The Round Table

A Survey of Recent Scholarship in German (2)

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This is a follow up to my earlier survey of research on Arthurian literature written in German for colleagues who do not read German scholarly prose with ease. It covers the years 1993/94 to 2000/2001.

Much work is still done on the 'classical' Arthurian texts (Chrétien de Troyes/Hartmann von Aue: Erec et Enide/Erec, Yvain/Iwein, Chrétien de Troyes/Wolfram von Eschenbach: Perceval/Parzival), with Wolfram of Eschenbach's Parzival once again receiving the lion's share. However, the shift towards research on 'postclassical' Arthurian texts (Ulrich von Zazikhoven, Lanzelet; Heinrich von dem Türlin, Diu Crône; Der Stricker, Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal; Der Pleier, Garêl von dem Blühenden Tal; Prose Lancelet) continues.

The major research topic during recent years has been the question of fictionality, of the relationship between fiction and history in literary texts, and with it the question of the role of the author/narrator and of narration in general. These issues are frequently discussed in the context of the orality/literacy debate. Surprisingly missing—if one thinks of the North American scene—are gender studies. A new approach looks at the Arthurian (and other medieval) texts from the point of view of media theory. The two names to be mentioned here are Horst Wenzel and Haiko Wandhoff.

In 1995 Wenzel published a major study in which he tried to reconstruct the production of vernacular German literary culture as an integral part of a culture of remembrance which realizes itself still to a large degree in immediate personal contact with the carriers of the culture. In 1996 Haiko Wandhoff's 'media historical study of courtly literature' appeared. In this highly theoretical study, he argues for multisensory communication with special emphasis on the visual dimension of oral recital. Both books are not easy to read. However, Wenzel as well as Wandhoff also demonstrate their approach in articles which are more easily accessible.

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In this context, I would also like to draw attention to two articles by Barbara Haupt as they cover similar ground. In one article she analyzes different types of literary memoria as 'cultural remembrances' (J. Assmann), paying special attention to the prologue of Chrétien de Troyes's Erec et Enide. In a second article she investigates from the same point of view examples of ekphrasis in the work of Chrétien de Troyes.
My survey is divided into two parts: first, work done on fictionality and secondly, work done on everything else. In both parts I shall first look at Habilitationsschriften and published doctoral dissertations and then at articles.

In research on fictionality, I begin with three dissertations. Gertrud Grünkorn sets up a set of criteria for fictionality based on speech-act theory that also draws on medieval Latin poetic theory. Matthias Meyer's study is less theoretical. He analyzes several thirteenth-century texts to see what creates fictionality. Both Grünkorn and Meyer had already published articles in which they use the same approaches. Brigitte Burrichter discusses the issue of fictionality mainly in reference to Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chrétien de Troyes. A summary and critique of Burrichter and Grünkorn is contained in an article by Fritz Peter Knapp. Knapp has recently also published a collection of seven previously published articles on fictionality in different kinds of texts together with an afterword in which he briefly summarizes the state of research on this topic.

I now turn to articles on fictionality. Jörg O. Fichte investigates the status of historiography in the rhetorical system of the schools and shows the unclear borderline between fiction and history. Peter Kern argues that one cannot speak of a uniform model of fictionality in the classical and postclassical Arthurian novel. He points out different aesthetic procedures which make the denial of the making conscious of fictionality subject to play with the illusion of reality. Günter Butzer analyzes the problems of texts between orality and literacy. He comes to the conclusion that the transition from orality to literacy has far-reaching consequences for the structures of knowledge as well as for the modes in which these texts are proliferated. Walter Haug, whose book on medieval literary theory was instrumental in starting the fictionality debate, considers this topic in connection with the function of chance. He writes that in the novel of the twelfth century the invention of fictionality and the discovery of personal love go hand-in-hand. These novels discuss how chance, love, and death belong together, demanding reflection rather than mimesis from the reader. The postclassical novel, however, shows a decided dissolution of this linkage. Ricarda Bauschke interprets Le Bel Inconnu as a radical answer to Chrétien in so far as fictionality is made ironic by a collage technique of allusions and new combinations of traditional elements. Christoph Cormeau tries to show how Chrétien and his German successors legitimate a model of success by using the narrator in a new role as a play of fiction. The later novels show that this model can also be used without confirmation by a powerful narrator because the later novels function in the context of the previous ones. Elisabeth Schmid talks in her article on the Estoire del Saint Graal about the securing of fictionality by references to previous texts. This leads in this story to a kind of obsession with writing. Ingrid Strasser looks at fictionality in Hartmann of Aue's Erec. She discusses the validity of the aesthetic categories of Ingarden and Iser for the medieval concept of fiction. Hartmann's novel is understood as an intensive dialogue with the radically new phenomenon of free poetic invention in Chrétien and as a corrective answer to Chrétien. Klaus Ridder, the author of a major study on narration in three courtly novels of the 14th century, discusses fictionality in
Wolfram of Eschenbach’s Parzival. He argues first that the ties to written sources become ambivalent if the sources themselves are fictitious, and that in this way the responsibility of the author becomes prominent. Secondly, giving the author biographical features shows the ambivalent position of narrative distance between the world of the text and the real world. Ambivalence in the technique of literary description creates a consciousness of fictionality. Thomas Rausch demonstrates the stringency of the argumentation on poetic theory in the prologue, the self defence and the Minne excurses, and the image of the bow in Wolfram of Eschenbach’s Parzival, in order to show how in the end the autonomy of fiction is rejected.

Hans Jochen Schiewer deals with the relationship of fictionality and history in Wirnt of Grafenberg’s Wigalois. We see in this novel a new and radical combination of fictional worlds to which are added narrative patterns based on secular history and the history of salvation. This guarantees the exemplary status of the hero in all narrative worlds and demonstrates the universal validity of the transcendental Christian connection. Volker Honemann examines the significance of the introduction of a historical figure for the interpretation of the same novel and for the relationship of fictionality to history in it. Also in an article on Wigalois, Elisabeth Lienert, the author of an exemplary study on narration in Konrad of Würzburg’s Trojanerkrieg, argues that fictionality in this novel is to a large degree identical with intertextuality and authorial referentiality inside the literary system of the courtly novel and not anymore the constitution of meaning in a system of symbolic narration. In an article on the Prose Lancelot, Walter Haug concludes that the Arthurian world in this text comes to an end because the novel frees itself from a fictionality which is subject to an objective principle while it is still not possible to use fictionality as the project of a subject.

I begin my survey of research on a number of diverse topics with two Habilitationsschriften. Maria E. Müller discusses virginal figures in courtly novels of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, pointing out that these move at the borders of male narrative models. Claudia Brinker von der Heyde investigates the role of mothers in several medieval texts, among them Parzival, Wigalois and Lanzelot. According to her the images of mothers are not limited to the actual mothers in the novels as these images are also inherent in the role of the woman as lover and are directed towards sons as well as towards lovers. She maintains that the function of mother figures in the courtly novel is considerably more important than the actual presence of mothers would suggest.

I shall now turn to published doctorial dissertations. Waltraud Fritsch-Rößler asks how love relationships in the courtly novel proceed during the times when lovers are separated. Erdmuthe Döffinger-Lange wrote an extensive and detailed research report on the Gauvain part in Chrétien’s Conte du Graal. Isolde Neugart compares the wooing of Orgeluse in Chrétien and Wolfram von Eschenbach. She uses as tertium comparationis the concept of ‘narrative schema’ which consists of the sequence hero, task, solution, reward. Hartmut Beck establishes in his study on space and movement in Wolfram of Eschenbach’s works that deictic pointers do not provide spatial delimitations but rather are narratorial gestures. Ulrike Draesner
investigates the usefulness of the modern concept of intertextuality for a medieval text. She is able to show that in Parzival it is mainly Gawan who constitutes a reference point for intertextual allusions whereas Parzival, Orzeluse and Herzeloyde are to a large degree excluded from them. Ulrike Grein Gamra analyzes the structure of Wolfram of Eschenbach’s Parzival and attempts to answer the question whether this complex novel is rather a chaotic deterministic system than a linear one. Konstantin Pratelidis compares the world of Arthur and the world of the Grail in Wolfram of Eschenbach’s Parzival. He argues—contrary to the conventional scholarly opinion—that the two worlds are of equal status. In recent years a number of dissertations have appeared which contain extended commentaries to selected sections of Wolfram of Eschenbach’s Parzival. Instead of mentioning them individually, I refer to an article by David Yeandle in which he provides a survey of such commentaries. Yeandle also describes a project for creating a line-by-line bibliographic database for Parzival on CD-ROM. A result of this project is the publication of a first CD-ROM by Yeandle and al. One commentary which appeared after Yeandle’s survey is Gisela Garnerus’s dissertation on the first half of the sixth book. Alfred Raucheisen examines the relationship of Orient and Occident in Wolfram of Eschenbach’s Parzival and Willehalm. Frank Roßnagel describes the changes in German Arthurian novels from Hartmann of Aue to the Pleier and tries to show that these changes do not result from the later authors’ incompetence but that they are conscious and intentional. Regina Pingel provides a close analysis of the prologue to the postclassical Arthurian novel Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal by Der Stricker. Roland Franz Roßbacher studies three postclassical Arthurian novels as a means of communication within the medieval nobility. He comes to the conclusion that Ulrich von Zatzikhoven’s Lanzet voices a serious political statement, Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal by the Stricker a cynical view of the world of politics from the perspective of the hard pressed whereas Gard von dem Blühenden Tal by the Pleier indulges in literary nostalgia. In her dissertation on fairy tale elements in the postclassical Arthurian novel Diu Crône by Heinrich von dem Türlin, Anneget Wagner-Harken attempts to differentiate between fairy tale elements and artistic elements. Johannes Keller’s dissertation belongs into the context of recent attempts to show that the postclassical Arthurian novels, in his case Diu Crône of Heinrich von dem Türlin, are not failed imitations of the classical novels but possess their own aesthetics. He discusses the so-called ‘Wunderketten’ (‘miracle chains’) in Diu Crône, which up to now have caused confusion rather than helped our understanding of the novel. Keller argues that they force the recipient to interpret the text and thus make him an active participant in establishing the meaning of the novel. Hartmut Bleumer in his rather theoretical study also tries to show that the postclassical Arthurian romance Diu Crône by Heinrich von dem Türlin demands active participation on the side of the recipient. Lies, play and comical elements are expressions of its poetic character in which the truth of the text is constituted in a process of interaction with the recipient. Bleumer explains the breaks in the causality of narrative action by establishing a set of organisational principles. Ulrike Zellmann Ulrich discovers through a biographical
Michèle Remakel puts forward the thesis that the three parts of the Prose Lancelot are subject to a coherent design which involves a moral devaluation of Arthurian chivalry and an even more radical rejection of secular love in favour of an eschatologically oriented concern with individual redemption. Cornelia Reil argues that the aspect of dominion has a central function in most parts of the Prose Lancelot. The Prose Lancelot combines the historical description of Arthur in the tradition of Geoffrey of Monmouth with the Arthurian knighthood in the tradition of Chrétien and the concept of salvation in the tradition of Robert de Boron.

I shall now survey articles on diverse texts and topics. Petra Gilroy-Hirtz argues that we find in medieval literary texts of different kinds female spaces as well as forms of female solidarity which constitute a sphere of female action independent from the spheres of male dominance. Corinna Biesterfeldt looks at the relatively few studies which deal specifically with endings in courtly novels and establishes desiderata for further research. Monika Unzeitig-Hertz examines the problems of the endings in Arthurian romances. Hartmut Kugler examines in two articles Hartmann of Aue's Iwein. In one of them he discusses the technique of 'windows' (taken from computer language) and their narratological function. In a second article, he concludes that Iwein rules in his novel the same way as the soul in the body, using terms borrowed from Thomas of Aquinas. Dorothea Kullmann points out that Chrétien's Conte de Graal offers the first known example in French literature of the entrelacement of two plots and shows the novelty of this technique in reference to earlier works by Chrétien. In his article on the crowning of Erec in Chrétien and Hartmann of Aue, Uwe Ruhberg discusses problems of legitimizing independent territorial rulership, of interrelations between reality, metaphor and ideal, and of transcending the concept of Arthurian society as represented in Erec et Enide by succeeding Arthurian romances in Germany. Matthias Meyer suggests in a comparative reading of the beginning of Chrétien's and Hartmann's Erec that a tripartite notion of literary character which evades the character type binary can bring a wider scope to structural interpretation. Martin H. Jones writes that Erec in Hartmann of Aue's novel shows an increasing ability to emphasize with defeated opponents and to find solutions for situations of conflicts which benefit courtly society. Berndt Volkmann compares the quarrel between Keie and Iwein at the beginning of Yvain/Iwein. Hartmann shows considerably more interest in this scene than Chrétien and attempts to integrate Keie and his aggressive behaviour persuasively into the narrative sequence. Friedrich Wolfzettel reexamines the question of the Arthurian 'dual path' scheme which has been considered as a fundamental generic device of the Arthurian romance for some time. According to Wolfzettel the French Arthurian romance is on the whole biographical romance of the enfances type. On the basis of this hypothesis Wolfzettel argues that the practicality of the dual path device in Arthurian criticism is open to question. According to Edith Feistner the fairytale world in the Arthurian novel (Erec) functions as a projection screen for the consciousness of the protagonist's identity. The newly discovered relevance of consciousness is connected with the irreversible break between
the individual and society. Timo Reuvekamp-Felber analyzes the authorial role in prologues and epilogues of vernacular narratives of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Walter Delabar constructs the complexity of a narrated social encounter using as an example the blood drops-in-the-snow episode in Wolfram of Eschenbach's Parzival. Benedikt Jessing maintains that this episode shows the border between the world of Arthur and the world of the Grail. Wolfgang Haurich interprets the story about the death of Gahmuret in Wolfram of Eschenbach's Parzival as told by Tampanis. He shows in a comparison with contemporary burial monuments from reality and literature how the key elements of Gahmuret's life, love and fighting, are made present in his burial monument. The monument and its epitaph are carriers of memoria because Gahmuret prefigures what is fulfilled in Parzival. Manfred Eikelmann attempts a new interpretation of the eighth book of Wolfram of Eschenbach's Parzival leading to new insights for the whole of the novel. Wolfram presents to his audience an open narrative world which develops out of transcending the earlier Arthurian novel centered around a hero. John M. Clifton-Everest reads the eight book of Wolfram of Eschenbach's Parzival in light of a new interpretation of the name Antikonie. He sees her as an unsuccessful precursor of Itonje who in contrast to Antikonie actually manages to reconcile her brother and her lover. Walter Blank investigates whether the categories of melancholy from Burton's Anatomy can be applied to the German Prose Lancelot, Hartmann's Iwein and Wolfram's Parzival. Ulrich Ernst argues that love and violence in Parzival are not to be understood as two different motifs but that we can see a thematic correlation between them. In a second rather theoretical article Ulrich Ernst argues that Parzial is a paradigmatic meta-analytical narrative in which the analytical forms of the narration are part of a highly differentiated metafictionality, simulated evidentiality and structural openness. Barbara Deterich compares the descriptions of Erquelleuse/Orgeluse in Chrétien and Wolfram. The latter shows a tendency to take over traditional pictorial concepts but transcends them. According to Barbara Nitsche the literary significance of Eating and Drinking allows us to see even a very well-researched text as Wolfram of Eschenbach's Parzival in a new way. Friedrich Michael Dimpel discusses the Orgeluse Gawan relationship in Wolfram's Parzival. According to him Gawan's love service is used by Wolfram to test courtly conventions. In an article on Wirnt of Grafenberg's Wigalois Ingrid Hahn writes that there is no conflict between the fulfillment of courtly ideals and the requirements of piety. Peter Kern's article on the same text focuses on the phenomena which form a metadiscourse, reflecting especially on the significance of fortune and the narrative structure of the Arthurian tales. Edit Feistner understands Ulrich of Zatzikhoven's Lanzelet as an ironic answer to the protagonist of the classical Arthurian novel. Ulrich Wyss argues that the logic of the prose romance consists in a permanent attempt to reduce the complexity of the world, an attempt that produces new complications and confusions. He tries to describe the different levels of this process. Joerg O. Fichte investigates the narrative structures of the Morte Artu and Le Morte Arthur, in which the traditional elements aventiure and queste lose their original symbolic function. They are replaced by the movement of the hero from and to the court, the contrast
of public and private spheres, and the hopeless love of Lanzelet to Guinivere. Gerhard Wild describes the changes from the classical Arthurian novel to the Prose Lancelot in which the multiplication of adventure cycles results in a considerable reduction of meaning of the older dual path structure. The 'openness' of this new model towards other genres makes it suitable as a blueprint for the later evolution of romance. Bart Besamusca investigates a Middle Dutch collection of ten Arthurian romances in verse, compiled around 1320. The core of the compilation is made up of three translations of the Old French Prose Lancelot. The compiler inserted into the transitions between the translations seven Middle Dutch Arthurian verse romances. It is shown that—due to the form and the narrative technique of interlacing—the compilation is presented as a coherent unity but a closer look reveals inconsistencies as well. Albert Gier argues that in the late Arthurian verse romance Escanor by Girart d'Amiens the narrative roles of heroes and villains are intentionally confused. Moreover, the linear structure of the narrative is dominated by paradigmatic relations concerning the use of speech; actually, all Arthurian knights talk either too little or too much, praise or depreciate each other excessively. Wolfgang Achnitz edited with an introduction and commentary the postclassical Arthurian novel Gauriel of Muntabel by Konrad of Stoffeln. He describes this novel in an article in which he also discusses the question of the author and to what degree the novel mirrors historical events.

I conclude this survey with a book on Wolfram of Eschenbach's Parzival by Joachim Bumke, probably the foremost Wolfram scholar, that has just appeared. According to the announcement, Bumke begins with an analysis of the blood-drops-in-the-snow episode. He reads the processes of perception in this scene on the background of early scholastic theories of perception and knowledge and then proceeds to look at the question of the significance of perception and knowledge in the whole of Wolfram's work. This leads to a new interpretation of Parzival from the perspective of the hero's limited perception and finally to the problem of the poetics of the novel.

notes
2 This is, of course, not a complete list of 'postclassical' Arthurian novels but a selection, listing the texts on which research has concentrated recently.


8 Gertrud Grünkorn, Die Fiktionalität des höfischen Romans um 1200 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1994).


19 Ricarda Bauschke, 'Auflösung des Artusromans und Defiktionalisierung im "Bel


28 Elisabeth Lienert, Geschichte und Erzählen. Studien zu Konrads von Würzburg 'Troyanerkrieg' (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1996).


49 Hartmut Bleumer, Die ‘Crône’ Heinrich’s vom Türklin. Form-Erfahrung und Konzeption eines späten Artusromans (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997).
59 Ulrike Ruhberg, ‘Die Königskronung Erecs bei Chrétien und Hartmann im Kontext arthurischer
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<td>'Die Blutstropfenepisode. Ein Versuch zu Wolframs Parzival,’ bickelwort und wildiu maere, pp. 120–43.</td>
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87 Joachim Bumke, Die Blutstropfen im Schnee. Über Wahrnehmung und Erkenntnis im ‘Parzival’ Wolframs von Eschenbach (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001). I should also mention in this context the 7th, completely revised edition of Bumke’s Wolfram von Eschenbach (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1997). This is an excellent introduction to the works of Wolfram of Eschenbach and to the research on Wolfram.