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By

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Committee in charge:

Professor Niklaus Largier, Chair
Professor Lilla Balint
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Abstract

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This dissertation examines scenes of reading – a literary motif where one or more figures are portrayed in the act of reading – in German literature from the High Middle Ages to today. Against the pressure to interpret such scenes as depictions of historic or exemplary reading practices, I analyze them as imaginative theorizations of reading, as nexuses of imagery, form, and content that reflect on, explicate, and influence the role of reading in a textual culture. As an integral part of a text's poetical structure, these scenes render the reading process visible, exposing it to critique and reflection. In my analysis of several texts, including a medieval Arthurian romance, a late medieval devotional text, a nineteenth-century novella, and a contemporary narrative of migration, I demonstrate how the matrix of people, practices, and technologies that constitute reading scenes have affected and continue to affect popular as well as academic discourses on this fundamental cultural practice. By elucidating the theoretical and meaning-making capacities of scenes of reading, my project offers a unique approach to the study of reading: it incorporates the diversity of historic reading practices with the symbolic potency of reading's representation to explicate reading's poetological role in literature.

For those who taught me to read. // Für die, die mir das Lesen beigebracht haben.

Wer hât mich guoter ûf getân?
sî ez iemen der mich kan
beidiu lesen und verstên,
der sol genâde an mir begên,
ob iht wandels an mir sî,
daz er mich doch lâze vrî
valscher rede: daz êret in.

Wigalois, 1-7

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Introduction

Scenes of Reading

In the act of reading, various cognitive, biological, and social competencies are combined with complex operations of sign recognition, pattern building, and language computation to elicit imaginative, intellectual, aesthetic, and emotional responses.[1] Reading is a fundamental cultural technology that has been institutionalized in our educational, religious, economic, and legal apparatuses, yet in today's information and knowledge-based society, it remains in many respects enigmatic: scientists are just beginning to uncover the neurological process of recognizing, decoding, and connecting meaning to the shape of letters, the sounds of syllables, and the context of words;[2] educators continue to debate the best way to teach children and adults to read;[3] and media theorists, literary scientists, psychologists, and linguists are exploring the effects of digital reading, the most recent disruptive media transformation in the history of reading.[4] These fundamental internal processes of reading – how written symbols are transformed into discernible thoughts, bodily reactions, and tangible actions – are a black box[5] of cognitive processing that, ironically, incites the curiosity and excites the imagination of many.

Reading is popularly imagined and normatively encoded as an individual, internal process. In their introduction to the *PMLA* special edition on reading cultures, Diedre Shauna Lynch and Evelyne Ender express how odd it is to see someone reading and not be privy to what is happening in the reader's mind:

> Watching someone else get lost in a book and become riveted by its words or story is a baffling and estranging experience…Barred from an unmediated knowledge of the

[1] Honold and Parr, "Einleitung: Lesen," 19.

[2] See Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain*; Rautenberg and Schneider, *Lesen: Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*; Honold and Parr, *Grundthemen der Literaturwissenschaft: Lesen.*

[3] See, for example, the theories and methodologies section of *PMLA* 130, no. 3 (2015); Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain*; Goldstein, "In the Fight."

[4] See Baron, *How We Read Now* and *Words Onscreen*; Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain*; Wolf, *Reader, Come Home*; Hayles, "How We Read"; Piper, *Book Was There*; Lauer, *Lesen im digitalen Zeitalter*; Carr, *The Shallows*.

[5] The "black box" is a favorite metaphor for scholars of reading including Matthias Bickenbach who describes the entire reader as a black box, because their reading cannot be scientifically observed. Bickenbach, *Von der Möglichkeiten*, 4. Nicolas Pethes extends the black box to include reading's material exterior as well as its mental operations, because reading – as opposed to writing – leaves behind no trace. Pethes, "Leseszenen," 108. The image of a black box, however, is based on the no-longer practiced psychological behaviorism of the mid-twentieth century that did not believe anything could be observed or said about the internal life of humans or animals and therefore focused on reading as a passive decoding of meaning. Given the advances of cognitive psychology and neuroscience as well as the attendant shift in our understanding of reading toward active meaning-making, the black box metaphor has lost its relevance and scientific usefulness. For the development from psychological behaviorism to cognitive neurosciences as it pertains to research on reading, see Brem and Maurer, "Ansätze der Kognitiven Neurowissenschaften"; Pfeiffer, "Psychologische Dimensionen des Lesens," 464. Julika Griem concisely explains how the image of the black box is misleading: for artistic and intellectual reading practices, she argues, the metaphor enables undisciplined creativity to feed off the implied inaccessibility of reading while utilitarian forms of reading can continually fill the black box with stipulations. Griem, *Szenen des Lesens*, 16. Interestingly, Andrew Piper uses the metaphor not to describe readers but our digital devices. These devices, he argues, are functional but sealed off from human understanding by our own ignorance of how they work, making the black box a human construction that could be illuminated, if only we had the will to. Piper, *Book Was There*, viii.

> content of that response, we are limited to inferring that reading is happening. We observe manual operations – the turning of pages, for example – but the mental operations they accompany remain inaccessible.[6]

Despite various cognitive models and attempts to chart the internal processing of reading through external phenomena, the intrinsic functioning of the reader's mind and the world in which the reader mentally sojourns while reading remain difficult if not impossible to deduce from external observation.[7] This relative fact, however, often overlooks just how meaningful the "manual operations" of reading are, even if they do not correspond directly to the "mental operations" of reading.

Rainer Maria Rilke's 1908 poem "Der Leser" captures the intricate relationship between both the cognitive and somatic operations of reading:

Wer kennt ihn, diesen, welcher sein Gesicht	Who knows this one who turns his face
wegsenkte aus dem Sein zu einem zweiten,	away from his own being toward this thing
das nur das schnelle Wenden voller Seiten	that only a page, by hastily turning,
manchmal gewaltsam unterbricht?	sometimes forcibly seems to erase?
Selbst seine Mutter wäre nicht gewiss,	Even his mother might not be persuaded
ob *er* es ist, der da mit seinem Schatten	it is he, reading what soaks in his shadow.
Getränktes liest. Und wir, die Stunden hatten,	And we, who have hours, how could we know
was wissen wir, wieviel ihm hinschwand, bis	just how much of him had already faded,
er mühsam aufsah: alles auf sich hebend,	lost since he wearily looked up from the page
was unten in dem Buche sich verhielt,	lifting the heavy substance of his book,
mit Augen, welche, statt zu nehmen, gebend	with eyes that do not grasp but gently nudge
anstießen an die fertig-volle Welt:	the full and finished world they have just ranged–
wie stille Kinder, die allein gespielt,	as quiet children who play in some lone nook
auf einmal das Vorhandene erfahren;	grow suddenly adept with what is at hand–
doch seine Züge, die geordnet waren,	but his expression, in his tight command,
blieben für immer umgestellt.[8]	remained forever and ever changed.[9]

On the one hand, Rilke's reader is enigmatic: immersed in a second existence between the pages of his book, he is unfamiliar, even unrecognizable to his own mother. On the other hand, the externally observable elements of Rilke's reader – his manual operations and physical responses – relay his reading experience in meaningful gestures and images: the lowered head marks a transportation to a second existence; the reader's shadow marks his physical presence and his mental absence; his raised eyes recognizably give to the world what he has read; and his rearranged facial features are visible traces of the lasting effects of his reading. Rilke's poem portrays the phenomenology of textual experiences by building connections between the body, the book, and mind of the reader, interweaving the external with the internal.

Undeniably, the imagery of Rilke's poem – the lowered head, the shadow, the refigured facial features – imbues the reading process with an air of mystery. The rhyming lines entice us

[6] Lynch and Ender, "Time for Reading," 1074.
[7] Honold and Parr, "Einleitung: Lesen," 8.
[8] Rilke, *New Poems*, 434.
[9] Ibid., 435.

to observe, yet the poem does not lend us a full, satisfying picture of the reader. There is instead a tension between the unknown, the estranging black box of the reader's cognitive reading process and the unmistakable familiarity of this scene and its activity. The tension begins in the poem's tongue-in-cheek opening line, "Wer kennt ihn, diesen…," a riff on the common phrase *wer kennt ihn nicht* (who does not know him). The rhetorical question implies, ironically, that we all know this person; we have all undoubtedly seen someone reading before, met someone who has been affected by their reading; in fact, that person is very likely ourself. Because the expected *nicht* is withheld, we read the stanza further, becoming immersed in our reading. We, therefore, could be the subject of Rilke's poem because the poem's opening question is general; it posits an anonymous, generic (masculine, it must be said) person that could be anyone, indeed anyone of us. But, in an instant, *der Leser* is also concretized – "diesen," this one right here is the subject of Rilke's lyric, and just as quickly, we, the readers of this poem, are turned into onlookers, observers, objectifiers. This tension between the general and the specific mirrors the tension between the familiar and the estranging that makes this reading scene simultaneously immersive and reflective.

"Der Leser" is a creative rhetorical construction in contrast to the real-world encounters with readers that Ender and Lynch were discussing. It is the poem's words, artful composition, and poetic form that infuse the reader's body and actions with meaning; it is a narrative act that shapes a scene and channels our gaze through it. It is the constellation of imagery and rhetoric that establishes a discourse and lets us anchor our personal experience in something that is still not quite our own. Lynch and Ender, speaking specifically of the novel, recognize the ability of literature to vividly present the experience of reading: "…a novel can put its reader inside the consciousness of a character who is reading in his or her turn. Mysteriously, almost miraculously, this genre can enable us to read as though we were someone else – to apprehend, even as we ourselves read, how words on a page or screen put that other mind [and body!] in motion too."[10] In literary representations of reading, we can experience someone else reading while we ourselves are reading. Such scenes present the physical, emotional, social, historical, and cognitive effects of reading. They construct specific figures reading specific texts in specific surroundings allowing us not only to observe, experience, and at times critique the portrayed act of reading, but also, as second-order readers, "to reflect on the phenomenology of our textual experiences at the same time we are having them."[11]

Rilke's portrayed reader is just one example in a large archive of aesthetic representations of reading. The depiction of reading has a long history in literature as well as in the plastic arts, theater, film, television, and even social media.[12] Its popularity in all artistic mediums is proof not only of reading's cultural importance but also its artistic expressiveness as a theme, a topos, and an image. Just the ability to read can mark social, educational, or religious status; the act of reading can be revolutionary or reactionary, emancipatory or subjugating, moralistic or transgressive, enlightening or debilitating. Depictions of reading draw on all these possibilities, making the image of the reader a potently malleable icon. In some ways, these characterizations of reading are grounded in historical evidence, but they are more consequently grounded in the collective discourse around reading, in the way this cultural technology is talked about, discussed, and represented in the past years, decades, centuries, and millennia. Representations of reading simultaneously react to and influence the reading behaviors of their time: they

[10] Lynch and Ender, "Time for Reading," 1074.
[11] Ibid.
[12] See Friedrich, "Repräsentation des Lesens."

comment on, criticize, and caricature empirical reading behaviors; they support trends and conceive alternative possibilities; they formulate models, hopes, fears, and fantasies concerning reading, while developing intertextual conversations about reading practices.[13]

Rilke's poem and Lynch and Ender's comments exemplify a modern preoccupation with the individual and their internal realization of reading, whereas the recent work of Karin Littau, for example, analyses similar representations that reveal reading to be not just a sense- but also a sensation-making practice.[14] Representations of reading do not just reflect on the individual – both body and mind – but also extend outward away from the individual into relations among groups, societies, and nations, even to the super-natural or transcendental, and they can comment on, inform, and drive discourses around education, media, politics, and religion in addition to literature, fictionality, and aesthetics. The portrayal of reading is thus a two-way street: it can show the influence of external stimuli and can exert formative pressures on external structures.

This study analyzes the depiction of reading in literature in order to understand why this cultural practice has been such a prevalent object of literary representation and how it functions as a theme, topos, and image in literary works. Representations in literature are the focus, because literature, as compared to paintings, sculpture, or film, must be read. Therefore, it inherently has a reflexive and self-constructive potential on various levels, including the mediatic, practical, and poetic. By portraying acts of reading, literary texts comment on their own nature and the matrix of people, practices, technologies, and customs that determine their existence and impact. Reading, in its recognizability and its symbolic power, is a potent object of literary representation that can take on many forms: characters can be described as religious, intellectual, or frivolous readers to quickly create a basic profile; the reading of letters or diaries, hidden messages or religious texts can build pivotal plot points; filled with books and readers, schools, monasteries, libraries, and cafés can become telling settings for novels; and mentions of literary titles or famous protagonists in narration or dialogue build intertextual allusions. The possibilities for representing reading and all its cultural, social, personal, and political implications are seemingly inexhaustible.

My analysis focuses on one specific means of representing reading: scenes of reading, moments in texts where one or more figures are portrayed in the act of reading. The basic outline of such scenes is remarkably stable over the course of literary history while their details vary infinitely. They combine a reader and text in specific spatial and historical contexts where bodies, codices, furniture, and weather can all take on meaning and express nuance, as can historically-specific reading methods, instruments, and technologies. Each portrayed reader has the potential to be a type representing a sea of similar readers, or an islanded individual completely unique in their mode of reading, or the product of social pressures and realities. The setting can express bourgeois ease, religious devotion, teenage angst, or existential peril while surrounding props can become instruments of reading, accessories of an aestheticized life, or tools for survival. Reading scenes are compact formal devices dense with potential meaning, making them particularly susceptible to close analysis. The scenic structure can make these portrayed acts of reading appear self-enclosed, detachable from the rest of the text, offering potentially extractable poetic theorizations. But such scenes inevitably interweave into the text as a whole, too, building complex poetic reflections operable at various diegetic, extradiegetic, and theoretical levels.

Although the topos has been in practical usage in western literature for millennia, scenes

[13] Stocker, *Vom Bücherlesen*, 37-8 and 45.
[14] Littau, *Theories of Reading*.

of reading have been recognized as a discrete object of literary study only recently and mostly in German literary studies. The explicit label *Leseszene* has several advantages in that it defines an object of study different from, for example, reading protagonists or editorial fictions, and it provides a common basis for comparing such scenes across texts, genres, and time periods, enabling the juxtaposition of texts not normally read together.[15] The term also has theoretical consequences in that it calls attention to fundamental features of the topos and outlines a framework for its interpretation. By denoting them as "scenes," for example, the label implies boundaries and self-containment, it evokes the dramatic arts and its cross-pollination with literary aesthetics, and it creates a position for an observer.

The definition for the scene of reading emerged from previous work on its close relative, the writing scene or *Schreibszene*. A basic definition for the reading scene, analogous to the writing scene, is any description of the objective complexity of the reading process portrayed in reading situations that are to be understood in their historically specific context and their immediate surroundings.[16] A more theoretically oriented and poetologically fruitful definition is derived from Rüdiger Campe's description of the writing scene. Drawing on Roland Barthes's concept of *écriture*, the intransitive act of writing, Campe posits the writing scene as an unstable ensemble of language, instrumentality, and gesture, a tension-filled interaction that morphs throughout cultural history.[17] Campe sees the writing scene as a self-enclosed moment in which writing reflects on itself by playing out the moment of writing and following the marks the body leaves on the page with writing instruments. Based on Barthes and Campe, Nicolas Pethes describes the reading scene as the staging of bodily acts in handling the materiality of symbolic structures and media-technological instruments.[18] As with scenes of writing, these three elements – body, textual artifact, and language – are combined in innumerable iterations to build scenes of reading that draw attention to the physicality of reading, its situatedness, and its effects; these combinations, despite being neither stable nor theoretically generalizable, are phenomenologically meaningful as the practical act of reading continually reconfigures the relationship between the individual elements. In contrast to writing scenes, however, the act of reading does not always leave material or symbolic traces – bodily gestures are not turned into text; instead, text provokes bodily gestures.[19] The intransitive quality of this conception of reading enforces reflection on reading and the individual reader. Reading for the sake of reading makes it evident that to read literature always means the reading of reading itself, namely, questioning the point and process of reading literature. Such a focus on the act of reading as both the object of representation and of critical reflection delineates the scene of reading as a self-enclosed moment of self-commentary.

The literary reading scene for Pethes enacts above all its self-referentiality and its self-sufficiency; it offers the opportunity to read reading itself and, in this self-referentiality, to

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[15] In this study, I do not adopt the distinction between *Leseszene* and *Lese-Szene* drawn from Stingelin's *Schreibszene* and *Schreib-Szene* distinction, where the former is the umbrella term and the latter is reserved for such scenes that introduce elements that obstruct the writing or reading process, respectively, and thereby thematize, problematize, and reflect on the acts of reading or writing. This distinction is heuristic but difficult to apply to specific textual examples, because, in my view, obstruction ("Widerstand") is not the only way in which a *Leseszene* can thematize, problematize, or reflect on the act of reading. See Stingelin, "Schreiben. Einleitung," 15; Hron, Kita-Huber, and Schulte, "Leseszenen (in) der Literatur," 16n9.

[16] Benne, *Die Erfindung des Manuskripts*, 607.

[17] Campe, "Die Schreibszene," 760. See also Horn, Kita-Huber, and Schulte, "Leseszenen (in) der Literatur," 18.

[18] Pethes, "Leseszenen," 108.

[19] Ibid.

recognize the basis of this traditions-forming culture technology.[20] However, we should heed Julika Griem's warning that academically educated readers, especially those who engage in research on reading, have a tendency to generalize and to singularize based on their own training and routines, leading to particular modes of reading being marked as normative.[21] I understand her critique of Pethes to be directed at his increased focus on the internalization of reading within literary scenes of reading, which downplays if not ignores other modes of reading that would grant the reading scene influence over and connection to external cultural or societal issues. Günther Stocker recognizes the larger societal issues to which reading is connected when, in his study of reading scenes in post-1945 German-language literature,[22] he considers the political and social influences of the texts he analyzes, whether they be fascism and totalitarianism or western social constructions of childhood. He combines this awareness with considerations of media-systems and environments contemporary to his textual objects, thereby offering a broadened understanding of reading scenes as commentaries on, critiques of, and catalysts for social, political, and media evolution.

My work will demonstrate that it is the literary form of reading scenes that enables them to equally reflect inwardly on the practice of reading and project externally on related cultural issues, practices, and discourses. Part of this ability is derived from its relatively restricted and concentrated mode of representation. Scenes of reading are restricted by the representability of reading: only the external elements of reading – the body, the book, the setting – and not the process of interpretation or imagination are representable. However, in this limitation, reading scenes draw focus to the reading materials – the corporeal reader, the material text, and the physical surroundings – that frame and facilitate any cognitive reading processes.[23] These scenes become concentrated sites of sense-making, producing both meaning and sensation, as readers, texts, media-technologies, and settings are infused with symbolic meaning manipulated anew in the staging and narrativization of every individual scene. The iconographic meaning of a handwritten or printed book, a religious codex, or a loose-leaf manuscript, the pregnant semantic possibilities of the human body, and the loaded connotations of particular spaces are dramatized and developed differently in every scene of reading leading to individual statements about reading, its effects on the individual and society, and its relation to other pressing issues.

With this great flexibility, variability, and expressiveness, the scene of reading provides a unique case study for how reading as a primary cultural technology and an everyday activity goes from an object of literary representation to a catalyst for aesthetic and societal reflection. My main argument is that scenes of reading make this leap from fundamental cultural tool to critical device by presenting reading in ways that seem familiar, but simultaneously alienating. Reading scenes create a tension between these opposite feelings by presenting reading as a cultural practice familiar for the surrounding context, but leaving it as a somewhat mysterious practice, whose workings and effects are not entirely transparent. In the poem by Rilke, for example, this tension is created through a portrait of the reader that vacillates between familiarizing and defamiliarizing images to portray a reader with whom we feel we can identify, but who is also enigmatic enough to create a critical distance. This tension between the recognizable and the alien is the key element that propels a reading scene from being a mere narrative description to a device of reflection and critique. The familiar images and tropes draw

[20] Pethes, "Leseszenen," 130-32.
[21] Griem, *Szenen des Lesens*, 16.
[22] Stocker, *Vom Bücherlesen*.
[23] Pethes, "Leseszenen," 112.

the empirical reader into the text, encouraging her to identify with the reading character and connect through their shared activity, while the unfamiliar elements of the reading scenes and characterizations of the fictional reader cause the reader to pause and consider just how similar her situation is to that of the reading protagonist. If the identification between readers is not disturbed, then the portrayal of reading and the empirical reader's mode of reading elude notice and do not rise to a level of critical reflection. But when the familiarizing and alienating forces collide, the reading scene exploits this tension into a poetics of reading.

The poetics of reading is an analysis of the ways in which literary texts poetically create the potential for reflection on the reading process and/or performatively render it visible, usually in order to make a theoretical or critical statement about reading, its materiality, processuality, efficacy, and/or authenticity.[24] A text builds its poetics of reading through various illustrations and thematizations of reading; perhaps the text depicts the protagonist reading his favorite poem, relates two characters discussing the latest novels they have read, or has a narrator who directly addresses the reading audience. A text's poetics of reading is necessarily related to the text's desire and need to be read. It guides the audience's reading, it drives consumption of the text perhaps by freeing the reader from previous reading tropes, by inciting critical reflection on the reading process, or even by entrapping the reader in an inescapable reading logic. A focus then on the poetics of reading through a close analysis of reading's representation in literature opens up another way for analyzing reading besides the history of readers and reading, individual text reception histories, reading as motive, and reader-response theories.

Scenes of reading can constitute a fundamental part of their text's reading poetics. The reading scenes and the reading poetics of a text are intertwined in a hermeneutic circle, where the reading scenes function as individual examples that build towards the general poetics while the larger poetics guide and determine any interpretation of individual reading scenes. When the tension between familiarity and estrangement arises in individual reading scenes, it asks for resolution in the larger poetics of reading. It is then often the original tension in the scenes of reading that provokes reflection on the act and practice of reading. On the one hand, this reflection is anchored in the text's understanding of its textuality and its reliance on a reading audience. On the other hand, it revolves around the actual reader, creating a need for them to consider their reading practices and those that the text is encouraging or demanding. This reflection is first focused on the presentation of reading in the text, perhaps a privileged mode of reading supported by the text.

The texts I analyze here all put forward a poetics of reading that constructs a particular readership. The scenes of reading are pivotal in this work because they both present a privileged mode of reading and draw the empirical reader into it. Important to this argument are the dramatic and theatrical connotations of the "scene" in "reading scene." These often ekphrastic descriptions of reading have a theatrical quality as they describe settings almost like stage settings. Here, I draw on Christian Benne's resuscitation of this meaning of "scene" from the *Schreib-* and *Leseszenen* discussions through Derrida's notion of the "scène de l'écriture." Derrida conceptualizes writing as a tangle of practices, materials, and discourses that the writer cannot entirely comprehend, causing the writer to lose control over the writing process and the act of writing to perform itself as a kind of stage play.[25] The German translation of Derrida's

[24] My definition is based on similar definitions of the poetics of writing derived from theorizations of writing scenes and on Matthias Bickenbach's "Lesepoetologie." See Lubkoll and Öhlschläger, "Einleitung," 13; Bickenbach, *Von den Möglichkeiten*, 178-9.

[25] Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing"; Benne and Hron, "Gespräch über das Lesen," 72.

term, "Schauplatz der Schrift," and Benne's appropriation of it into "Schauplatz des Lesens" highlight the act of reading and the reading scene as a show, an exhibition (*die Schau*), something to be viewed (*schauen*) in a very specific place (*Platz*). If the reading scene is theatrical, then it implies or, more emphatically stated, requires an audience, a viewer, an observer.

Scenes of reading both rely on and manipulate this need for an audience. As each of the analyzed texts demonstrates, reading scenes and the resulting poetics of reading are used to construct a viewer and a reader. By intertwining narrative, imagery, and form, these texts illustrate and then encourage distinct modes of reading. In one medieval Arthurian romance, for example, I show how the text incorporates the mode of its own reception – somewhere between orality and textuality – into its scenes of reading to construct a productive and engaged audience. In a medieval devotional text, the sensuous imagery in scenes of reading encourage the creation of a community of somatic readers. A nineteenth-century confessional story uses a scene of reading to draw the reader into the subjecting form of reading that the protagonist practices and encodes in his text. A twenty-first century migration narrative uses reading scenes to break down the distinction between various narrative levels, effectively constructing a readership forced to read transgressively against literary, narrative, and personal boundaries. By manipulating the kind of reading that takes place and thereby the kind of reader involved, these texts both explore the modes of reading practiced throughout history and portray the effects modes of reading have on diverse cultural, social, religious, and political topics.

The main effect of these scenes of reading is to confound distinctions between the narrative levels of each text. Through narrators or formal devices, immersive imagery or allusions to the empirical world, the analyzed scenes of reading dissolve the boundaries between internal diegetic levels and the boundaries between the narrative and empirical worlds. By resolving these boundaries, the texts force their readers to take on (or actively resist) constructive and interpretive boundary work.[26] This work – setting up boundaries between text and context, fiction and reality, protagonist and reader – establishes context, makes analogies, and defines possible interpretations making it a type of meaning-making work. By pushing this task onto the reader – a reader that is simultaneously being molded by the text – these scenes of reading mark reading as an act just as constitutive of the text and its possible meanings as writing.

In its methodology and aims, this project brings together two academic traditions from German and North American literary studies. It analyzes literature from the German-speaking areas of Central Europe and is therefore informed by the long tradition of research on reading in German-language scholarship. German literature has a rich history in the portrayal of reading that grapples with literary and intellectual movements and technological innovations. Whether in its conceptualization of courtly culture, religious reformation, Enlightenment ideals, Romanticism, and modern political ideologies, or its confrontation with the deluge of information enabled by the printing press and later the internet and commodified by market capitalism, German literary culture has continually reached for representations of reading to portray, critique, and imagine society, its challenges, and its futures. Previously the place of influential historical studies of reading[27] and *Rezeptionsästhetik* (reader-response theory),[28]

[26] I rely on Leslie Adelson's concept of boundary work as she derives it from the narrative theory of David Herman. See Adelson, *The Turkish Turn*, 50; Herman, *Story Logic*.

[27] Two prime examples of German social histories of reading are Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser* and Schön, *Der Verlust der Sinnlichkeit*.

[28] See, for example, various works by Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss.

current German-language scholarship in literary sciences – thanks to shifts toward *Kulturwissenschaft* and "German media theory" – largely approaches reading from cultural, communications, and media theoretical perspectives. In particular, the transformation in media and communication technology has prompted a large-scale reassessment of what reading is and how it functions, as well as an increased focus on the methods and technologies that enable reading.

Rüdiger Campe's 1991 essay, "Die Schreibszene, Schreiben," is indicative of the transition from post-structural critique of hermeneutics to communications and media theory in that it analyzes writing as a non-stable ensemble of language, instrumentality, and gesture that acknowledges the instabilities and ambiguities writing and its thematization in literature effect in poetics, genre, rhetoric, and media history without creating a standardized way of interpreting scenes of writing.[29] Campe's conceptualization of the *Schreibszene* opened up the methodological possibility to question the heterogenous constituent factors and participants of writing as a non-self-evident framing.[30] The *Leseszene* research has grown out of the *Schreibszene*-paradigm and the subsequent praxeological, epistemological, cultural-technical, and media-use questions, with the first attempts at a codification of the *Leseszene* in the early twenty-first century.[31] The first work on scenes of reading in German scholarship focused, much like earlier work on reading protagonists, on the German novel. The analysis of reading scenes has remained largely centered on literature around 1800, when the novel emerged as an autonomous artwork highlighting its potential for self-referentiality, a focus for which the thematization and representation of reading was well-suited. This explains, I believe, the overwhelming scholarly focus on intransitive reading and its creative theorization in scenes of reading. The reading scene as an object of academic analysis has gained traction in the German-language literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but it has found little to no traction in pre-modern German literature.[32]

Meanwhile, American literary scholarship has yet to receive and engage the *Schreib-* or *Leseszene* paradigm and approaches reading currently from a self-critical perspective interested in questioning established reading and interpretive practices. Prefigured by critiques of hermeneutics, which dominated literary studies for much of the twentieth century, the current conversation has a much broader scope, not just critiquing past reading practices and methodologies but also proposing new (and recognizing older) practices greatly influenced by feminist, queer, post-colonial, and critical race studies as well as new formalism and affect theory. Besides the ubiquitous forms of *critical* and *close* reading, a myriad of new reading methods have been suggested including *symptomatic*, *reparative, distant, surface, hyper, postcritical*, and *cosmopolitan*, among others.[33] The productivity of this discourse demonstrates that the way academics read is fundamental to everything else they do.[34] The academic

[29] Klausmeyer, Krauß, and Wankhammer, "Scenes of Writing," 966.
[30] Giuriato, "(Mechanisiertes) Schreiben," 7.
[31] Spoerhase, "Die spätromantische Lese-Szene"; Benne, *Die Erfindung des Manuskripts*, 600–614.
[32] See Stocker, *Vom Bücherlesen*, "'Lesen' als Thema," and "Lesebilder und Mediengeschichte"; also several essays in Hron, Kita-Huber, and Schulte, *Leseszenen*.
[33] See Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*; Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading"; Moretti, *Distant Reading*; Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction"; Hayles, "How We Read"; Felski, *The Limits of Critique*; Mani, *Cosmopolitical Claims*.
[34] The awareness of the centrality of reading has even catalyzed interventions into debates on teaching reading at the primary and secondary level since today's elementary students are tomorrow's college students and future scholars. See the theories and methodologies feature of *PMLA* 130, no. 3 (2015).

conversation is shifting away from suspicious modes of reading bent on uncovering hidden meaning towards exploring reading methods that reveal and enable the meaning-making potentialities of reading.

My project aims to contribute to both academic environments in that it shows how the topos of reading derives its symbolic meaning from the fact that reading is a cultural practice/technology, but also how scenes of reading can affect that cultural practice in that they create, present, and reimagine possible modes, means, and methods of reading. They then draw a line from the cultural practice of reading and its methodology to larger related social, political, cultural issues. Additionally, the texts selected for analysis expand the corpus of reading scenes beyond the classical German novel to both pre-modern and contemporary literature, a move that productively questions the assumption that only reading scenes around 1800 can portray consequential, nuanced poeticizations of literary, communicative, and media relations. Each selected text presents a specific type of reading scene in which the text being read by the fictional character is the same text being read by the empirical reader. As a sort of sub-category of the reading scene, these constellations amplify the potential mediatic, textual, and poetic self-referentiality of the reading scene. They also demonstrate conclusively how reading scenes have always been involved in the construction and manipulation of a text's readership, making these scenes well-suited comparisons with the more famous reading scenes of the German novel from around 1800.

My analyses of *Venus im Pelz*, the 1870 novella by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, and the 2008 novel *Der falsche Inder* by Abbas Khider demonstrate how the tropes of reading protagonists and scenes of reading present in the novel around 1800 are developed, ironized, and undercut in subsequent eras. The inclusion of the high medieval Arthurian romance *Iwein* (c. 1203) by Hartmann von Aue and the late medieval devotional text *Legatus divinae pietatis* (c. 1300) extends the history of the reading scene, demonstrating that many of its features and themes were in common usage long before European modernization. The expansive temporal range that these texts cover is intentional so that the similarities in the representation and functionality of reading scenes can be made apparent. At the same time, each text is historically contextualized within the pertinent technologies, media, practices, and discourses surrounding reading at the time of composition and publication. This long historical view should demonstrate the flexibility and viability of an analysis of representations of reading across the centuries and justify the use of scenes of reading as a literary technical object that contributes to a broader poetological understanding.

The analysis of these texts through the lens of scenes of reading serves as an introduction for a North American scholarly audience to the communication, cultural, and media questions these scenes address through reading,[35] while also providing literary illustrations of the diversity of reading methods, which have mostly been reserved for academic reading practices and scholarly theorizations. The title of each chapter is a play on the recent explosion of newly proposed methods of scholarly reading not meant to belittle the important theoretical and methodological work terms like reparative, close, surface, suspicious, and distant reading do or to add more terms to the critical arsenal, but to highlight and reflect the diversity of reading methods that have been imagined and portrayed in creatively theorized forms by the texts we read. My project also aims to infuse this North American methodological discussion into German

[35] *Die Schreibszene* was only very recently introduced into the North American scholarly discourse through *MLN* 136 (2021), which includes a translation of Campe's article along with several original essays – including another one by Campe – on the writing scene.

literary studies and challenge the normalized, unmarked bourgeois model of reading that reigns unquestioned in the popular imagination of both societies on either side of the Atlantic.

Each chapter also addresses a different topic traditionally associated with reading. The first chapter on *Iwein*, for example, shows that one does not have to wait until the eighteenth century to recognize gendered reading. The inclusion of the *Legatus* in this study makes explicit the role of religion in the development of reading methods and the role of reading in medieval monastic Christianity. Love and eroticism are themes frequently tied to reading, especially scenes of reading, and *Venus im Pelz* exaggerates and perverts these themes. *Venus im Pelz* and *Der falsche Inder* both engage reading as a means for subject and identity formation that preoccupied the reading protagonists in the classical German novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. My analyses do not exhaust these individual topics, but they introduce them as meaningful and relevant topics associated with the portrayal and dramatization of reading.

In my first chapter, "Scenes of Imaginative Reading: Vernacular Storytelling and Reception in *Iwein*," I explore the representation of reading at a moment of great cultural, media, and literary transformation: the European High Middle Ages. In Hartmann von Aue's Arthurian romance, a series of episodes strung together by a motif of reading and storytelling provides a commentary on the narrative and fictional qualities of the text. By focusing on the narrative roles readers and reading fulfill within these fictional constructs and the text-internal meaning they create, a critical model of reading for the implicit theorization of the courtly romance emerges. Reading in *Iwein* takes on a metapoetic function as it turns the knight's *âventiure* into a metaphor for literary activity. In this way, the scenes of reading are more than moments of exemplarity or historical evidence, they become tools of implicit theorization within imaginative literature. In fact, these moments of reading – in the broader productive medieval understanding of the term – articulate a theory of literature as a practice capable of both cultural production and critique.

The second chapter, "Scenes of Sensuous Reading: The Devoted Reader and Her Praxis in the *Legatus divinae pietatis*," elucidates the relationship between reading and sensual experiences of the divine as portrayed by a group of nuns in German-speaking lands at the turn of the fourteenth century. In the *Legatus,* scenes of reading are presented in which hypothetical and specific readers are portrayed in various states of divine union enabled by sensual readings of the book. My analysis focuses on the privileging of the book as a material, sensible object that not only represents but also embodies the divine, and it considers medieval conceptualizations of the human sensorium to explain how devotional reading was a communal, physical, and mystical practice for these women at Helfta. I argue that the *Legatus* portrays a form of devotional reading that invokes all the senses in an effort to unite the book, the reader, and her community with the divine. Drawing on medieval conceptualizations of the human sensorium and monastic reading practices, my analysis of the sensual language and evocative imagery in the *Legatus*'s scenes of reading explicates the sensuous reading practices that the *Legatus*'s writers portrayed as fundamental to their communal devotional lives.

In chapter 3, "Scenes of Subjecting Reading: Fashioning the Masochist in *Venus im Pelz*," I extract a subjecting poetics of reading from the depiction of the male masochistic fantasy in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's late nineteenth-century novella. I demonstrate how masochism as a fundamentally educational relationship between victim and torturer, as defined by Deleuze, is reflected in and constitutive of the poetics of reading that *Venus im Pelz* enacts. I argue through a Foucauldian understanding of subjection as subject-formation that Sacher-Masoch's novella portrays and enacts a subjecting reading poetics – a particular means of subject-

formation through reading that can be historically situated within the reading debates of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, specifically the *Lesesucht* and *Lesewut* debates and the rise of the modern German novel. The subjecting poetics of reading is portrayed through the novella's style, its imagery, and its content, while its form enacts and perpetuates the poetics it displays. In the end, Sacher-Masoch's novella turns the structures of the masochistic male fantasy into a replicable and repeatable textual practice for each and every reader.

In the final chapter, "Scenes of Migratory Reading: Deconstructing Authenticity in *Der falsche Inder*," I intervene in the current discourse on authorship, migration, and identity in contemporary German-language literature by highlighting the role of the reader in the formation of these concepts. The example in this case is a 2008 novel by Abbas Khider, which presents a narrative of twenty-first century forced migration and challenges general assumptions about the identity formation of migrants by staging specific interventions in established discourses on literary authority and authenticity. While tropes of writing and authorship tend to dominate such discourses, the novel's focus on reading, largely overlooked in the scholarship on the novel to date, repositions the debate. By undercutting romanticized notions of authorship and originality with the physical, material, and economic realities of migration, the novel exposes the bourgeois preconditions of such romanticized notions. This chapter argues that the novel's depiction of identity construction revolving around reading instead of writing foregrounds the power of readers to construct not only their own identity but also that of the figures they read about. The novel destabilizes notions of identity for both migrant and author figures by focusing on the constructive power readers employ in shaping the identities of migrants and their narratives. In my analysis, literary theories of narration and reading as well as social theories of form and formation elucidate the novel's critique of the current fetishization of originality and authenticity in the public and scholarly literary discourses on so-called *Migrations*- or *Migrantenliteratur*.

The role of reading in society is influenced by our reading practices, our reading technologies, and our collective reading imaginaries. These practices and technologies are tangible, observable entities that can be researched and interpreted as they change over time. Reading imaginaries, on the other hand, are more elusive but not any less influential. This study combines the historic realities of reading practices and technologies with the changing conceptualization and representation of reading – how it works, what it does, why we need it (or not). At the center of my analysis is how scenes of reading repurpose the historic realities of reading in creative constellations to produce imaginary modes of reading, modes that can instruct, exemplify, enrapture, and mislead. In presenting reading practices encoded in popular and academic discourses on reading, these scenes imagine potential ways of reading, shaping in turn both the discourses and historic realities of reading. Today, in the midst of the digitalization of reading practices and cultures, a reassessment of the literary representations of reading reminds us not only of the media and practices that shape our reading, but also the societal reading imaginary that is to a large extent created, explored, and perpetuated by scenes of reading.

Chapter 1

Scenes of Imaginative Reading: Vernacular Storytelling and Reception in *Iwein*

In the middle of his *âventiure,* Iwein arrives at a beautiful garden in the middle of a castle compound where he sees a beautiful young maiden reading to her parents, the lord and lady of the castle. The bucolic scene portrays a paradisiac vision of familial love and courtly perfection. The young maiden is exemplary in all ways as she entertains her parents who look on lovingly and proud. Such scenes of reading are not uncommon in medieval courtly literature; there is hardly a narrative courtly text that does not have at least one example of a knight reading a romance, a lord corresponding via letters, a boy learning his grammar, or a group of women listening to a heroic tale.[36] Previous scholarship on reading in the vernacular literature of the German Middle Ages has focused on depictions of reading and descriptions of fictional readers (be they narrators, audiences, protagonists, or minor characters) as evidence for a medieval history of reading or has applied historical knowledge about literacy and social structures to historicize interpretations of individual texts.[37] This scene in Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein* (c.1200) is often cited as evidence for the existence of an extensive female readership for medieval romance, and, because it seemingly has no immediate bearing on the plot, it is often abstracted into a moment of idealized courtly behavior that combines traditional courtly values and the cultural practice of reading. In such an interpretation, the scene becomes a moment of exemplarity that portrays to the audience a desired mode of being and acting and can thus be considered a relic of a cultural practice at a time when literary culture was rapidly transforming.

The connections between the idealized themes of courtly literature and their social-historical reality, however, are tenuous at best, and this focus on the historicization of reading and its poetic depiction has left the relationship between representations of reading and a text's internal poetics largely undertheorized. The scene of reading as a focused unit of literary analysis has not gained traction in scholarship on premodern literature despite its demonstrated ability to problematize and thematize this cultural practice in modern literature. This observation is curious since reading was such a central act of cultural production and intellectual practice in the Middle Ages. As John Dagenais has argued, for example, the rich medieval production of commentaries and glosses, translations and adaptations, sermons and florilegia – the main thrust of textual activity in the Middle Ages – were all based in acts of reading.[38] Acts of authorship, Mary Carruthers has noted, were really acts of reading one's memory,[39] and the scribal production of medieval manuscripts was a physical, material, and creative act of reading. Nevertheless, questions about authors, composition, and manuscript transmission have traditionally dominated scholarship on Middle High German literature; even questions about fictionality and meaning-

[36] Scholz, *Hören und Lesen,* 199-202. For an analysis of women as recipients and producers of texts in the Middle Ages, see Green, *Women Readers*.

[37] For the former approach, see Scholz, *Hören und Lesen*; Bumke, *Höfische Kultur, Literatur und Gesellschaft*; Green, *Medieval Listening and Reading*. For the latter approach, see Schnyder, "Kunst der Vergegenwärtigung und gefährliche Präsenz"; Reuvekamp-Felber, "Autorschaft als Textfunktion."

[38] Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture,* 20-26.

[39] "Composition starts in memorized reading. The commonest way for a medieval author to depict himself is as a reader of an old book or a listener to an old story, which he is recalling by retelling." Carruthers, *The Book of Memory,* 191. See also Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture*, 23.

making have more often been framed in terms of the relationship between author and text rather than text and reader.[40]

Recently, however, independent attempts at recovering a medieval literary theory and defining functional modes of fictionality in the High Middle Ages have opened a critical space open to the import of the analytical structures of reading scene research for medieval courtly literature. This chapter takes the opportunity to build on the history of reading work done in the late twentieth century and push past it, repositioning our focus on reading away from the historical, ideal, or exemplary towards the inner poetological function of reading in texts. Dagenais, in working with material, manuscript evidence of reading, advocates for a reader-based interpretation paradigm centered on a text's reception and its potential for reproduction, emendation, translation, correction, and, of course, interpretation in order to enliven passages, tropes, and conventions that appear stale in an author-based paradigm.[41] My focus on scenes of reading shows that the different reader-based (re)production acts that Dagenais recognizes as fundamental to medieval literary culture are apparent in the portrayal of reading in courtly literature, suggesting that such a productive conception of reading was recognized and utilized by medieval authors to perform theoretical work within their imaginative texts.

Specifically, this chapter focuses on *Iwein*, a medieval romance that has been included as evidence both in histories of reading and poetological theorizations of medieval literature, but without a clear link between the two. As I will argue, Hartmann's Arthurian romance thematizes and portrays reading in several episodes that build an intertextual discourse on reading's function in imaginative works. The constellation of the thematization and representations of reading in concise scenes serves to focalize reading's role in propelling the title knight along his *âventiure* (adventure) and establishing his *mære* (story). Reading scenes then become an object of analysis that promise to elucidate the poetological function reading serves in this text by underscoring the relationship between plot, narration, and discourse. From the narrative function of such scenes and the text-internal discourse they construct, a localized critical model for reading this courtly romance emerges. The scenes of reading in *Iwein* effectively turn the knight's *âventiure* into a metaphor for literary activity – storytelling, reading, interpreting. In so doing, they exploit the potential of literary activity to reflect on and construct itself, in this case to articulate a productive mode of reading and to construct a productive audience that underwrite both Iwein's *âventiure* and his *mære*.

In this chapter, I first analyze the prologue of *Iwein* to elucidate the fundamentals of the poetic architecture that structures the rest of the text. Important in this prologue is the development of a theoretical framework that builds on statements about the nature of imaginative literature, the presentation of the first reader in the work, and the implicit engagement of the audience that creates a dynamic relationship between the levels of plot and discourse. The prologue also provides an opportunity to situate the romance and its representations of reading within their historical context. My analysis then moves on to several scenes of reading and storytelling within the body of the text that perform imaginative theorizations of Iwein's

[40] For examples of attempts in New Philology to renew the focus on reading in medieval literary culture that, however, leave the author and text in their traditional central location, see Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture*, 22.

[41] Dagenais's example is the topos of an author encouraging readers to emend his text. From an author-oriented point of view, such a passage appears merely as an obligatory expression of modesty that has little bearing on our interpretation of the text because it points beyond a modern definition of a text as an interpretable object. From a reader-oriented point of view, however, the topos opens the text up to a new range of activities and marks the text as a single piece in a larger literary undertaking. Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture,* 24-26.

adventures and its narrativization. Through episodes with errant knights, courtly maidens, and enslaved weavers, the scenes of reading in *Iwein* – centuries before the established examples from the novel around 1800 – articulate a creative poetic theorization about literature's relationship to reading and enact that poetics for the audience. Specifically, these scenes of reading as intertwined in Hartmann's mode of storytelling offer a critique of the social costs of literary production in an imagined courtly world, proving reading scenes' meaning-making potential before the onset of modern reading and literary practices.

Reading (in) the Prologue

Walter Haug famously extracted a medieval vernacular literary theory from the prologues, epilogues, and poetic excursuses of French and German courtly narratives in which he found poetological reflections on as well as arguments and apologies for a newly emerging vernacular poetics. The prologues of Chrétien de Troyes *Yvain* and Hartmann's *Iwein* play a central role in Haug's argument for a "modern" sense of autonomy in the Arthurian romance in its move away from exemplarity toward meaning derived from literary interpretation.[42] In a cultural environment without clearly defined institutions for and discourses on literary theory for vernacular literature (as opposed to the existing institutions for the theorizations of Latin literature), the prologues, epilogues, and poetic excursuses Haug analyzed form a tidy textual corpus for comparative study of vernacular literary theorization. However, Haug's methods have been critiqued since such passages are inseparable from their immediate surroundings and should therefore not just be extracted into a generalizable discourse but understood within the context of the individual text.[43]

Therefore, let us start this analysis of reading scenes in *Iwein* with a reassessment of the prologue, not to rehash Haug's illumination of intertextual trends and literary development, but to unfold the complex situation of reception and the constellation of narrator, audience, and content that Hartmann establishes in the opening lines and builds upon throughout the text. In the course of the romance, there are several scenes of reading and storytelling whose framing, imagery, and interpretation rely on the conceptualization of reading as it is established in the prologue, the romance's first performative scene of reading.

Hartmann's prologue is in several ways the textbook example for a medieval vernacular romance. It begins with a *sententia* that claims those who strive after "rehte güete" (true kindness) shall receive "sælde und êre" (bliss and honour, 1-3),[44] then it puts King Arthur forth as a worthy example of this adage before introducing the author and his story and addressing the audience. Despite the seeming clarity of the prologue's elements and its progression, it is deeply invested in questioning and blurring the distinction between author and audience, content and interpretation, stories and deeds. After lamenting that such joyous Pentecost festivities such as those that take place at the court of King Arthur at the beginning of the story are not rivaled in the narrator's own time, the narrator nevertheless states,

> ichn wolde dô niht sîn gewesn,
> daz ich nû niht enwære,

[42] Haug, *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter*.
[43] Chinca and Young, "Literary Theory and the German Romance," 613.
[44] The Middle High German text and the English translation are from Cyril Edwards's *German Romance* edition of *Iwein*.

dâ uns noch mit ir mære
sô rehte wol wesen sol –
dâ taten in diu werch vil wol. (54-8)

I would not have liked to have existed then
at the expense of existing now,
since now we can still derive
such truly great pleasure from tales about them –
then it was their deeds that gave them much pleasure.

These lines draw a clear distinction between the historical past of the narrated events and the rhetorical present in which they are narrated by tweaking the conventional *laudatio temporis acti*: the narrator praises the greatness of the past events but expresses his preference to experience the stories about these great deeds rather than the past deeds themselves.[45] Walter Haug cited these lines as the first example of literature's self-expressed superiority over factuality. His assertion that these lines provide an apology for the artful, rhetorical expression of facts in literary form is based on a distinction that is drawn here by the narrator between the deeds of the past (*taten…diu werch*) and their retelling as stories (*mære*) in the present. The temporal dichotomy between 'then' (*dô*) and 'now' (*nû*) supports the distinction between deeds (*diu werch*) and stories (*mære*) as does the distinction between 'them' (*in*) and 'us' (*uns*). The narrator includes the audience in his own enjoyment of the story, but he importantly leaves out any mention of a composer or a time of composition. By mentioning an ambiguous "uns" and "nû," the narrator creates a perpetual present of reception that includes all possible audiences. The deeds of the past are set, but the telling of the story is perpetually present and unfolding. Despite the seemingly clear dichotomy expressed in this passage, these distinctions between deeds and stories, then and now, them and us are not strictly maintained throughout the text. Instead, the distinctions are constantly blurred, and the individual elements intertwined, building a perpetual tension between the events of the plot and the presentation of those deeds through narration. Instead of recognizing the extra-textual conclusion that Haug draws to elevate literature above factuality, I see a tactical employment of two levels of narration within the text: one containing the events of the plot (*histoire* or *Handlungsebene*) and one that artfully arranges the narration of those events (*discours* or *Bedeutungsebene*).[46] It is not a commentary on the superiority of one external frame of reference over another, but a recognition of the interplay between form and content.

The distinction between these two levels of narration is a foundational element for medieval courtly romances, which is largely established through the role and figure of the narrator;[47] in *Iwein* this distinction is evident in the narrator's personal statement just discussed. In *Iwein*, interestingly, it is a figuration of reading and readers that most consequently bridges and, at times, obscures the boundaries of these discursive levels. The figuration of readers and reading takes shape already in the opening lines of the poem, where the *sententia* invokes an

[45] Courtly poets placed their idealization of courtly culture in a stylized past, and the *laudatio temporis acti* was a means by which they could make visible the distance between the raw reality of noble life and the new ideal of courtly perfection. Bumke, *Höfische Kultur, Literatur und Gesellschaft*, 26-29.
[46] For the terminology see Butzer, "Das Gedächtnis des epischen Textes," 160; Bumke, "Autor und Werk," 104.
[47] Reuvekamp-Felber, "Autorschaft als Textfunktion," 3; Bumke, "Autor und Werk," 105; Krueger, "The Author's Voice."

imagined audience: “Swer an rehte güete / wendet sîn gemüete, / dem folget sælde und êre,” (If a man applies his mind to true kindness, heavenly bliss and honour will accrue to him, 1-3). The “swer” is anyone who wishes to lead such a life as demonstrated by the example of King Arthur, which will be reproduced by the text (“Des gît gewisse lêre / künech Artûs der guote, / der mit rîters muote / nâch lobe kunde strîten,” [King Arthur the Good gives true teaching of this, he who, with his knightly disposition, knew how to strive for praise], 4-7). By presenting King Arthur as an example for his audience, the narrator closely associates the two and gives the audience an ostensible reason to read further. The following description of Arthur’s exemplary life and the posthumous honor attached to his name begins to thematize the act and practice of storytelling:

> Er hât bî sînen zîten
> gelebt also schône
> daz er der êren krône
> dô truoc, und noch sîn nam treit.
> Des habent die wârheit
> sîne lantliute,
> si jehent, er lebe noch hiute.
> er hât den lop erworben,
> ist im der lîp erstorben,
> sô lebt doch iemer sîn nam. (8-17)
>
> He lived in his times
> in such splendour
> that he then wore honour’s crown,
> and his name does still.
> The proof of this is upheld
> by his fellow-countrymen:
> they claim he is still alive today.
> He has won such repute that,
> though his body be dead,
> his name will, nevertheless, live forever.

His name lives on in the mouth of his countrymen and poets, like this narrator. The repeated alternation between past and present tense in these lines establishes, on the one hand, the past of King Arthur’s life and the present of the storytelling but demonstrates, on the other hand, how easily this historical difference can be overcome in the act of storytelling and reading.

Meanwhile the repetition of similar pronouns with different antecedents further draws together the figures in these opening lines. “[K]unech Artûs” is stated only once, otherwise he is referred to four times by the pronoun ‘er.’ At the end of the description of his exemplarity, the antecedent of ‘er’ flips from King Arthur to the *swer* of the opening line:

> Er hât den lop erworben,
> ist im der lîp erstorben,
> sô lebt doch iemer sîn nam.
> er ist lasterlîcher scham

iemer vil gar erwert,
der noch nâch sînem site vert. (15-20)

He has won such repute that,
though his body be dead,
his name will, nevertheless, live forever.
That man will be forever
entirely safe from dishonourable disgrace
who even today follows his ways.

The first *er* in the lines quoted here refers to King Arthur, but the second refers to anyone who follows Arthur's example. The two are tied together in this tight construction of tercets that both begin with the pronoun and are bridged by a rhyming couplet. The second *er* is initially ambiguous, but the sudden change to the present tense and the content of the final line make it clear that its antecedent is indefinite and directed at the audience. The intention is plain: the audience should become like Arthur.

With the introduction of the third figure in this prologue, the text's author, the thematization of reading is explicit:

Ein rîter der gelêrt was
unde ez an den buochen las,
swenner sîne stunde
niht baz bewenden chunde,
daz er ouch tihtens pflac –
daz man gerne hœren mac,
dâ chêrt er sînen vlîz an.
Er was genant Hartman
und was ein Ouwære:
der tihte diz mære. (21-30)

A knight who was learned
and read in books,
when he could not spend his time
in any better way,
also practised poetry.
He applied his industry
to that which people may gladly hear.
He was named Hartmann
and was of the Ouwe family:
he composed this tale.

Hartmann the composer is described as a knight, a reader, and a poet. This depiction defies the prevailing dichotomy of the time between *miles illiteratus* and *clericus literatus* by presenting him as a *miles literatus*, an ostensible oxymoron.[48] The two defining characteristics of his

[48] Curschmann suggests that this image of a literate knight might have reflected the reality of an increase in the number of literate lay people or even a desire for a body of poetry for knights by knights independent of the clerical

identity are his stature as a knight, which grants him access to the social circle of the court – the presumed audience of this text – and as a reader, which grants him access to literary practices and traditions. Reading from books precedes and enables his versification, and, unlike his usual presentation as a knight, his self-presentation as a reader is not unusual for medieval authors. As such a knight-poet-reader he is in a good position to shape the life and deeds of King Arthur into poetic form for an attentive audience, a mediating position that is underscored by the continued emphasis of the *swer* of the audience, the *er* of King Arthur and now the *er* in "er was genant Hartman…"

Content, audience, and author are thus triangulated around reading and storytelling in a performative scene of reading. To understand how this prologue functions as a performative scene of reading, it needs to be stated that the medieval concept of reading was more capacious than our modern one. The most famous medieval treatise on reading, Hugh of St. Victor's *Didascalicon*, defined reading in three ways: when the teacher reads a book to someone, when a student is read a book by someone, and when an individual reads a book for themself.[49] In German vernacular texts from the Middle Ages, various verbs were employed to convey the reception of a text including *lesen, hoeren, hoeren sagen, vernemen,* and *schouwen,* all of which also appear in combinations such as *hoeren und lesen*, *hoeren sagen oder lesen,* and *sehen und hoeren*. The variety of verbs and their combination demonstrate a diversity of literary communication means omnipresent in the writing, presentation, and reception of medieval texts.[50] The sum of these verbs that capture various bodily and cognitive activities adds up to a very sensual, complex, and layered conceptualization of the medieval reading experience.[51] The interchangeability of these verbs and the formulaic ways in which they are often employed preclude definite conclusions about the specific reading processes of individual works and audiences; instead they sanction a range of equally plausible reception methods including any combination of reading, listening, viewing, and understanding. This variety of possibilities is based on the literacy of medieval audiences,[52] the composite oral and textual cultures,[53] and the social function of reading and storytelling[54] in the High Middle Ages.

Michael Curschmann appropriately summarizes this reality of mixed media reception in medieval Germany under the term *Mischkultur*.[55] This mixed-media culture is a prominent feature of Arthurian romances, and *Iwein* is no exception: at the figural level, depictions of recitations and oral storytelling are included and characters, including author, narrator, protagonist, and minor figures, are granted differing levels of literacy. At a rhetorical level, there is a mixture of elements conventionally associated with orality and textuality that are exploited both in the narration of *Iwein* and in its depictions of storytelling. The prologue engages reading on both levels: Hartmann is an author who reads and the narrator of this text who assumes the

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class. Curschmann, "Hören – Lesen – Sehen," 231. Reuvekamp-Felber reads this description of Hartmann as a legitimizing move: only as a knight can he (*der Erzähler* or narrator) claim authority to speak about knighthood. Reuvekamp-Felber, *Volkssprache zwischen Stift und Hof,* 127-8.

[49] Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon* III.7.

[50] For specific examples and interpretations of these different verbs and their uses, see Scholz, *Hören und Lesen*; Bumke, *Höfische Kultur, Literatur und Gesellschaft,* 521-525; Green, *Medieval Listening and Reading*; Curschmann, "Hören – Lesen – Sehen."

[51] See Curschmann, "Hören – Lesen – Sehen."

[52] See Green, *Medieval Listening and Reading*, 8-10.

[53] Other contemporary cultural practices that developed written forms from verbal communication include trade, contracts, law, and music. See Curschmann, "Hören – Lesen – Sehen," 220.

[54] See Lieb and Müller, *Situationen des Erzählens*.

[55] Curschmann, "Hören—Lesen—Sehen."

role of an orator reading aloud his text for an assumed and addressed audience. As Michael Curschmann notes in his discussion of the narration in *Parzival*, but which is just as applicable for the prologue of *Iwein*: "Neither textuality nor orality inherently preclude the other. They operate together in the oral performance of written poetry precisely in a way that the written defines the oral as a function of the portrayal from the outset."[56] When we assume a historical mode of literary performance for medieval epics that D.H. Green labeled the "intermediate mode" – the reading of a text aloud for a listening audience – the prologue becomes a performative element, replicating one possible means for receiving, listening to, or in the broader medieval sense, reading the text.[57] From this standpoint, the entire prologue is a performative scene of reading, one that could be replicated by the actual circumstances of the audience or one that can create rhetorically the communal, oral, and textual performance of the court for an individual reader.

Besides setting the initial argument for the impending story, introducing the material and author, and expressing a view on the nature of poetry, the prologue also renders the receptive situation – the various reading possibilities of the romance – visible and makes it a central thematic and performative element for the rest of the text. As we will see, *Iwein* depicts both oral, textual, and intermediary modes of reading not as lingering vestiges of past cultural practices but as conscious links in a web of depicted literary activity that undergirds the text's self-image as a medium for cultural production. Scenes of reading and storytelling will continue to blur any supposed distinction between plot and discourse as well as between orality and textuality, and the ensuing adventures of Iwein will exploit these tensions to articulate a critique of literary production in the midst of Hartmann's *mære*.

Turning the âventiure *into a* mære

The questions and motives created in the prologue spill over into the romance's first scene, a scene of storytelling. Whereas in the prologue the narrator presents his arguments at the discursive level (which made it attractive for Walter Haug to interpret the content as a contribution to a generalizable theory), in this first scene the arguments and motives are expressed in the plot. This first diegetic scene then works to meld the discursive arguments of the prologue into a functional aspect of the *histoire*. Furthermore, the motives of storytelling and reading are intertwined into the textual aspect of the romance, showing that reading and storytelling continue to function in tandem in the romance.

In the analysis of the interlocking motives of storytelling and reading, I extend the search for a vernacular literary theory beyond the tightly constructed and well-defined prologues, epilogues, and poetic excursuses that have been the center of focus since Haug. Recently, several scholars have encouraged a broader search for and understanding of medieval literary theory. Nicolette Zeeman, for one, advocates for a greater consideration of "'imaginative' articulations of literary theory," arguing that "the full extent of [medieval] literary self-theorization – whether Latin or vernacular – only becomes apparent when we recognize that much of it is expressed in

[56] Curschmann, "Das Abenteuer des Erzählens," 662. My translation.
[57] Green labels it the "intermediate mode" because it is constituted by both oral and textual means of communication and located in the middle of a spectrum between a memorized, oral recitation and a completely visual reading. Green, "On the Primary Reception." Although a common mode of presentation, very little is known about this historic mode of literary performance and reception for medieval romances and epics. Bumke, *Höfische Kultur, Literatur und Gesellschaft*, 521.

figured and even metaphorical form."[58] Mark Chinca and Christopher Young have made a similar plea specifically in medieval German literature and in direct response to Haug to recognize "implicit theorizing" in "non-discursive passages that prompt reflection on the nature and function of literature."[59] They argue that without a defined institutional space for a separate, autonomous discussion of vernacular literary theory to develop, medieval vernacular "theory" and practice are inseparable.[60] Scenes of reading, I am convinced, are a necessary and logical next step in this collective examination of medieval literary practical theorization as they have the potential for complex poetological commentary and fall under Zeeman's rubric of figured or metaphorical form. In *Iwein,* Hartmann apportions his imaginative articulations of literary theory in scenes that perform explicit acts of narration and reading. These reading and storytelling scenes theorize the act of reception (reading, listening, seeing, etc.) and its role in the unfolding of the knight's *âventiure* at the level of the plot and the narration at the discursive level.

An effective example of Hartmann tying together the acts of storytelling and reading, orality and textuality, as well as the plot and discursive levels is his manipulation of the conventional motif of source material. His relatively short prologue excludes some generically expected motifs, including the naming of his source material. Descriptions of authors in the prologues of romances often include the author's source material along with a motif of *Wiedererzählen* or *Neuerzählen*[61] – a claim to a better, more truthful, or expanded retelling – but the description of Hartmann does not list a specific title, author, or source legend nor does it articulate a poetics of retelling despite the obvious connection to and reworking of Chrétien's *Yvain*. Instead, Hartmann displaces this motif into the diegetic narration of the *âventiure*, effectively dispelling any clear distinction between plot and discourse. In the suspension of the motive, he also refigures it, basing it not on an existing author or work, but on a story that arises in the plot.

Iwein opens during the Pentecost festival, and in his account of the festivities, the narrator presents a small group of knights gathered to hear an entertaining story of *âventiure* from their fellow knight, Kalogreant. Amongst the other leisure activities mentioned, the narrator provides at first only a basic synopsis of Kalogreant's tale: "Der begunde in sagen ein mære / von grôzzer sîner swære / und von deheiner sîner frümcheit," (He began to tell them a tale of great hardship on his part, and of no credit to his valour, 93-5). These few lines parody conventional formulations promising stories of glorious deeds and unparalleled bravery, while the description of the scene situates the performative act of storytelling in a setting similar to that in the opening prologue: a knight telling a tale of *âventiure* for an attentive audience. The use of the term "mære" to describe Kalogreant's story aligns it both with Hartmann's "mære" and the general "mære" that tell the stories of the past to delight the present.

However, Kalogreant's story is initially not part of the narration. It risks going unrecounted and being relegated to the fringes of the festival scene until Queen Guinivere interrupts the storytelling. She sneaks out of bed into the group hoping to join them undisturbed, but Kalogreant notices her and cuts off his story in order to greet her. Annoyed at the interruption, Keie insults Kalogreant for his over-zealous observance of courtly manners and protocol. The argument that ensues between Keie, the Queen, and Kalogreant presents a negative

[58] Zeeman, "Imaginative Theory," 222.
[59] Chinca and Young, "Literary Theory and the German Romance," 614.
[60] Ibid.
[61] For *Wiedererzählen* (retelling) as the fundamental and consciously employed general category of medieval narrative poetics, see Worstbrock, "Wiedererzählen und Übersetzen."

example of courtly behavior, especially among listeners to a story, that parallels the anti-courtly content of Kalogreant's ensuing narrative. Kalogreant threatens to withhold his tale because of the quarrel, announcing that everyone everywhere must forgo his story forever: "Doch sol man ze dirre zît, / und iemer mêre swâ ir sît, / mînes sagens enbern" (Yet people shall on this occasion, and forever more in your presence, be spared my tale, 217-19). The finality and pretension of this statement is quite severe; he speaks as if the whole world is listening to him and not just a handful of friends. This statement acknowledges the textual nature of Kalogreant's oral tale. Even though at the diegetic level his tale shall be delivered orally, it will be incorporated and fixed into the text of the larger romance and thereby have the potential to reach a broader audience without spatial or temporal boundaries: such is the conceptualization of *mære* that Hartmann weaves into his narration and the consciousness of his storytelling and reading figures. Keie's insolence threatens then not only Kalogreant's festive recitation but also the narrativization and textualization of his *âventiure*. A knight's search for *âventiure* and the opportunity to prove himself or, in Kalogreant's case, his failure to prove himself, only conclude when they are narrativized in the form of a *mære*.[62]

Luckily for all of us readers not personally present at King Arthur's Pentecost festival, the Queen wishes to hear the story and orders Kalogreant to tell it. This marks the first of several instances where a woman intervenes to further both the discourse and the plot of Iwein's *âventiure*. The Queen is marked by Kalogreant's act of courtesy as an outsider and she changes the situational dynamic: socially, she stands above the gathered knights, and as a woman she serves a different function in the court than they do. Her presence elevates the storytelling scene from a small homogeneous gathering to a differentiated audience. The Queen's presence symbolically stands in for a larger audience and invites a more elaborate speech act from Kalogreant. Discursively, Kalogreant's storytelling is more elaborate because the narrator records the restarted tale word-for-word, embedding it into the overall *mære*. Stylistically, Kalogreant reinitiates his tale with a prologue, one whose ambitions exceed those expected from a man telling his buddies about his escapades and whose form mimics that of the medieval romance:

> Swaz ir gebeit, daz ist getân,
> sît ir michs niht welt erlân.
> Sô vernemt mit guotem site,
> unde miet mich dâ mite:
> ich sagiu deste gerner vil,
> ob manz ze rehte merken wil.
> Man verliuset michel sagen,
> man enwellez merchen unde dagen.
> Manger biut diu ôren dar –
> ern nemes ouch mit dem herzen war,
> sô ne wirt im niuwan der dôz,
> und ist der schade alze grôz,
> wan si verliesent beide ir arbeit,
> der dâ hœret und der dâ seit.
> Ir mugt mir deste gerner dagen,
> wan ichn wil iu deheine lüge sagen. (243-58)

[62] Kartschoke, "Erzählen," 27.

All that you command shall be done,
since you will not spare me.
Listen, then, with good demeanour,
and reward me by doing so:
I'll be the more willing to tell you a great deal,
if people will pay proper attention to it.
Much story-telling is wasted
if people will not take note and keep silent.
Many a man keeps his ears open –
unless he pays attention with his heart,
he has nothing by it but the noise,
and the loss is all to great,
for they are both wasting their labour,
both he who is listening there and he who is speaking.
You have all the more reason to be silent before me, with good will,
because I have no intention of telling you any lies.

This prologue picks up on two topoi that Hartmann's initial prologue eschews – the topos of attentive listening and an explicit address to the audience – and therefore functions as a sort of delayed prologue,[63] but not without a touch of parody. Kalogreant's statement seems rather naive – of course, one tells a story more gladly if people pay attention to it – but it raises the question of proper listening (and reading) practices. What does it mean to properly perceive a story "ob manz ze rehte merken wil"? *Merken* could be added to the list of Middle High German verbs for reading since it has a broad and flexible semantic field that can mean everything from "pay attention to," "notice," "observe," "judge," or "recognize." But Kalogreant does not answer this question with anything specific. *Much* is lost, he says, when one does not want to pay attention ("merken") and keep quiet, but what exactly one loses or what one stands to gain from attentive listening is unclear. The image of listening with the ear but not the heart is a common trope, but it does not specify what one perceives (*warnemen*) in the heart beyond the sounds heard in the ear. Kalogreant acknowledges that the listener must work as hard as the storyteller. Taken all together, these comments insinuate at a discursive level that the listener/reader has something to search for in the story, has a job to perform, but at the level of plot it sounds more like he is just scolding his audience to be quiet, let him tell his story, and not question it since it is the truth ("Ez geschach mir, dâ von ist es wâr…," It befehl me – which is why it is true…, 259). Kalogreant's prologue therefore poses implicit questions of readerly reception and interpretation, but since he does not answer them, they remain to be worked out in the rest of Kalogreant's and then Hartmann's *mære*, too.

The plot of Kalogreant's *mære* is pivotal for defining the concept of *âventiure* that Hartmann employs. Kalogreant speaks about his *âventiure* as if it needs no explanation. It is seemingly self-explanatory that a few years ago he rode out on an *âventiure*, outfitted as usual in the Broceliande forest, as one does. Pivotally, he encounters a wild man, who has never heard of *âventiure*, and asks for an explanation. Kalogreant describes it as a mere duel between two men, which increases the honor of the winner. The wild man knows about an opportunity where Kalogreant could risk his life; Kalogreant pursues the lead and eventually fails at the task,

[63] See Scholz, *Hören und Lesen*, 175 and n697.

returning shamefully to court. Kalogreant's physical and social failures are a sign that his understanding of the cultural terms of *âventiure* is superficial. His naiveté is apparent to everyone from the uncivilized forest man to the cultivated, courtly audience. The only unaware person is Kalogreant. His naiveté and the action it informs highlight the socially constructed nature of the *âventiure*. Kalogreant's nonchalance in pursuing *âventiure* for its own sake along with his oversimplified definition underscore the uncritical acceptance of this term in courtly society. Simultaneously, the presentation of Kalogreant's *âventiure* as a *mære* embedded within a storytelling scene implies that these *âventiure* only exist in narrative form and that it is this narrative form that constructs and perpetuates the social meaning. In such a form, then, the important roles are occupied not just by the protagonist and figures of the tale but also, just as importantly, by the tale's audience.

The role of the audience is first foregrounded in Kalogreant's prologue where listeners are urged to pay attention to the story and discern something important; then, in his epilogue this teaching is dramatized through Kalogreant's immediate audience. Recognizing his own failure, Kalogreant ends his *mære* by urging the gathered knights to tell a better, more successful tale if they have one: "Sî iuwer deheinem geschehn baz, / ob er nû welle, der sage ouch daz," (If better things have befallen any of you, if he wishes now, let him tell that story, too, 797-8). No one in the audience accepts the challenge. In lieu of a story, however, Iwein offers vengeance. At the level of the plot, Iwein goes on an *âventiure* to redress Kalogreant's defeat, and at the discursive level, Iwein's actions offer the possibility to correct and emend Kalogreant's story, replacing it with a better, more successful *mære*. Kalogreant's story thus becomes both the challenge motif for Iwein's ensuing actions and its source text. By dramatizing the motif of source material within this scene of storytelling instead of in the prologue, as was common, Hartmann presents a notion of *âventiure* that encompasses both a collection of knightly deeds and literary practices. He effectively turns the larger *mære* into its own self-sustaining and self-commenting source material. As Iwein exchanges the role of listener for that of actor, his ensuing *âventiure* is continually formulated at the diegetic and discursive levels as both a literal and figurative text, not just a collection of knightly (and unknightly) deeds.

From Idealized to Contextualized Reading

Kalogreant's storytelling scene is the first example of implicit or creative theorization that extends beyond the excursive passages theorized by Haug, but it still relies on similar rhetorical structures given that its prologue and epilogue are so vital to its interpretation and its relationship to the rest of the text. But this should not be surprising for a theoretical discourse without institutional bounds that, as Chinca and Young phrase it, must be both a *saying* and a *doing*.[64] The form becomes especially important for a creative theorization because it is what turns the content, the *saying*, into an action, the *doing*. Kalogreant's prologue and epilogue, for example, are to be interpreted differently than Hartmann's prologue because the situational contexts of the respective speech acts differ: Kalogreant's is situated within an already existing narrative that clearly marks Kalogreant as an ironic narrator since he is incapable of living up to the values he espouses.[65] But this structural and scenic repetition in a different context is intentional and vital to the implicit theorization, because it signals an inventive moment in which language demonstrates an ability to signify and comment on itself with irony, effectively *doing*

[64] Chinca and Young, "Literary Theory and the German Romance."
[65] Kay, "The Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance," 222.

theory.

Julie Orlemanski, in arguing for an analysis of medieval fictionality that prioritizes contemporary literary praxis over (contemporary and modern) theorizations of fiction, introduces the heuristic concept of textual "commonplaces" to "encompass both the shared topoi of nonactuality in medieval writing and the regularized situations of imaginative invention, or the common *places* where fiction-making happened."[66] She argues that close attention to these commonplaces – the pantheon of pagan gods, the framework of games, states of psychological solipsism, and dreams, for example – can reveal "the claims about language, meaning, textuality, and discourse being made" in imaginative texts.[67] Similarly, Nicolette Zeeman articulates a list of "recognizable figures" employed in medieval texts to dramatize how "language can signify and, more important, comment on itself."[68]

Zeeman includes "the reading of a book" in her list of recognizable figures, while scenes of reading are not explicitly included in Orlemanski's admittedly non-comprehensive list of commonplaces.[69] However, it requires little mental gymnastics to recognize them as a regularized situation of imaginative invention; one just needs to recall Dante's Francesca and Paolo, Chaucer's Criseyde, or Wolfram's Sigune. The reading of books within a text and the character's reaction to the book's content replicate and thematize the reception of the text within itself and acknowledge cultural and social practices that structure the logic of literature. Any description of a reader is inherently believable because it replicates what the reader of the text is doing, but as the details of the scene inevitably vary from the audience's situation, any analysis or scrutinization of a scene of reading encourages audiences to compare their physical and social conditions, their interpretive methodology, etc., with that of the fictionalized reader. Scenes of reading are a means for texts to mimetically and imaginatively display their power to represent, because they acknowledge that they exist to be read and work to manipulate how they are read.

The commonplaces that Hartmann employs – the scenes of reading and storytelling – are undoubtedly reflexive in nature, showing an awareness of the ability of a fictional, imaginative text to reflect on its own functionality, social contexts, and meaning-creating potential. But once it is clear that Hartmann draws from existing structures to create an implicit theorization of literature within his own text, we need to ask: what does this self-referential structuring accomplish for the text or what does it enable the text to do? That literature can rework, cannibalize, satirize, and appropriate its own form, content, and structures is no new revelation, but what role that metadiscourse can serve within the text, how it can *do* theory and not just *say* it, is the pivotal question, especially here in *Iwein*.

To answer this question, let us shift our focus to a reading scene later in Iwein's *âventiure* that, as I will show, presses on some of the tension created by Hartmann's indexical structures and topoi and performs a theorization of reading to unsettle established notions of reading and imaginative literature. Iwein has long ago succeeded where Kalogreant failed, defeating and killing the lord of the spring, marrying his wife and reigning over his domain. Now he is on a quest to regain his honor after falling out of favor with his wife by championing aggrieved women. On his way to fight for a young woman in a dispute with her sister, Iwein arrives at the Castle of Ill-Fortune seeking shelter. Here he comes upon the reading scene cited at the beginning of this chapter, where a young, beautiful maiden reads to her parents. The description

[66] Orlemanski, "Who has Fiction?," 159.
[67] Ibid., 158.
[68] Zeeman, "Imaginative Theory," 225-26.
[69] Zeeman, "Imaginative Theory," 225; Orlemanski, Who has Fiction?," 159.

of the young maiden provides a first good example of the rhetorical structure of the entire scene:

> ez dûhte sî guot, swaz sî las,
> wande sî ir beider tohter was.
> Ez ist reht, daz man sî krœne,
> diu zuht unde schœne,
> hôhe geburt unde jugent,
> gewizzen unde ganze tugent,
> kiusche und wîse rede hât.
> Daz was an ir und gar der rât
> des der wunsch an wîbe gert.
> Ir lesen was et dâ vil wert. (6465-74)

> They thought everything good that she read,
> for she was the daughter of that pair.
> It is right that one should crown her with praise –
> she who possesses courtesy and beauty,
> high birth and youth,
> discretion and entire worth,
> chastity and wise speech.
> That she had, and a full supply
> of what perfection desires of woman.
> Her reading was, indeed, much valued there.

The maiden is presented in the highest possible conventional courtly terms: of high birth and good upbringing, beautiful and youthful, intelligent and demure in speech. The one unconventional, though not entirely alien, attribute is, for our purposes, the most important: she reads. The description underscores this fact by framing the description with remarks on her reading that move from the specific situation of her family ("ez dûhte sî guot, swaz sî las") to a larger generalization ("Ir lesen was et dâ vil wert"). By tying her conventional courtly qualities to her literacy, the description makes her reading an ideal courtly act. This scene has often been interpreted as an idealized image of reading based on the connection between the maiden's courtly attributes and her exemplary reading. Mireille Schnyder puts forward just such an interpretation: by drawing an analogy to contemporary religious reading practices that required readers to have exemplary moral conduct, impeccable beliefs, and errorless reading capabilities, Schnyder argues that the maiden's courtly virtues of high birth, youth, intelligence, virtue, chastity, beauty, etc., make her the perfect courtly reader.[70] Such qualities in the reader make her a worthy vessel for the reception of the text in her hands. The relationship, importantly, is also reciprocal, Schnyder argues, and the text receives a certain elevated quality from its reader as well. Combined then with the love and desire she evokes as a courtly maiden and ideal daughter, the text becomes a perfect courtly-erotic text, embodied by the maiden and embedded at the core of Iwein's *âventiure*.[71]

While the idealization of the act of reading and its eroticization are important to this description, the entire scene opens the possibility of an interpretation where the maiden's act of

[70] Schnyder, "Kunst der Vergegenwärtigung und gefährliche Präsenz," 442.
[71] Ibid., 442-3.

reading has consequences for our understanding of the plot of Iwein's *âventiure*. The entire reading scene is tightly constructed as it is framed by the characters' gazes and thereby becomes an act to be viewed and observed. When Iwein approaches the castle, he ascends a flight of stairs that opens out onto a beautiful garden, "daz er vor des noch sît / deheinen schœnern nie gesach," (such that neither before nor since did he ever see any more beautiful, 6442-3). Iwein's gaze into the garden cues a description by the narrator, ostensibly, of everything Iwein sees. In the intervening period the audience's imaginations are escorted through the scene by the narrator, moving first to the old man sitting on a bed befitting the gods surrounded by blooming flowers on a pristine lawn. With his old body, handsome and grand, sitting next to his wife, there could be no more noble, mature pairing. The view then shifts to their daughter sitting in front of them, reading and bringing smiles to their faces. The audience's gaze has been directed very consciously from the patriarch to his wife and then his daughter, establishing the idyllic setting, the nobility of the figures, and the interplay of generations. The scene and its description are then interrupted after about forty lines when the family notices their guest: "Dô sî den gast sâhen, / dô begunden sî gâhen, / diu frouwe und der herre, / gegen im gnuoc verre," (When they saw the stranger, they then made haste, the lady and the lord, to go to meet him from far enough afield, 6475-8). In the moments between his initial gaze and the recognition by his hosts, Iwein and his thoughts are noticeably absent from the description. Instead, the narrator inserts himself conspicuously surmising, instead of asserting, that the mature lady must be the lord's wife ("und wæne wol sî was sîn wîp," [and, I believe, she was his wife], 6454), and then substantiating the daughter's literacy through hearsay ("ein magt, / diu vil wol, ist mir gesagt, / wælsch lesen kunde," […a maiden who could, so I am told, read the Romance language (French) most readily], 6459-61). By thematizing the characters' gazes to activate the audience's visual imagination and by removing Iwein and inserting himself, the narrator suspends the action of the plot and focuses on the scene of the maiden reading as if it were a still-life. This move raises the scene out of its intradiegetic context to an extradiegetic position, as Schnyder claims, effectively presenting the maiden as an exemplary ideal.

There are not enough clues in the scene to lead to a positive identification of the book the maiden reads: the narrator only reports that he has heard that the maiden can read French. Manfred Kern has nevertheless playfully suggested that she could be reading Chrétien's *Yvain*, a French romance, a suggestion strengthened by speculations that in the same scene in *Yvain* the young maiden is reading Chrétien's text.[72] Kern's intention is not to ignite a philological debate about the identity of the book, but to suggest a moment of media transference within the text. Iwein's interruption of the maiden's reading is reminiscent of the *Odyssey* where, in book nine, during an oral performance of the fall of Troy, Odysseus breaks out in tears, reveals his identity, and, at the request of the Phaeacian King, tells his own story. Perhaps, Kern suggests, when Iwein enters and interrupts, he not so much causes an end to the maiden's reading, but rather becomes an embodiment of the story as if it has come to life.[73] Kern hereby suggests an analogous situation between Odysseus's oral storytelling and the maiden's reading to argue that in this period of literary history marked by vocality, the courtly epic was not preoccupied with acquainting the audience with the new medium that made the genre possible, i.e. writing, but with the new form of literary meaning construction enabled by the new medium.[74] An interruption of one fictional story to be continued by another suggests a transferability of

[72] Kern, "Iwein liest 'Laudine'," 396; Kay, "The Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance," 205.
[73] Kern, "Iwein liest 'Laudine'," 396.
[74] Ibid., 390.

fictionality between stories, and when presented in such a fictional construction where readers are reading about a reader reading, the possibilities of contextual, intertextual, and experiential meaning are compounded. This scene of reading, read as an isolated, autoreferential moment, therefore reaches outside the text to reference other texts (perhaps *Yvain* specifically, but at least romances more generally), other reading practices (both courtly and religious), and other readers (the present readers of the romance) to demonstrate the network of contextual meaning utilized by Hartmann's text.

Such an interpretive move beyond the text, however, overlooks the network of reading practices internal to *Iwein* that this chapter seeks to expose. While both Kern and Schnyder reference the prologue to *Iwein* in their analyses of the reading scene, they do not contextualize the reading scene within other textual commonplaces, moments of implicit theorization, or even within its immediate surroundings. After all, this idyllic scene is situated in an otherwise menacing episode. The maiden's reading takes place during Iwein's dark, mysterious, and dangerous stay at the castle that begins with cold shoulders and warnings at his arrival in the town, followed by a rude welcome from the castle gatekeeper, and ends with a forced fight to the death with two giants. These events contrast greatly with the idyllic, hospitable reading scene and should be read against it, suggesting that the reading scene is not as ideal as it appears and might, in fact, be a means to lure Iwein into the machinations of this castle's lord.

An analysis of the garden scene can only be incomplete if not read at least against the immediately preceding scene: after entering the castle compound, Iwein notices a dilapidated textile workhouse in which a large group of enslaved women are working at various tasks. The social and narrative positions of these women inversely mirror those of the young reading maiden, while the topoi and the structure of the scene contrast and resemble the maiden's scene of reading encouraging a direct comparison. An analysis of this scene read against the impending garden scene mars the idealized presentation of the young maiden and ensnares her elevated act of reading in the complex presentation of literary acts that drive the narrative, plot, and discourse of *Iwein*.

At the level of the plot, these women are in opposition to the young maiden, yet they are not quite as different as they appear. The women working in the weaving room were not born to that fate; they, too, were noble born but forced to relinquish their courtly standing by the misadventures of their young lord. Nevertheless, the maiden and her family retain and advance their social status by exploiting these now-enslaved women. While the noble family in the garden scene makes no mention of the workhouse women, the enslaved women are well aware that the family profits greatly from their toil: "Von unserm gewinne / sint sî worden rîche, / und leben wir jæmerlîche," (By our profits they have become rich, and we live wretched lives, 6408-10). Descriptions of anything other than the extravagance or nobility of courtly life are rare in German courtly literature and are used mostly to foil the extravagance and nobility of the imagined courtly society,[75] but the workhouse scene here portrays the labor that sustains the affluence of courtly life.

The social and material conditions of these two different types of women construct an inverse relationship on the level of the plot which is strengthened by their narrative proximity and then underscored by a parallelism in the narrative structures of their respective scenes. As Iwein approaches the workhouse, the scene is portrayed – just as in the garden scene – through Iwein's gaze: he looks through a window in the building to see three hundred women at work: "Darin er durch ein venster sach / würchen wol driu hundert wîp," (Looking in through a

[75] Bumke, *Höfische Kultur, Literatur und Gesellschaft,* 13.

window, he saw a good three hundred women working cloth in there, 6190-1). The window frames and concentrates Iwein's gaze, aestheticizing the scene while designating Iwein as an outsider. As in the garden scene, Iwein sees what is before him, but his presence is not noted in the description of the women and their condition. The women's clothing and bodies are squalid, yet none of them are old; some are weaving fine silk and gold while others do detailed and laudable embroidery work; still other unskilled women take up menial tasks:

> und die des niene kunden,
> die lâsen, dise wunden,
> disiu blou, disiu dahs,
> disiu hachelte flahs,
> disiu bürste, disiu swanc,
> disiu lînwæte twanc,
> rehte wîz als ein swan.
> Disiu streut garn an,
> daz sî ze tuoche wolde weben.
> Diu drümer muose ir disiu gebn.
> Dise spunnen, dise nâten,
> unde wâren doch unberâten. (6201-6212)
>
> and those who had no skill at that
> sorted threads. Some wound yarn,
> this one beat in, that one broke,
> this one hackled flax,
> this one rippled, that one scutched,
> this one forced linen,
> just as white as a swan.
> This one drew out yarn
> which she wanted to weave into cloth.
> That one had to give her the thrums.
> These spun, those sewed,
> and yet they were ill-provided for.

The repetition of similar words (*die*/*disiu*/*daz*/*diu*/*dise*) and the quick pacing of the verses underscore the industry of the women, contrasting with the leisure of the garden scene. The description of their work transitions into a description of their meager bodies, deep hunger, and ragged clothing, which are consequences of their hard work and foils to the beautiful things they produce. The descriptive scene ends, like the garden scene, when the women notice Iwein's presence:

> Ouch wurden sî sîn gewar,
> wâren sî ê riuwevar,
> ir leides wart dô michels mê.
> In tet diu scham als wê
> daz in die arme enpfielen,
> wan in die træhen wielen

ûz den ougen an ir wât.
Daz ir grôzzen unrât
iemen fremder het ersehen,
dâ was in leide an geschehn.
Diu houpt sigen in zetal,
daz sî vergâzen über al
des werches in den henden. (6227-39)

Moreover, now that they beheld Iwein,
if they were of sorrowful aspect before,
their sorrow then grew much greater.
Shame hurt them so hard
that their arms drooped,
for tears fell
from their eyes down upon their garments.
Sorrow befell them
at any stranger having beheld
their great deprivation.
Their heads dropped,
so that they entirely neglected
the work in their hands.

When they realize Iwein is watching them, their shame is increased and materialized in tears that fall onto their work; it overwhelms them and makes them forget the work in their hands. Iwein's interruption here foreshadows his intrusion into the maiden's garden where he disturbs her reading. If we understand Iwein's interruption of the reading maiden, as Schnyder and Kern suggest, as an embodiment and continuation of a story, we can understand his interruption of the women's work similarly. His interruption physically marks a collision of stories, and soon Iwein will take up the women's work and their narrative.

The imagery of the book in the maiden's scene of reading supplies most of the evidence needed to suggest a collision of storyworlds; in the workhouse scene, there are other clues – completely overlooked as far as I can tell – suggesting that this scene, too, provides a moment of implicit theorizing. For example, Iwein interprets the women's presence and appearance as signs of a hidden story. He reads the outward appearances of the women and determines that their noble dispositions and pleasant bodies do not match their current social position. If they were happy and rich, Iwein concludes, they would certainly be beautiful:

Den sint die siten und der lîp
gestalt wol dem gelîche,
wæren sî frô und rîche,
sô wæren sî vil wol getân. (6274-77)

Their bearing and their persons
are, indeed, of such semblance that,
if they were happy and wealthy,
they would be most fair.

Iwein's conclusions are phrased in the subjunctive suggesting that something is wrong, that there are other possible realities for these women, that there must be a story. Iwein first asks the male gatekeeper about the women's situation but is rebuffed; so, Iwein returns to the women, finding a door to enter the workhouse. Despite the decrepit physical surroundings, the narrator stresses that the situation is courtly: the poor women let their work rest while in Iwein's presence, they comport themselves as their proper upbringing demands, and they abstain from the idle talk ("überiger rede") that the narrator usually expects from a gathering of women (6299-302). Iwein then asks the women to tell him their story and whether they are in this position because of birth or disaster:

> nûne sagt mir minre noch mê,
> wan rehte wiez drumbe stê:
> weder hât iu diz lebn
> geburt ode unheil gegebn?" (6319-22)
>
> Now tell me, neither more nor less,
> but precisely how it stands:
> was it birth or misfortune
> gave you this way of life?

In effect, Iwein's presence amongst the women and his request function similarly to the Queen's presence at and request for Kalogreant's narrative, elevating the subsequent words from the "überiger rede" of everyday life to the same aesthetic status as their narrative context. One woman responds to Iwein's request and begins her speech with a brief prologue:

> Unser lebn und unser geburt
> suln wir iu vil gerne sagen,
> got und guoten liuten clagen,
> wie uns grôz êre ist benomen,
> und sîn in disen kumber chomen. (6324-8)
>
> We shall most willingly tell you about
> our way of life and our birth,
> and lament to God and to good people
> how we have been deprived of great honour
> and have met with these troubles.

In this condensed but still recognizably formulaic preface, the woman summarizes her story's theme, she acknowledges Iwein's request to hear her story, and she invokes a larger audience including God and other well-meaning people. By recognizing an audience larger than Iwein, the prologue anticipates its inclusion in Hartmann's overarching narrative. By explaining how a young, inexperienced, and naive lord of their land rode out in search of *âventiure*, arrived at this castle, and lost the battle with the two giants that the lord of the castle imposes on every visitor, the woman narrativizes the failed *âventiure* which is in turn textualized by the word-for-word retelling in Hartmann's narration. When she concludes by telling how the defeated knight

escaped with his life by offering a yearly tribute of thirty maidens, she draws the story up to the present moment and stands there as the embodied consequence of the misadventure. Clearly, the story functions similarly to Kalogreant's failed adventure as a reversal of the normal triumphant *âventiure* that Iwein is supposedly undertaking, but this *mære* is told not by the embarrassed knight, but by the women, the victims of this man's foolhardy *âventiure* and now his *mære*. The women must now rely on another knight to come along and defeat the giants to release them from their physical and narrative exploitation.

Of course, Iwein – and his lion – prevail in the fight against the giants that his host inexplicably forces upon him. The opportunity to redress the women's collective story helps him rectify his misdeeds against his wife and propels him along his journey. The role of women in Iwein's *âventiure* cannot be ignored even though the focus on the title knight can lead to an overshadowing of the female characters. Their roles are varied and function at all levels of the narrative to push Iwein's *âventiure* forward. Sarah Kay makes a convincing argument for *Yvain* that holds *mutatis mutandis* for *Iwein* that the woman constitute part of a "poetics of commodity" where they are exchanged in the course of the romance as gifts and as valuable objects driving Iwein's motivation and the logic of the courtly *âventiure*.[76] Lunete, for example, negotiates Iwein's marriage to Laudine – the first exchange that catalyzes the rest of Iwein's adventures – until Lunete's life is threatened because she helped him after he killed her lord. Iwein now exchanges his valorous deeds for her safety. The workhouse women and the reading maiden are also objects of exchange, when, instead of accepting the lord's daughter after defeating the giants, Iwein swaps his prize for the weavers' freedom. Seeing the women as exchange goods in the entire romance is an oversimplification because women also serve to intervene where knights fail, like when Lunete convinces her lady to marry Iwein and when the three women who rescue Iwein from his madness, resuscitate his courtly being and provide him with a knightly challenge to restart his *âventiure*. Women, therefore, function at the plot level to rescue, resuscitate, and encourage Iwein's *âventiure* and at a discursive level to question the role of the knight and the social function of his adventures as well as to theorize the narrativization of those adventures.

The enslaved women's weaving work materially underwrites the leisure enjoyed by the maiden and her parents in the garden, while also symbolically suggesting a conventional sign of literary production. The orality of the working women's tale and the textuality of the maiden's book further suggest a pairing of production and consumption. The position that the enslaved woman has as storyteller is a productive one supported by the metaphor of weaving textiles and text that propels both Iwein the knight and *Iwein* the *mære* by providing a story to be completed. This role is further supported by the maiden's reading and Iwein's embodiment of her text that was provided to her materially and symbolically by the weavers. In fact, the weavers' work also materially sustains Iwein when first arrives at the castle and is offered clothing and fine garments produced in the workhouse:

> Dânach gap sî im an
> vil wîze lînwât reine,
> geritiert cleine,
> und ein samîtes mantellîn.
> Darunder was hærmîn,
> als ez ob hemden wol stât. (6487-91)

[76] Kay, "The Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance," 207.

After that she gave him
much pure white linen to wear,
finely pleated,
and a little cloak of samite.
Ermine was beneath it,
as is seemly above tunics.

The women thus function in both instances to turn Iwein into a productive reader, a receiver of stories and texts that he is then meant to embody and live out in the rest of his *âventiure* – both his knightly deeds and their narrativization. The ideal knight thus becomes someone who reads productively, while the ideal *âventiure* is one that encourages a productive reading in its *mære*.

Conclusion

After contextualizing and comparing several scenes of reading in Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein*, I have shown how a poetics of reading emerges that is fundamental to both the plot and literary discourse of the romance. The web of depicted literary activity indexes, complicates, and ultimately theorizes the forms and acts of storytelling and reading employed by Hartmann. The multi-level storytelling and contemporary conceptualizations of reading included in these scenes develop, articulate, and enact a theory of literature as a practice capable of cultural production and critique. The romance demonstrates this capability by intertwining the levels of plot – *âventiure* – and narrative discourse – *mære* – making Iwein's actions into a story and his story into an adventure. By using scenes of reading as well as figurations of composers, readers, narrators, and audiences to entwine these levels of discourse, *Iwein* grants reading a critical and productive role in the function of literature. Kalogreant's tale along with the workhouse and garden scenes portray a critical mode of reading when they critique cultural practices, like the *âventiure*, as well as the exploitative social structures that enable literary practices like storytelling and reading. They portray a productive mode of reading by demonstrating the active role audiences play in shaping the structures and meaning-making potential of imaginative texts. By mapping this same critical and productive reading potential onto its audience through its various scenes of reading, Hartmann's *Iwein* encourages the active interpretation, embodiment, and adaptation of imaginative *âventiure* and their *mære* for critical purposes.

Chapter 2

Scenes of Sensuous Reading:
The Devoted Reader and Her Praxis in the *Legatus divinae pietatis*

While Hartmann's *Iwein* engages reading as practiced and performed in the courtly culture of the High Middle Ages, the text at the center of this chapter functions within the parallel reading culture developed in medieval European monastic communities, one focused on the reading, study, and interpretation of the scriptures and other devotional texts.[77] The *Legatus divinae pietatis* (*The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness*) is a religious text written in Latin by the community of nuns at the convent of St. Mary in Helfta around the year 1300. It is an amalgamation of the life and visions of Gertrude of Helfta (c. 1256–1302), one of several women at the convent who received and recorded visions from God. The text, as I will show, served many different functions in the religious life of the women in this convent, but most fundamentally it was a devotional text that sought to teach and incite direct sensory experience with an intimate knowledge of God. *Lectio divina* was for most of the early and high Middle Ages the predominant mode of scripture reading, a system of ascetic activities that began with slow, careful, and repetitive *lectio* that lead to *meditatio* and *oratio*.[78] The transition from reading to meditation to prayer was imagined as a communication circuit with the divine as God spoke through the texts to the reader and the reader responded through prayer.[79] This means of devotional reading focused on the text's role in initiating the reader's intellect to imagine, contemplate, and – to the extent possible – comprehend the divine. By the end of the thirteenth century when the *Herald* was composed, however, devotional practices were increasingly exploring the possibility that the human body could sense, experience, and engage the divine. The *Herald* provides a historic record of this shift in devotional practices.

Despite earlier warnings from theologians such as Augustine and Gregory the Great that the physical senses were inadequate, sinful, or otherwise incompatible with experiences of the divine,[80] late medieval devotional practices embraced the physical senses as vehicles to move the soul toward God.[81] Food, paintings, sculptures, incense, and music purportedly initiated vivid visions of Christ and sensuous encounters with him among devotees. The *Herald* has often been cited as evidence for the senses' integral role in the incitement and experience of divine encounters for the few people who received them.[82] It depicts the encounters of holy women with the divine in sensory terms; it portrays them seeing, feeling, and tasting the divine; and it

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[77] This chapter is an expansion and reframing of a previously published article: Reitz, "Sensuous Reading in the *Legatus divinae pietatis*."
[78] Stock, *After Augustine*, 105.
[79] See, for example, the admonition often repeated by the early proponents of monasticism: "May you engage constantly in prayer or reading: in one you speak with God, in the other God speaks with you." Stock, *After Augustine*, 105.
[80] Newhauser, "Introduction." Casagrande, "From Vigilance to Temperance," argues for a strong turn in the understanding of the senses from naturally sinful to naturally inculpable; however, it is more accurate to speak of a tempered shift since the senses were neither completely disparaged previously nor entirely embraced afterward.
[81] For the role of sensory perception in medieval devotional practices, see Largier, *Figures of Possibility*; Hamburger's fundamental work on images and vision, *The Visual and Visionary*, "Seeing and Believing," and "Speculations on Speculation"; Jung, "The Tactile and the Visionary" on touch; Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment* on vision as a physical encounter; and Williamson, "Sensory Experience" for inaudible sounds and invisible images.
[82] For example, Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, and Jung, "The Tactile and the Visionary."

highlights the physicality and materiality of their experiences. The graphic language, images, and metaphors employed in the *Herald* to portray the experiences of Gertrude and other women suggest that these events were not recorded as mere historical witnesses. Instead, they formed an integral part of a larger rhetorical scheme meant to generate and convey divine knowledge and experience through devotional practices.[83] That sensory experiences can be evoked by partaking in the Eucharist, hearing the choir sing mass, smelling incense in the church, or gazing at painted altars is clear. But how can reading, a fundamental practice in the religious devotee's repertoire, often imagined as solitary and purely cognitive, be sensual? How can tasteless, odorless, frictionless text manifest sensory knowledge of the divine?

The *Herald* provides an example. It channels and evokes the physical, sensual aspects of late medieval devotional culture in reading practices through a rhetorical appeal to the senses merged with an imaginative theorization of reading. The *Herald* employs rhetorical techniques, sensory language, and appeals to material objects to engage the senses – both the so-called inner and outer senses – and ignites the imagination so that readers can experience God with their entire bodies. These techniques are supported by a specific concept of embodied reading that revolves around the material status of the book, the phenomenological experience of reading, and the corporality of the reader. The combination of the sensual rhetoric and conceptualization of reading presented by the *Herald* is most apparent in multiple scenes of reading. These scenes depict a devotional practice that does not just elicit contemplation and prayer but also engenders physical feeling and experiences of the divine in human sensory terms, enabling the *Herald* to effectively portray, promote, and enact reading as a sensory experience of the divine.

The *Herald*'s presentation of reading as a physical act involving bodies and objects that ignite the senses is exemplary of a key paradox in late medieval piety, namely, that objects and materials were increasingly understood to contain and express the divine even in a religion characterized more and more by interiority, negative theology, and mysticism.[84] The *Herald* presented itself as just such an object, a material book that incites sensory experiences meant to deepen the personal relationship between devotees and Christ.[85] Recently, Jessica Barr has convincingly argued that the *Herald*'s portrayal of itself as a material book with somatic attributes suggests that it serves as the meeting point for intimate interactions between the body of the book's reader and the imagined body of Christ.[86] My argument builds on this idea of intimate reading in the *Herald* by investigating the activation of the human senses through sensual language, evocative imagery, and the phenomenological experience of reading in order to achieve union with the divine.

By analyzing the *Herald*'s scenes of reading, I will argue that the codex not only serves as the location of intimate interactions with the divine, but that it also becomes a physical and symbolic representation of Christ that the reader is encouraged to taste, smell, and touch in her

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[83] See Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg and Her Book*, 6–9, for a concise overview of the scholarly debate on how to interpret seemingly (auto)biographical mystical and visionary texts. I agree with Poor that such texts are most likely a complex combination of historical truths and literary constructions.

[84] Bynum, *Christian Materiality*. For an analysis of religious objects intended to incite sensory experiences for devotional practices, see Bagnoli, "Longing to Experience," and for medieval sensory objects more generally, see Griffiths and Starkey, *Sensory Reflections*.

[85] Recent scholarship has shown that the materiality of manuscripts organized and regulated reading bodies through embodied forms of reading, incited affectual reading practices, and created sacred spaces where the five senses could be activated in the production of meaning. See Amsler, *Affective Literacies*; McNamer, *Affective Meditation*; Camille, "Sensations of the Page"; Palazzo, "Art, Liturgy, and the Five Senses"; Dillon, *The Sense of Sound*.

[86] Barr, *Intimate Reading*.

own way. From there I will extrapolate a concept of reading held by the women at Helfta in which reading is a sensory experience that, if done properly, unites the text, the book, the reader, and God with one another. I will also make the argument, based on the communal devotional practices at Helfta, that the sensuous reading practice portrayed in the *Herald* united the women of this convent into both a textual and a sensory community.[87] Ultimately, I will show that the devotional potential of this text is centered on neither the retelling of Gertrude's visions and life nor a hermeneutical explanation of the divine, but rather on the sensual experiences the text encourages between the reader's body, the book's text, and Christ.

The Herald's Historical and Devotional Contexts

The convent of St. Maria at Helfta was a center for religious learning and writing in the second half of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries, when the women there produced various mystical texts that explored theological and devotional themes framed within a search for knowledge of the divine through union with Christ.[88] These texts include meditations, prayers, visions, and anecdotes about the daily lives and devotional practices of the women in Helfta that make it clear that these texts themselves were an integral part of the women's routine devotional activities.[89] All the texts produced in Helfta are believed to be a communal effort, since several include stories about their composition in which multiple figures are involved, and since all have textual evidence of other writers, editors, and/or endorsers.[90]

The *Herald* is divided into five books: Gertrude wrote what is now considered book two probably around 1290. It portrays scenes of her receiving God's grace based on the visions she received beginning in 1281.[91] One or more nuns who lived and wrote with Gertrude composed books three, four, and five probably during Gertrude's lifetime. These books expand on Gertrude's gifts of the spirit and other visitations and visions she received. Book one, a sort of *vita* for Gertrude, was also written by one or more fellow sisters, most likely shortly after Gertrude's death.[92] Despite various speculations, the contributors – those who had a hand in producing, compiling, and approving the entire text – remain anonymous.[93] The composition history of other texts written at Helfta, like the *Book of Special Grace* attributed to Mechthild of Hackeborn and the final book of the *Flowing Light of the Godhead*, otherwise written by

[87] For the concept of sensory communities, I draw on Newhauser, "The Senses," and Griffiths and Starkey, *Sensory Reflections*.
[88] Under the leadership of Gertrude of Hackeborn (d. 1292), the convent of Helfta became an intellectual and theological center. The other known writers associated with Helfta are Mechthild of Magdeburg (d. 1280/90) and Mechthild of Hackeborn (d. 1299). For the history of the convent and its textual production, see Kirakosian, *From the Material to the Mystical*, 13–19.
[89] Löser, "Schriftmystik"; Nemes, "Text Production and Authorship."
[90] For the history of collective writing practices at Helfta, see Hubrath, *Schreiben und Erinnern* and "The *Liber specialis gratiae* as a Collective Work of Several Nuns"; Kolletzki, "Über die Wahrheit dieses Buches"; Grimes, "Writing as Birth"; Harrison, "Oh! What Treasure"; Nemes, "Scenes of Writing, Figurations of Authorship"; Kirakosian, *From the Material to the Mystical*.
[91] For more about the life of Gertrude of Helfta see Ruh, *Frauenmystik* and "Gertrude von Helfta." For the other texts she composed, see Harrison, "Oh! What Treasure," 77.
[92] Ruh, "Gertrud von Helfta"; Harrison, "Oh! What Treasure," 77-78. For an analysis of a recently discovered special edition of the *Legatus* that depicts a greater authorial consciousness on the part of this other sister, see Nemes, "Scenes of Writing, Figurations of Authorship."
[93] Harrison, "Oh! What Treasure," 76–77 and 76n4.

Mechthild of Magdeburg, are similarly complex.[94] The texts present all persons involved as people who, through the grace of God, serve to speak and record God's words and not their own[95] – the women are just God's mouthpieces, scribal hands, and assistants.[96] Thus, focusing on any specific Helfta woman as author of these texts misunderstands the collective nature of their textual endeavors, misplaces the focus on human instead of divine authority, and overlooks the attempt to present God as ever-present in this community.[97]

In their textual production, this vibrant intellectual community addresses several pressing issues and exemplifies characteristics of late medieval piety, including an increased focus on the somatic and the role of the human senses in experiencing the divine, mystical encounters and the difficulty in expressing them in human language, and reading practices within an increasingly networked textual culture. The *Herald* in particular provides a compelling example of how these issues are intertwined and how these women combined the practical elements of their devotion with theological argumentation and scriptural precedents to address outstanding issues.

In portraying visions and personal encounters with Christ, the *Herald* is situated in a long history of seeking experience and knowledge of the divine that reaches back to the early Greek church fathers and includes pre-Christian Greek and Jewish thought. Attitudes toward the role of the bodily senses in the search for experience and knowledge of the divine evolved over the centuries, but by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the depiction and language of mystical experiences were increasingly somatic. An Aristotelian understanding of the senses as the source of physical sensation and the first step toward knowing became prevalent in learned circles,[98] while late medieval devotion increasingly focused on Christological practices including a greater veneration of Christ's body. Devotees and theologians alike focused on the tension between the divine and human elements embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate God in whom body, soul, and divinity are one. The overall interests in "the human Jesus, [a] hunger for his direct bodily presence in the Eucharist, and [a] desire to gain holiness and access to God by physically imitating Jesus and his followers" influenced many mystical theologians to believe that human "bodies have a central role in our approach to and union with God."[99]

The writings of Bernard of Clairvaux were greatly influential in promoting the human body's heightened role in experiencing the divine. Unlike earlier theologians such as Augustine, Bernard did not explain away sensory language in the scriptures as mere surface text or metaphor; instead, he understood it as affective on a single human sensorium that could be directed at material and bodily things as well as spiritual and divine things.[100] This single human sensorium represented a fusion of the dichotomy between an outer set of senses for perceiving worldly, material objects and an inner set of spiritual senses for perceiving divinity, a concept that had originated with Origen of Alexandria's biblical commentaries and greatly influenced subsequent understanding of the human senses.[101] Despite the supposed split, Origen still suggested that both sets of senses were vital to correct interpretation of the scriptures. For as

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[94] Harrison, "Oh! What Treasure," 76–78. Hubrath has developed an "open concept of authorship" to describe the composition of the *Herald* and the *Book*. Hubrath, "The *Liber specialis gratiae* as a Collective Work of Several Nuns" and *Schreiben und Erinnern*.
[95] Harrison, "Oh! What Treasure," 89.
[96] See *Liber* 5:32 and *Legatus* 5.34.1.9-11
[97] Harrison, "Oh! What Treasure," 93-96.
[98] Camille, "Sensations of the Page," 33; Bagnoli, "Making Sense," 23.
[99] Rudy, *Mystical Language of Sensation*, 5.
[100] Ibid., 36-7 and 45.
[101] Rudy, *Mystical Language of Sensation*, 25.

Niklaus Largier recognizes, Origen proposed that the holy scriptures do not just convey a historical understanding (as in a form of discrete knowledge) but also engender a new reality of vividly sensual experience in which the senses play an important perceptive role.[102] Bernard's writings, in a way, renewed the close interaction between internal and external senses; he embraced the knowledge provided by external sensory perception and employed sensory language based on the more immediate senses of taste and touch in kissing and embracing to portray the immediacy of union with God and with the humanity of Christ. Bernard's influence extended to the writings of Hadewijch of Brabant, Bonaventure, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Rudolf of Biberach, Jan Ruusbroec, and Richard Rolle, which presented "an integrated notion of the mystical self that saw the outer and inner aspects of sensation – feeling, desiring, perceiving and knowing – as part of a continuum of conscious and progressive reception of divine gifts."[103]

Somatic devotional practices were especially, but certainly not exclusively, cultivated in female religious communities, where writers report women's bodies beginning to behave in new ways as they experienced or encountered the divine. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, records of women experiencing extreme bodily wonders appear, including "stigmata, incorruptibility of the cadaver in death, mystical lactations and pregnancies, catatonic trances, ecstatic nose bleeds, miraculous inedia, eating and drinking pus, [and] visions of bleeding hosts."[104] These records align with the contemporary focus on *imitatio christi* and its attendant ascetic practices across late medieval European devotional cultures. It is difficult, however, to conclude to what extent medieval holy women engaged in and endured these practices or felt the deep passions conveyed in their *vitae*, because many contemporaries regarded women as unsuitable for systematic theological thought, leading to two possible distortions: perhaps many women felt forced to present their intellectual contributions as seemingly passive, emotional, corporeal, and nonintellectual experiences of the divine, while other writers – especially men – may have over-emphasized the somatic piety of women.[105] What we are left with, nevertheless, are forms of female spirituality that are often understood and expressed in bodily terms. At stake is not a recreation of the individual historical experiences of the divine, but the use of sensuous rhetoric and somatic imagery by the women at Helfta to conceptualize, express, and propagate complex theological issues and devotional practices.

The somatic imagery was, as I will show, an effective way for the Helfta women to confront a perennial problem for mystical texts, namely, the adequate conveyance of knowledge and experiences of the divine to audiences through human language. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Meister Eckhart, for example, often employed negative theology, in which language is used to express what God is by stating what he is not. Mechthild of Magdeburg acknowledges this same problem by admitting to the inadequacy of her speech in a *sermo humilis* trope and attributing her words to God. The *Herald* attempts to convey knowledge of the divine not so much in abstract concepts or metaphors as through relatable bodily sensations; however, it still runs into the issue of linguistic mediation when it needs to express via text knowledge that was originally won through the senses. Gertrude of Helfta and the other contributors to the *Herald* were aware of this issue, and as a solution they presented the act of

[102] Largier, "Die Applikation der Sinne," 50.
[103] McGinn, "Late Medieval Mystics," 209.
[104] Bynum, "The Female Body and Religious Practice," 171.
[105] Hollywood argues that accounts of holy women written by men stress somatic and highly visible piety more than those penned by women, which tend to emphasize theological concepts similar to those important to male monastic writers: the apostolic life, the roles of poverty, work, and action, and the imitating of Christ to reach unity with the divine. Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife,* 26–56. See also Barr, "Reading Wounds."

reading – the act of deciphering text – as a sensory experience analogous to the sensory experiences of the figures in the text. Therefore, the reader can experience the divine in the same medium – bodily sensation – as Gertrude supposedly did.

The act of reading the women at Helfta present is a product of a rise in literacy and written culture in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that affected devotional practices (as well as many other facets of medieval culture) by fundamentally shifting models of meaning-making toward new and emerging concepts of written language. The written word, or at least the concept thereof, restructured society and knowledge in lasting ways, including the creation of textual communities, which were mainly religious communities whose thoughts and actions had been reformed around key interpretations of a particular text.[106] The written word as an authoritative source for beliefs and practices became central to the identity of these communities. By the late thirteenth century, then, this process had fully matured, and the centrality of particular texts and their interpretations to religious communities were almost taken for granted.

Notions of community were a prevailing concern in all the Helfta writings, making this Benedictine/Cistercian convent a prime example of Brian Stock's notion of a textual community, both within its own walls and as part of an elaborate monastic network.[107] At a local level, its texts resembled *Gnadenvitae* and *Schwesterbücher*, functioning as both devotional manuals and memory archives for the sisters in Helfta, around which their communal identity coalesced.[108] At a broader level, the Cistercians in Western Europe constituted a textual community in that they developed and propagated shared reading and hermeneutical practices that swung dialectically between text and experience.[109] Such a monastic reader "engaged his mind and his senses" when reading in an attempt to rehearse, revivify, and relive the recorded experience. His "grasping of the inner meaning depended largely on his ability to come to grips with what was before him on the page," a process that required close interaction "between the text, his self, and his faith."[110] This interaction engendered the creation of an experience rather than the mere conveyance of discrete objective knowledge, an experience which was available to all devoted readers. This Cistercian understanding of reading as an interactive experience between text, self, and faith through the activation of the senses underlies the rhetorical program of the *Herald*. The *Herald* presents this experience as an interaction among bodies facilitated by sensuous acts of reading. The text's appeal to the body's senses bridges the ostensible gap between the human and the divine while also creating the possibility for a shared communal experience. Its employment of scenes of reading details in material, physical, and sensory terms how this mode of reading functions through the explicit interactions between codex, the reader, and the divine.

The Book as Christ's Body

The embodied reading practice presented in the *Herald* is predicated upon a complex metaphorical, ontological, and theological relationship between Christ, the reader, and the material book. The scenes of reading predominantly portray all three as bodies that interact, proving and perceiving somatic sensation. Christ and the reader, at least implicitly, already have

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[106] Stock, *The Implications of Literacy*, 90.
[107] Stock, *The Implications of Literacy*, 90. For analyses of community in the writings from Helfta, see Hubrath, *Schreiben und Erinnern*, and Voaden, "All Girls Together."
[108] Hubrath, "Monastische Memoria als Denkform"; Bürkle, *Literatur im Kloster*, 178.
[109] Stock, *The Implications of Literacy*, 405.
[110] Ibid., 409.

bodies, but what about the book? Before analyzing the reading scenes, we need to understand how the *Herald* presents itself – metonymically as text and codex – as an embodied object, often either as an embodiment of Christ's divinity or an object meant to be consumed or incorporated by another body. This understanding of the book as a material, somatic, and divine object will be important in the configurations of the reading scenes analyzed in the next section.

The *Herald* is read repeatedly in the *Herald*. It presents itself in various scenes as text, words, or a completed codex. The imagery of the *Herald* in all its constituent parts, from the text inspired by God and written by Gertrude to the book blessed by Christ and read by the community of nuns, bespeaks the awareness the women of Helfta had for the book they were producing, underscoring their belief that it already existed and that they had merely been commissioned to write it down. The awareness of the writers for the textual status of the book is continually reflected on in the *Herald*. Several scenes depict the *Herald*'s conception and production, presenting the reader with a specific conceptualization of what this book is and how it should be regarded, read, and interpreted.

The awareness of the simultaneous divine, material, and semiotic status of the *Herald* is portrayed through imagery of the text and book that is charged with Christlike carnal and divine attributes. For example, the divine words of the book are made flesh. As Jessica Barr points out, the *Herald* first takes shape when it is written on Gertrude's body, which "becomes a divinely authored text to be read, first in the process of composition and subsequently by her audience."[111] This embodied textuality of the *Herald* is portrayed in the second book, where the word of God rains down on a struggling, doubtful Gertrude. Her body is too weak to absorb anything useful except some profoundly significant words, which, however, her inadequate human understanding cannot grasp: she is "a delicate and tender little shoot" flattened to the ground by the heavy beating of the rain (2.10.2.4–11).[112] Gertrude's ability to absorb words that she cannot understand and then pour them out onto the page as if they were her own suggests that her encounter with God is more embodied than intellectual.[113] In this scene, Gertrude's body first receives the text, lending it a physical form; then, she uses her body to convey the words into script. In effect, her body becomes the medium on which, and then the medium through which, the book is written. The text, or so this imagery suggests, is Christlike in that it is the word made flesh, but then it is also the flesh made word, again.

The text of the *Herald* in its own self-presentation continually vacillates between the word as flesh and the flesh as word. In one of Gertrude's visions recorded in book five, Christ appears holding a completed version of the *Herald* and says: "I have pressed this book which is mine deep into my divine breast to saturate every single letter written in it with the sweetness of my divinity, as sweetest mead drenches a bite of fresh bread with sweetness, so that each one who reads it in humble devotion for my praise will gain the fruit of eternal life" (5.33.1.3–9). This text is the product of Gertrude's channeling the word of God through her body onto the page. Christ takes up the book and presses it against his body, bringing the word back into contact with the flesh to infuse it with his divine substance. The text has an indeterminate status here as both the word and the flesh, since Christ's body has transferred his divinity into the text

[111] Barr, *Intimate Reading*, 166.
[112] Citations of the *Herald* refer to Gertrude d'Helfta, *Œuvres Spirituelles* and are cited by book, chapter, paragraph, and line numbers. English translations of passages from book five are from Nemes, "Text Production and Authorship," while all other English translations are my own in consultation with Gertrude the Great of Helfta, *The Herald*, translated by Barratt, and Gertrud die Grosse von Helfta, *Gesandter*, translated by Lanczkowski.
[113] Barr, *Intimate Reading*, 168.

as if it, like Gertrude's body, has a material form capable of absorbing Christ's essence. The word both houses God's divinity, like Christ's human body, and expresses it. The imagery of this transference of divinity through bodies and objects via physical contact mirrors the divine effects of the mystical touch, kiss, or embrace.

Meanwhile the strikingly relatable image of bread soaking up mead functions as a metaphor for the rich delights contained in the text. The additional mention of the "fruit of eternal life" that is offered to the book's reader underscores the book's contents as *sweet-tasting* and introduces the notion of the book being something to be consumed. The image of mead-soaked bread evokes the eucharistic body, further highlighting the somatic understanding of Christ and text, and it insinuates the act of consuming that body in the form of the host, especially since the Eucharist becomes an explicit image just a few lines later when Christ declares: "Through the same power by which, at mass, I have transformed the bread and wine for the salvation of all, I have sanctified everything written in this book by my heavenly blessing for the true salvation of all those, as I have said, who read it in humble devotion" (5.33.1.13–17). By invoking the power of transubstantiation, Christ transforms the substance of the book into His own body, making it a sweet morsel of food accessible to Christians for consumption through the act of reading.

Endowed with Christ's divinity and portrayed as a graspable body or object, the codex is analogous to, if not an extension of, his body as divine essence incarnated. It functions as a cross between a bodily form and a material object like a relic, making it a book that should be read and handled not just as a holy text but as Christ's body. This combination of divine and somatic imagery reflects a certain treatment of the theological problem of knowing the divine. Divine essence is described in these scenes not as a material object but as a quality. This quality can only be explained through an appeal to sensory perception, like rain with its overwhelming *wetness* and mead with its *sweetness*; yet it is the unquantifiable wetness and sweetness themselves that hold the mark of the divine, not the rain or the mead, strictly speaking. These sensory adjectives, importantly, do not function as metaphors (as if Christ's divinity is as sweet *as* mead); instead, the sweetness is a clear sign that Christ's divinity is present, a sign that the human body can perceive the divinity just as it can taste the sweetness of mead.

A connection between Christ and the book is also created through the sense of smell. After Christ uses the power of transubstantiation to sanctify the words of the book, Christ praises the book's writer, saying that "she had adorned me with as many vials of perfume as there are letters in the book" (5.33.1.19–21). This imagery endorses the author's writing while also presenting Christ's body as a perfumed object to be enjoyed in sensory terms. The metaphorical connection between the number of perfume vials and the number of letters in the book both sets the writer's work into material terms and creates a sensory analogy between the smell of the vials and the perception of the text, thereby conflating the sensory experience of Christ's body with that of the text.

The *Herald* – as a book – figures as Christ's body in yet another way in this passage. Shortly after the comparison with the Eucharist, Christ decorates the book to show that its contents come from him: "For I will cover this book which even now I often have called mine with my most holy life and adorn it with the rose-coloured jewels of my five wounds and seal it with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, as with seven seals, by my divine might, so that no one shall be able to pluck this book from my hand" (5.33.1.32–7). The wounds, elements of Christ's own body, adorn the book as jewelry, again suggesting that the book is the body of Christ. There is a rich tradition of equating books with Christ's body or considering them as incarnations of

logos; for example, the Bible has passages where the holy text functions as a metonymic realization of the absent God, and many medieval manuscripts containing the holy scriptures were decorated and treated as reliquaries for the body of Christ.[114] Codex Bibles were often richly decorated with gold, ivory, and jewels and paraded around or prominently placed in public view during rituals to symbolize the presence of Christ. When ostentatiously decorated in this way, the Bible embodied the high value and mystical meaning of the text in material form and functioned less as a communication medium than as a sacred signifier expressing the mystery and truth of faith.[115] The scene from the *Herald*, then, evokes the creation and decoration of just such a reliquary.

The decoration of the finished codex with Christ's wounds makes the book a multisensory object appealing to the sense of sight and tactile perception. Christ's wounds are ever-present in medieval meditations, as they powerfully recall the Passion. Christ's side wound was particularly venerated as a doorway that could be penetrated to reach His heart or opened to release an outpouring of His divinity.[116] Similar to the bread of the Eucharist, which allows Christ to be tasted, these wounds can be touched to access Christ in the *Herald*. In an earlier vision, Christ presses Gertrude against His side wound to substantiate her divine inspiration. When Gertrude, humbly expressing doubt that God would genuinely grant her the gifts of the Spirit, asks her friend Mechthild of Hackeborn to seek advice directly from Christ, Christ appears to Mechthild, "embracing the one [Gertrude] for whom she prays, with His right arm, so that her left side – where the heart lies – was fastened to the opening of His wound of love" (1.16.1.15–18). Mechthild wonders what this vision means, and Christ explains to her that "by seeing [Gertrude's] heart attached to my side wound, you should realize that I have prepared her heart so that she can directly absorb the flow of my divinity at any time" (1.16.1.25–8). Christ's inner divinity can thus flow through bodies; in this case from His side wound to Gertrude's heart, but also, given the imagery of the book as an embodiment of Christ divinity, from the book to any reader.

Sensuous Reading in the Herald

Since the *Herald* portrays the book as a physical embodiment of divine essence that is to be tasted, touched, sniffed, and seen, it follows that it also portrays a method of reading that foregrounds physical interaction and sensory perception. In the *Herald*, where the textual object is the mediator of divinity, accessible through an affective and sensory experience, the reader's body becomes the focus of reception. The key role of the reader's body is apparent in several scenes of reading in which sensual language and imagery are employed to both portray and engender a sensuous reading practice. These scenes depict the sensation that the characters experience when reading, demonstrating how reading can lead to bodily sensation. Simultaneously, the sensuous language in these passages extends the sensual experiences of the characters in the text to the actual reader of the book. In this way, the scenes of reading in the *Herald* explicitly demonstrate and enact how the sensual language of the text is transformed into sensual perception for the reader.

These scenes depict, in some ways, the theory of reading described by Hugh of St. Victor in which the effect of reading on a reader is compared to the effect of music on a listener. The

[114] Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen, Schrift und Bild*, 344-56.
[115] Ibid., 351.
[116] Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 14-15; Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, 164 and 219.

sensual rhetoric is set in a particular context so that its persuasive effect is employed in the form of a sensual experience – in its reception, the "explicatio" of the text passes over to an "applicatio" that empties the text of its meaning and converts it into a vividly sensual "experientia" or "cognitio experimentalis."[117] The sensual rhetoric of the *Herald*'s reading scenes encourages such a reading experience, one that transcends the traditional distinction between inner and outer senses and bodies. In these scenes of reading, the *Herald* conflates the sensual experience of the figures, the rhetoric of the text, and the actual reading experience of the devotional reader.

In book two of the *Herald,* Gertrude lays out a brief theory of reading using a complicated set of metaphors that combines the process of reading and understanding with an act of eating. Comparing the reader to a student, she portrays the reading process as an intensification of understanding:

> May [readers] achieve personal experience of ampler graces in their innermost being, just as a student arrives at the rules of logic by way of the alphabet! In the same way, may they, who read what has been recorded here, be led by these pictures of the imagination to taste within themselves that hidden manna, that can through no physical conception be conveyed. Whoever tastes it once, hungers for it forever. (2.24.1.12–17)

This prayer mixes metaphors to a dizzying degree: the process of reading the book is compared to a student's intellectual maturation, in an escalation of intellectual activity from letter learning, to learning how to read, and finally to learning the structures of logic and thought. Furthermore, the reader is described as hopefully being led to God's hidden love by means of "pictures of the imagination." But these metaphors drawing on intellectual capacity are contrasted by the image of heavenly manna and the evocation of the bodily act of eating. There is a tension, too, in the fact that Gertrude says this heavenly manna cannot be portrayed in physical terms, yet she simultaneously appeals to the sense of taste to convey the greatness of God's love. Another source of tension arises when, despite the intellectual work the first few metaphors imply, Gertrude ultimately compares what is won from the reading process to food provided by God that literally falls out of the sky with no human effort required. The desire such a taste evokes is also portrayed affectively as an 'eternal hunger' – a description that combines both human (hunger) and divine (eternity) characteristics. Gertrude inserts this physical description of reading's reward right at the moment when, presumably, intellectual description fails to grasp the meaning or experience; yet the somatic description relies on the intellectual build-up to effectively portray the acquisition of divine knowledge. Thus, we see a process that grants the reader's body what we might call both cognitive and affective capabilities, guiding her from reading to understanding to sensual experience.

A similar example of this process appears at the end of the *Herald*. The writer prays that the book will prove fruitful for every reader and then calls out "the simpler readers of this book, those who are not able by themselves to swim in the stream of divine grace" (5.36.1.18–20). Such readers "may at least travel by this vehicle and rejoice that they, too, may be led by the hand through their neighbour's gifts of grace until finally they begin to taste, by reading, meditating, and contemplating, how sweet the Lord is" (5.36.1.20–4). As before, the text portrays the progression of a novice in a process that builds up through stages of intellectual and imaginary work to culminate in a sensory experience, the tasting of the sweetness of the Lord.

[117] Largier, "Die Applikation der Sinne," 45.

These instructions exemplify the type of exercises necessary to construct the inner senses and the space where the distinction between inner and outer senses can be transcended. In the *Herald*, that space is created through the sensuous interaction between the reader, the text, and the divine. The passage also specifically signals the intermediary stages of meditation and contemplation. These practices are essential to internalizing the reading experiences presented in the *Herald* and connecting the external senses with the inner senses, for they encourage the reader to dwell on what has been read, savoring the invoked physical sensation and growing the capacity of the inner senses. The *Herald* seems not to draw any great distinction between the inner senses as spiritual senses and as cognitive functions. Inner seeing, tasting, and hearing in devotional practices designated a type of spiritual understanding that knows something about the divine but does not require absolute knowledge. Thus, the "goal of affective mysticism is," as Patricia Dailey argues, "to allow one's affective and thus embodied experience to stimulate the construction of the inner body and then to allow the heart, innards, or inner senses to speak and act through the outer body. […] The inner is developed so that it may become a reality that dominates, scripts, and bestows sense on the outer."[118] Reading is the practice within medieval devotion that enables the outer senses to build the inner body and sharpen its senses for reception of the divine. Once the inner body begins to sense and receive the divine, it can channel its reality onto the outer body, sharpening its perception of the world or directing its actions, including acts of praying, writing, and preaching.

These recurring tensions between divine and human, inner and outer, cognitive and sensual are reflected in the portrayal of reading as both a cultivated practice, something that must be pieced together through continual work, like a school child learning logic through the alphabet, and a God-given, divinely immersive event, like the feasting on manna. As the portrayals of reading work to show how reading bridges these supposed sets of opposites and subsumes them all as constitutive elements in reading, devotional readers may still be unsure of how to reconcile the two. On the one hand, they are called to read, meditate, and contemplate, to actively engage in the reading practices portrayed; on the other hand, they are compelled to be led by the divine, to give themselves over to the sensation. It is in these seemingly contradictory instructions that the reader is encouraged to identify with the readers presented in the text, but to also reflect on their own practices.

The *Herald* continues to provide instruction on a proper mode of reading for its readers, but in a way that encourages and incites the sensory and embodied reading practice it espouses. The instruction or explanation comes in the form of Christ supplying an explanation to one of the women, usually Gertrude or Mechthild, for a vision they received. For example, to explain the formative role of the outer senses for the inner senses and then the executive role of the inner body over the outer, the *Herald* offers a telling metaphor from the mouth of Christ. When Mechthild receives the vision meant to reassure Gertrude that she is divinely inspired, Christ explains to Mechthild that his heart is inseparably united with Gertrude's soul so that they are one spirit. Their wills correspond "as if members of her body were in harmony with his heart just as a thinking man is in control of his heart: when he decides to do something, immediately the hand completes it" (1.16.2.9–11). Then Christ takes the somatic metaphor further:

> she is like my right hand, with which I accomplish what I want. And her insight is for me my eye, because she recognizes what pleases me. And the drive of her spirit is to me a tongue, since she, driven by this spirit, speaks what I desire. Her discrimination is to me a

[118] Dailey, "The Body and Its Senses," 269.

> nose, because I lend the ear of my mercy to him, to whom she through compassionate love turns. Her intent is to me my feet, since she aspires for that, which is necessary to follow me. (1.16.2.17–25)

This passage demonstrates exactly how the internal qualities and senses of the mystic are connected directly to God and to external actions. Gertrude's will *is* Christ's right hand through which he works; her insight *is* his eye; the drive of her spirit *is* his tongue with which he speaks. These direct equivalencies destabilize the difference between metaphorical and literal use so that one can no longer be sure what the instrument is that accomplishes all God's work: is it the eyes, the feet, or the tongue? Or the insight, the intent, or the drive? The devotee is united with Christ in that her internal faculties form parts of His physical body.

Then in portrayals of the reading of the *Herald*, Christ makes clear that such a union, in which one's primed inner faculties have merged with the divine and have begun to affect one's outward perception and actions, is available to the reader as well. This mystical power is depicted, for example, in the scenes of reading that use imagery of breath and breathing to depict a close connection between the inner and outer bodies as well as human and divine bodies. One such scene occurs already in the prologue when Gertrude presents the first part of the text to Christ, who reassures her:

> When a person in humble devotion desires to read in this book for the sake of spiritual progress, I will draw him toward me so that he will read in the book as if between my hands, with him I will join myself in this work, as it happens when two people read off of the same page: one senses the breath of the other.[119] I will absorb the breath of the desire of the reader in me, whereby my pious flesh shall be stirred up over it. Furthermore, I will breathe on him with the breath of my divinity, and so will this person be internally renewed through my spirit. (Prologue.2.9–17)

This intimate scene constitutes what Barr calls a "textual encounter" between the reader and Christ.[120] In the act of reading portrayed, the relationship between Christ, the reader, and the book is demonstrated through their physical placement – Christ pulls the reader in so closely that she can read the book as if between Christ's hands. The positioning of the reader (and probably the book, too) between Christ's hands functions as both a display of affection and a gesture of guidance or supervision. The intimacy of the reading scene is increased when the reading bodies are united through an exchange of desirous and rejuvenating breaths that continuously and uninhibitedly transgress the boundaries between the reader's inner and outer bodies. This movement of breath takes place under the conditions of reading, the proper intentions of the reader, and the auspices of divine presence. It is a movement analogous to the transference of the external perception of the book to some sort of internal comprehension or perception.

The image of reading with God emerges again in the final book of the *Herald*. In this vision, Gertrude brings her book to Communion, secretly hidden in her habit, but the Lord sees it and again infuses all the words with the sweetness of His divine love (5.34.1.9–11). But now

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[119] In these passages of the *Herald* with references to unspecified, hypothetical readers, translators have conventionally rendered the pronouns with the generic masculine. I maintain this convention for consistency when quoting the *Herald*, but, given the intellectual vibrancy of the Helfta women, I prefer to imagine a female reader in my analysis of these passages.

[120] Barr, "Imagined Bodies" and *Intimate Reading*.

instead of explaining the nature of the book, Christ speaks about the reading process, almost parroting His words from the preface:

> And I will take whoever comes to me with a humble heart, desiring for love of my love to read this book, onto my lap and with my finger point out all specifically that is beneficial for him. And I will incline myself graciously towards him, so that, in the same way that someone who has been sated by both species of the Eucharist breathes onto the one who wishes to kiss him, I will breathe into the reader efficaciously with my divine breath to effect his soul's salvation. (5.34.1.11–19)

The book serves again as the meeting point where Christ takes any humble reader onto His lap and guides her reading. The scene begins with the didactic act of Christ pointing out beneficial passages, but then it moves on to a sensuous, bodily act of Christ breathing into the mouth of the reader to effect her soul's salvation. The comparison here to the Eucharist recalls the experience of taking the body and blood of Christ into one's own body, a communion with the divine through a physical vehicle. Meanwhile, the image of a kiss conjures the intimate union of bridal mysticism, the unification of Christ with His bride through physical touch.[121] Reading is thus presented as an act of bodily consumption and sensation that brings the reader together with Christ. When we consider that the book in this passage is the *Herald* and that it, too, has been endowed with divinity as an extension of Christ, the reader of the text should imagine herself in the position of the reader with a humble heart being instructed through Christ and the book, feeling the satiety of the Eucharist, and inhaling the breath of Christ to affect her soul. As a set scene between a devotee, Christ, and a book, it provides several points for meditation and contemplation, images that should incite cogitation on the wonders of the incarnate Christ and a savoring of the mystical kiss. It is a moment in which the reader is led to an immersive experience that is equally and inseparably bodily and cognitive; sensation and reflection feed off each other.

Communal Reading in the Herald

The intimate interaction of bodies over a shared book highlights not only the tangibility of reading but also the communality of the activity. Whether the reading experience is shared with the many holy figures (John the Evangelist, heavenly angels, Christ, etc.) portrayed among the Helfta community in the *Herald* or with fellow sisters, the reading practices depicted are rarely solitary events. The evidence of communal writing practices drawn from depictions of events in the *Herald* as well as scholarly analyses of the authorship of individual books already mentioned in this chapter support an overall set of communal textual practices. Even if a reader did not read the *Herald* seated physically next to a fellow sister, when she read about her fellow sisters experiencing the divine, the sensory language and scenes of reading would have led her to perceive her sisters' experiences and to imagine the presence of the divine in her immediate surroundings. In effect, she would have become that reader whom Christ describes as reading the *Herald* on His lap, and she was thereby joined to the community of holy women writing, reading, and disseminating this text. These scenes, through their evocation of physical, sensual

[121] Such physically intimate conceptions of devotional reading are attested by surviving manuscripts of other devotional texts that show physical signs of being caressed and kissed by the reader. See Amsler, *Affective Literacies*, 133–7, and Rudy, "Dirty Books."

reading, extend this notion of community engagement to readers distant from Helfta in both time and space, to all those who imagine themselves in the figure of the unnamed reader and experience the physical presence of Christ in their interaction with the book. Reading the *Herald* in this way reminds the reader of the community she is part of, whether the specific community of the monastery at Helfta or the broader community of believers united through their sensuous experiences of the divine.

One final scene of reading from the *Herald* provides a negative example, a warning, that expresses through sensory language and physical interaction how a reader could be left without divine support and could position herself as an errant individual outside of the holy community. All other readers portrayed have pure hearts and pure intentions, but here we encounter a false reader who

> is spurred on by curiosity and self-aggrandizement to come to me [Christ] underhandedly, leaning as it were on my back to spy over my shoulder and scan the text of my book to pervert it: I will not suffer the burden of his weight for a moment; I will not hesitate to destroy the disgraced with my divine power. (5.34.1.19–24)

The reader approaches the text both literally and figuratively from behind, perverting the bodily interaction required for devotional reading: Christ cannot guide her reading, kiss her mouth, or breathe into her soul. She keeps a jealous watch over the book, inspecting (*perscrutari*) the text as if looking for flaws to exploit, rather than reading or gathering (*legere*) the words of Christ ardently like the good readers described in the *Herald*. Additionally, Christ feels the false reader as a burden, unlike the good reader who sits weightlessly on Christ's lap, conveying a simple binary opposition between reading practices through physical sensation. Finally, the reader's position behind Christ's back marks her independence or, more negatively expressed, her refusal to engage in communal reading practices, further supporting, by negative definition, the communal identity established through the act and practice of correct reading. Such a physically, intellectually, and socially distanced stance, one that eschews the outer senses and prevents the reader from engaging and experiencing the sensuous, somatic mode of reading necessary for a cultivation of the inner senses, marks her as a disgraced reader.[122] In providing a contrasting example of how not to read, this scene should also incite a moment of reflection for the reader of the *Herald*. She can contemplate her own motives and reading practices; she can consider whether she is a burden on Christ with her skeptical approach or if she is open and available for his instruction, his touch, and his breath. By providing this negative example, the *Herald* uses the reading scene both instructionally and evocatively to help readers contemplate and discern their own approaches and experiences.

Conclusion

As the scenes of reading illustrate, devotional reading in the *Herald* is not just an intellectual pursuit, a pure function of the imagination, or an immediate affective reality; instead, the devotional writers of the *Herald*, who were also devoted readers, portrayed embodied, sensuous reading as the catalyst and means for constructing an inner body, where an intellectual,

[122] For an analysis of how vernacular adaptations of the *Herald* reworked and extended the imagery of reading and writing into embodied forms of becoming the bride of Christ, sanctioning their work and practice as receptive, creative readers, see Kirakosian, *From the Material to the Mystical*, 126–47.

internal understanding is intensified by sensual responses, and vice versa. Described in the *Herald* using sensual imagery, reading unites Christ and the reader as well as the reader's own inner and outer bodies through an aesthetic "applicatio" that emancipates the fallen nature of the human sensorium. By aestheticizing reading practices into bodily reading scenes through sensuous, somatic, theological, and intellectual metaphors, the *Herald* portrays devotional reading as one aspect of the complex mystical and devotional practices that engage the body, mind, and soul, combining intellectual and carnal epistemological modes.

The flexibility of the reading scene is exemplified in the *Herald* when it is employed to represent reading as a cultivated devotional practice that bridges the human and divine, the inner and the outer, and the cognitive and the sensual. Gertrude and her fellow sisters charge the imagery of reading with theological meaning through allusions to transubstantiation, the Eucharist, and the mystical kiss. Their writing seems to be unique in its theological, imaginative, and rhetorical depiction of devotional reading practices, while, as my analysis has shown, the conception of reading presented in the *Herald* arose within the context of other contemporary theological frameworks and discourses on reading. By reimagining reading through sensuous metaphors that compare it to processes of touching, eating, smelling, seeing, and breathing, these women portrayed reading as an intimate practice intertwined with other complementary practices and beliefs that modeled and reinforced their communal religious way of life. They left their community a devotional text that, when read, instructs and enacts sensuous reading.

Chapter 3

Scenes of Subjecting Reading:
Fashioning the Masochist in *Venus im Pelz*

The novella *Venus im Pelz* (1870) by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, a nobleman on the periphery of the nineteenth-century Austrian Empire, is far removed from the medieval courtly culture of Hartmann von Aue and the cloister of St. Mary in Helfta. Yet, as we shall see, it, too, engenders a metadiscourse in scenes of reading through both familiarity and alienation to build an internal poetics of reading. Sacher-Masoch, because of this novella that parallels his biography in several ways, is infamous as the source for the name Richard von Krafft-Ebing gave to the "sexual perversion" masochism: the desire to suffer pain and be subjected to force that is a normal part of femininity but perverse to masculinity.[123] Krafft-Ebing used the name because he recognized this perversion as the foundation of much of Sacher-Masoch's work. Subsequently, Krafft-Ebing notes that his patients with masochistic fantasies were mostly well-read men, who often cited literary works such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Sinbad's Adventures*, and *1001 Nights* as well as, of course, *Venus im Pelz* as inspiration for their fantasies.[124] From the first conceptualization of masochism, then, reading and literary fantasy have had privileged roles.

These literary origins, however, were overshadowed if not forgotten by clinical research into masochism until Gilles Deleuze's 1967 study, *Le Froid et le Cruel*, in which Deleuze returns to Sacher-Masoch's literary works to elucidate masochism's characteristics. Through a detailed textual analysis of Sacher-Masoch's works, Deleuze argued that masochism is a complex dialectic of discourses and roles between a victim in search of a torturer and a torturer in need of guidance and education from the victim.

The relationship between Severin von Kusiemski and Wanda von Dunajew in Sacher-Masoch's *Venus im Pelz* is paradigmatic for Deleuze. The story of Severin's infatuation and affair with Wanda (who, at Severin's request, slowly comes to dominate him, appearing in the guise of the goddess of love draped in beautiful pelts, Venus in Furs) is the centerpiece of Sacher-Masoch's novella. A contract makes their master-slave relationship legally binding. Wanda steps into her role with increasing ferocity, until, at the climax of the novella, she oversteps her role by instigating a masochistic scene in which another one of her lovers surprises Severin and beats the "poetry" out of him. Presumably "cured" of his supersensual fantasies, Severin parts ways with Wanda to take up his familial responsibilities. At home, Severin writes a confessional text detailing and concretizing his masochistic experiences, a text that becomes the framed narrative of Sacher-Masoch's novella.

Despite the seemingly powerless position in which Severin presents himself in his autobiographical text, Deleuze stresses Severin's role as educator: he is "a victim in search of a torturer…who needs to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest of schemes."[125] Rita Felski has drawn on this understanding of the masochistic relationship as fundamentally educational to conclude that the man's fantasy is in

[123] Mennel, *The Representation of Masochism and Queer Desire*, 15-17. For the most thorough analysis of Sacher-Masoch's life and his literary production, see Koschorke, *Leopold von Sacher-Masoch*.
[124] Mennel, *The Representation of Masochism and Queer Desire*, 27-9.
[125] Deleuze, "Coldness and Cruelty," 20.

control of the masochistic scenario, despite his ostensible position as the victim. Because Wanda needs instruction to fulfill the requirements of her role, she ends up parroting Severin's words and channeling his desires, becoming "his double or reflection," namely, "a projection of male fantasy."[126] She is therefore not the *femme fatale* she first appears to be, but rather a feminine form onto which the man can project his desires and play out his erotic fantasies. Not only can the man through this relationship take a subservient, "feminine" position as a servant, but he can also explore a cruel femininity through his erotic double.

Severin's fashioning of Wanda into a cold, cruel goddess is a powerful and fascinating process through which his desires are realized. But what drives these desires? How does the masochistic fantasy take hold and where does it come from? This is where I situate my analysis of the act of reading in Sacher-Masoch's novella. Like Krafft-Ebing's patients, most of Severin's inspiration for his feminine torturer comes from women in fictional, religious, and historical texts, as well as their representation in paintings and sculptures. Famous *femmes fatales* like Circe, Judith, Delilah, and Catherine the Great populate his personal reading repertoire, ignite his fantasies, and inform his fashioning of Wanda. Reading, in short, is portrayed as fundamental to Severin's masochistic practice, yet the thematization of reading in the novella and its relationship to this sexual perversion have not been sufficiently addressed. There is a link between the aestheticization of reading in masochism and masochism in literary texts that remains undefined. To uncover this link, we must situate *Venus im Pelz* at the intersection of masochistic aesthetics and the aesthetics of reading as found in the German novelistic tradition. Severin can and should be read alongside the tradition of the reading protagonist, like Don Silvio or Werther, who is defined by the texts he chooses to read, how he reads and interprets them, and how he applies his readings to the fashioning of his life.[127] These characters, however, emerged at a time of great change in cultural reading practices tied to social, media, and economic transformations, and thus served as literary commentaries on these changes. Severin's reading in *Venus im Pelz*, I argue, functions similarly in that it reveals the nature of the protagonist, especially his masochistic fantasies, while also offering a reflection on the effects of reading. *Venus im Pelz*, however, goes even further than previous models, intertwining reading and masochism to enact the subjecting power of reading it portrays.

This chapter, then, analyzes the thematization of reading – a steady and obvious undercurrent flowing through the depiction of the masochistic male fantasy that has made the novella and its author infamous – to demonstrate how masochism as a fundamentally educational relationship between victim and torturer is reflected in and constitutive of the poetics of reading that *Venus im Pelz* enacts. I will argue with a Foucauldian understanding of subjection as subject-formation that Sacher-Masoch's novella portrays and enacts a subjecting reading practice – a particular means of subject-formation through reading that can be historically situated as a satirical response to the reading debates of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The subjecting, subject-forming reading portrayed by the novella's imagery and content and realized in its form enables Sacher-Masoch's novella to turn the structures of the masochistic male fantasy into a replicable and repeatable textual practice for Severin as well as the novella's reader.

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[126] Felski, "The Counterdiscourse of the Feminine," 1104.

[127] The figure of the reader in German novels around 1800 has been thoroughly analyzed. See Wuthenow, *Im Buch die Bücher*; Wolpers, *Gelebte Literatur in der Literatur*; Bracht, *Der Leser im Roman des 18. Jahrhunderts*; Neubauer, *Indikationen und Katalyse*; Marx, *Erlesene Helden.*

Severin the Leseheld

Since the majority of the novella is comprised of Severin's autobiographical text, the novella's portrayal of Severin is largely a self-portrait. Severin self-identifies as a dilettante and largely portrays his amateurism and aestheticism through his relationship to literary texts, paintings, and the plastic arts. In particular, Severin documents his wide-ranging reading habits. Many of his fantasies, desires, and goals are subsequently derived from his reading, while reading shapes his self-image, his perception of reality, and his relationships. Severin reads about and surrounds himself with images of cruel women and the men tortured and killed at their hands, imagery that spills over into his masochistic fantasies and their eventual realization.

Severin's aestheticism reflects his renunciation of the dominant discourses and pressures for active self-realization in the world;[128] it provides a retreat from the subject-building that is expected of him as a young man of means and position. He does not, however, escape self-formation all together, because he falls under the potent influence of aesthetic and literary discourses. These discourses exercise a power over Severin that forms him as a subject and shapes his desires in a way very similar to Michel Foucault's conceptualization of subject formation. In his analysis of power relations, Foucault details the creation process of the modern subject. In "subjection" (*assujettissement*), power functions both as an external force that affects the actions of an individual and as an internalized force that becomes a necessary condition of the subject's existence.[129] "Subject," therefore, is laden with two simultaneous meanings: "subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to."[130] As the subject accepts the power's terms and defines itself by those terms, they come to depend on the power for their existence and harbor the power in their being.[131] This subjectivation paradox elucidates Severin's portrayal of his own coming into being or, perhaps more specifically, his entry into masochism, where he is subjected to a sexual desire through his interactions with texts that both influences his external actions and becomes fundamental to his subject-identity. He projects these internalized forces into his masochistic fantasies and onto Wanda, fashioning her into a figure through which he can channel his desires and subjugate himself.

In Severin's self-portrayal, reading is the means by which he internalizes the forces that drive his own subjection. Already in the first few pages of his text, Severin reveals much about his reading practices. As practically no scholar writing on *Venus im Pelz* has failed to notice, Severin's manuscript has a "citational fervor"[132]: it constantly alludes to and references celebrated literary (and visual) works of art. This citational fervor is apparent beginning in the manuscript's title. "Bekenntnisse eines Übersinnlichen" (17) (Confessions of a Supersensualist, 151)[133] alludes to two canonical texts by Goethe: the sixth book of *Wilhelm Meister*,

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[128] Felski, "The Counterdiscourse of the Feminine," 1095.

[129] Foucault works out his conceptualization of power and subject-formation over several works including *Discipline and Punish*; *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1; "The Subject and Power"; and "Two Lectures" published in *Power/Knowledge*.

[130] Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 781.

[131] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 2.

[132] MacLeod, *Fugitive Objects*, 146. See also Sauter, "Marmorbilder und Masochismus"; Finke, "Sacher-Masoch, Turgenev, and Other Russians"; and Koschorke, *Leopold von Sacher-Masoch*.

[133] The German text and its page number are followed by Jean McNeil's English translation and the corresponding page number. Sacher-Masoch, *Venus im Pelz*; Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*.

"Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele" (Confessions of a Beautiful Soul), and *Faust* with its supersensual title character. If that connection is not immediately clear, the epigraph makes it explicit with a slightly altered quote from Mephistopheles to Faust: "Du übersinnlicher sinnlicher Freier, / Ein Weib nasführet dich!" (17) (Thou sensual, supersensual libertine, / A little girl can lead thee by the nose, 151).[134] The epigraph foreshadows the text's content, while the allusion to *Bekenntnisse* or *Confessiones* frames the text within the well-established literary tradition of rhetorically structured autobiographies reaching back to Augustine of Hippo. The literary claim Severin makes by situating his text among these pillars of the western canon is bordering on the absurd or unattainable and expresses his dilettantism. Yet more interesting for my purposes here is that by referencing these texts, Severin alludes to three famous fictional readers: Wilhelm Meister, who reads *Hamlet* throughout his coming-of-age story; Faust, who first meets Mephistopheles while reading and translating the opening lines of the Gospel of John; and Augustine, who completes his conversion to Christianity in the famous *tolle lege* scene in his *Confessiones*. Just based on these few opening citations, Severin proves himself to be a well-read bourgeois man, and, as his text continues, it becomes increasingly clear just how profoundly reading dictates his life and identity.

Severin begins the main body of his text with another quotation: "Gogol, der russische Molière, sagt – ja wo? – nun irgendwo – 'die echte komische Muse ist jene, welcher unter der lachenden Larve die Tränen herabrinnen'" (17) (Gogol, the Russian Molière, once wrote, I cannot remember where: "The true muse of comedy is a woman with tearful eyes under a smiling mask," 151). While one can linger over the meaning of the quotation and the tragicomic story it portends, perhaps more interesting is Severin's introduction of the quotation. For an ostensible self-confession, Severin's text begins with a dense network of allusions and citations that crowd out his own voice. The Gogol quote exemplifies how Severin, as an author, removes himself by several degrees from the text he writes. In calling Gogol the Russian Molière, Severin effectively denies Gogol his own unique existence, subsuming him under another's identity, which is what he effectively does to himself in constantly citing other's words. Severin's inability to cite the quote belies Severin's mode of extensive reading and his mode of citational writing, namely, that he pulls words out of their original context and reworks them into new networks of association.

Severin is a selective reader, one who apparently reads widely but latches onto particular passages in larger texts as is convenient for his own purposes, desires, or goals. A few pages into his narrative, Severin recalls writing a small text, "An Amor!" (20) (To Love!, 154), on the back of a small reproduction of Titian's painting "Venus with a Mirror." Severin claims that the poem, which accuses the god of love of having a charming appearance that veils his true maliciousness, is from the paralipomena to *Faust*. By lifting a text already excised once from its context and transferring it onto the back of the painting, he changes the painting of a sensuous, vain, and coquettish Venus into a menacing *femme fatale*. Severin's selective excerption is reminiscent of historical reading practices like the medieval practice of compiling *florilegia*: gatherings of beautiful, important, or otherwise noteworthy citations. This Latin term as well as its German translation, *Blütenlese*, vividly capture the image of a metaphorical gathering of flowers. *Lesen* as a verb meaning "to gather," used here in close association with its other meaning "to read," underscores a long tradition of reading similar to Severin's method. In the nineteenth century, *Blümeln* described the browsing and passage-reading process that Severin in part exemplifies, a

[134] In *Faust*, Mephistopheles speaks of a "Mägdelein" (young woman), but Severin uses "Weib" (woman) instead. Curiously, McNeil translates "Weib" as "little girl" as if Severin had not altered the quotation.

method that was largely deemed incorrect because it failed to consider the entirety of a text. Friedrich Schleiermacher, for example, considered *Blümeln* to be the product of an inability to grasp the particular.[135] The way to the particular passes through the whole, so when that path is disrupted by a fixation on a single passage, the individual situation of the reader is brought to the foreground, eclipsing the fuller context. The ability to grasp the entirety and with it all the particulars, so this line of thinking goes, is only possible through a disciplined, repetitive, and comprehensive method of reading.[136] Severin's focus on the particular over the whole favors his individual situation, so that his reading practices expose more about him than the texts he reads.

The interwoven citations and allusions in Severin's writing suggest what it is that he takes away from his reading, while particular moments and scenes related in his narrative point towards his selective and then his identificatory reading processes. After penning "An Amor," he adds a small text of his own that expresses a desire to become a slave to a beautiful female tyrant, just as the hero Samson gave himself over to Delilah. With this mindset, he takes his breakfast and reads from the Book of Judith: "Ich…beneidete den grimmen Heiden Holofernes um das königliche Weib, das ihm den Kopf herunterhieb, und um sein blutig schönes Ende" (21) (I could not help envying the heathen Holofernes who came to such a bloody end, beheaded by a regal lady, 155). The Book of Judith seems like an unusual reading selection, but Severin seeks out texts in search of a feeling, a stimulant, an experience – which is provided by and exemplified in the reading scene. The feeling of desire that the passage evokes in Severin for the stately woman and the envy for Holofernes's bloody beautiful death are signs of a strong personal affinity that he tries to establish with the man murdered by a charming yet brutal woman. The desire to replicate Holofernes's experience is made clear as Severin rereads the sentence, "'Gott hat ihn gestraft und hat ihn in eines Weibes Hände gegeben'…Nun, was soll ich etwa anstellen, damit er mich straft?" (21) ("The Lord hath smitten him by the hand of a woman."…What must I do for him to smite *me*?, 155). A few days later, the same literary desire is evoked as he reads the *Odyssey* over breakfast. In the entire epic of twenty-four books, he chooses to read about Circe, "von der reizenden Hexe, die ihre Anbeter in Bestien verwandelt" (of the delightful witch who changed her suitors into wild beasts), and describes her as a "[k]östliches Bild der antiken Liebe" (23) (spicy tale of love in ancient times, 157). Calling her an alluring witch puts Severin in the position of a suitor, and his describing her as an exquisite image of ancient love belies his unique, personal perspective on what constitutes love.

Severin's mode of reading – selective, empathic, and identificatory – recalls many of the most famous reading figures in the history of the German novel. From the very conception of the German novel, reading protagonists were constituent components: Don Silvio, Werther, Wilhelm Meister, and Anton Reiser come readily to mind. In Christoph Martin Wieland's *Don Silvio of Rosalva*, the title character reads fairy tales and imagines their reality to be his own. Goethe's Werther reads books that match his variable moods, and he easily draws erroneous parallels between his own situation and those of the characters he reads about. Wilhelm Meister's reading of *Hamlet* brings the Prince of Denmark into his life not as a literary figure, but as a friend.[137] Meanwhile, the failed socialization of Karl Philipp Moritz's Anton Reiser is marked and accompanied by the continual discovery of new textual genres and reading habits.[138] Not incidentally, all these figures are portrayed as rather poor, naive readers since they struggle to

[135] Stanitzek, "Brutale Lektüre," 254.
[136] Ibid.
[137] See Wuthenow, *Im Buch die Bücher*.
[138] See Renner, "Vom Lesen erzählen."

find a proper relationship between the worlds of the texts they read and their own realities.

The depicted struggle to find, elicit, or portray the proper relationship between reading and reality in the emerging novel was a response to the anxiety that reading produced during the immense social, epistemic, and economic transformations in central Europe around the turn of the nineteenth century. Evolving from a rather unrespected form into the predominant literary genre, the novel emerged as an economic and cultural winner of societal changes. Its market fortunes and popularity reflected the deftness with which the genre was able to depict, process, and drive the cultural transformation. There are two convincing explanations for the particular form of reading critique present in the emerging novel that are at several points inextricable. The first, perhaps more widely recognized explanation is situated more intimately within the intellectual and literary debates of the time. The depiction of errant readers can be seen as a response to an Enlightenment-era education project that sought to establish a communal subjectivity based on a universal set of moral values, disseminated through an aesthetics of identification in literature.[139] If readers could identify with model literary figures, then a communal moral understanding could be attained across society. The reading practices of Werther, for example, throw such an identificatory mode of reading into question. His reading method demonstrates how uncontrollable individual reading practices are and how dangerous identificatory reading practices can be – warnings not just contained within the novel with Werther's suicide after his reading of *Emilia Galotti*, but also present historically in the well-documented Werther-fever that followed the novel's publication.

The other, more recent explanation connects the depiction of the faulty reader with broader anxieties surrounding commodity culture. In his recent study *Necessary Luxuries*, Matt Erlin convincingly demonstrates that the well-recorded *Lesesucht* (reading addiction) and *Lesewut* (reading mania) debate that criticized the new reading culture was one manifestation of larger anxieties surrounding commodity culture. The reading of novels, like participating in commodity culture, allowed individuals to generate fantasies of alternate selves: the fictional world of novels enabled readers, so the argument went, to escape their social reality and play with individual elements of their lives and identities that were supposed to mark their places in the social order. Just as commodity culture made new clothing and foodstuff available to the lower classes enabling them to blur the previously rigid lines of social performance, reading novels offered them the manners and emotions, the fantasy and the stories to do the same. These new imagined selves – that, thanks to commodity culture, lower classes could perform in public – threatened elites who feared the "fictionalization of their own selves in the context of a theatricalized public sphere."[140]

Over the course of this decades-long debate, what was read (novels, newspapers, plays), who was reading (the lower classes, women, and young men were the usual targets), how they read (extensively, identificatorily), and the consequences thereof (domestic unrest, loss of personal identity, political tumult) were all critiqued. One important shift noticed in reading culture at the time that eventually affected the content and form of the novel was the move toward an anonymous book market. Whereas writers previously wrote for a small circle of intellectual peers, a specific royal court, or a patron, authors in the book market of the late eighteenth century increasingly wrote for large, unknown publics. Consumption was effectively detached from production in the growing book market, just as in the rest of commodity culture. The loss of the author's control over the reading practices of their audiences was a great

[139] Bledsoe, *Reading and Identity Construction*.
[140] Erlin, *Necessary Luxuries*, 91.

motivation for the novel's reflection on the reader under the conditions of the mass market.[141]

"Reflect" is the key verb here, as these canonical novels and their reading figures are not didactic texts, but rather texts that encourage the audience to reflect on their own reading practices. In *Don Silvio,* for example, multiple reading figures are portrayed, but each method of reading they practice is presented as flawed. No model of proper reading is presented to be emulated because the new market conditions make it impossible for an author to control the reading practices of the audience. Instead, the audience is encouraged to reflect on their own reading practices and decide what is best for the text at hand.[142] In *Don Silvio* this point is rather apparent, since, like in its model *Don Quixote,* irony and absurdity abound. However, in *Werther*, the reader is first lured into identificatory reading through the editor's call to make a "friend" of the book and then through the single, subjective viewpoint created by Werther's letters. Werther's responses to the texts he reads should make the reader skeptical of his identificatory reading practice, but the reader might be too captivated to achieve a critical distance. Goethe's reading figure then demonstrates how thin the line can be between identification and critical distance, but he nevertheless presents no reading method as the correct or proper method. Therefore, in its ambiguity, the figure of the reader created by the early novel refuses to present a clearly correct or proper reading method encouraging the audience to find, question, and reflect on its own reading practices.

While these novels may not have presented a correct means of reading, there was no lack of opinions and methods expressed on the subject by many commentators. Especially relevant for my analysis of *Venus im Pelz* is the early nineteenth-century model of textual hermeneutics that urged consuming readers to become productive readers, a model that Erlin argues can be understood as an "effort to reestablish subjective agency in the face of a potentially overwhelming expansion of the sphere of material culture."[143] The perceived overproduction and overconsumption of texts that mutually facilitated each other presented a danger to commentators like Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who recognized the social division between professional writers and a class of readers as a dangerous division in the personal psyche: individuals should embody a balance between being both active producers and receptive consumers.[144] To "reassert [the reader's] agency vis-à-vis a potentially despotic world of text-objects"[145] and to combat the tendency towards passive overconsumption, Fichte encouraged readers to subjugate (*unterwerfen*) the text. For Fichte, this meant approaching a finished work of an author like a scientific experiment and subjecting it to questioning until one has a complete mastery over it and can use it as raw material for one's own production process.[146] This means of reading reproduces the text along with a surplus of the reader's own productive thoughts, making the act of reading a "part of the production of the rationally organized self."[147]

Fichte was not alone in framing the passive overconsumption of books as a threat to personal identity and freedom. In his book, *Die Kunst, Bücher zu lesen* (1799), Johann Adam Bergk advised readers how to reap the great treasures (*Schatz*) and spoils (*Ausbeute*) to be found in books without becoming enslaved (*unterjochen*) to them.[148] Readers must not allow

[141] Bickenbach, *Von den Möglichkeiten,* 30.
[142] Ibid., 38.
[143] Erlin, *Necessary Luxuries*, 81.
[144] Ibid., 93-4.
[145] Ibid., 95.
[146] Erlin, *Necessary Luxuries*, 94-5.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Bergk, *Die Kunst, Bücher zu lesen,* viii.

themselves to be handled like slaves by the books they read; instead, Bergk proclaims, readers must reign (*herrschen*) over their content as absolute rulers (*Selbstherrscher*).[149] Readers must critique and help the author by maintaining independent thought and thinking along with the text; readers should even produce their own original literary texts in response.[150] Bergk and Fichte's rhetoric of slavery and domination as proposed solutions for the estrangement of the lines of production and consumption underscores the assumption that power of this sort works only in one direction. The models of textual hermeneutics that they encouraged assumed that readers could take an external position from which they could exert pressure on the contents of books, pillage what is good and useful, and remain independent individuals unaffected by a book's contents.

The presentation of reading as a subjecting power in *Venus im Pelz*, however, is a critique and satirization of this view that readers can be sovereign over their reading material. The relationship between Severin and his literary consumption and production is much more complex, interwoven, and ultimately inescapable. Sacher-Masoch's literary response to the naive opinion that reading material can simply be dominated can be better explained through Foucault's conceptualization of subjection. The interrelationships of subjection is more complex than the exertion of external pressure; it is in fact a process by which a subject internalizes and exerts the terms of power, thereby equally shaping and being shaped by those forces. This inevitability of power is something neither Fichte nor Bergk anticipated, so they failed to realize that productive readers are both determined and shaped by their engagement with, internalization of, and co-production of the surrounding discourses.

Severin's Subjection

Severin's reading habits demonstrate a subjecting power of reading that both limits and forms Severin as a subject. As I will illustrate in this section, reading exerts a power on and through Severin that drives his subjectivation through his masochistic fantasies. Much like the reading protagonists of the early German novel, Severin's reading habits are an important means for self-formation. The effects of Severin's reading habits uniquely manifest in his masochistic relationship with Wanda which melds reading, power, and eroticism in a process of subjectivation. In fact, the link between masochism and Severin's subject-formation is determined through the act of reading as portrayed in the novella's many reading scenes. The portrayal of his reading habits reveals how reading and masochism function together in his case of subjectivation.

Reading in *Venus im Pelz* is an event, an experience, an act rife with dramatic poetic potential. While there are ample clues to Severin's mode of reading based on his writing (especially his citational style and his personal commentary on various texts), the reading scenes create specific constellations that not only tie into other narrative techniques employed by Sacher-Masoch but also pervert the presentation of reading in the German novelistic tradition. Reading is a highly aestheticized and eroticized practice for Severin as the types of texts and passages he reads indicate, but the addition of scenery, props, clothing, and sensual responses bridges Severin's fantasies, supported and incited by his reading material, with his realizations of those fantasies.

Severin's text is meticulously staged in dramatic constellations that present borders that

[149] Ibid., 63 and 66.
[150] Ibid., 66.

are eventually overlapped, transgressed, and eliminated. Severin's writing style, undoubtedly mirroring the journal entries that he draws on to write his text, is scenic: his text is written in short clips, vignettes, that resist being cobbled together into a linear narrative and yet are sewn together through the addition of a frame narrative. Whether the proper model is theater, painting, or (anachronistically) film, the novella regularly portrays vivid, intimate scenes between relatively few characters normally in a single private setting, often a bedroom or garden, a library or apartment. The surroundings are usually luxurious in both setting and description, potentially offering more meaning than the dialogue.

These formal elements that structure the narrative into individual scenes are supported by allusions to famous scenes from literature, dramatic paintings, and sculptures. As works of art, each is theoretically framed by the conditions and restrictions of its form ostensibly drawing attention to the limits or borders of the aesthetic. But all the artworks that appear in the novella are "always already a copy" evacuated of all interiority by the novella and transformed instead into "fetishistic, interchangeable accessories or props…"[151] They populate Severin's larger narrative in arrangements with each other, the novella's characters, and its plot to create "a vertiginous crossing of boundaries: between literature, sculpture, painting, and photography; between stasis and mobility; between 'original' and copy; between reality and virtuality."[152] The characters of the novella, for example, wittingly and unwittingly, embody fictional and legendary figures and reproduce the paintings hanging around them in elaborate *tableaux vivants* that blur the distinction between art and nature.[153] This reproduction of the already copied paintings into the narrative scene creates a mise-en-scène effect that eats away at any distinction between different levels of representation.

Furthermore, the theatricality of the scenes in *Venus im Pelz* is vital to the masochistic fantasy. Albrecht Koschorke's study on Sacher-Masoch's sexual desires and their expression in his writings evokes already in its title the importance of theatrical staging for masochism. *Die Inszenierung einer Perversion* seems to offer at first glance an account of the translation of Sacher-Masoch's "perversion" into literary form, but it also analyzes the importance of staging in realizing the masochistic fantasy. The novella's masochistic scenes are theatrical not because they are presented in literary form, but because the masochistic fantasy lives from the pose and not from action.[154] It lingers on the static image of the woman in furs holding a whip aloft capable of striking at any moment; the anticipation of the whip's pain is more exciting than the pain itself. Every item – the costumes, the props, the furniture, the poses – adds to the image viewed by the victim and contributes to the anticipation he feels. It is the tension between the living bodies and the lifeless props, the action and the pose, the static and the transformative that produces the masochistic pleasure. On the one hand then, the scenic composition of the paintings, sculptures, and literary texts surrounding Severin facilitates their transformation into realizable masochistic experiences. On the other hand, the scenic composition of the masochistic experiences facilitates their relatively seamless transformation into textual, literary form. The boundaries between art and life, text and experience are thereby rendered permeable.

The text's awareness – verging on obsession – of staging and posing demonstrated

[151] MacLeod, *Fugitive Objects*, 144.
[152] Ibid.
[153] As MacLeod notes, *tableaux vivants* were contentious aesthetically in the nineteenth century as they were often seen, in contrast to the plastic arts that "animate dead matter," as an "aesthetically perverse countermove, reducing the human body to lifeless and static matter." Ibid., 152.
[154] Koschorke, *Leopold von Sacher-Masoch*, 143.

through its incorporation of artworks and its portrayal of the masochistic fantasy additionally allows the novella's reading scenes to stand out as particularly meaningful narrative devices in the novella's formal and aesthetic program. The same attention, I argue, should be paid to the constellation of reading scenes because their configuration portrays Severin's manner of reading, affects his masochistic self-production, and destabilizes the boundary between text and reader. In a reading scene from early in Severin's life, we see the first overt connection between his reading, his erotic fantasies, and his self-formation. In recounting his first encounter with "dem schönen Geschlechte" (40) (the fair sex, 174), Severin remembers studying Tacitus and admiring the virtues of the ancient Germanic peoples as his mother's young, attractive housemaid approaches and kisses him: "Der Kuß der verliebten kleinen Katze durchschauerte mich, aber ich erhob meine 'Germania' wie ein Schild gegen die Verführerin und verließ entrüstet das Zimmer" (41) (The kiss of this amorous kitten sent a shiver down my spine, but I raised my *Germania* to shield me against the temptress and left the room in indignation, 174). The contrasting imagery of this sentence presents the conflicting notions of love, virtue, and eroticism that the young Severin finds confusing. Severin at first describes the thrill of the kiss he receives from a kitten (notably a fur-covered animal), but then in the next clause, he describes the girl as a seductress to be fended off with a shield. As an impressionable young boy, he is stuck between the feminine domestic world of his mother and the masculine world of his books. The classical, scholarly reading material next to the domestic surroundings and the high virtues of the ancient Germans paired with the young maid in this reading scene is a confusing juxtaposition for the boy beginning to assert himself yet still caught under the control of the women surrounding him. The dramatic use of Tacitus's text to shield himself against the seductive powers of women marks the beginning of Severin's connection between the cognitive, physical, and erotic effects of reading.

Severin contends that after this encounter he avoided physical contact with women, instead – as a true aesthete – he maps his growing erotic desires onto a statue of Venus in a nearby meadow: "Oft liege ich, wenn die Sonne im Gehölze brütet, unter dem Laubdach einer jungen Buche und lese, oft besuche ich meine kalte, grausame Geliebte auch bei Nacht und liege dann vor ihr auf den Knien, das Antlitz gegen die kalten Steine gepreßt, auf denen ihre Füße ruhen, und bete zu ihr" (19) (Often, when the dappled sunlight shimmers beneath the trees, I lie in the shelter of a young birch, reading. Often at night I pay a visit to my cold, cruel beloved; clasping her knees, I press my face against her cold pedestal and worship her, 153). While abstaining from physical contact, he continues to connect his erotic desires with reading, here comparing implicitly his daytime leisure reading to his nighttime prayers of devotion to his sculpted beloved.

As he ages, the connection between his reading material and his erotic fantasies intensifies. In two scenes of reading that I previously mentioned, he begins to connect and eventually project the desires evoked and sustained by his reading onto Wanda, the beautiful young widow living in an upstairs apartment. When Severin reads the Book of Judith, he sits in his "Gaisblattlaube" (21) ([honeysuckle] arbor, 155) reading about the beheading of the pagan general while eating breakfast. The morning reading of material he finds erotic suggests a desire that his reading fantasies carry over into his day. His eating while reading amplifies the sensual aspect of his reading, stimulating several of his senses that are also ignited by his reading material. His sensual reading experience is then interrupted just as he contemplates what he can do, like Holofernes, to earn God's punishment, when a messenger arrives with a request for reading material for Wanda, whom Severin at this point has only ever seen from a distance. The books he sends constitute his first contact with Wanda. Interrupted in his own reading, he sends

other reading material to the enigmatic, beautiful, god-like figure, but he forgets that the reproduced Titian miniature including "meinen Ergüssen" (24) (my outpourings, 156), i.e. the poem "An Amor" and his reflections on Samson and Delila, are stashed in the pages of these books. He wonders what the widow might say about these effusions and immediately hears her laughing. He asks, "Lacht sie über mich?" (22) (is she mocking me?, 156). The books he sends her not only mark their first contact, they also instigate the first moment of sexual humiliation.

Shortly thereafter, Severin reads about Circe in the *Odyssey*, it is morning again and he is sitting "wieder in meiner Gaisblattlaube" (23) (again in my [honeysuckle] arbor, 157). As he admires the exquisite image of antique love, a sound catches his attention: "In den Zweigen und Halmen rauscht es leise und die Blätter meines Buches rauschen und auf der Terrasse rauscht es auch. Ein Frauengewand" (23-24) (Suddenly there is a rustling in the branches and in the grass, in the leaves of my [book], on the terrace: a woman's dress, 157). His act of reading is again interrupted, this time by a particular soundscape that recalls the rustling of the undergrowth on Circe's island caused by the admirers she turned into scrambling pigs and unites the garden retreat, Severin's book, and Wanda. The sentence's syntax, with its undifferentiated conjunctions, elides any fundamental differences between its content and carries the sense of *Rauschen* smoothly from one instance to the next. The correlation of Circe's wilderness with the natural vegetation in Severin's reading garden, with the leaves ("Blätter") of the book, and finally with Wanda's dress creates an analogy between Circe and Wanda, between the literary inspiration for Severin's fantasies and the woman who will fulfill them.

Reading for Severin slowly evolves from a means for developing his fantasies of subjection to a means for realizing his subjectivation. In another poignant reading scene, Severin reads to Wanda from Goethe's *Römischen Elegien* (*Roman Elegies*). The text selection alone underscores the eroticism of the situation, and the ensuing scene builds on that theme. As Severin lays the book aside, he notes the setting of their collective reading: "Der Regen pochte melancholisch an die Scheiben, das Feuer am Kamin prasselte winterlich traulich, mir wurde so heimatlich bei ihr…" (30) (The rain beat mournfully on the windowpane and the fire crackled in the hearth as in midwinter. I felt so much at ease with her…, 164). He then sits at her feet and reads her a poem that he has written, in much the same position in which he used to read and pray to the garden statue of Venus. He has replaced his stony lover with a real woman while reading provides the opportunity for him to sit at her feet and worship her. The entire constellation of a cozy, melancholic setting with the romantic reading materials and the subservient body positioning portrays the slow but steady submission of Severin to Wanda: "Es ist auch keine Neigung des Gemütes, die in mir entsteht, es ist eine physische Unterwerfung, langsam, aber um so vollständiger," says Severin (31) (It is not a sentimental inclination but a physical surrender that is coming over me gradually and inexorably, 165).

After these several reading scenes have created the connection between his reading material and Wanda, reading helps Severin educate Wanda about his fantasies.[155] Wanda has already been prepared for this education through her own childhood reading provided by her father: *Gil Blas*, *The Maid of Orleans*, Venus and Apollo, Hercules, and Laokoon.[156] In her presence Severin alludes to legendary women who beat men into submission. In one conversation with Wanda, he wistfully remembers envying King Gunther, whom Brunhilde

[155] For the resonances of Wanda's education with contemporary arguments for and against women's education, see Mennel, *The Representation of Masochism and Queer Desire*, 47-51.

[156] The list of books Wanda's father provided her is similar to the fantasy-inducing reading material Krafft-Ebing noted that his patients read. Mennel, *The Representation of Masochism and Queer Desire*, 29 and 50.

bound on their wedding night, a poor troubadour, whose lady sewed him into a wolf's skin and let him be hunted, and the knight Ctirad, who was captured by the warrior Scharka, taken to a castle, and tortured on a wheel. Increasingly, the scenes of reading transfer Severin's internalized fantasies onto Wanda. One day Wanda allows Severin to read a passage from *Faust*: "Heute liess sie mich die Szene zwischen Faust und Mephistopheles lesen, in welcher letzerer als fahrender Scholast erscheint; ihr Blick hing mit seltsamer Befriedigung an mir" (69) (Today she asked me to read her the scene in *Faust* where Mephistopheles appears as a wandering scholar. She seemed strangely satisfied and could not take her eyes off me, 203). His choice to describe it as her allowing him to read to her projects the power dynamic he wishes her to take on, as does her comment that she does not understand how such a sharp and rational man can simultaneously be "ein solcher Phantast, ein übersinnlicher Schlemihl" (69) (a romantic and a supersensualist, 203). Her comment's ambiguity – it could apply just as well to Faust as to Severin – reveals that she is learning from his reading, that she is gathering from the literary events clues to his desired fantasy. Severin greets this realization with tears. As Severin calls Wanda "[m]ein schöner Teufel" (75) (my lovely devil, 209) and feels as if he has signed his soul over to the devil before actually signing it over to Wanda, he and Wanda play out this Faustian fantasy.

In another scene, Severin's literary fantasy is immediately brought to life: "Ich lese ihr die Manon l'Escaut. Sie fühlt die Beziehung, sie spricht zwar kein Wort, aber sie lächelt von Zeit zu Zeit, und endlich klappt sie das kleine Buch zu" (101) (I am reading her Manon Lescaut. She sees the association but does not refer to it, and merely smiles from time to time; finally she closes the book, 234). *The Story of the Chevalier des Grieux and Manon Lescaut* is cited several times throughout Severin's text, always with reference to the female character, Manon Lescaut, who, by threatening infidelity, controls des Grieux and forces him to support a luxurious lifestyle he cannot afford. In this particular scene, Severin reads part of the novel to Wanda, who interrupts the reading by closing the book. They should read the text no further, instead, she insists, "Heute spielen wir selbst Manon l'Escault" (101) (I have decided to act the story of Manon in real life, 234). This scene recalls one of the most famous erotic reading scenes in European literature: Dante's portrayal of the doomed lovers Paolo and Francesca. As Dante visits hell, the shadowy figure of Francesca, blown around by the unrelenting winds of passion, recounts the catalytic moment of her affair with her brother's husband: reading together the love story of Lancelot and Guinevere. Importantly, when Guinevere kisses Lancelot, Paolo and Francesca are overcome by their own passions and read no further. Dante's implication is that instead of reading the tragic ending of Lancelot and Guinevere's love affair, Paolo and Francesca unwittingly enact it. Severin and Wanda similarly read a text that mirrors their own erotic affair, *Manon Lescaut,* but they intentionally stop reading to act out their own version of the fictional tale. The intentionality with which Wanda closes the book invites tragedy into the relationship as an erotic tool to fulfill Severin's fantasies. Whereas the book and its communal reading portend the tragedy of Paolo and Francesca's love affair, the book and its reading by Severin and Wanda pervert the lover's reading scene by appropriating and reinscribing the threat of tragedy for sexual pleasure.

Up until the final scene of Severin's text, the subjectivation process of Severin is seemingly under his control. He derives his fantasies from his reading and then projects them onto Wanda, who realizes those fantasies for him and makes him into the masochistic supersensualist he desires to be. In fact, at several points Wanda falls out of her character, unwilling to fulfill her role, only to be persuaded and instructed by Severin to continue. Her cruelty increases as she more fully embodies the Venus in Furs that Severin so desires. She

withholds her presence for longer stretches of time; she moves with Severin to Florence where he becomes her servant and is renamed Gregor; she takes on other lovers and enlists three nameless black women to assist in the torturing. Then, in the final scene of Severin's text, she oversteps her bounds, like a pupil surpassing her teacher.

Although devoid of reading, this final scene combines the continually interlacing strands of literature and masochism through an appeal to their shared aesthetics. The final scene is a masochistic *tableau vivant* reenacting the Ovidian myth, the Flaying of Marsyas, in which Marsyas, a satyr, challenges the god Apollo to a musical competition.[157] After losing, Marsyas is flayed alive by Apollo for his impertinence in challenging a god. Severin believes Wanda is going to whip him as her assistants tie him up, but when he is bound, she calls out to her suitor, affectionately known as the Greek, who emerges from the bed curtains. Severin imagines this beautiful man, his rival, to be the Apollo Belvedere come-to-life, the counterpart to the statues of Venus he has worshiped most of his life: "…ich war gebunden wie Marsyas und mußte sehen, wie sich Apollo anschickte, mich zu schinden" (135) (Like Marsyas I was bound hand and foot and condemned to be flayed by Apollo, 268). Under Apollo's whip and Venus's laugh, Severin begins to feel a supersensual pleasure, the scene, however, ultimately outstrips his fantasy, "Das übertraf meine Phantasie" (133) (It surpassed anything I had imagined, 266), and the Greek whips the poetry out of him, "…Apollo peitschte mir die Poesie heraus, Hieb für Hieb…" (136) (Apollo whipped all poetry from me, as one blow followed the next). Wanda had previously predicted that if Severin was ever really to fall into the hands of the vicious women of his dreams, he would be disabused of his "Poesie" (46) (poetry, 179). Wanda proves at once to be both the woman of his dreams and the woman who pushes him beyond his limits, exorcizing the aestheticism from his pain and his pain from his pleasure.

This final dramatic scene portrays Severin's masochistic fantasies as a contagious affliction and this moment as its cure with a clinical rhetoric reminiscent of the *Lesewut* discourse. In a later letter, Wanda expresses her enjoyment in realizing Severin's fantasies and in helping him heal from them, "…ich fand es pikant, Ihnen Ihr Ideal zu verwirklichen und Sie vielleicht – während ich mich köstlich amüsierte – zu heilen" (137) (I found it exciting to realize your ideal and while I amused myself pleasantly, perhaps to cure you, 270). She recognizes, in a continuance of the clinical rhetoric, that it was Severin who made her "genußsüchtig" (134) (thirsty for pleasure, 266), who formed her into Venus in Furs, and who should be the first victim of his creation: "So warst du es, der mir die Selbstsucht, den Übermut, die Grausamkeit eingeimpft hat, und *du sollst ihr erstes Opfer werden*" (133, emphasis in original) (It is you who have taught me selfishness, pride and cruelty, and you shall be my first victim, 265). Wanda identifies this final scene as Severin's ultimate cure, "Ich hoffe, Sie sind unter meiner Peitsche gesund geworden, die Kur war grausam aber radikal" (137) (I hope that my whip has cured you, that the treatment, cruel though it was, has proved effective, 270), and Severin, picks up on this rhetoric, too, claiming in the final line of his text to be cured: "…ich bin gesund geworden" (138) (I am cured, 271).

However, the notion of being cured that Severin and Wanda both propagate should not be taken at face value. Masochism and its means of subject-formation is more complex than a disease that can be so completely cured. The fundamental breakdown in the culminating masochistic scene is the overstepping of bounds, the dissolution of the proper framing. The

[157] Sacher-Masoch was probably unaware of Titian's painting, "The Flaying of Marsyas," but the Ovidian version of the story was the subject of many paintings by Italian Renaissance artists among others. MacLeod, *Fugitive Objects*, 166.

contract is the constituent framing device for the masochistic relationship. It enforces a situation, a power hierarchy, in private that is the inverse of the hierarchy in the public realm. It frames the relationship by clearly differentiating between the external reality and the internal fantasy by outlining the inverse power relations between the male victim and the female torturer. In the climactic scene, this framework is overstepped by Wanda when she introduces someone else into the relationship, and this overstepping is aestheticized in both the *tableau vivant* and a *mise-en-abyme.* The replication of Apollo and Marsyas myth in a living scene fits with Severin's masochistic aesthetic but breaks the heterosexual contractual understanding. In the moment before the Greek whips Severin, Severin gazes at a painting hanging on the ceiling depicting the blinding of Samson by the Philistines at the feet of Delilah. As the masochistic scene below unfolds, a *mise-en-abyme* effect is created because Severin identifies with Samson, feeling similarly betrayed at the hands of a woman. The staging of the final scene and its aestheticization of the dissolution of the framing puts Severin in an ambiguous position inherent to masochist subjectivation. According to Catriona MacLeod, the triangulation of the painted scenes and the masochistic scene sets Severin into several possible positions: the "triumphant 'supersensualist' torturer, the abject victim, or the supposedly detached dilettante spectator" because the torturer is a mirror of the victim and "to some extent the observer and the observed share an identity, since the masochist is always desirously watching his own victimization."[158] This unclear position between the observer and the observed destabilizes the barrier between viewer and performer and the order that the *tableau vivant* had previously offered.[159]

What Severin and Wanda both call a cure is really a breaking down of the masochistic framework. While it might reveal the fantasy to be like a dream, it does not cure Severin of his fantasies; his fantasies merely need to be separated again from the structures of the public realm. In short, they need to be reframed. He accomplishes this reframing by aestheticizing and textualizing his fantasies in his autobiography.

Subjecting the Reader

Severin supposedly substantiates his well-being by returning to and taking over his hereditary position, estate, and responsibilities; he leaves his fantasies behind and assumes his proper place in the patriarchal public sphere. From this position Severin writes his autobiographical confession, a textual production that, at first glance, might seem to substantiate his claim of good health since, in the sense of Fichte and Bergk, he has produced a text out of his reading and the experiences it instigated. However, if we follow Ellis Hanson's astute reading of Severin's autobiographical and confessional text as a performative speech act that lays his shame bare for all to read and provides him with masochistic pleasure from being shamed by every reader, then this does not represent a cure, but rather a return to the original medium and discourse of Severin's masochism and his subjection.[160]

After Wanda overstepped and broke the framework of their relationship, Severin returns to the medium with which his desires began and reinscribes his desires into a text that he and others can read – a static text to which he can always return to fulfill his desire for shame without the fear it will overstep its bounds. By writing down his experiences and fantasies, he is able to mark off his fantasies from his social reality. In this way, the text serves the same function as the

[158] MacLeod, *Fugitive Objects*, 168, 166.
[159] Ibid., 166.
[160] Hanson, "Confession as Seduction," 45.

contract did with Wanda: it demarcates a space within which he can take the inferior position of power. The text functions like Wanda, too, in that it, as a confessional autobiography, becomes an object that can receive the projection of Severin's desires and redirect them back onto him. Severin enjoys every stage of the textual process from writing down his humiliation, presenting it to his friend, and seeing it get published because at each stage he can relive and observe his original humiliation.[161]

Key to this reading of the novella is the frame narrative that contains Severin's confession. As a scene of reading, the frame narrative also functions to pull the external reader into Severin's masochistic fantasies. The abundance of frame narratives in the literature of the nineteenth century that dramatize the relation between authors and readers, storytellers and audiences, enacting the problematic of transmission, reveals the deep anxiety around transmission, specifically around reading as transmission at the time.[162] The frame narrative in *Venus im Pelz* presents a story of transmission, ostensibly the autobiography of Severin, but it also threatens to transmit the male masochistic fantasy, a perversion that carries connotations of disease and that, like *Lesesucht* or *Lesewut*, can be spread by reading. The frame narrative as a scene of reading thus ties Severin's masochism and subjectivation to the novella's poetics of reading, portraying the subjectivation of reading that Severin undergoes and enacting that same process of subjectivation on the reader of Severin's text.

The novella begins with a dream sequence in which the unnamed frame narrator is confronted with the beautiful Venus in Furs that so intoxicated Severin, and together they philosophize about the nature of love, passions, and fantasies. When the narrator is awakened, his servant reminds him of his meeting with Severin, but not before admonishing him: "…'es ist eine wahrhafte Schande…in Kleidern einzuschlafen und noch dazu bei einem Buche…von' – er schlug den Deckel auf, 'von Hegel…'" (13) ("This is disgraceful…To fall asleep with your clothes on and a book in your hand"…He looked at the title page: "Ah, Hegel," 147). Perhaps the narrator has fallen asleep while reading Hegel's theorization of the master-slave dialectic not because it was boring, but because it was easier to dream it than read it.[163] Hegel's master-slave dialectic, in which the master, who first appears external to the slave turns out to be the slave's own conscience, prefigures Foucault's theory of power. Both present a "power that at first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assum[ing] a psychic form that constitutes the subject's self-identity."[164] The narrator's dream, then, is not just an easier form of philosophizing, but an internalization of the masochist fantasy.

Then the stage for the upcoming reading scene is set. The narrator sits in Severin's estate house having just finished recapitulating his dream to his friend. As with most of the novella, the details of the immediate surroundings are rich, but any larger context for the scene is missing. As Severin quietly contemplates his friend's dream, the narrator describes the room:

> Während er also stumm blieb, sang dafür das Feuer im Kamin, sang der große ehrwürdige Samowar, und der Ahnherrnstuhl, in dem ich, mich schaukelnd, meine Zigarre rauchte, und das Heimchen im alten Gemäuer sang auch, und ich ließ meinen Blick über das absonderliche Geräte, die Tiergerippe, ausgestopften Vögel, Globen, Gipsabgüsse schweifen, welche in seinem Zimmer angehäuft waren, bis er zufällig auf

[161] Ibid., 59.
[162] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 28.
[163] Hanson, "Confession as Seduction," 61.
[164] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 3.

> einem Bilde haften blieb, das ich oft genug gesehen hatte, das mir aber gerade heute im roten Widerschein des Kaminfeuers einen unbeschreiblichen Eindruck machte. (14)
>
> While he sat there in silence one could hear the faint singing of the fire, the humming of the venerable samovar, the creak of the old rocking chair on which I sat smoking my cigar, and the chirrup of the cricket in the wall. I let my gaze wander over the curious collection of objects: skeletons of animals, stuffed birds, globes, plaster casts. Suddenly my eyes alighted on a picture that I had often seen before but which today in the red glow of the fire made a particularly strange impression on me. (148)

Every sense is engaged in this description: the fire, tea machine, chair, and cricket all sing as if in a chorus while the narrator's eyes run over various curiosities; the warmth of the fire radiates through the room, while the taste and smell of the cigar wafts in the air. The measuring tools, skeletons, stuffed birds, globes, and plaster casts straddle the natural and artificial worlds; as lifeless preservations of once living beings or scaled down, comprehensible representations of natural phenomena, these objects once endowed with significant representational functions are now rendered in their bourgeois surroundings as merely aesthetic objects. The sensual experience of the room ends when the narrator notices the "Bilde" hanging on the wall. He then moves into an ekphrastic description of a painting depicting Wanda wearing nothing but a fur and a whip in her hand standing on Severin, who is described variously as a slave, a dog, and a martyr. When questioned about the painting, Severin calls attention to a reproduction of Titian's *Venus with a Mirror* on the opposite wall as a means to explain who the woman is and the narrator recognizes her as the Venus in Furs from his dream. The ease with which the narration moves from detailing the room to describing the painting to making connections with the dream demonstrates the lack of borders between life, art, and fantasy that is characteristic of this novella. As another means to answer his friend's questions about Venus in Furs, Severin offers his text and commands him to read it. Thus, the surrounding objects and paintings come to mark the setting and literally frame the scene of reading.

When the narrator recognizes the woman in the painting as the Venus in Furs of his dream, Severin claims she was in his dreams, too, "nur habe ich meinen Traum mit offenen Augen geträumt" (14) (but I was dreaming with my eyes open, 149). Severin continues: "…*ich bin im Ernste gepeitscht worden,* ich bin kuriert, willst du lesen wie?" (16, emphasis in original) (I have been thoroughly whipped myself and it cured me. Would you like to read about it?, 150), and he produces a small manuscript, instructing his friend simply: "Da – lies!" (16) (Here you are – read this!, 151). The text he places on the table is, of course, his "Bekenntnisse eines Übersinnlichen," the text that becomes the framed narrative of the novella. The simple instruction recalls the similar instructions the disembodied voice gives to Augustine in the *Confessiones*, "tolle lege," simultaneously reminding us of the confessional nature of Severin's text and implying a sort of conversion for the soon-to-be-reader who will find the answers to his questions if he would just take up the book and read it.

For Severin, his interactions with Wanda were a type of disciplinary power: a practice in which he willingly participates and through which he as a subject can be controlled and corrected. Disciplinary power is a fundamental force in Foucault's formation of the individual; its chief function is to train, and, as Foucault elaborates, "[d]iscipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of

its exercise."[165] But now that Wanda is no longer present to provide this discipline, reading becomes the pertinent disciplinary practice in the frame narrative of *Venus im Pelz*. Severin passes his text on to the narrator, a text that contains the instruction and correction needed for the realization of Severin's masochistic fantasy.

Before the narrator begins reading Severin's text, he invokes his surroundings: "Severin setzte sich zum Kamin, den Rücken gegen mich, und schien mit offenen Augen zu träumen. Wieder war es still geworden, und wieder sang das Feuer im Kamin, und der Samowar und das Heimchen im alten Gemäuer und ich schlug die Handschrift auf und las" (17) (Severin sat by the fire with his back to me, lost in reverie. Everything became quiet: the fire singing in the hearth, the samovar and the cricket were heard once more. I opened the manuscript and read, 151). The recalling of the room's noises draws attention again to the immediate surroundings, the objects in the room, and the narrator's senses just as Severin disappears into a daydream and the narrator immerses himself into the world of the manuscript. With references to dreams, journals, and paintings, this scene mixes memory, fantasy, and the present; it surrounds the reader with all the elements of the aesthete's masochistic fantasy that will be enlivened by the reading of the text.

In the constellation of this reading scene, Severin's position is, just as in the final masochistic *tableau vivant* of his text, difficult to define. In producing his own text and passing it on to his friend, he is an author and instructor. On the backend of the frame narrative Severin's friend asks twice what the moral of the story is, and Severin answers, "Wer sich peitschen läßt, verdient, gepeitscht zu werden" (138) (whoever allows himself to be whipped deserves to be whipped, 271). This answer seems to be a warning against being too passive, against taking a subordinating position; however, the reversed logic of this answer – the act of being whipped somehow justifies the whipping – represents exactly the masochistic logic of subjectivation: the external force that works on the body is internalized as a justification for who the subject is. Severin also represents the masochistic subject by being the subject of the text. As the first-person narrator and main character of his autobiographical text, he is the subject and content of the reading scene. He is also a detached spectator as he watches his friend read and fall into the subjecting power of the text.

Severin's text is a key element in the masochistic triangulation of victim, torturer, and observer. It, too, plays various roles: as the external manifestation of Severin's desires, it is capable of being Severin's torturer; it is a form of Severin as a subject since it is a self-representation; and it is an observer, a witness to Severin's torture. Following this logic of multiple roles for both the text and Severin, the reader (the ostensible observer) gets pulled into the multiple triangular configurations. The confessional nature of Severin's text forces the reader, knowingly or unknowingly, consenting or non-consenting, into the exhibitionist's game in the necessary position of voyeur, and, as a voyeuristic reader they are master and servant.[166] The function of the frame narrative is pivotal since it sets up the opportunity for not only Severin's friend but the novella's reader, too, to participate in the game through an interaction with the text. However, by getting more specific and recognizing the frame narrative as a scene of reading, we can notice the text functioning as a means for Severin to instruct those who read his text about his fantasies. The text becomes a masochistic discourse, a subjecting power that can exert its force on the reader; it both portrays and enacts a reading practice that allows the reader to explore and shape his own fantasies just like Severin when he reads the many texts that inform his masochistic self.

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[165] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 170.
[166] Hanson, "Confession as Seduction," 62.

Conclusion

Throughout the novella, the framing and scene work ostensibly function to define and frame the world of the masochistic fantasy as separate from a heteronormative, patriarchal social reality. But as these bounds are transgressed, dissolved, and made fluid through the emptying out of any meaningful distinction between aesthetics and life, the relationship between fantasy and reality becomes meaningless, and, seemingly, the poesy is destroyed. However, when Severin translates his masochistic experience into textual form, the necessary frame is reconstituted through the material as well as social conventions of reading literature. In this way, the masochistic fantasy is resurrected for him: it is neatly confined to a manuscript that he can revisit, reread, and relive. He can also circulate the text among readers to foment their humiliating laughter. Severin, then, never escapes his masochistic fantasies, nor does he want to. The stable textual form provides him with an object, equally potent as Wanda, onto which he can project his internalized fantasies, and which can return that projection to subject him, but in a form that does not threaten to surpass its author or his desires.

The textualization of his fantasies completes the circle of Severin's personal masochistic experience that was inspired, shaped, and encouraged by his reading. But the reading scene that constitutes the frame narrative enacts Severin's subjecting method of reading through the frame narrator and onto the novella's reader threatening to draw them into the masochistic fantasy. Sacher-Masoch utilizes literary forms – the frame narrative and the reading scene – that often provide the means and structures for critical reflection as in the editorial fiction in *Werther* or the examples of reading in *Don Silvio* or *Anton Reiser* to actually break down the critical distance aestheticization can provide. Instead, the reading scene and frame narrative remove the barriers and provide an entry point into the fantasy, drawing the reader into masochism, a sexual perversion as well as a replicable and repeatable textual practice. As the reader enters the text then, *Venus im Pelz* presents a subjecting reading through its reading protagonist, a practice that forces the reader into submission and forces the reader to perpetuate the practice. Sacher-Masoch's novella basks in a perverted celebration of the fears and proposed solutions of subjecting reading by weaving his own productive version of subjecting reading into the masochistic fantasy.

Chapter 4

Scenes of Migratory Reading: Deconstructing Authenticity in *Der falsche Inder*

As much as the reading scenes in *Venus im Pelz* satirize and pervert the storyline of the German reading protagonists around 1800, modern scenes of reading and reading protagonists remain largely indebted to the narrative elements, symbolic functions, and aesthetic forms established by authors like Wieland, Goethe, Moritz, and Novalis.[167] The current explanation for the revived prominence of reading culture as a theme in contemporary literature and research relies on the media-technological inventions, conceived of as disruptions, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[168] At the introduction of every new type of medium – radio, film, television, and the internet – the novel seems to return to the thematization of reading to assert its status as a leading medium for cultural formation and critique. Because of these challenges to the medium and genre, the thematization of reading in the modern novel often picks up on the issues from around 1800 including the relationships between reality and fiction, the individual and his society, and the reader and her reading practices.

But to focus on media disruptions as the main driver for the self-reflection of reading cultures over the past century is to ignore a much more complex reality. While the recent introduction of e-readers and smartphones, for example, has prompted renewed interest in the ways western societies read, so too have societal shifts caused by world wars, political ideologies, imperialism, and globalization. Among the several topics that are relevant to modern reading cultures, the recent migrations to Europe from the Middle East and Africa provide a poignant example of how the previous conceptualizations of reading in German culture are ripe for a new analysis. While media changes have initiated transformations of reading practices from within German society, migration represents an external catalyst for change in the normalized reading practices of modernity. The realities of migration along with the cultures and literary traditions of migrating people pose a substantial challenge to the notions of the self, *Bildung*, and authorship in German culture, concepts that have been to a large extent developed and propagated by depictions of reading protagonists.

In its thematization of reading, reading scenes, and reading protagonists within a narrative of migration, Abbas Khider's 2008 debut novel, *Der falsche Inder*, appropriates and redeploys traditional German literary tropes to subvert normalized attitudes towards reading and migration. The novel reworks the themes, symbols, and figurations of canonical German reading figures around the physical, material, legal, and economic realities of contemporary migration to expose the presuppositions that accompany the prevailing conceptualization of reading in modern Germany. Khider weaves the German cultural heritage of the reading hero from around 1800 into an updated narrative that includes modern technologies and media landscapes to address the popular imagination and accompanying stigma attached to migrants forced out of Middle Eastern countries for political, personal, and economic reasons. As I will show, Khider reworks these cultural figures and challenges the cultural status quo most effectively through the reading figures that he constructs and deconstructs in the novel.

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[167] This chapter is an expansion and reframing of a previously published article: Reitz, "'Meine *eigene* Geschichte': Identity Construction Through Reading in Abbas Khider's *Der falsche Inder*."
[168] Stocker, "Lesen als Thema," 209.

Recently, B. Venkat Mani has pointed out that modern stories of "minoritized readers" – people whose access to literacy and textual culture is impeded by discriminatory racial, linguistic, and educational politics – "remind us of the simultaneous construction and deconstruction of the reader at the borderlands of translation, within a space where the national collides with the extranational, where nostalgia for the homeland defines the diaspora, where, to borrow from Gloria Anzaldúa, the vernacular grates its bloody back against the cosmopolitan."[169] Readers are constructed by their political and linguistic surroundings, their education, and their access to books, not to mention – like Don Silvio, Werther, and Anton – by the books they read. As my entire study up to this point has stressed the aesthetic and dramatic configuration of readers in scenes of reading and their role in constructing their texts' readers, Khider's novel explicitly thematizes this construction by deconstructing the normative reader in the contemporary German cultural imagination through a minoritized reader, a migrant whose acts of reading are presented as border crossings and linguistic violence in an unruly, undefined, and denormalized transnational space.

In the novel, dramatized scenes of reading play an important role as an unnamed frame narrator reads a manuscript written by a young man, Rasul Hamid, that recounts his personal migration story from Iraq to Germany. The novel's frame narrative simultaneously thematizes Rasul's self-depiction as a reading migrant and the frame narrator's reading of Rasul's manuscript. This double perspective on reading serves as an intervention in the contemporary discussion on reading and migration in two different, but interrelated ways. First, Rasul as the main protagonist occupies physical and cultural spaces at the borders of nation states, political ideologies, languages, and literary traditions while experiencing the economic, physical, and emotional precarity of forced migration. These conditions are reflected in what and how Rasul reads, which in turn affect his sense of self and, accordingly, his self-depiction in his manuscript. As a reading migrant, Rasul's practices foil the prevailing popular notions of reading that are based largely on the celebrated fictional readers of the novel from around 1800 and celebrate the cultivation of subjectivity, imagination, escapism, and empathy.[170] Such reading practices are often predicated on the security, safety, and even the boredom of a stable middle class life; in contrast, Rasul's reading as an act of self-determination becomes a necessary practice for survival. Secondly, the frame narrator – a man with his own personal experience of migration – reads Rasul's account and perceives the story as his own. The frame narrator acts as the editor of Rasul's manuscript, a position that is both the first reader and the final author of the text. In this position, he exercises a reader's power to shape the figure he encounters – an inversion of the power exercised by fictional characters over their readers.

At the center of the novel is a tension between the migrant's subjective reading of the world he experiences and the objectifying reading of the migrant, a tension that is extended through a correlation between the novel's fictional characters and its author. The flyleaf of a later edition of *Der falsche Inder* calls a reader's attention to this fact by juxtaposing summaries of the novel and Khider's biography that employ similar phrasing: the novel is about the flight of an Iraqi, who was imprisoned under Saddam Hussein and eventually fled war and oppression, while Khider was born in Baghdad and fled after a conviction on political grounds and a two-year

[169] Mani, "Rights, Permissions, Claims," 146.
[170] For such canonical "reading heroes," see Wuthenow, *Im Buch die Bücher*; Wolpers, *Gelebte Literatur in der Literatur*; Bracht, *Der Leser im Roman des 18. Jahrhunderts*; Neubauer, *Indikationen und Katalyse*; Marx, *Erlesene Helden.*

prison sentence.[171] These broad similarities distract from the more subtle ways in which Khider writes himself into his novel and its fictional characters. Interpreting novels through the lens of their authors' biographies, while generally avoided in contemporary literary criticism, has appeared increasingly more often in the contemporary public discourse and scholarship on German-language novels written by authors with recent migration backgrounds. When critics and scholars point to an author's personal or familial history, usually to substantiate the author's literary depictions of migration as believable or authoritative, they encourage an overly-biographical interpretation of the novel that is more concerned with finding a purported reality hidden in the novel than exploring the ways in which literary practices reimagine and express lived experience to engage, critique and shape social realities. Through such reductive interpretations and labeling, as seen, for example, in the use of the term *Migrationsliteratur* and in the selection criteria for literary prizes such as the former Adelbert von Chamisso Prize, the author and their works are pigeonholed into a particular sector of German literature.[172]

Der falsche Inder challenges this often fetishized and author-centric notion of authenticity in migration narratives by portraying an author, a frame narrator, and a protagonist who share and, to some extent, write the same narrative.[173] By giving his novel multiple points of origin and several potential authors, Khider suggests that the authenticity of migration narratives need not rely on one authoritative writer, figure, or experience. In fact, although writing is a prevalent theme throughout the novel, I argue that *Der falsche Inder* problematizes notions of authenticity in the authoring of migration narratives through a thematic and poetic focus on reading and readers. By only depicting acts of reading Rasul's manuscript – never any acts of writing it – the novel demonstrates a reader's power to construct the narratives and the figures they read about. If reading has the power to construct figures and their identities, however, will the novel's main figures also be susceptible to re-creation when the novel is read? The novel, I argue, is acutely aware of this issue and exploits it in order to expose and critique the interpretive power of the reader, especially in the construction of migrant figures and their narratives.

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[171] See the fifth edition of the novel: "Dieses Romandebüt handelt von der Flucht eines jungen Irakers, der unter Saddam Hussein im Gefängnis saß und vor Krieg und Unterdrückung flieht, sich in mehreren Ländern als Hauslehrer, Gelegenheitsarbeiter, Kellner durchschlägt… Abbas Khider, geboren 1973 in Bagdad, floh 1996 nach einer Verurteilung aus 'politischen Gründen' und nach einer zweijährigen Gefängnisstrafe aus dem Irak. Von 1996 bis 1999 hielt er sich als illegaler Flüchtling in verschiedenen Ländern auf, seit 2000 lebt er in Deutschland."

[172] Author Olga Grjasnowa, for example, has argued that the term *Migrationsliteratur* is racist and paternalistic as it refers simply to the works of authors who are different, who do not belong, who are not *biodeutsch* instead of, as could reasonably be assumed, referring to works that engage the topic of migration. Grjasnowa, "Privilegien," 135. Brent Peterson sees a similar move in the selection criteria of the (now discontinued) Chamisso Prize, which, he argues, implied a "biocultural orientation" as the criteria assumed a modeling of cultures as "intact, homogeneous, bounded and authentic" to which individuals are born. The prize's presumption of "migrant authors" as biologically authentic representatives of cultural exchange relied on a literary-critical perspective that an author's biography provides the ultimate interpretive framework, a perspective that is no longer considered valid. Peterson, "*Peter Schlemihl*," 83-4. Past recipients of the Chamisso Prize, Ilija Trojanow and José F.A. Oliver, however, have argued that the decision to discontinue the Chamisso Prize was paternalistic as it assumed that the type of authors it supported no longer needed support and the issues it helped to raise no longer needed attention. They also contend that the critique that the prize ghettoized a particular literature does not hold water. Oliver and Trojanow, "Ade, Chamisso-Preis?" It is worth noting that Abbas Khider was awarded the Chamisso Promotional Prize in 2010 for *Der falsche Inder* and the Chamisso Main Prize in 2017 for his complete works to that date.

[173] In using the term "migration narrative," I draw on Brent Peterson's distinction between "migration literature" and "migration narratives." In the German speaking context, the term *Migrationsliteratur* often references works by authors who migrated to Germany (or even whose parents or grandparents migrated to Germany), whereas "migration narrative" refers to literary works that explicitly thematize migration. See, Peterson, "*Peter Schlemihl*."

My analysis of this novel moves from the inside out: it begins by explicating the presentation of Rasul as a reading protagonist in several scenes of reading in his autobiographical manuscript to show how his reading practices are shaped by his social, political, and economic conditions and, in turn, mold his self-identity. Then I move on to the form and structure of Rasul's manuscript and the challenges it presents to any potential reader. Finally, I interpret the composition of a reading scene that constitutes the frame narrative as a formal and narrative move that breaks down boundaries between the textual and contextual in order to throw into question the position and role of the novel's reader.

Reading as Identity Construction

In his manuscript, Rasul's identity formation is often actualized in and expressed through acts of reading. The second of eight chapters that chronicle his forced migration, "Schreiben und Verlieren" (Writing and Losing), relates the story of Rasul's literary awakening when, for the first time, he reads a book not assigned for school: a collection of poems by Rasul Gamzatov. "Nachdem ich es gelesen hatte, packte mich sofort der Vogel, der Büchervogel," remembers Rasul (23) (Once I'd read it, the bird immediately got hold of me, the books bird, 18).[174] In this moment of reading, his life-long literary obsession begins: "Ich las wie besessen […] Und eines Tages kam ich auf die Idee, selbst Gedichte zu schreiben" (23) (I read as if possessed…And then, one day, I thought of writing my own poems, 18). Conspicuously, Rasul's literary obsession begins when he reads the poems of another Rasul. The coincidence of the shared first name goes unremarked by the narrating Rasul; however, it ties him – a fictional reader and fledgling poet – to a renowned real-world poet and presages a literary destiny. Rasul Gamzatov was born in the Caucasus mountains with a bard for a father, from whom he learned to compose poetry. Gamzatov wrote in his native Avar language and his works were often translated into Russian and celebrated in the Soviet Union and Russian Federation. Rasul Hamid reads an Arabic translation of Gamzatov's Russian poems, and he remembers this moment as the spark that lit his poetic ambitions. By including this scene in his manuscript, Rasul constructs a literary identity that is based in acts of reading and translation and defies the bounds of linguistic and national traditions through a conflation of a textual construct with reality caused by a shared name.

The reading mania unleashed by these poems alienates Rasul from his immediate familial and national contexts, a situation that recalls the charge from late eighteenth-century Germany that excessive reading disturbs domestic peace.[175] His reading of forbidden books outside of school separates him from the official state ideology and national consciousness, while his ability to read at all creates conflict with his father, a recent convert to Saddamism. Rasul returns home one day to find his books and writings thrown by his father into the wastewater pooling in front of the house: "[w]ie Leichen an der Front lagen sie da und schauten mich entsetzt an" (27) (Like fallen soldiers, they looking up at me in terror, 22). The war simile and image of betrayed comrades convey the life-or-death stakes reading has for Rasul, and they portray Rasul's relationship to books as more intimate than his relationship to his countrymen, who, thanks to the government, have mutated into "Fantasiekreaturen": "Oder wie hätte es sonst sein können, dass ein Staat das Lesen und Schreiben außerhalb von Schulen und Universitäten in kriminelle

[174] Khider, *Der falsche Inder*. For English translation, see Khider, *The Village Indian*, trans. McLaughlin.
[175] For an overview of the *Lesesucht* debate, see Schön, *Der Verlust der Sinnlichkeit*, 46-49. For a critical historicization of the debate, see Wrage, "Jene Fabrik der Bücher."

Handlungen verwandelte, sodass mein Vater es für angebracht hielt, meine Bücher und alles, was ich bisher geschrieben hatte, zu vernichten" (27-28) (creatures of the imagination…How else can you explain a state declaring as criminal any act of reading and writing outside the schools and universities? Which is why my father thought it best to destroy my books and my writings, 22-23). Even though Rasul's father only destroyed permitted reading material (Rasul kept his forbidden books hidden, and his illiterate father could not and probably did not care to distinguish between sanctioned and unsanctioned books), Rasul's relationship with his father is irreparably damaged. Rasul's ability to read and thereby threaten established political and familial institutions marks Rasul at a young age as an outsider in his family and a fugitive in his country, foreshadowing his eventual flight.

Rasul's incessant reading leads to obsessive acts of writing that are framed in his manuscript as acts of identity construction as well.[176] After he frames his identity through anecdotes about skin color, geographical positioning, and confused lineages in the first chapter, he moves away from these external factors in the negative assertion that begins the second chapter: "In meiner Familie gab es keinen Schriftsteller" (23) (There were no writers in my family, 18). This direct statement discounts any familial or environmental basis for his writing, which he instead presents as an internal compulsion: "Das Schreiben hatte immer etwas mit meinem Innenleben zu tun, das mich unaufhörlich dazu zwang" (24) (Writing was connected to my inner life – it was constantly compelling me to write, 19). His *Lesesucht* leads to a *Schreibwut*, in which he becomes "eine echte Schreibmaschine" (24) (a writing machine, 18).

Rasul's *raison d'écrire* moves through three stages. First, he understands that writing captures his feelings in words; then he believes his writing can – through active engagement – change the world, just like a revolutionary; finally, he is convinced that he can better understand himself through his writing. He discovers the world and himself by withdrawing from the world and diving deep into himself: "Ich verriegelte fast täglich die Tür meines Zimmers, blendete die Außenwelt aus und tauchte in mich hinein, um jedes Mal ein weiteres verborgenes Stück meiner selbst an die Oberfläche zu ziehen" (24) (I locked myself in my room, blocked out the external world and plunged deep within to bring, each time, another concealed part of myself to the surface, 19). By bringing concealed pieces of himself to the surface, he constructs his identity by nuancing the *Oberfläche*, which, until then, had been characterized only by his skin color. In the next chapter, "Priestertöchter" (Priests' Daughters), the image of self-writing and the notion of surface come together in his constant struggle to find sufficient writing surfaces – falafel wrappers, state documents, prison walls, a lover's body – whenever erotic desire spurs him to write at home, in prison, and on the run. As he roams across countries, drifts from job to job, and leaves one lover for another, his desire to write oscillates in intensity but remains the one unifying act in all of his experiences. Meanwhile, the changing materiality of his writing surfaces – their variation in ephemerality and permanence, intimacy and publicity, legibility and illegibility – reflects the ever-changing stakes and precarity of his migrating self-identity.

Rasul's self-construction through writing culminates in writing his manuscript, titled *Erinnerungen* (Memories). His desire was always to write his own "Geschichte" (latent with both the meanings of history and story), but he struggles because of his "fürchterlich schlechtes Gedächtnis" (25) (terrible memory, 19). For Rasul, memory and writing have an intimate relationship; they require and determine each other, such that his writing becomes a means for

[176] See Barthold, "Arabische Märchen zwischen Berlin und München," for an analysis of the performative instances of authorship meant to legitimize the migrant author in this novel. See also Hofmann, "Erzählung der Flucht," and Jensen and Müller-Tamm, "Echte Wiener und falsche Inder."

internalizing life into an increased consciousness, a process that Sarah Fortmann-Hijazi sees reflected in a play on words with the manuscript's title, *Er-innerung*, literally an internalization of the (masculine) self.[177] However, Rasul admits that his memory is full of holes which leave only ragged, unordered, and diffuse narrative shreds. This admission undermines the authenticity of the so-called "wahre Begebenheiten" (25) (real events, 20) of his narrative. Writing often functions as a memory-support, but not for Rasul: the materiality and symbolism of writing fail him when, for example, his penciled notes are smudged and become illegible and his secret alphabet, created to circumvent government surveillance, becomes as mysterious to him as hieroglyphs. Rasul, however, views his forgetfulness as a positive competence ("eine Fähigkeit," 25) and a blessing ("Gnade," 25). His ability to quickly forget the worst events of his life – combined with an ancillary ability to gild any remaining memories – is a functional survival strategy. On the one hand, his forgetfulness undermines his story's ability to accurately represent reality; on the other hand, it represents the necessity for physical and psychological survival that Rasul confronts every day. The constant loss of his writings through fire, confiscation, erasure, misplacement and forgetting gives him the opportunity to reconstruct his story, re-write his history, and refurbish his memories after every moment of loss. In the relative safety and stability of asylum in Germany, digital writing seems to offer a more effective means for preserving his writing, when, for example, he gets upset after losing a manuscript on a bus but is reminded by a friend that it is all saved on his computer. However, when Rasul says that he rewrites everything new that he had previously written and lost – "So als schriebe ich all das Verlorene wieder neu" (31) – the subjunctive mood makes the statement speculative, a possible simile, suggesting that his rewriting is merely a simulation. Meanwhile the sentence's ambiguous construction allows for the possibility that Rasul either reproduces word-for-word or rewrites anew the lost material. His constant rewriting is both a consequence of his survival and a necessary condition for it. As to the authenticity of his narrative, even if the facts relayed in his narrative are unreliable, his manuscript's portrayal of his authorial function accurately depicts the reality of his condition.

Rasul's version of authorship, predicated on the realities of migration, is continually delayed, forestalled, erased, and repeated and, therefore, rendered as acts of rewriting and rereading his past experiences and previous texts. Its portrayal recalls Friedrich Kittler's conception of authorship around 1800 as a deferred effect of rereading indecipherable texts that had been unconsciously composed in delirium. Kittler finds examples of this type of authorship in E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Der goldne Topf" and Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, where the reading of hieroglyphics, unknown medieval languages, and coded alphabets incites the protagonists to author not only their own stories but also their futures.[178] In contrast to the delirious or dream-like state of Anselmus's and Heinrich's readings, Rasul's rereading of his past memories and previously written texts is based in exile, imprisonment, and sexual arousal. Rasul's catalysts for writing are material and corporeal thereby reflecting more closely the conditions of forced migration rather than the imagined conditions of a romantic German author in the nineteenth century. *Der falsche Inder* reconfigures these esoteric notions of romantic authorship for the material and psychological realities of writing while migrating, effectively disrupting prevailing conceptions of romantic authorship and readership that rely on privileged notions of physical and financial security.

Rasul's self-construction as a migrant and as a writer culminates in a scene of reading in

[177] Fortmann-Hijazi, *Gehen, um zu erinnern*, 225.
[178] Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme*, 138-158.

the fourth chapter, "Sprechende Wände" (Talking Walls). The combination of Rasul's surroundings, his migratory condition, and a specific poem scrawled on a wall conjures a network of intra- and intertextual referents that obscure the boundaries of Rasul's authorial, linguistic, and migratory identities. After being detained by the German police, Rasul shelters in an asylum center in Bayreuth with other asylum seekers from around the globe. Among the mélange of inscriptions and paintings that cover the walls of the otherwise sanitized and clinical government-run short-term residence, Rasul finds and reads a poem well-known among the residents for its hopelessness entitled "Chronik der verlorenen Zeit" (64) (Chronicle of Lost Time, 59). The poem renders him speechless partially because of the intimate feelings it evokes but also because he recognizes that "[d]as Gedicht stammte von mir" (64) ("the poem was one of mine," 60). Rasul conspicuously does not claim outright authorship of the poem he supposedly wrote; instead, his pointed use of the verb *stammen* insists less on a moment of authorship or an author of the poem and instead with the root word *Stamm* (root, trunk, or line) invokes the image of a genealogical tree. The poem on the asylum center wall becomes a leaf branching off from the trunk of Rasul's writings. This image implies his poem was picked up by a fellow migrant and passed from migrant to migrant until someone carried it to this asylum and wrote it on this wall. This unregulated notion of origin and authorship, this untraceable transmission, and the nonstandard medium of graffiti on a wall fall outside the scope of the conventional literary market that strictly regulates authorship, ownership, and transmission. Without these conventional markers of authority, the poem circulates unpredictably, gaining different interpretive possibilities as it flutters from, say, a falafel wrapper to a lover's body to a police station urinal to the wall of an asylum shelter and back to its originator. This means of transmission eschews the borders between text and context and allows each asylum seeker, each reader to pick up the poem and read it as part of their own story; from there they can carry, internalize, and redistribute it endlessly, perhaps even as their own.

This reading scene not only depicts the transgression of normative authorial and market boundaries that the realities of migration necessitate, it also transgresses the border between the novel's fictionality and the empirical reality of the novel's context. After reading the poem, Rasul promises to use its title for his first published collection of poems, which the narrating voice of Rasul confirms eventually happens. The first collection of poems, in Arabic, published by Abbas Khider carries this title.[179] This intertextual reference conflates the identities of Rasul and Khider, connecting Rasul's identity to facts beyond the novel's narrative and inserting Khider's authorial figure into it. Just as the poem's presence on the wall blurs the line between literature and lived experience, the explicit reference of its title to the literary biography of both the novel's protagonist and its author obscures conventional boundaries between text and context, but now at the level of the novel. The reading, citation, and rereading of the poem create a recursive effect for the migrant figures of the novel – whether it is the asylum seekers reading their experiences of helplessness, Rasul being reminded of his composition of the poem, or Khider infusing his past authorial and migratory experiences into the identities of his fictional migrant figures – that does not distinguish clearly between lived experience and the narration of that experience. The specific, situated reading of the poem invokes familiar memories of larger, similar migration experiences among the migrants who read it, while potentially conflating the experiences of multiple migrant figures in the eyes of the novel's reader. As we will see, the novel as a whole reproduces a similar experience based on the specific conditions of the act of reading Rasul's manuscript.

[179] Jensen and Müller-Tamm, "Echte Wiener und falsche Inder," 322.

Reading in a Loop

Rasul is a figure whose identity is closely tied to the texts he reads and the circumstances under which he reads them. The novel, as I will show in these next two sections, is equally concerned with the way Rasul's text is read. This present section focuses on the unique form of Rasul's manuscript text and the implications it has on any reader's introduction to Rasul as a fictional figure and as a migrant. The next section will then pick up on the staged reading of Rasul's manuscript within the novel. At stake is the depiction and manipulation of reading practices at every narrative and meta-narrative level of the novel and its effects on the novel's reader.

As a relatively poor child from an economically and politically unstable country, Rasul is expected to escape his surroundings and improve his social and economic conditions through a move to Western Europe. These expectations arise from the traditional arc of a formation or migration narrative, one that assumes a linear trajectory from a disadvantaged, struggling youth to a mature and socially integrated adult. Rasul's coming of age narrative has several elements traditionally associated with the *Bildungsroman*, like a boy deeply impacted by the books he reads and a first-person narrator that narrates his story in the past tense from his present mature position. Rasul, however, tells his story non-linearly. He picks up on and exaggerates the underlying looping narrative of social integration from the *Bildungsroman* creating a narrative form that exposes the inadequacy of ideological concepts such as self-improvement, social assimilation, and *Bildung* for his narrative of migration. This iterative, looping narrative form in turn generates a looping mode of reading that reflects the conditions and processes of Rasul's self-manifestation.

The manuscript's eight chapters, each of which tells an autonomous version of Rasul's migration, resist being consolidated into one linear plot line; they contain almost no corresponding events, they do not refer to each other, and they foreground different themes. Each chapter ends with Rasul in Germany, and every subsequent chapter begins with Rasul in Baghdad. This narrative loop becomes so predictable that the trajectory of each chapter from Baghdad to Germany is predicated upon an eventual return to Baghdad. In contrast, Rasul's migratory path never redoubles on itself. Not until the end of the manuscript, when he moves from Berlin back to Munich, does he ever arrive in the same place twice: "Früher kehrte ich nie zum selben Punkt zurück. Ich ging immer weiter…Dieses Mal aber kehrte ich nach München zurück, um endlich mein richtiges Studium aufzunehmen" (150) (I never returned to a place. I always traveled on…This time, though, I returned to Munich to finally begin studying properly, 154). Only in the relative stability that asylum in Germany offers can Rasul choose to return somewhere – for a forced migrant, a loop back home remains impossible.

The constant return of the narrative to Baghdad represents neither a longing to return nor a diasporic nostalgia for the homeland. Instead, Rasul is always constructed as an outsider, a transient figure whose transience has no beginning or end, a point reinforced by the manuscript's looping form. Rasul recognizes his endless journey, when, on his way to Sweden, he is arrested in Germany: "Hier also sollte meine Reise ihr Ende finden. In Wahrheit aber fand sie gar kein Ende, sondern nahm nur neue Formen an" (97) (This, then, was where my journey ended. Truth be told, it didn't end at all. It only took on new forms, 96). With this line and the looping form of his narrative, Rasul undercuts the conventional, and often celebrated, migration narrative of a harrowing journey capped by the arrival and successful social assimilation in a new country.

The tension between the novel's looping form and its portrayal of a migratory trajectory from political persecution to supposed safety replicates a tension characteristic of post-war German society. The loop, in Diedrich Diederichsen's conception of it, became the central formal model of cultural production after the Second World War even as *Weiterkommen* (progress) was the slogan for post-war West Germans and their conception of social interaction.[180] Diederichsen reminds us that the loop was integral to the structure and goal of Germany's central *Bildungsromanen*: Karl Philipp Moritz's *Anton Reiser* and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre.*[181] These novels about social advancement and its failures incorporate looping narratives and physical movement. The first condition of *Bürgerlichkeit,* for example, is a parting from the bourgeois world, a willing movement away from the family home into the world that is then followed by a period of social conditioning and an eventual return to bourgeois society. This genre-defining looping structure of social development warps as its circularity comes to be seen as fateful or even as a sign of failure. The loop becomes something humans are cursed to as *Bildungsfiguren* are increasingly disenchanted by the world and are forced to return to dead-end middle-class careers.[182] The post-modern configuration of the loop takes a slightly different but revealing form: "The loop is not simply perpetual return. It posits a process that ultimately begins again from the start in a maligned eternity."[183] The focus is then displaced from a disappointing conclusion to an eternal beginning that precludes any conclusion. This version of the loop precludes any possibility of *Weiterkommen* as it gives a concrete form to maligned eternity.

The form of these iterative narratives reflects elements of Rasul's precarious situation and his fragmented sense of self. Without *Weiterkommen*, one loop cannot be chronologically or teleologically distinguished from another, making all the loops appear simultaneous. The basic construction of the chapters in Rasul's manuscript similarly erases any meaningful sense of time or progress since they all cover the same period but share only starting and ending locations. Consequently, the figure of Rasul does not progress or develop toward social integration in a new land, because, as soon as he reaches Germany, his manuscript takes him back to Baghdad. The figures of Rasul constructed in each chapter effectively overlap and exist at the same time, representing figurations of Rasul as a migrant that are possible at all times. These multiple possible iterations of the self presented by Rasul sustain the tension between the developing individual and society, which is traditionally subsumed by a first-person narrator who narrates in the past tense from a position of completed social integration. Since there is no secure moment in time from which Rasul can create a master narrative loop, the novel suggests that Rasul never integrates socially. The narratological approach of the novel is then not to create a single coherent narrative, but to express multiple narrative possibilities and multiple iterative identities for Rasul. Just as the continual retelling of the story denies his migration narrative a teleological form, the looping figurations of his self eliminate any possibility of a teleological trajectory to his self-development and identity-construction, forming instead *eine schlechte Unendlichkeit*.

The task then of forming a sense of development and constructing an identity for Rasul falls onto the reader. Within the manuscript, Rasul's social position and personal identity are continually structured by the racist preconceptions of others, xenophobic policing strategies,

[180] Diederichsen, *Eigenblutdoping,* 17.
[181] Ibid., 24.
[182] Ibid., 25.
[183] "Der Loop ist nicht einfach die ewige Wiederkehr. Die setzt einen Prozess voraus, der schließlich wieder von vorne beginnt, in schlechter Unendlichkeit." Diederichsen, *Eigenblutdoping,* 17-18. My translation.

nativist governmental policies, and impenetrable bureaucracy that he encounters at every turn in his migratory experience. But in the larger scope of the novel, the reader is led to formulate Rasul's identity. The individual narratives of Rasul's looping chapters frame his story into eight separate stories about the same person that then leaves it up to the reader to transgress these narrative boundaries in order to coalesce Rasul's multiple narratives and identities into a coherent figure. Such a process of reading is exemplified through the frame narrator's reading of Rasul's manuscript and the frame narrative that constructs that manuscript into a cohesive account. The novel's frame narrative, as I will show in the next section, centers the act of reading and the reader within the novel's construction and exploration of authenticity and identity.

Reading the Frame Narrative

The entire novel is framed by an act of reading. The front end of the frame narrative constructs a scene of reading that presents the embedded narrative as the reading material, and the back end of the frame narrative reflects on the reading experience. This act of reading functions within the novel to manipulate the conventional boundaries between text and context and to conflate the world of the reader with the fictional world of the novel's protagonists. According to the narrative theory of David Herman, stories trigger readers to draw oblique connections between the storyworlds they are reading about and the contexts in which they are reading them. As they read and interpret a story, readers engage two mental models: one model utilizes representations within the storyworld, while the other draws analogies from the world in which readers try to make sense of a given story.[184] "Contextual anchoring" is then the term Herman uses for "the process whereby a narrative, in a more or less explicit and reflexive way, asks its interpreters to search for analogies between the representations contained within these two classes of mental models."[185] Leslie Adelson has shown how Herman's contextual anchoring can be applied to migration narratives by exploring the interpretive work such texts and their story logic force readers to undertake in order to make decisions continually about what constitutes text and what constitutes context. This boundary work (Adelson's term) causes readers to engage actively in the "transgression of boundaries assumed to separate the actual and the virtual, the fictional and the real."[186] Adelson uses this framework to argue that the labor of reading the boundary between text and context yields interpretive possibilities.[187]

Der falsche Inder foregrounds this type of boundary work in its frame narrative that constructs and then transgresses textual and contextual boundaries through a scene of reading. The combination of the reader, reading material, and the setting produce contradictions that orient and disorient, localize and universalize, contextualize and decontextualize. As the novel opens in Berlin's Zoo train station, the automated voice of the Deutsche Bahn details an imminent train trip across Germany: "Intercity Express 1511, Berlin-München, über Leipzig, Bamberg, Nürnberg, Ingolstadt. Planmäßige Abfahrt 12 Uhr 57" (7) (The Intercity-Express 1511 from Berlin to Munich, calling at Leipzig, Bamberg, Nuremberg and Ingolstadt, will depart…at 12.57, 1). As the narrator checks the time on the platform clock, the train station suddenly appears empty, and he loses all orientation: "Wo bin ich eigentlich? Was mache ich hier? Wo sind die anderen?" (7) (Where am I? What am I doing here? Where's everyone else?, 1) His

[184] Herman, *Story Logic*, 331.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Herman, *Story Logic*, 338; also quoted in Adelson, *The Turkish Turn*, 50.
[187] Adelson, *The Turkish Turn*, 55.

disorientation is heightened by allusions to faraway places and situations like "einem afrikanischen Fest," "eine endlose Wüste, nackte Berge" and "klares Wasser" that decontextualize his current position (7) (an African festival…a never-ending desert…bare mountains…clear water, 1). The narrator's disorientation in a train station, a place defined by strict chronological and geographic order, reflects an unresolved internal conflict, one that cannot yet be localized, because it is still in motion. When the train arrives, it brings with it a burden of symbolic meaning. The railway and its trains are markers of industrial modernization that stand symbolically and functionally as unifiers of nations and peoples, facilitating mass travel and commerce, but also as fortifiers of national boundaries and isolators of peoples, facilitating mass deportations and resource plundering. The paradoxical symbolic meaning of the railway "as an embodied, transitional space emblematic of both the emancipatory hopes and the destructive nightmares of [the modern] epoch" has often been exploited in stories of migration and scenes of reading.[188] The intercity express train in *Der falsche Inder* poses as a rather bourgeois setting on a domestic route connecting two economically and politically important German cities, Berlin and Munich. The train's scheduled course that crosses no national boundaries stands in contrast to the looping, atemporal, imaginative travel experienced by the reader of Rasul's manuscript. The opening of the novel and the setting of the reading scene in the train create the initial tension between constructing and transgressing boundaries that increases as the reading scene and the novel's narrative form unfold.

The setting of the reading scene separates the narrator and his act of reading from his immediate context. Despite being at ease in the train, finding his reserved seat in the smoking section and unpacking his notebook, book, carton of cigarettes, and lighter, the narrator sticks out. At the first station stop, the surrounding seats are taken by a girl immersed in the music of her MP3 player, a boy typing away on his laptop, and a capricious blond woman prattling on her phone, all assumed to be recognizably German. The narrator presents presumably as an Arabic speaker, because the woman takes an envelope off the seat next to the narrator and drops it on his lap. Written across the envelope in curled handwriting is the word for 'memories' in Arabic. He had noticed the envelope earlier, and hoped, excitedly, that the package belonged to a potential Arabic-speaking person interested in reading and writing, if not a poet. But now, with the return of the manuscript's owner doubtful, he opens the envelope to read its contents. Surrounded by modern media, the narrator's analog reading of a handwritten manuscript stands out as a romanticized and nostalgic act that further sets him apart from the digital preoccupations of his fellow passengers.[189]

The geographical, political, and social boundaries evoked by the train and the narrator's surroundings are all in anticipation of the narrative boundary established in the transition from

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[188] Presner, *Mobile Modernity*, 3. Railway stations and train travel stage encounters between Germans and *Gastarbeiter* in Sten Nadolny's *Selim oder Die Gabe Der Rede* (1990). In Emine Sevgi Özdamar's "Im Zug" (originally published as "Leben im Dazwischen" in 2008) train travel transgresses and actualizes borders while also figuring historical transformation. Katja Petrovskaja's novel, *Vielleicht Esther* (2014), opens in Berlin's new main train station, an embodiment of and portal to all that was lost in the twentieth century. *Anna Karenina*, as another example, has a poignant reading scene in a train. See Ong, "Anna Karenina Reads on the Train."

[189] Barthold reads this scene as the beginning of the Arabic migrant's self-styling as author as it invokes the long-standing culture-critical discourse of entertainment media consumption as unreflective immersion as opposed to the high-cultural activity associated with the poetic and intellectual quality of writing, especially handwriting. Barthold, "Arabische Märchen zwischen Berlin und München," 74. That the narrator's authorial persona, as well as Rasul's, is generated by an act of reading supports my argument for the privileged place of reading in the novel's depiction of authorship.

the frame narrative to Rasul's manuscript. This opening half of the frame narrative ends when the narrator opens the envelope – "Ich mache den Umschlag auf" – and the novel proceeds with the text of the found manuscript (10). Page eleven of the novel is the title page for Rasul's manuscript: the author's name, Rasul Hamid, is printed in the top-center of the page above the bolded title "**Erinnerungen**." Below the title is a quote attributed to Gottfried Benn – "Es gibt nur zwei Dinge: die Leere und das gezeichnete Ich" (11) ("There are two things: emptiness and the I portrayed, 6) – and the rest of the page is blank. Title pages function as a framing device that marks everything that follows as part of the text by delineating it from the outside world. However, by listing an author's name – a figure of the real world – title pages also point outward effectively indexing the text as a creation of this real person and therefore as part of the real world.[190] The three elements on this title page exaggerate and exacerbate the simultaneous performative and indexical functions of a title page. In naming Rasul as the author of the manuscript, it establishes him as a figure beyond the diegetic level of the manuscript; he is more than just the figure of the ensuing text, he is a person in the same world as the frame narrator. The close association of Rasul's name with the manuscript's title suggests that the manuscript is autobiographical; however, the Benn quote, the last two lines of his poem "Nur zwei Dinge" (1953), is a self-conscious commentary on the nature of memories and the fluid relationship between the author and his self-portrayal in the text. The manuscript's title page thus points to every level of the novel: it suggests that Rasul exists as an author in the world of the frame narrative as well as a figure in his manuscript, it flags the fictional nature of the manuscript's narrative, and it places the manuscript in conversation with the external world by quoting a historical poet. Instead of clearly demarcating narrative levels, dividing fact from fiction or delineating text from context, this title page conflates them all.

Although the title page of Rasul's manuscript implies that Rasul exists as a figure in the diegetic level of the frame narrative, the only figure we are introduced to at that narrative level is the anonymous frame narrator. This figure also establishes a boundary, a frame, from which he simultaneously points inward and outward. The found manuscript trope makes the frame narrator into a reader, an author, and an editor. First of all, the scene of reading has set up the unnamed narrator as an invisible interlocutor between Rasul's narrative and the novel's reader. When describing the mysterious envelope, the narrator never states the precise Arabic word written across its surface; instead, he conveys that information in German: "Außen in schnörkeliger Handschrift auf Arabisch: 'Erinnerungen,'" (9) (On the outside, in squiggly writing, the Arabic word for 'memories,' 3). This seamless act of translation calls attention to the original foreign language but bars the reader access to it by positioning the narrator as an interlocutor between the text of the envelope and the reader of the novel. As the narrator opens the envelope and reads the enclosed manuscript, he presumably continues to act as the interlocutor between the manuscript's text and the novel's reader.

By finding Rasul's manuscript randomly, the frame narrator's relation to Rasul and the manuscript is undefined, seemingly arbitrary. When he reads the manuscript, therefore, he has more in common with the reader of the novel than with Rasul. In fact, in the portion of the novel where the manuscript is (re)produced for the reader, the frame narrator and the novel's reader collapse into the same viewpoint as they both read the manuscript. Thus, the frame narrator functions to connect the reader, who stands outside the bounds of the novel, with the innermost diegetic level of the novel. Both the frame narrator and the novel's reader recede into the background as a new first-person narrator takes over the narration of the embedded story. The

[190] Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 105.

collapsed identities of the frame narrator and the novel's reader creates a distance between them and the embedded story insofar as a reader is distinguished from the text he reads. The embedded text invites identification through first-person narration, but other elements such as its title "Erinnerungen," which suggests the personal memories of someone else, and its highly rhetorical form, which continually foregrounds the constructedness and artificiality of the narrative, discourage the reader from immersing in the story and identifying with the intradiegetic narrator-protagonist.

However, when the novel closes with the second half of the frame narrative, the frame narrator becomes estranged from the novel's reader. In a scene that closely mirrors the opening reading scene, effectively closing the loop of the frame narrative, the frame narrator sits in a café surrounded by a woman on a cellphone, a girl listening to an MP3 player, and a boy on a laptop and lays his notebook, book, carton of cigarettes, and lighter on the table as he lights a cigarette. He packs up the manuscript into an envelope, presumably to send it off to his publisher to get the novel we are reading printed. Exactly this path – from finding a manuscript to sending it off for publication – defined the function of an editor in the editorial fictions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[191] The label of editor fits the frame narrator well as he is the first reader of the manuscript and effectively its second author since he defines its final form for publication.[192] The frame narrator becomes a link in the chain of authors between Rasul, who writes his autobiographical migration narrative, and Khider, who supposedly formed this novel from his own experiences.

The events and dialogue of the frame narrative further establish this authorial and editorial position of the frame narrator. After reading Rasul's manuscript, the frame narrator wonders what he should tell his girlfriend about his trip:

> Ob ich [meiner Freundin] erzählen soll, was ich während meiner Reise erlebt habe? Ich meine die Sache mit dem Manuskript. Aber was soll ich sagen? Dass ich ein Manuskript gefunden habe, in dem meine eigene Geschichte zu finden ist, geschrieben von einem Fremden namens Rasul Hamid? (153)
>
> Should I tell [my girlfriend] what happened [during my trip]? The whole thing with the manuscript, I mean. But what should I say? That I found a manuscript containing my story? Written by [a stranger] called Rasul? (157)

In this moment – a scene reminiscent of Rasul in the asylum center – the narrator claims to have read his own story in the manuscript of Rasul Hamid. In the manuscript's content, he finds details that no one except he could know and only a few descriptive errors: Rasul "hat nur ein paar Namen und Beschreibungen einiger Ereignisse verändert. Das ist aber ohne Bedeutung" (154) (changed only a few names, the details of a few incidents. But that isn't significant, 158).

Ironically, it is the form of the manuscript with which the narrator most closely identifies. He admits that he often tried to set his story down into literary form, but every attempt failed:

> Schon lange hegte ich den Wunsch, meine Fahrt auf dem Geisterschiff, meine Odyssee, niederzuschreiben. Nie habe ich es geschafft. Immer wieder, seit mindestens fünf Jahren, versuchte ich einen Anfang. Und immer wieder hörte ich auf, weil ich nicht überzeugt

[191] Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 110.
[192] See ibid., 26.

> war, weil mir die Erzählstruktur fehlte, weil ich einfach nicht zufrieden war. Ich wusste immer genau, was ich schreiben wollte, aber eben nicht wie! (154)
>
> For a long time, I'd been meaning to commit my odyssey, my journey on the ghost ship, to paper. I'd never managed. Time and again – in the past five years, at least – I'd tried to start. And time and again I stopped because I wasn't convinced, because I didn't have the right structure, because I simply wasn't satisfied. I always knew exactly *what* I wanted to write; only never *how* to. (158)

In Rasul's story, he finds then *his* exact form and style, first quite literally – "Sogar die Schrift gleicht meiner bis aufs letzte Pünktchen. So klein und fast unleserlich, und dazu auch noch mit Bleistift" – and then stylistically:

> Und dann auch noch die Idee, der Aufbau, die Struktur der Erzählung. Genau mein Stil…Immer wieder habe ich versucht, eine Form zu finden, bei der man jederzeit und überall mit dem Lesen anfangen kann. Jedes Kapitel ein Anfang und zugleich ein Ende. Jedes eine eigene Einheit und doch unverzichtbarer Teil eines Ganzen. Alles in einem Werk vereint: Roman, Kurzgeschichte, Biografie und Märchen … Das war doch verdammt noch mal meine und nur meine Idee! Und jetzt taucht da wieder einer der vielen Dämonen in meinem Leben auf und will mir alles nehmen: mein Leben, meine Idee, ja sogar meine Seele? (154)
>
> Even the handwriting is like mine, down to the last dot. Very tiny. Illegible, almost. And in pencil…And then the idea, the structure. My style, exactly…Again and again, I tried to find a form that would allow readers to begin wherever they liked. Each chapter would be a beginning and an ending. Self-contained, yet an essential part of the whole. A novel, a short story, a biography, a fairy tale – all brought together in one work…That had been my – and only my – idea, damn it! And now, one of the many demons in my life had turned up, wanting to take it all from me. My life, my idea, even my soul? (157-58)

The narrator feels so uniquely tied to the combination of biographical details and literary form that he accuses Rasul of stealing his life, his ideas, and even his soul. The trope of the found manuscript effectively erases the labor of writing, so much so that the fictional construction of the author and authenticity of the manuscript rely on idiosyncratic questions of literary style – a notoriously romanticized concept difficult to quantify or prove – to establish these characters' identities. Of course, there is also the possibility that the frame narrator here ventriloquizes Abbas Khider's reflections on the style and poetics of his migration narrative. Because there is no definitive information about the creation of the manuscript, let alone a definitive authorial scene of writing, it is impossible to tell whose story and whose form it really is. Thus, these three figures – Rasul, the frame narrator and Khider – are so intricately interwoven in the form and narrative of the text that they can neither be differentiated from one another nor extracted from the novel's form and narrative.

In essence then, these authorial figures and their shared narrative only take shape in the reading of the novel and the encased manuscript. The exclusion of any portrayal of the act of writing the manuscript shifts the responsibility for shaping and defining these figures onto the reader of the novel. Although the frame narrator is conflated with the novel's reader as they read

Rasul's manuscript together, the former takes on an authorial function when he sends the manuscript to be published and loses his affinity with the latter. Regardless of the reader's actual life experience – whether they, too, have a migration experience or not – they cannot lay any claim to the close relationship between *Geschichte* and *Stil* that Khider, the frame narrator, and Rasul share. At the last moment readers are effectively removed from the figurative constellation of authors (Rasul, the frame narrator, and Khider) once that illusion of close association with the frame narrator is broken.

Conclusion

In *Der falsche Inder*, scenes of reading function simultaneously to erect and transgress narrative and identity boundaries. The novel demonstrates how any act of reading moves a reader into the world of the text and, at the same time, indexes the text outside of itself in the reader's world. The breaking down and confusion of the various narrative levels through the framing devices that are ostensibly supposed to separate them – including the frame narrator's act of reading, the manuscript's title page, the looping form of the manuscript chapters, and the frame narrative – obscure the boundary between text and context, specifically the boundaries between the narratives and identities of the novel's three authorial figures. Thus, any notion of an original narrative, an original migration experience, or an original author is destabilized.

By frustrating narrative boundaries through acts of reading and looping forms, the novel intervenes into contemporary discussion of *Migrantenliteratur* in two ways. First, at the level of representation, *Der falsche Inder* illustrates the fluidity of the migrant figure's identity as it continuously evolves in a complex interplay between writing and reading, narrative and form, self-determination and social construction. Secondly, the dissolved boundaries demand that the reader perform constructive and interpretive boundary work to separate or meld text and context into meaningful configurations. The novel thereby delegitimizes notions of authenticity that place the burden of expressing migratory experiences on authors and migrants and instead shifts some of the burden of interpreting and actualizing these narratives onto the reader. When readers use their personal context to interpret narratives, just like the frame narrator who reads Rasul's manuscript, they bring their own contextual identity, knowledge, and assumptions to the reading process and inevitably construct the literary figures they read about in that light. If readers are unaware of the contextual frameworks they bring to their readings of narratives of migration and rely on the authority of an author with a lived migration experience, they risk reading the text as a biographical story, a journalistic call for sympathy, rather than as the complex work of literature that it is. Khider's migration narrative resists this naive reading by using the migrant figure and his reading practices to unsettle existing literary aesthetics, forms, and modes of signification, ultimately challenging the conventional scripts of contemporary reading and unsettling simplistic constructions of migration and the people who migrate.

Epilogue

Digital Scenes of Reading

Throughout this project, the scene of reading has proven to be a malleable and persistently potent literary motif across a wide range of historic, literary, and media cultures. From the idealized courtly reading practices of the High Middle Ages used in *Iwein* for critical purposes to the reading visionary in the *Herald* and her monastic devotional praxis, scenes of reading contextualized and expanded existing practices to develop new reading imaginaries. In *Venus im Pelz* and *Der falsche Inder*, reading scenes satirized established and normalized reading practices and exploited sexual and xenophobic fears, showcasing the subversive power of reading. Each chapter in this study provides an example of how depictions of reading in imaginative texts generate meaning within their larger narrative structures and poetic forms and lay bare a text's capacity to construct its readership. The analyzed texts engage existing cultural archives to construct meaningful constellations of readers, texts, media, and environments that present neither strictly historical nor completely ideal, but *possible* reading practices. The scenes of reading challenge, warp, ironize, and pervert existing, proposed, and imagined reading practices to reconfigure the cultural import of reading. My analysis reveals the scene of reading to be a dynamic space for processing poetological as well as social issues in a critical and reflective mode, while also recognizing the rich variety of imagined reading practices that have affected literary practices over centuries.

The analytical framework that I devised through scenes of reading can continue to be effective as our reading practices, media, and environments change. Now – at the conclusion of this project and at this moment in the twenty-first century – we find ourselves facing the next cultural shift in the history of reading and its representation: digital reading. Despite the relative unpredictability of the future of reading in the digital age, I am confident that the basic premise of the reading scene and its triangulation of reader, medium, and practice will continue to generate practical and theoretical possibilities for understanding and shaping reading cultures.

The digitalization of reading has been prognosticated now for at least a few decades; it has become an increasingly important topic in pedagogy, cognitive science, neuroscience, and literary studies, while remaining an unpredictable protean process. Three pertinent questions linked to the looming presence of digital reading – what will happen to the book, to the reader, and to reading practices? – are, I believe, approachable through analyses of reading scenes. I therefore conclude my study on scenes of reading by presenting them as a powerful and, as of yet, untapped tool for analyzing the literary, practical, and cultural shifts initiated by the digitalization of reading.

Currently, the digital reading debate is dominated by skeptics. Scientific research gives some scholars reasons for concern that digital reading has initiated potential negative changes in the cognitive functioning of readers, while other commentators perceive any aberration from the practice of close, sustained reading as uncritical and naive. These lines of reasoning are, of course, not mutually exclusive. The human brain has never been predisposed to reading; it is a skill developed both by humanity over millennia and again by every child who learns to read. Reading rewires our brain as neurons designed for seeing and tracking signs in nature are

repurposed to recognize letters, syllables, and phonemes.[193] As the brain is restructured to process visual marks on a page into semantic meaning, merging that meaning with the reader's affective responses and existing knowledge base, the very nature of human thought is influenced.[194] Over the history of literacy, reading has paired with other epistemological practices to develop the analytical or critical mode of thinking that today is marked as the paradigm of rigorous mental processing. Sustained, deep reading encourages the mental cogitation and reflection that support analytical thought. This relationship between an idealized form of attentive, uninterrupted reading and critical thought has structured our modern educational system, public discourse, and democratic institutions.

But the plasticity of the brain, which first enabled reading, now poses a threat to our modern societies, or so argue several leading voices in digital reading research.[195] The new objects used for reading – mainly tablet, phone, and computer screens – and the arrangement of hyperlinked texts on digital platforms encourage a new set of digital reading practices like skimming, hyperlinking, scanning, and juxtaposing, collectively referred to as hyper-reading.[196] These methods of hyper-reading, research suggests, encourage a more superficial reading than prevalent print reading practices.[197] Reading in this way – affected by the "shallow" content and form of social media, text messages, listicles, and tweets – readers' brains are rewired, again: "the more we read digitally, the more our underlying brain circuitry reflects the characteristics of that medium."[198] This pessimistic view on the constellation of the digital reader, digital text, and changing reading practices portends the loss of the ability to focus on, comprehend, and remember what we read. Critical analysis, empathy, and reflection – higher-order cognitive skills developed and fine-tuned by reading – could then also be negatively affected. Dire conclusions drawn from this line of reasoning allege that digital culture threatens the deep thinking and critical discourse necessary for our democratic societies at the level of brain circuitry.[199]

These clarion calls to gird ourselves (and our children!) against the detrimental effects of digital reading are riddled with value judgments about reading "well" or "critically" that are difficult to define let alone substantiate, as well as tenuous connections between reading and empathy, public discourse, and political practice. Such calls to safeguard "the lost art of reading" are largely nostalgic and fail to imagine beneficial new ways of reading and engaging with our ever-increasing textual and digital cultural archives.

There exists a substantial contingent of scholars who embrace digital reading and reframe its potential cognitive consequences positively. They ask how our minds might become more flexible, more responsive to changing environments and multiple stimuli and how digital reading might enhance established reading methods.[200] They question long-established reading methods, like close reading, that notoriously difficult to define yet resolutely championed set of practices and assumptions for reading in the academy.[201] Generally, these scholars recognize the

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[193] See Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain*.
[194] Wolf, *Reader, Come Home*, 2. See also Dehaene's neuron recycling hypothesis. Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain*.
[195] See, for example, Wolf, *Reader, Come Home*; Baron, *How We Read Now* and *Words Onscreen*; Greenfield, *Mind Change*; Carr, *The Shallows*.
[196] Sosnoski, "Hyper-Readers and Their Reading Engines," 163; Hayles, "How We Read." 66.
[197] This is called the "shallowing hypothesis." Baron, *How We Read Now*, 79.
[198] Wolf, *Reader, Come Home*, 80.
[199] See, for example, Wolf, *Reader, Come Home*, 200-3.
[200] See, for example, Sosnoski, "Hyper-Readers and Their Reading Engines"; Hayles, "How We Read"; Koepnick, "Digitus" and "Reading on the Move"; Lauer, *Lesen im digitalen Zeitalter*.
[201] See Culler, "The Closeness of Close Reading."

inevitability of hyper-reading but usually envision it as another method in the reader's toolbox that does not threaten to supplant existing modes of reading because it is suited for different objectives. They encourage moving beyond questions of the death of reading or the book to analyze natively digital literature as it is generated in the twenty-first century. As Andrew Piper phrases the purpose of his thought-provoking experiential survey of reading's past and future, *Book Was There: Reading in Electronic Times*, "[i]t is about moving away from questions of futurology to ones of meaning."[202] For example, what meaning might the digital text, the modern reader, and hyper-reading practices combine to create?

Scenes of reading will be a means for coming to terms with the evolving digital media environment and imagining novel literary possibilities, as it has been at every moment of media disruption. They will anticipate, shape, and engender digital reading practices and their inevitable cultural impact. In fact, they have already begun to do so in multiple modalities, which is only fitting for the multi-media practice that is digital reading.

My first example comes from a digital reading event held one weekday evening in May 2020. About 150 readers joined "The Silent Reading Party," a virtual gathering thrown by the Seattle news publication, *The Stranger*, on Zoom, that online meeting platform that became ubiquitous during the stay-at-home orders of the Covid-19 pandemic. The party, which had been meeting in person since 2009, moved online in April 2020. The organizers encouraged readers to join virtually and turn on their cameras "if you want the whole world to be able to see you reading."[203] An explanation of the party described the reading scenes that the party would generate: the potential for strangers to gather and read silently, "each person…in their own little world, but…all together."[204] The party offered a communal experience through reading – a practice that has always curiously conflated distinctions between public and private spheres of existence and activity – as a means for overcoming imposed isolation, but with an air of privacy and anonymity afforded by digital technology.

Each of the readers' video feeds, arranged in five-by-five grids of small boxes over seven pages, presented a twenty-first century scene of digital reading. People read on various media: James on his smartphone, Hannah with a kindle, Malia on a tablet, and Irem in a hardcover book. They read in various settings: Kathy sat in a wicker chair outside surrounded by large shady trees; James read indoors with a blacklight casting moody shadows on the geometric posters behind him; the Brewsala couple shared space on a couch in front of their kitchen. They read contorted in different shapes: Kary laid on her back with her arms extended straight up holding a pen and large book folded in two, while her legs pointed upward but then bent at the knees to rest her feet on the back of her couch; Alex, a young woman with light curly hair, sat cross-legged on a sofa, a paperback in one hand resting on her knee, and beside her a girl lounged with her legs on the sofa, her feet toward Alex, her knees bent, while her left hand wrapped around her head to tuck hair behind her right ear and her right hand held a yellow and blue paperback. One person, Beth, was even reading in her dreams.

Each reading scene – delineated by the parameters of the Zoom-interface – was unique and reflected the reading spaces, bodies, and media of each reader. However, these individual scenes were transcended whenever one of the readers looked up from the pages of their book to scan the computer screen. The juxtaposition of all the squares created a collective digital space and the music coming from the piano player, Paul (the only person reading music instead of

[202] Piper, *Book Was There*, xiii.
[203] Organizers of Silent Reading Party, email to participants, May 27, 2020.
[204] Frizzelle, "Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About the Silent-Reading Party."

text), united the shared experience aurally. This communal reading is reminiscent of the reading scenes presented in the *Herald*; while not everyone is reading the same text, there is a transcending force enacted through the medium that unites readers across space and time. This virtual reading space – this digital *Zusammensein* – created a constellation of readers, a twenty-first century textual community, tied together by a shared reading space and experience.

Most of the reading scenes on this Zoom were casual, informal portraits of readers, but many appeared, like the reading scene in *Iwein*, highly idealized. Several of the readers presented clearly self-conscious portraits of themselves as readers. Scott from Seattle, for example, sat at a forty-five-degree angle to his laptop camera in the right half of the screen. The red of his shirt matched the lamp over his left shoulder and contrasted with the blue of his lipstick and the paint on his background wall. Although the book he was reading was outside the frame, a row of books was lined up on a shelf behind him with a coffee cup filled with pencils serving as a bookend and an abstract painting hanging overhead. Just as the body of the reader and his positioning within a room of significant objects characterized Severin as a reader and, to a certain extent, a person, the same basic elements combine in Scott's scene to present him as a young, queer, educated, and sophisticated modern reader. Scott and several other participants, I argue, manipulated the elements of reading in their Zoom squares to present a stylized image of what they imagined reading and readers to be. At the same time, the participants were not just performing for the cameras, they were also actually reading.

The hybrid of representation, performativity, and praxis represented in these scenes aligns with the long history of visual representations of readers in painting, sculpture, and film, but the most similar example is probably representations of reading on social media. The cumulative posts on Bookstagram, a corner of Instagram for book and reading enthusiasts, for example, present a contemporary reading aesthetic as users share book recommendations and discuss literary trends but also market books and particular idealized lifestyles. One interesting account with the forthright username @hotdudesreading, however, takes a different approach. Instead of posting staged shots of beautifully illustrated book covers surrounded by the accouterments of luxurious reading – like lattes, lit candles, potted plants, and glasses of wine – this account posts images and saucy captions of attractive men captured reading in mundane situations. It is an archive of inconspicuously taken and anonymously submitted pictures that document the reading male. One recent post shows a young man sitting in a London Underground train wearing a set of noise-canceling headphones and hunching over to read the book he is holding between his knees. As his forearms rest on his thighs, he holds a small dog in the crux of his left arm. The voice in the caption is jealous of the dog and exhorts the pictured reader to "strap a leash on my neck and I'll lead you right home. #AfterAll2WienersAreBetterThan1 #hotdudesreading."[205]

While the attractive men are the ostensible focus, the crowdsourced means of compiling the images along with the cheeky commentary always written in the voice of a lustful bystander call attention to the voyeurism of the posts. The perspective of each post is that of the picture taker, but the framing of the post within the social media platform should make the user realize that they are in a position to observe the original observer. Any user might ask how the picture was taken, who took it, why they took it, and whether the subject knew it was being taken. Meanwhile the captions, as in the above example, usually draw explicit attention to other elements of the image and relate them to the reader, thereby revealing what the writer of the caption has noticed. This second-order observation is the aspect of digital reading scenes that

[205] Hotdudesreading. "Good Lord."

aligns more with narrative reading scenes than plastic ones, because the position of the observer is present as a possible point of critique and analysis. This allows us to infer from the sum of the @hotdudesreading posts a reading imaginary held by the account's persona: it finds the men and their reading attractive because it assigns a nostalgic value to reading that is wrapped up in an idealized image of masculinity, where men are desirable because they gain knowledge and empathy by reading (print) books.

The combination of print and digital elements in these contemporary reading scenes is reminiscent of the *Mischkultur* represented in *Iwein*, where oral and textual elements productively merged. A final example to illustrate this productive union in contemporary popular literature is from Rainald Goetz's novel *Abfall für alle*.[206] Written and published one day at a time on www.rainaldgoetz.de from February 1998 to January 1999, Goetz's *Roman eines Jahres* (Novel of a Year) captures the tedious daily events of his life in short blog entries. These basic notes on the external and internal proceedings of his life present Goetz processing the media and noise surrounding him, what he calls the waste (*Abfall*) of his daily life, including telephone calls, TV shows, newspapers, lectures, etc. In the entry for Saturday, February 21st, 1998, for example, he collects the newspapers strewn across his kitchen, bedroom, and office and begins reading them all: "Zeitungen, Zeitungen, Zeitungen. Las alles, was nicht – ja, ich weiß gar nicht, alles eben" (65) (Newspapers, newspapers, newspapers. I read everything, whatever wasn't – yeah, I don't know, just everything). He reads article after article by popular commentators steeped in the minutiae of the contemporary popular discourse: articles about suicide and Paul Celan, the pop music charts, and reviews of the work of intellectuals and artists on the occasion of their birthdays. Occasionally, he turns his attention to the television. Interspersed among the details of his media consumption are his own commentary and thoughts. One article leads him to imagine an interview he would conduct with the Austrian writer Peter Handke; the base track and melody of Madonna's new song "Frozen" emanating from the TV gives him an idea for the structure of a play. In this entry, Goetz portrays a mode of productive and scattered reading that helps him shift through the overwhelming mixture of commentary on niche topics, inspiring art, and detritus contained in the surrounding media landscape. At the end of the day, he confesses, he has yet more to read, but he is "abgefertigt, ausgebeutet und erniedrigt" (66-67) (processed, exploited, demeaned). This mode of reading is not easy; it is productive, but also exhausting.

Despite reading print media, Goetz's reading practice eerily resembles hyper-reading: he juxtaposes, scans, filters, pecks, imposes, and fragments these texts.[207] In other entries he describes similar methods, like starting in the middle of texts – "Bücher einfach IRGENDWO aufschlagen" – and reading passim – "Überall bißchen? Querbeet? An allen möglichen Stellen?" (18; 800) (Open books just ANYWHERE; A little bit everywhere? Diagonally? In every potential passage?). Without explicitly challenging critical reading practices, Goetz offers personal alternatives that are shaped by his contextual media landscape. Throughout the novel, he reads emails and websites, he writes on laptops, and he struggles to install new computer software. In the production of the novel, he exploits the possibilities of the internet to minimize the time between his writing and the public's reading of his text by posting it daily and making his most recent post the website's landing page. Both his reading and writing praxis encompass digital and print media, practices, and forms that inform each other.

Amidst the daily noise, Goetz proposes an ideal aesthetic for his writing:

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[206] Goetz, *Abfall für alle*. Translations are my own.

[207] See Sosnoski, "Hyper-Readers and Their Reading Engines," 163; Hayles, "How We Read," 66.

> Einfach aus der Sprache heraus schreiben. Nicht so bildende-Kunsthaft…in der Ästhetik, nicht so künstlich. Viel widerstandsloser. Das wäre das ästhetische Ideal, die Ästhetik: Die Ästhetik der Widerstandslosigkeit. (401)
>
> Just write straight out of the language. Not so learnedly artsy…in the aesthetic, not so artificial. Much more unresistant. That would be the aesthetic ideal, the aesthetic: The aesthetic of resistancelessness.

This aesthetic of *resistancelessness* represents a radical departure from the aesthetic theories that underlie the academic conceptualization of the *Leseszene*, including the aesthetic assumptions underwriting my study. The resistance that scenes of reading often employ through images, forms, or figures to the empirical reader so that they might pause to consider the reading practices being represented and compare them with their own reading practice is fundamental to the reading scene motif. Given the role of the representation of reading in the development of critical reading practices, an aesthetic of *resistancelessness* would be antithetical to those practices. If there is nothing to make readers pause and consider what they are reading, can reading advance analytical thought?

In many ways, the digitalization of reading strives precisely for *resistancelessness*. Websites streamline text, placing it where the reader's eye naturally scans. Hyperlinks drastically limit the difficulty of finding supporting facts, background information, and further reading material. The e-reader's touchscreen and the computer's scroll design literally provide a constant flow of text at a reader's fingertips. Goetz's unusual novel by no means achieves this aesthetic ideal; his varying style – from lists to rants to poetic reflections – impede comprehension; the removal of the website that first published his novel and the subsequent printing of the text in an 864-page codex drastically limits its accessibility; and the barrage of names and events hyper-specific to the place and time of the novel's incremental production demand very specific background knowledge from the reader. But it is in these scenes of reading that meld print and digital practices, texts, and readers that Goetz conceptualizes his ideal mode of reading in a media-filled world. While *resistancelessness* might not yet be achieved in Goetz's novel, it is a *possible* mode of reading imagined through scenes of reading.

Whether imaginative, sensuous, subjecting, migratory, or unresistant, our modes of reading affect the way we learn, the way we write, the way we interpret, and the way we perceive and interact with the world. As my study shows, scenes of reading have historically captured, manipulated, and realized these consequences of reading. My concluding observations on digital scenes of reading exemplify the symbolic power still wielded by reading imagery and its capacity to produce meaning in the twenty-first century. As the practices, media, and persons that comprise digital reading evolve, scenes of reading will continue to be a place for literary experimentation, a means for coming to terms with reading's role in society, and a tool for imagining new possible modes of reading.

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