfram-narrator means that intertextual links often have to be articulated in other ways. For example, without the notion of an embodied authorial narrator eager to confront his literary rival extradiegetically, there is nobody to voice threats along the lines of »You attack my characters and I'll attack yours«:

mîn hêr Hartman von Ouwe,
vrou Ginovêr iwer vrouwe
und iwer hêre der kûnc Artûs,
den kumt ein mîn gast ze hûs.
bitet hûeten sîn vor spotte.

¹¹ On aristocratic female readers in the Middle Ages, see Scholz 1980: 205-211; Green 1994: 192: »Noblewomen have long been recognised as an exception to the medieval equation *laicus=illitteratus*«.

¹² Obermaier 1997 notes that whilst the figure of Lâhelîn is key for evoking the »Epochenwandel« (473) from the medieval to the modern world, this transition also requires Parzivâl to become a reader: »Durch die Konfrontation mit Lâhelîn muß auch Parzivâl sein Mittelalter verlassen und zum neuzeitlichen, d.h. aufgeklärten Menschen werden: der Ritter wird zum Leser.« (476).

¹³ For Hartmann's romances as pre-texts for *Parzival*, see Wand 1992; Draesner 1993: 200-234.

ern ist gîge noch diu rotte:
 si sulen ein ander gampel nemn:
 des lâzen sich durch zuht gezemn,
 anders iwer frouwe Enîde
 unt ir muoter Karsnafide
 werdent durch die mûl gezücket
 und ir lop gebrücket.
 sol ich den munt mit spotte zern,
 ich wil mînen friunt mit spotte wern.

(*Parzival* 143,21-144,4)

Whilst the Wolfram-narrator never actually fulfils his threat of smearing Enite and Karsnafite, he does compare some of Hartmann's characters unfavourably to his own: Laudine, for example, is said to be less faithful than Sigune (*Parzival* 436,4-7), and Erec less reliable than Loherangrin when it comes to carrying out that which he has threatened to do (*Parzival* 826,29-30).¹⁴ Furthermore, the digs at Hartmann and his works do not always require explicit narratorial comment. Instead, the listeners may simply be expected to note the strategic re-deployment of particular narrative patterns, such as the parallelism between Erec's ill-treatment of Enite and Orilus's ill-treatment of Erec's sister Jeschute; or to appreciate the ways in which the story-line of *Parzival* retrospectively impacts on the relative standing of Hartmann's characters. For example, if Orilus has defeated Erec (as he claims to have done in *Parzival* 134,14-19), and Parzival then defeats Orilus (*Parzival* 265,1-266,6), this implicitly establishes the superiority of Parzival over Erec.¹⁵

Despite dispensing with the figure Wolfram-narrator, Muschg clearly wishes to retain the option of intertextual polemics. Wolfram's implicit jibes against Hartmann are easily exported from *Parzival* to RR, with Muschg adding a further detail that contributes to the retrospective undermining of Erec. When the challenge of Schastelmarveile is brought to the attention of the Arthurian court, none of the knights shows any interest in pursuing it:

Die Ritter bröckeln ab. Es zieht sie nichts nach Schastelmarveile. Herr Orilus muß sich in seiner Kampfschule zurückmelden. Ritterlicherweise macht er die Ruhe geltend, deren Frau Jeschûte endlich bedürfe. Herr Erec gedenkt mit Frau Enîte eine Zeitlang in wohlverdienter Minne auf seinen Gütern zu leben. (III.6, 559)

¹⁴ Erec is of course not to be criticised for backing down on his threat of killing Enite unless she remains silent; instead, the problem lies in his voicing of a threat that is too extreme to be carried out in practice (within the parameters of courtly romance).

¹⁵ Cf. Draesner 2003: 205-206.

Here, Erec's decision to prioritise sex over *aventure* implicitly suggests that he has never entirely overcome his inclination towards *verligen*.¹⁶

However, in the absence of a Wolfram-narrator, any more explicit digs at Hartmann have to be articulated by, or through, the protagonists themselves. For example, a confrontation in III.3 between Erec and Orilus, hinging on the similarity in the ways that they both bullied their wives, may be read meta-poetically as an objection by Hartmann von Aue to the redeployment of a story-line that he had made famous. When Orilus and Jeschûte return to the Arthurian court after their reconciliation, Jeschûte publically laments the harsh treatment that he has meted out to her for her supposed infidelity. Orilus counters that this is normal practice »in einem solchen Fall« (III.3, 519). Erec then appears in person – something that never happens in Wolfram's text – to object, not to the cruelty inflicted on his sister, but to that fact that Orilus seems to have copied his *aventure*:

So mit Verlaub, habe ich es gemacht, meldete sich ein älterer Herr mit römischer Frisur.
– Wie kommt Ihr dazu, mein Abenteuer zu kopieren?

Herr Erec! sagte Orilus grob, von Eurem Abenteuer habe ich gehört, auch wenn nicht, wie Ihr meint, die ganze Welt davon spricht. Von Kopieren kann keine Rede sein. Zwar ritt Frau Enite ebenfalls in Fetzen mit Euch, aber da gab es vielerlei Unterschied. [. . .]

Wie auch immer, sage der Ritterschaft, zeihe ich Euch des unritterlichen Plagiats und fordere Genugtuung von Euch. [. . .]

Könnt Ihr haben, Schwager, sagte Orilus, wenn Ihr durchaus Lust habt, ein weiteres Mal vom Pferd gefegt zu werden. Denn gegen mich habt Ihr kein Brot. (III.3, 519)

Whilst this passage serves partly as a reminder of Orilus's previous victory over Erec and hence of Parzival's ultimate superiority, the (highly anachronistic) charge of plagiarism carries poetological overtones: it is writers, not protagonists, who are potentially guilty of this offence. To the extent that Erec serves as a mouthpiece for Hartmann, this passage may therefore be seen as a (post-)modern equivalent to *Parzival* 133,21-144,4 quoted above.¹⁷ On the meta-poetological level, this passage also implicitly foregrounds Muschg's own role as a writer capable of merging and reconfiguring these earlier narratives.

The knights' collective preoccupation with their own *fama* is furthered underscored when Gawan performs of the most some of the best-known Arthurian tales –

¹⁶ Iwein is also identified as one of the knights who refuses the challenge (III.6, 559); cf. Carnevale 2005: 189.

¹⁷ Cf. Carnevale 2005: 188-189.

in the presence of the same people who star in them: »Herr Gâwân sang die Abenteuer Iweins und Laudînes, Erecs und Enîtes, sogar Lancelôts und Ginovêrs mit fester Stimme, in der auch Anzûgliches einen guten Ton annahm.« (III.3, 525) Whilst embedded narratives are common in Arthurian romance, these tend to be first-person accounts of an individual knight's most recent exploits, sometimes linked to the topos of Arthur's refusal to dine until he has heard something new and exciting.¹⁸ Although more overtly literary recitals may also have played a part within medieval courtly celebrations,¹⁹ the fact that the Arthurian court is here listening to old stories about its own members suggests that it is past its prime: backward-looking and self-obsessed. Gâwân's performance also provides an opportunity for wry reflection on the relationship between reality and literary idealisation:

Dank Herrn Gâwâns Laute kamen alle Herren und Damen des Kreises nun doppelt vor, einmal im Fleische, einmal ideal, und das Fleisch straffte sich unter der schönen Zumutung und war bemüht, des Ideals nicht ganz unwürdig dazustehen. (III.3, 525)

However, the availability of written texts within the diegesis of RR means that Erec and Iwein exist, not just doubly, but triply: as members of Arthur's court, as the objects of celebration in Gawan's songs;²⁰ and as figures »aus den Liebes-Exempeln, die Der von Ouwe ausgedacht und gedichtet hatte« (I.17, p. 185). Whereas Hartmann's prologue to *Iwein* raises the question of whether it is better to experience the Arthurian world first-hand or through fiction,²¹ Sigune has the (theoretical) option of doing both: at Herzeloyde's request, she reads Hartmann's texts aloud,²² but she could also have travelled to Arthur's court to meet Erec and Iwein in person.²³

Whilst questions of authorship and of literary competence do not really arise for Gawan's song, the explicit identification of »Der von Ouwe« as the author of *Erec* and *Iwein* makes it possible to challenge Hartmann on a deeper level. In *Parzival*, the intertextual polemic is typically structured in terms of the relative merits of protagonists

¹⁸ Cf. Wandhoff 2002: 130-131; Lieb 2002: 45; Kartschoke 2002: 21.

¹⁹ Cf. Kartschoke 2002, esp. 21-23.

²⁰ These »Abenteuer« must have been relatively compressed, given the amount of ground that Gâwân was able to cover in a single performance. They cannot have been identical with Hartmann's works.

²¹ *Iwein* 48-58; cf. Haug (²1992): 121-124.

²² *Iwein* 6455-6558 provides a key example of young girl reading aloud to members of her family. Cf. Green 1994: 189.

²³ The lacklustre representation of these real knights in III.3 is such that, had she met them, Sigûne might well have formed a similar conclusion to Hartmann's narrator, namely that fiction is more rewarding than real-life experience.

(i.e. the best work will be the one with the best protagonists), but for Sigûne and Herzelayde in RR, the overall reading experience is of greater importance – and they simply find Hartmann tedious:

Was waren diese höfischen Romane für eitles Zeug! Aber man mußte es kennenlernen, um den Bräuchen der Welt nicht fassungslos gegenüberzustehen. [. . .] Und so studierte man das Ritter- und Damengefabel in gemeinsamen Leseunden, kostete von der sogenannten Spannung und beherrschte seine Ungeduld. (I.19, 203-204)

Initially, Sigûne does recognize something of her own experience in these texts, and responds with affective identification: »Oft schwammen die Augen der Vorleserin in Tränen. Denn wie hätte sie bei diesen Exempeln nicht ihrer eigenen treuen Sehnsucht gedenken sollen« (I.17, 185). Nonetheless, their appeal is soon exhausted. Herzelayde rejects them as rather provincial (»ländlich Ritterkost« (I.17, 185)) and wonders if Sigûne could not come up with something more exotic (»aparteren« (I.17, 185)). They try *Tristan* by »Meistergottfried« and immediately find the fluid style and thought processes of that author more congenial than the more static qualities of Hartmann:

Sigûne las mit andächtigen Augen, denn da war in wunderbar fließenden Versen immer wieder vom wunderbaren Fluß der Welt die Rede, und die Minne schien von allen Dingen das fließendste zu sein. Das sage der Herrin besser zu als die feststehenden Exempel Des von Ouwe. (I.17, 186)

Tristan even surpasses the tales that Schiônatulander tells Sigûne about the Orient: »Was war Belakâne gegen Isôt? Gahmuret gegen Tristan?« (I.17, 186) – tales that had previously been deemed much better than those by Hartmann or Veldeke (I.14, 144). However, notwithstanding this clear hierarchization of narrative competence, the communal reading of »Meistergottfried« comes to a abrupt end when Herzelayde decides that this text is too immoral to be read out in the presence of her unborn child. They therefore go back to Hartmann, albeit without any great enthusiasm: »Und Sigûne mußte lieber wieder aus Dem von Ouwe lesen, vom Armen Heinrich zum Beispiel, bei welchem Vortrag die Herrin sanft zu entschlummern pflegte; er mußte demnach wohlthätig sein.« (I.17, 189)

Although Wolfram almost certainly did not have access to Gottfried's *Tristan* in its finished form,²⁴ RR accords considerable prominence to this work. This testifies to Muschg's desire, not only to expand the intertextual web with a nod towards the

²⁴ Cf. Draesner 1993: 227.

presumed animosity between the two poets,²⁵ but also to heighten the tension between the real and the literary existence of a given figure. Here, the problem is one of timing. When Morholt of Ireland participates in the tournament at Kanvoleis (I.3, 37),²⁶ his death at the hands of Tristan must still be in the future. Nonetheless, while Herzeloyde is still expecting Parzivâl, Sigûne obtains a copy of the work by »Meistergottfried« and is able to read about events which cannot have happened yet. It is, after all, virtually impossible to imagine that everything from the killing of Morholt up to the trial ordeal and Minnegrotte happens in a matter of months - not to mention the time required for »Meistergottfried« **actually to write the text**, and for Schiônatulander to obtain a copy of it from a monastery. On one level, this chronological inconsistency does not matter – after all, »für die Fabel sind Raum und Zeit keiner Rede wert, es sei denn, sie hätte gerade eine besondere Verwendung dafür« (III.25, 748). However, the chronological lapse is hardly accidental;²⁷ and of course Muschg need not have included Morholt in the tournament at all. Instead, this detail serves above all to stress the priority to the reading experience: it is by reading the *Tristan* romance that Sigûne actualises the story, even before the events of that text might have had time to unfurl within the narrative universe of RR.²⁸ Similarly, even though Erec and Iwein are construed as real (albeit very minor) figures within RR, their primary importance lies in the way that they allow Sigûne to develop as a consumer of literature.

II: Sigûne as a Reader

In RR, Sigûne is presented as an avid yet deeply troubled reader. Even Wolfram's *Titirel* frames the central disaster in terms of an act of frustrated reading: Sigune's desire for the elusive Brackenseil is uncontrollable because she believes that access to this particular

²⁵ For the debate concerning the relationship between these two authors, see Huber 2013: 71.

²⁶ Morholt is mentioned on a number of occasions in *Parzival* (49,5; 67,19; 73,18; 82,11; 86,14), but Wolfram is thought to have derived this figure from Eilhart's version of the story; cf. Draesner 1993: 227.

²⁷ RR features many other forms of anachronism. In particular, the verisimilitude of the medieval time-frame is undercut by objects and practices associated with later periods (e.g. computers, water-beds, kaleidoscopes and tea). Cf. Obermaier 1997: 473.

²⁸ Admittedly, this interpretation only works for readers of RR who are familiar with Gottfried's text. RR therefore offers a reading on two levels: one on the surface, and one for the more specialist medievalist readers.

text is the only thing that will provide her with crucial insights into her own emotional trajectory. However, RR develops her role as a reader very extensively, as she is exposed to a wide range of literary works before finally encountering the Brackenseil. In developing this role, RR probes the opposition between a typically medieval approach, whereby the consumption of courtly literature is a typically construed as a collective experience, and a more modern approach of genuinely independent reading. Overall, Sigûne is relatively comfortable with the collective scenario (even if she is just reading aloud to one other person), but struggles with solitary reading. To that extent, she contrasts with Lâhelîn, the man of the future, who enjoys Arabic texts in isolation and who aspires to become entirely independent of the oriental servant who is helping him to acquire reading fluency (IV.11, 873).²⁹

Sigûne's attitude to reading is profoundly self-conscious.³⁰ Admittedly, when Trevrizent first teaches her to read, the letters of the alphabet stimulate her imagination in a way that seems exciting and genuinely unconcerned with her sense of self:

Die Ungeheuer? Das war buchstäblich zu verstehen. Denn er [=Trevrizent] verwandelte die Lettern, um sie einzuprägen, in Wesen nicht von dieser Welt, als da sind: Tritonen, Kentauren, Griefen, Hydren, Medusen oder Lemuren. Und am ende war es das Unmögliche daran, was das Einprägen erleichterte. Denn jeder Buchstabe nahm den Leib einer Fabel an, die in keinem Buch geschrieben stand. (I.19, 199)

As a young adult, however, she consistently relates literature to her own performance of self. The very fact the romances of Hartmann are frequently referred to as »Exempel« suggests a somewhat reductive approach to these texts.³¹ On one level, Sigûne and Herzeloide regard them as manuals for courtly practices, believing that they reflect die »Gebräuche der Welt« and even provide a model for how to speak: »So reden die Romane, die ich Euch vorlesen muß, und ich gebe mir Mühe, das Gelernte anzuwenden.« (I.4, 42)³² On another level, Sigûne also uses them as a blueprint for her affective life.

²⁹ It is also noteworthy that whereas Sigûne stays within the confines of German (or at least European) literature, Lâhelîn is willing to look further afield.

³⁰ Obermaier 1997: 470 comments on the way in which Muschg endows the medieval figures with psychological depth: »Die Figuren erhalten Körper und Psyche, ein Ich-Bewußtsein, Erfahrung und Geschichte, sind keine Typen mehr.«

³¹ The German term »Roman« is itself potentially ambiguous; whilst it constitutes the correct designation for the courtly romances of Hartmann and Gottfried, it is also suggestive of the modern novel with all its cultural ramifications.

³² Sigûne's approach is not only a reflection of her personal preferences, but also of (later) medieval cultural practice. Cf. Haug 1989: 166: »Er [=der Roman] interpretiert und problematisiert nicht mehr die höfische

She not only want to sound like a figure from a romance, but also to live like one – and to be appreciated as such:

Die Erzählung ihrer Liebe sollte vollkommener werden, reiner als die Liebe selbst . . Sie würde Vollkommenheit lernen müssen, ihre Liebe, und sich zur höchsten Erzählung entwickeln, höher als alles, was in den Büchern stand.

Ja, Sigune wollte sich selbst in Erzählung verwandeln, und zwar in eine, die blieb, während alles übrige schwankte und schwand. (I.14, 152)

Ironically, in resorting to the metaphor of becoming a story (and not just any story, but the best one), Sigûne is de facto looking for a way to evade the difficult role of reader. Essentially she is striving towards passivity and objectification, a dubious transition which is completed at the point of her death: »Sie hat lesen gelernt, und jetzt ist sie lesbar geworden.« (IV.12, 889)

Sigûne's ambivalence towards reading, especially solitary reading, is apparent from early on in the novel. Even though she spends a lot of private time at her »Leseput« in Kanvoleis, her frustration is such that she is more often *not* reading: »In der Nacht danach hatte Sigûne, wie in jeder andern, das schwere Konvolut der 'Eneît' auf das Leseput gehoben und sich davor gesetzt. Aber sie las nicht, sie fror.« (I.19, 198); »Sie hätte lesen können, Sigûne, denn sie hatte es gelernt. Jetzt las sie nicht.« (I.19, 200); »Sie saß an einem Lesestück, ohne zu lesen« (I.21, 220). The references to Veldeke show that the problem goes beyond the particular writing style of Hartmann; and even *Tristan* does hold sufficient appeal for her to carry on »mutterseelenallein« (I.21, 220), once Herzeloide has broken off their communal reading. Despite, or perhaps because of, her intensely self-conscious approach to literature, reading increasingly strikes Sigûne as a sterile undertaking: »Und ich soll immer nur lesen, bis ich grau werde?« (I.19, 204)

For private reading to hold the necessary attraction for Sigûne, it has to be linked to her manipulation of, and holding back from, Schiônatulander. For example, on the days when she has stood him up, even the works of Hartmann suddenly become exciting again: »Sie verbrachte ihn [=the day] in heiterer Nervosität vor dem Lesegerüst, um Frau Enîten aus dem Roman Des von Ouwe auf ihrem entbehrungsreichen Weg zu folgen.« (I.14, 148); and on one occasion when Schiônatulander is waiting outside in the rain, she ritualises her own reading process with exquisite slowness:

Idealität, sondern er gewinnt nun Modellcharakter für das reale Leben: die arthurische Literatur liefert moralische Muster, und sie vermittelt zugleich die ihnen korrespondierende äußere Form. Man beginnt – und dies in einem erstaunlichen Maße –, die Wirklichkeit romanhaft zu stilisieren.«

Sie trat in die Kemenate zurück und zählte bis zwanzig. Dann zog sie die Decke über ihrem Lager straff, richtete die Rosen im Wasserkrug, und rückte den Sessel am Lesepult zurecht. Dann blätterte sie im Versroman und schlug ihre Lieblings-Initiale auf, die den Garten "Joie de la court" zeigte, und zwar vor dem Kampf des Helden mit dem mächtigen Ritter Mâbonâgrîn. Da schlangen sich Lilien, Eppich und schön gemaltes Geißblatt durch ein großes U und rahmten eine weiße Hindin ein, die überschlanke Läufe hob und Sigûne vor den Augen tanzte. Wie bald würde sie diese Bilder mit dem Geliebten betrachten, Kopf an Kopf gelehnt? Ob er lesen konnte? Leider würde er diese Kammer nie betreten! (I.12, 125)

By contrast, when she is genuinely left to her own devices, Sigûne experiences literature (including the material book) in terms of disintegration and deadness, with texts and literary figures breaking down into their component letters: »Frau Didô setzte sich nur noch aus Buchstaben zusammen. Sie *brauchte* nicht mehr zu leben.« (I.19, 201) Sigûne's awareness of Dido's textual constructedness thus represents a factor impeding the enjoyment of Veldeke's text. Despite this – or perhaps because of it – Sigûne also thinks of herself as a fragmented bit of text, or even a single letter. In a moment of frustrated rage, she remembers how Trevrizent taught her to write the letter I (for Ira). The capital letter was styled as naked female figure (a personification of the vice): "eine Weibsperson, die ihre Füße, mit leicht gespreizten Schenkeln gegen den Boden stemmte." (I.19, 201) Trevrizent provides the outline of this figure, but requires Sigûne to colour in the initial – and insists that the woman's hair be coloured red. This initial sticks in her mind, and a few chapters later, when she is washing away her menstrual blood (a detail possibly suggestive of wasted fertility), she deliberately imitates the posture of the personification: »Sie stemmte die Beine auseinander, warf beide Arme in die Luft, wie auf dem I, das sie gemalt hatte, und auch der I-Punkt vibrierte in der Kälte. Doch so sehr der Wind an ihren Haaren riß, nach oben sträuben wollten sie sich nicht, rot wurden sie auch nicht davon.« (I.22, 229)

Here, the repeated reference to red hair has two functions. Firstly, it foregrounds the way in which Sigûne is merely trying out a role which does not really suit her; for all her faults, anger is not one of her fundamental character traits. Secondly, it creates a structural link between Sigûne and Orgelûse, a woman who really is red-haired and driven by profound rage. Whilst *Parzival* does not suggest any particular parallelism between these two women (beyond the common factor that they both mourn a dead partner), RR presents them as having an equally dysfunctional approach to reading and writing: they both tend towards self-objectification and yearn to be read by others.

However, as will be discussed in section IV below, Orgelûse takes the alphabetic posturing, or performance, much further than Sigûne: whilst the latter imitates the posture of a single letter and only in a moment of private experimentation, Orgelûse's many and varied contortions are specifically directed towards the male gaze.

One of Muschg's innovations is to split Gardavias from *Titurel* into two distinct but related forms: in RR, it features both as the familiar hound trailing the inscripted Brackenseil, and as a computer that appears on Sigûne's bookshelf, as though by magic, wedged between a commentary on the Book of Job and the romance of Alexander the Great.

In both of these guises, GARDEVÎAS offers reading material and a false sense of companionship. Its ability to adapt himself to Sigûne's tastes makes him even more responsive than modern tablets. She may learn from it, but it also learns from her, becoming more intelligent and sophisticated in the process: »Sigûne genoß, in aller Stille, eine Art höfische Erziehung und was dabei selbst zur Erzieherin geworden.« (I.22, 231) It finds or generates numerous pleasing romances (I.22, 230-231) and the interactive screen removes the need for traditional books: »Im Brautkleid der toten Mutter saß sie vor dem Lesepult, das von Ritterromanen befreit, ihm [the computer] nun allein zur Stütze diente. « (I.22, 229) The fact that Sigûne chooses to wear this rather morbid garment while reading underscores the extent to which she is conflicted about the process: reading is associated with the deadness of script, but also with yearning and sexual desire. GARDEVÎAS itself takes on a lover-like role, the process of refinement that it undergoes through interaction with Sigûne being analogous to that which a knight might expect to result from love-service. It also appears to feel a certain jealousy of, or resentment towards, the absent Schiônatulander. (I.22, 231) This jealousy is reciprocated later on when GARDEVÎAS reappears in canine form and Sigûne greets it in such a way as to evoke all the quasi-erotic aspects of the previous reading relationship:

Delphin! sagte sie, das ist das Wunderbarste, was Ihr mir jemals gebracht habt! Gardevîas was mein Freund, er kam jede Nacht, nun kommt er mir wieder!
Befremdliche Worte; der Delphin was erstarrt. Wußte sie, was sie sagte, konnte sie gemeint haben, was er hörte? (II.7, 306)

In insisting that Schiônatulander bring the lost leash back to her, she seals his fate, thereby ensuring for both of them that narrative status that she had previously regarded as

desirable: »Der Roman, in dem sie sich befanden, nahm seinen Lauf.« (II.7, 310) In the case of such metaphorical novels, there is of course often a strong correlation between becoming script and becoming dead. Schiônatulander is killed almost immediately, whilst the textualisation of Sigûne is only completed much later, when the leash is removed from the dead hound, the jewels scatter, and the letters that once made up the text merge with Sigûne's body:

Und von draußen sahen sie mit ungläubigen Erschrecken, wie die Schrift von Parzivâls ausgebreiteten Armen überlief in diejenigen der Frau, die sie einen Augenblick an ihr Herz zu drücken schien, bevor sie darüber zusammensank.« (IV.14, 904)

This provides a visual affirmation of Trevrizent's previous affirmation that the story of Clauditte that was inscribed on the Brackenseil is now (also) the story of Sigûne (IV.14, 903)

In RR, part of the problem for Sigûne is the role accorded to literacy within the Grail community. These people must learn to read in order to access the messages from God; at the very least, they must be able to read their own names and the fate that the Grail determines for them (I.19, 199). Although Sigûne's reading is largely limited to secular romances, her mistake is to read all them as though they too hold a special and unique message for her. Within the narrative, the Grail texts function as personalised directives from God rather than as works of fiction, and because of her Grail community parameters, Sigûne fails fully to appreciate the way that fiction works. For the actual readers of Muschg's novel, she serves as a reminder that in the pursuit of fiction, emotional engagement should ideally go hand in hand with intellectual detachment: literature is not, and should not be, all about you.

IV: Parzivâl as Reader

Although Trevrizent describes Sigûne as Parzivâl's »Schwester im Lesen« (IV.14, 903), these metaphorical siblings are very different types of reader. For Parzivâl, literacy comes late, and he shows no particular interest in engaging the classics of the Middle High German (or with any

computer-generated equivalents). Whilst Sigûne's reading position is static and dependent on props (e.g. the »Leseputz« and the inherited wedding dress), Parzivâl's is dynamic: he is »der reitende Leser« (III.17, 661), moving freely through an alphabetized landscape.³³ Within it, he responds both to the way in which natural phenomena might resemble letters (e.g. »Er folgte dem Flußlauf der Rabbîne, und wenn ihr Bett zunächst ein scharfes V war, so vertiefte es sich draußen in der Wüste immer mehr zu einer Schlucht.« (III.17, 663)), and to the alliterative patterning in place names: »Der Rote Ritter stellte, als er durch Rosche Rabbîns watete wie durch eine zu stark gewürzte Buchstabensuppe, einen humoristischen Gleichklang der Stadt mit seinem eigenen Kunstnamen fest.« (III.17, 661)

Soon Parzivâl is also confronted with the alphabetic contortions of Orgelûse's naked body: »Ihr Leib hatte ein X hingelegt, und sie was das Bild einer Initiale. [. . .] Die Arme hielt das X über den Kopf ausgebreitet. Der mußte so kräftig hingeworfen sein, daß rote Strähnen herunterliefen wie von einem frischen Blutfleck.« (III.17, 665) Having started off as an X, Orgelûse proceeds to twist her way through all the other letters: »Nu kringelte sich die nackte Figur und schien sich nacheinander in alle Buchstaben des Alphabets zu verwandeln, und Parzivâl las: jeder war die Initiale eines Männernamens.« (III.17, 666).

Parzivâl's dealings with Orgelûse involve a wrangling for textual authority: who is the writer, who is the reader, and who determines the correct meaning? On the one hand, Orgelûse assumes a stance of textual passivity in relation to all men, with both writing and reading construed as something that a man does to a woman. Thus she urges Parzivâl to re-write her to his own taste (»Nimm dein P heraus und tunk's in mein O, schreib mich um, wie du glaubst, daß ich lauten soll, und ich will O und A dazu sagen!« (III.17, 667)); and when he refuses, she questions the adequacy of his writing implement: »Ist deine Feder noch stumpf? Soll ist dir etwas flüstern, was sie scharf macht?« (III.17, 667) On the other hand, she also plays an active part in her own textual objectification. For example, she is responsible for her own bodily contortions (»Jedem soll ich den Text verschönern«, III.17, 666). Similarly, even when she praises Cidegast for having helped

³³ For the wider significance of the letters of the alphabet in RR, see also Schmitz-Emans 2015: 143-145.

to to attain orthographic innovation (»Er [=Cidegast] aber half mir, mich immer neu zu buchstabieren, und machte sich die schönsten Geschichten aus mir« (III.17, 665-666)), there is at least a sense of co-authorship: he may have helped her and made up the stories, but ultimately she seems to have been responsible for the re-spelling of herself. As far as her revenge plans are concerned, Orgelûse is anything but passive, and this sense of purpose and agency is also reflected in some textual metaphors. Before Orgelûse appears in her true form as a naked temptress, she speaks to Parzivâl in the guise of a literate vulture engaged in reading the *Nibelungenlied*:

Habt Ihr auch zu lesen? fragte er. – Was?

K und R, sagte die Stimme. – Kriemhilds Rache. Kommt zu mir, ich diktiere sie Euch Wort für Wort. Ihr schreibt sie ins Reine – B wie Blut. (III.17, 664)

Here, the proposed balance of power between the sexes is very different, with the woman (or her avian representative) dictating an established text, and the man being reduced from the role of author to that of scribe. The real Orgelûse is also reading from this book and confidently tells Parzivâl that he will do »was da geschrieben steht« (III.17, 665).

As Parzivâl has only just learned the alphabet in the previous chapter (III.16, »Die Fibel«), it is perhaps unsurprising that he should be unfamiliar with the *Nibelungenlied* (»Der Text ist mir neu«, III.17, 665). However, in his rejection of Orgelûse, Parzivâl reveals himself to be a confident and critical reader. He challenges her competence as a writer and repeatedly refuses to accept the readings offered to him: »Das klang mir zu geläufig, Frau, sagte er, ich lese Euch anders.« (III.17, 666); »... ich rate Euch, das Schreiben ganz zu lassen, bis Ihr besser lesen könnt« (III.17, 666); »Ihr gebt Euch Mühe, den Text zu verwischen, erwiderte Parzivâl, aber ich lese, was ich lese. [. . .] Ihr habt keine Geschichte, darum macht Ihr Euch so viele.« (III.17, 666)

Parzivâl's most devastating comment is perhaps his reply to Orgelûse's suggestion that he should dip his P into her O: »Frau, sagte Parzivâl, das steht nicht in meinem Text.« (III. 17, 667). With this formulation, Parzivâl foregrounds the importance of what Obermaier 1997: 486 has designated the »Eigen-Text«. In Parzivâl's case, the conception of the self as a uniquely private and reliable text derives from his visualisation of the book of Nature, of which she herself is the only reader:

Und je weiter Parzivâl las, desto besser konnte sehen. Er sah, daß die Erde im Innern ja auch nichts anderes was als ein Buch. [. . .] Er sah, N wie Natur war nicht nur ein Buch, sie war auch ihr eigener Leser, von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit; und der Text, zu dem sie dabei wurde, war für keinen andern Leser bestimmt. (III.17, 663)³⁴

This self-contained approach to textuality differs fundamentally from Sigûne's ideal of transforming herself into a perfect story for others to read, or from Orgelûse's complicated attempts at manipulative co-writing. Parzivâl has no interest in objectifying himself for others to gaze at or to read. Needless to say, he also does not deliberately pose as any letter of the alphabet. It is perhaps appropriate that the alphabet soup of chapter III.17 should end with the comparison of Parzivâl to a capital G as her leaps over the ravine:

Das Pferd sprang durch die Tamarisken und wieherte einmal, als Parzivâl aufsprang, ein zweites Mal, als es mit ihm davonsprengte; das dritte Mal, als er weit schon, die Arme in die Luft schleuderte, als ließe er nicht nur ein großes G fliegen, sondern den Geier dazu. (III.17, 671)

However, this similarity to the G (for Galoppieren as well as for Geier) is only noticed by the readers and by Orgelûse; Parzivâl himself remains healthily unaware of it.

Despite not serving as an important intertext for *Parzival*,³⁵ the *Nibelungenlied* is mentioned once more, towards the end of RR. Describing his unhappy relationship with Orgelûse, Gâwân claims not only that he would never have won her, had it not been for Parzivâl's battle with Gramovlanz, but also that Parzivâl is the one whom Orgelûse really wanted. This is backed up by an analogy with Gunther's bridal quest (with Orgeluse now in the role of Brünhild rather than that of Kriemhild): »Du hast dich an meine Stelle versetzt und Siegfried für mich gespielt. Du hast die Tarnkappe übergezogen und statt meiner gekämpft.« (IV.23, 981) When previously talking to Orgelûse, Parzivâl claimed to know nothing about the *Nibelungenlied*, but now he understands perfectly what Gâwân is saying – and is even able to supply further details from the story: »Ich, Siegfried! Du wirst nicht behaupten, daß ich dich in der Hochzeitsnacht vertreten habe oder gar, daß sie

³⁴ The image of Nature reading iteself as a book has affinities with Rilke's sonnet »O Brunnen-Mund«, in which the fountain pours water from its mouth into a bowl described as its own ear: »Dies ist das schlafend hingelegte Ohr, / das Marmorohr, in das du immer sprichst. / Ein Ohr der Erde. Nur mit sich allein / redet sie also. Schiebt ein Krug sich ein, / so scheint es ihr, daß du sie unterbrichst.« (Die Sonette an Orpheus II,15, 12-14; Rilke 1996: 265). However, whereas Rilke construes this circular process in terms of orality, Muschg's chosen metaphor hinges on literacy.

³⁵ Cf. Draesner 1993: 172 (note 9), 322-323.

dir zuvor die Glieder zusammengebunden und dich an den Nagel gehängt habe – « (IV.23, 981).

It is perhaps not productive to speculate as to how or when Parzivâl became acquainted with *the Nibelungenlied*, or to wonder whether he really knew the story when talking to Orgelûse and was just playing naive in order to stall her advances. Instead, the two key points to emerge from this scene are as follows. Firstly, Parzivâl is now a competent member of courtly society, capable of handling literary references as and when they feature in normal conversation. Secondly, on this one occasion when Parzivâl refers to a literary text, it is precisely to deny its relevance for his own situation. Unlike Sigûne and Orgelûse, who in their different ways are both obsessed with literary models, Parzival recognises that the *Nibelungenlied* is just one of many stories, all of them entirely separate from his own »Eigen-Text«. Furthermore, in denying the relevance of the Siegfried-analogy, Parzivâl is arguably not just making a specific point about the limit to his involvement in Gâwân's love-relationship, but is also guiding his supposedly much more sophisticated friend away from an unhelpful mode of literary engagement.³⁶

This is not to deny the dialogic quality of RR, which has been emphasised by numerous critics, including Obermaier 1997: 486:

Entscheidend ist, daß es ein Dialog ist: Erzählen, Lesen als Dialog mit einer alten Geschichte über eine alte Geschichte über alle Zeiten hinweg durch alle Zeiten hindurch, als Aufforderung zum Dialog, zum Eigen-Text. Das Nicht-Erzählte (das 100. Kapitel) ist das eigentlich Entscheidende.

However, as demonstrated by the contrasting figures of Parzivâl, Sigûne, Orgelûse and Gâwân, this dialogue needs to be free-form and open-ended. Reading widely and thoughtfully will stimulate the imagination (as Sigûne's imagination was originally stimulated by the monstrous letters) and will enable the reader also to engage more deeply with the »Eigen-Text«. However, reading should be a dynamic process of exploration and assimilation (in the manner of »Der reitende Leser«), without any

³⁶ On Gawan's sophistication as an intradiegetic narrator, see Pannitschka 2008: 100.

attempt to force analogies or to look for specific answers. In the same way, Pannitschka's closing assertion that »Die erzählte Erzählung von Wolfram kann in der Version Muschgs gelesen werden, eine weitere Version hat der Leser zu schaffen.« (Pannitschka 2008: 101) only holds true with the qualification that such »Version« may look entirely different from either *Parzival* or RR.

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