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Blinded Avengers

**Making Sense of Invisibility in
Courtly Epic and Legal Ritual**

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in Courtly Epic and Legal Ritual

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*Every medium that vanquishes invisibility and heightens visibility, brings salvation to mankind.*¹

Man is afraid of nothing more than of being touched by something for which he has no categories of experience. At the root of this fear, Elias Canetti recognizes a visual experience, given that, as he sees it, the eye is the most important sensory organ when it comes to orientation of the self in reality: “One wants to see what has one in its grip, one wants to know it, or at least be able to categorize it.”² Given that each of us every day experiences the invisible in one form or another, Canetti’s confidence in the eye’s hold on reality seems unreasonably optimistic. In keeping with Volker Demuth’s statement in the epigraph, confidence in things [pace Paul] seen can even become a synonym for redemption. To the contrary,

¹ „Jedes Medium, das Unsichtbarkeit aufhebt und Sichtbarkeit erhöht, bringt den Menschen Erlösung.“, cf. Volker Demuth, „Ästhetik des Unsichtbaren. Camouflage, Blendung, Verdunkelungsgefahren.“ In: *Lettre internationale* (2000), p. 90-96, here p. 92. – My thanks to Caroline Domenghino (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore), the initial translator of this article, and to Jeffrey F. Hamburger (Harvard University, Cambridge MA), who helped me enormously with his finishing touches. This paper presents a revised and elaborated version of the following article: Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, “Vom Kampf gegen einen Unsichtbaren. Freie Wildbahn – höfisches Epos – mittelalterliches Rechtsritual.“ In: *Kunst der Bewegung. Kinästhetische Wahrnehmung und Probehandeln in virtuellen Welten*. Edited by Christina Lechtermann and Carsten Morsch, Bern 2004 (Publikationen zur Zeitschrift für Germanistik. Neue Folge 8), p. 103-136.

² Elias Canetti, *Masse und Macht*. Frankfurt am Main ²⁷1991, p. 13 (my emphasis).

however, as I will argue in this essay, this sort of faith in visible certitude, no matter how misplaced, is really only possible for those involved in an action (be it in life or in fiction), not for the outside observer, who remains out of reach.

The category of visibility, complete with its attendant connotations of salvation, functions as a central tool for the interpretation of the religious art and literature of the Middle Ages.³ It can also be seen as operating within the literature itself. In this paper I take as my focus twelfth-century French and German courtly epic in order to show how these works self-consciously manipulate this paradigm. In the center always stands an episode narrating a fight between a visible and an invisible combatant. Whether in *Le Chevalier au Lion* by Chrétien de Troyes⁴ or *Iwein* by Hartmann von Aue,⁵ the protagonist kills the lord of the castle. In each work, the protagonist is then captured. While in this life-threatening situation, magic allows them to become invisible. The lord's avengers can neither see nor kill them, even though they know they are “there.” Whereas the murderers end up escaping, the avengers become blinded figures, ridiculous due to their exaggerated, yet ineffective physical and psychological efforts and their ridiculous gestures. Whereas the blinded avengers experience a fundamentally frightening encounter with the uncanny, the observers embedded in the narrative, like the audience outside of the text, enjoy a sovereign cheerfulness because the narration or plot endows them with “clairvoyance.” In this fashion, secular epic can be seen as using literary play with the visible and the invisible to very different ends than religious art. The existential desire for visibility reveals itself as a narrative motif that serves ideally to heighten the audience’s amusement.

³ As Jeffrey Hamburger points out, medievalists have, on the whole, come late to the debate over visibility. Cf. his review of Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages*, Houndmills-New York 2002 in *Speculum* 71 (2004), p. 133-136; Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (ed.), *The Mind’s Eye. Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, Princeton 2005.

⁴ Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier au Lion*. In: *Romans suivis des Chansons*, avec, en appendice, Philomena. Sous la direction de Michel Zink, Paris 1994, p. 705-936. – Chrétien de Troyes, *The Knight with Lion, or Yvain (Le Chevalier au Lion)*. Edited and translated by William W. Kibler, New York / London 1985 (Garland Library of Medieval Literature, Series A 48) (all Old French quotations and English translations follow these editions).

⁵ Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein*. Ed. by Max Wehrli, Zürich 1988; an English translation in *Hartmann von Aue, Iwein*. Edited and translated by Patrick M. McConeghy, New York / London 1984 (Garland Library of Medieval Literature, Series A, 19) (all Middle High German quotations and English translations follow these editions).

The following article aims to elucidate the epistemological and aesthetic premises of this pleasure in ways that require investigation of the interplay among medium, visuality and other modes of sensory perception. Its starting-point is a very un-spectacular observation: whoever fights physically against an opponent depends in general on sensory perception and, more specifically, on the coherence of different modes of perception. No matter how extreme a situation, combat brings into play perceptual processes that pertain to other situations in life. As modern neurology has demonstrated, any mental construction of reality requires consistency of sensory perception.⁶ For example, the inability to bring visual and the tactile perception into harmony with one another causes severe cognitive confusion and makes the subject feel helpless. This is no less true of sight alone. The slightest deception of the eye can be fatal while in a battle, not least because it creates confusion that can lead to the 'blinded' losing their life. Perceptual distortion and disorientation generates a gap between those who know and see more and those who perceive less.

Within medieval narratives, no less than in the realm of science, engineered asymmetries in visual perception constitute different levels or orders of knowledge. These differences can be intensified and raised to the level of self-conscious aesthetic devices within various media, primarily through the introduction of observer figures who simultaneously stand in for the reader. These figures force reflection on the following question: which position does the text grant to its protagonists and to what end does it grant superiority to some, inferiority to others? This question in turn introduces another, of crucial importance when considering the aesthetic dimensions of a given medium: how – and with what effect – can verbal and pictorial media visualize an invisible protagonist? I will try to answer these questions in four steps:

⁶ Wolf Singer, *Der Beobachter im Gehirn. Essays zur Hirnforschung*, Frankfurt am Main 2002; idem, „Conditio humana aus neurobiologischer Perspektive.“ In: *Die Rolle der Seele in der Kognitions- und Neurowissenschaft*. Edited Markus F. Peschl, Würzburg 2005, p. 41-61.

Part 1 focuses on the phenomenon of invisibility, namely on the material manipulation of visual perception that can be observed among wildlife in nature. Certain animals incorporate morphological and kinetic designs in their bodily appearance to make their victims “blind while seeing.” Looking at the mimicry systems of animals in nature helps to define and critically question the terms “visibility” and “invisibility.” In addition, it provides insight into the high tension inherent in this specific constellation of asymmetrically perceiving opponents. Any manipulation of visual perception by virtue of bodily shape or movement or – mutatis mutandis, by means of the magic tool of literary construction – establishes distinctions that are crucial for the argument I make in this paper.⁷

Part 2 – the principal part – provides a literary analysis of two closely related fictional texts both of which belong to the broadly defined genre of high medieval Arthurian epic. Both *Le Chevalier au Lion* by Chrétien de Troyes and *Iwein* by Hartmann von Aue narrate a battle against an invisible opponent, ingeniously making use of a fascinating motif from the viewpoint of perception theory that makes maximum use of narrative tension. Each work stages the critical battle as an asymmetrical event – asymmetrical in that the opposing combatants and those who can identify with them are differentiated in terms of their ability to recognize and “see through” differing degrees of sensory deception. My analysis demonstrates that in not allowing everyone to see to the same extent, the narration seeks to amuse the reader in terms of mimicry of the courtly knight and his duped avengers.

Part 3 complements the analysis of the Iwein-narrative by turning directly to the realm of the visible in the form of a pictorial example that belongs to the same epic tradition. The Ywain-frescoes in the South Tyrolean Castle of Rodeneck not only permit comparison across media, they also flesh out the specific appeal to vision in so far as they attempt to give visible form to invisible protagonist. How can

⁷ Cf. Niklas Luhmann’s statement about the distinctive function of magic: „Die Magie beruht auf der einfachen Unterscheidung sichtbarer und unsichtbarer Dinge in ein und derselben Welt. [Magic depends on the simple distinction between visible and invisible things in one and the same world.]“, Niklas Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, ed. André Kieserling, Frankfurt am Main 2000, p. 85.

a scene with both visible and invisible figures be represented with material means in order to make clear who is “there,” but actually not visible? And what perceptual premises ensure the observer of his sovereignty, and hence, his amusement?

Part 4 extends the argument by turning to the judicial duel at court. Embedded in a different context, we find the same motif of the battle against an invisible opponent. Why, one is forced to ask, was it of no concern that in such duels the combatant fought an invisible opponent? The *Sachsenspiegel* by Eike von Repgow, dated slightly later than the epics, describes the ritual in word and image. Both media underscore the importance of consensus when it came to the interpretation of visual perception. The example of judicial duels provides a useful point of comparison vis à vis the motif in courtly literature, not only with regard to the motif of invisibility and its asymmetric staging, but also in terms of its comic purpose.

There is no doubt that the medium shapes sensory experience, even as it conveys its content. Sensory perception is thus subjected to the laws of construction in several ways, not simply as a neuronal process, but also according to various media and their specific appeal to the physical and inner senses. The physical battle reveals the existential contingency of movement and visual perception to a greater extent than any other situation. In battle, the opponent has to be not merely visible to the eye of the other, he also has to be immediately identifiable as what he is. Each pertinent asymmetry is life threatening. This holds true not only for two opponents standing eye to eye in courtly epic of the Middle Ages, but also for aggression with high-tech weapons. Contemporary observations back this statement. Collective aggression at the beginning of the twenty-first century operates out of and with invisibility. An attack from invisible agents – not recognizable as aggressors – is seen as the quintessence of worldwide terrorist perfidy since 9/11. For this reason, invisibility has also turned into a developmental goal for anti-terror tech-

nology.⁸ Communication media have also learned how to capitalize on the invisibly present threat. They commercially use the experience of the uncanny that resides in the terrorists' invisibility. The infotainment-strategies of certain TV channels, which call for increasing their audience share by demonstrating real-life battle technologies and camouflage strategies as if they were fictional, have caused a harsh outbreak of media criticism.⁹ A historical perspective on the interrelation among media, visibility and aggression, as the following pages try to open, can highlight its background.

Different media work with perspectival modes of representation in order to evoke an uncanny response from the audience. Sigmund Freud is the classic scholar of the uncanny. In his essay "Das Unheimliche" (1919), he elucidates the strategies that can trigger uncanny feelings by means of artistic representation. The German word "unheimlich" is considered untranslatable; the English "uncanny" provides only a rough equivalent, and the phenomenon itself is difficult to define. The uncanny terrifies precisely because it cannot be adequately explained. Freud does not simply conceptualize the uncanny in psychoanalytical terms. Above all, he considers the aesthetic conditions of the experience insofar as they are bound to the media (in his case literary) under investigation.¹⁰ Three of his insights are important in the context we are considering. First, the expression "uncanny" turns out to be a phenomenon involving a semantic tilt. In addition to the uncanny/unknown, the term, surprisingly, also comprehends its opposite, the known and the familiar. Second, Freud views visual experiences, and specifically, the fear of decreased powers of vision and of blindness, as central to the experi-

⁸ The RQ-1 (predator), a type of miniature airplane which is used by the United States in their fight against terror. They destroy the victim without having once been seen with the eye. Cf. Siegesmund von Ilsemann, „Tödliches Auge.“ In: *Spiegel* 46 (2002), p. 222.

⁹ To substantiate my arguments, I would like to mention the following articles: „Auch eine Schlacht um Bilder. Wie sich Fernsehsender auf den Ernstfall“ (by: tpg); „Die Rakete als strafender Blitz Gottes. Recht und Rache im Hightech-Zeitalter“ (by: H.Sf), both articles can be found in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Nr. 31, 7.2.2003, p. 73; further Sieglinde Geisel, „Unsichtbare Mächte. Terrorismus und die Furien des Verschwindens,“ in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Nr. 263 (2001), p. 25.

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, „Das Unheimliche“ (1919). In: id., *Der Moses des Michelangelo. Schriften über Kunst und Künstler*. Introduction by Peter Gay, Frankfurt am Main 1993, p. 137-172; Sigmund Freud, „The Uncanny,“ in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Edited and translated by James Strachey, vol. XVII, London 1953), pp. 219-252.

ence of the uncanny. Third, he is aware of literary aesthetics, meaning the contribution of the medium. In fact, he owes many of his own examples to literature: the “Unheimliche der Fiktion [the uncanny in fiction]” deserves “gesonderte Betrachtung [specific attention]” because literature grants the poet „Vorrechte (...) in der Hervorrufung und Hemmung des unheimlichen Gefühls [privileges in provocation and suppression of uncanny sensations]“ that enables a representation which surmounts by far the everyday experience of the uncanny in complexity.¹¹

The three elements identified by Freud also characterize the literary representation of combat against an invisible opponent. Some protagonists experience it as highly irritating and uncanny, whereas others experience a profound cheerfulness. This is not surprising, because, as in combat, two opposites collide: on the one hand, the most deceptive, and hence, irritating; on the other hand, the most knowledgeable and the most cheerful. Both states of mind, it turns out, take as their point of departure one and the same perceptual situation. What distinguishes one from the other is the asymmetry between those who are granted sight and those who are deceived.

When explaining how pleasure becomes recognizable to the comic hero, Hans Robert Jauss makes a point of falling back on Freud’s theory on the difference of expenditure. This theory operates on the opposition between physical and psychological expenditure, which is exercised by a protagonist before our eyes; if he engages in a supreme physical effort (compared to the psychological expenditure), he then appears funny to the audience because they can feel superior to him.¹²

This psychogenesis of the comic can further illuminate the aforementioned

¹¹ Sigmund Freud (as footnote 10), p. 150-152 (German version), p. 231-232 (English translation). As to be expected, he connects the first observation (the semantic ambivalence of the term) with the suppressed (the uncanny as the suppression of original knowledge) and the second observation (fear of blindness) with the fear of castration. The third observation manifests Freud’s awareness of the artist’s ability to trigger uncanny feelings via literary or imaginative representation.

¹² Hans Robert Jauss, „Über den Grund des Vergnügens am komischen Helden.“ In: Wolfgang Preisendanz und Rainer Warning (ed.), *Das Komische*. München 1976 (Poetik und Hermeneutik 7), p. 398-402. Jauss refers back to Sigmund Freud, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* (1905). [See *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*. Translated by James Strachey. New York 1963.]

asymmetry. He who is made “seeing” by the text can feel superior. He experiences neither the invisible opponent nor his wildly gesticulating avengers as frightening and uncanny, but rather as amusing and funny. Wolfgang Iser adds a dynamic to the relationship of opposition, which in turn makes the comic possible. The binary patterns, which also characterize Freud’s definition, are destabilized. For that reason, Iser designates the comic to be a true tilt-phenomenon.¹³ Thus, he circumscribes an event, which turns around the expectations of those involved. This is precisely what can be observed in the battle scenes which will be analyzed in part 2: a captured knight, doomed to die, escapes without having touched a weapon, and a group of armed and angered avengers have to retreat despite their not having accomplished their mission after having twice spent their rage to no avail in an absolutely involuntary comic situation. This perspective, however, is granted only to those who have been informed by the narration. Only they can smile with sovereignty.

1. Fallacy of the eye: wild life

*Where the law of eating and being eaten holds way, camouflage, deception, lying and cheating are indispensable rules of life.*¹⁴

The uncanny-invisible is not solely bound to the human world and its cultural artifacts. It simply influences communication in animal and human societies because camouflage techniques, or more general, the techniques of influencing one’s visibility to others, ensures survival in the *struggle for life*. Animals as well as humans fall back upon sensory patterns of camouflage and deception, which not only challenge those involved in the deception but also the external observers on a perception-theoretical level. According to Volker Sommer, human and animal techniques of disguise are comparable from a cultural-anthropological perspec-

¹³ Wolfgang Iser, „Das Komische: ein Kipp-Phänomen.“ In: Wolfgang Preisendanz und Rainer Warning (ed.), *Das Komische*. München 1976 (Poetik und Hermeneutik 7), p. 398-402.

¹⁴ „Wo das Gesetz von Fressen und Gefressenwerden regiert, sind Tarnung, Täuschung, Lug und Trug unverzichtbare Lebensmaximen.“ Cf. Volker Sommer, *Lob der Lüge. Täuschung und Selbstbetrug bei Tier und Mensch*, München 1992, p. 46.

tive. He, therefore, includes human tactics of perceptual deception in the bio-evolutionary and neuro-medical analysis of animal mimicry.¹⁵

A true battle situation for animals and humans makes readily apparent how activity and passivity go hand in hand in the actual process of perception. Viewed functionally, the neurological processes in animals and humans define visual perception as an active process, i.e., as the result of a process that seeks to give the best possible interpretation to sensory signals.¹⁶ By the same token, however, sensory perception also consists of moments of receptivity, even passivity, when viewed from the point of its being done. Media philosopher Dieter Mersch introduces the German term “Ereignis [an event] into media-aesthetics, accentuating the receptive moment that is especially attached to the performance of visual perception.¹⁷ Although Mersch is aware of the etymology of the term, his concept could lean much more heavily on the historical semantics of the term “event” than it does. The expression “ereignen” [to take place] does not stem from “eigen [own],” respectively “proprium,”¹⁸ but instead derives from the Old High German *irougen* “to show (oneself), to make (oneself) visible.”¹⁹ It can therefore be said that this earliest Old High German verb and the noun derived from the verb grant

¹⁵ Volker Sommer (as footnote 14); for a liminal discussion of human and animal societies, consider the analyses on the primates, p. 66-160 and especially „Bruder Affe. Was die enge Verwandtschaft von Mensch und Affe bedeutet.“ In: *NZZ Folio. Die Zeitschrift der Neuen Zürcher Zeitung* 8 (2003), p. 14-18.

¹⁶ Ingo Rentschler, „Weltbilder der Kunst – Erscheinungsformen der Wirklichkeit.“ In: *Geist und Natur*, edited by Hans-Peter Dürr and Walther Ch. Zimmerli, Bern 1989, p. 116, cited after Gottfried Boehm: „Sehen. Hermeneutische Reflexionen.“ In: *Kritik des Sehens*, Edited by Ralf Konersmann, Leipzig 1999, p. 272-298, here p. 284).

¹⁷ cf. Dieter Mersch: *Ereignis und Aura. Untersuchung zu einer Ästhetik des Performativen*, Frankfurt am Main 2002 and idem: *Was sich zeigt. Materialität, Präsenz, Ereignis*, München 2002.

¹⁸ The Grimm article is infuriated about the semantic warping and distortion („entstellung“; „verwirrung“) of the word; cf. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Leipzig 1885-1984, vol. 3, Sp. 785.

¹⁹ The oldest word forms are the Old High German expressions *irougen*, *irougnissa*, *irougnessi*, *irougnida*, which are all part of the semantic field ‚(sich) zeigen, offenbaren, zu erkennen geben, ans Licht bringen, erweisen, beweisen‘ [to show (oneself), to reveal, to make understood, to bring to light, to show or indicate, to demonstrate] (*Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch*. Edited by Rudolf Große, Berlin 1997ff., vol. 4, col. 1715, which mentions the root for the first time; Rudolf Schützeichel, *Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, Tübingen ⁵1995, p. 231). Middle High German has the following word formations *ougen* / *erougen* / *eröugen* [possibly *erougenen*] ‚vor Augen stellen, zeigen, offenbaren‘ (*Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch*. Edited by Georg Friedrich Benecke, Wilhelm Müller und Friedrich Zarncke, Leipzig 1854-1861, vol. II, p. 453; Matthias Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch*, Stuttgart 1992, vol. I, col. 662). – Older new high German forms of the verb such as „eräugnen“, make the etymological connection between „event“ and visual sense apparent. (cf. Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*. Neubearbeitung, Leipzig / Stuttgart 1983ff., vol. 8, Sp. 1691-1693); Friedrich Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*. Edited by Elmar Seebold, Berlin / New York ²1995, p. 229 and *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen*. Edited and supervised by Wolfgang Pfeifer, München ⁵2000, p. 293.

an active part to that which is perceived by the seeing human being. For Mersch visual perception thus entails a process in which the taking in of signals comes first. An “Ereignis” (event) is insofar an “Eräugnis” (a situation of visual perception) when, within it, something is revealed to the eye that could conceivably and incalculably be withdrawn from the active influence of the perceiving subject.²⁰ As a result, the role of the subject appears to be non-intentional, passive in the sense of “receiving” the signals of presence of what “happens” or “manifests itself” (“was sich ereignet / eräugnet”).²¹ What might seem a mere act of receptivity also has a reverse, productive side. The activity of the human being consists in bringing forth the ‘reality’ inherent in the received sensory perceptions. This perspective on sight, complementary and also, to a certain extent, reversed, is the determining parameter to the media-aesthetics postulated by Mersch. Later in my article, it will help as a critical concept to explain the narrative importance of sensory traps in medieval fiction.

The next step, however, draws attention to the still unmediated situation of asymmetry of perception. Wildlife mimicry systems lay many cunning traps for the eye in order to allow one animal to overcome the other in order that the first can survive. If the asymmetries of perception determine the outcome of a confrontation between two opponents, then the techniques of sensory deception will represent the most primary of all attack and defense strategies. This holds true for an attacker that wants to capture its victim unseen, as well as for the potential victim, which wants to escape possible attacks by using camouflage. It is so much more surprising that the seriousness of the situation is countered by seemingly playful body and movement mechanisms.

1.1. Mimicry: Traps for the animal eye

²⁰ Cf. Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm (as footnote 18), vol. 8, col. 1691-1693.

²¹ This play with the expression “ereignen”, its etymology and its (misleading) similarity to other German words such as “eigen” (own) or “aneignen” (to appropriate) is one of the main parameters which determine the „aesthetic“ of Mersch. He claims to find support in the early history of the German word.

Whoever camouflages himself pretends “not to be there.” To be precise: he pretends not to be the person he actually is. Strangely enough, this pretending not to be there can play an important role in the survival of a species. Camouflage mimicry ensures existence; it connects the sender and the receiver of perception signals in a highly complex manner. Today, these systems of mimicry belong to the most carefully and extensively analyzed systems of communication.²² In principle, mimicry targets a semiotic triangular relationship between at least three members, who often, though not necessarily, belong to different species: a so-called *mimet* tries to imitate as perfectly as possible the visual appearance of its *role model* including shape, color, and kinesis (movement as well as the renunciation of movement) in order to divert the perception of the *signal's receiver* in a specific direction. It should react to the falsified appearance instead of recognizing what lies behind this appearance. Depending on the point of the view, the aim of camouflage is either self-camouflage or the deception of the other. If the signal's receiver is an aggressor, then the *protective mimicry* should protect the mimet from the aggressor. If the deceptive signal is directed towards the eyes of the prey, then the predator tries to approach or lure his prey with aggressive mimicry (which is why this type is also called luring mimicry). Extremely artful signal systems that are difficult to decipher, combine protective and luring mimicry. I will only briefly touch upon protective mimicry.

The Ghanaian *Myrmarachne formicaria* serves as illustration for this protective mimicry (fig. 1).²³ Anatomically and kinetically, the jump spider pretends to be an ant. The corseted, brown, and hairless front part of the spider imitates the ant's

²² According to the aims of this article I concentrate on the morphological and kinetic aspects of *visual* mimicry. Deceptions of the other senses through chemical, electric, acoustic, and tactile signals have to be ignored. Cf. Klaus Lunau, *Warnen, Tarnen, Täuschen. Mimikry und andere Überlebensstrategien in der Natur*, Darmstadt 2002, and Volker Sommer (as footnote 14); from a terminological point of view, he makes use of the established mimicry concept of Wolfgang Wickler, *Mimikry. Nachahmung und Täuschung in der Natur*, Frankfurt am Main 1973. This is supplemented by the analysis of Volker Sommer which is not considered by Lunau (cf. footnote 22), p. 37-45 which discusses the „classical“ mimetic fallacy between hunter and prey; as well as findings on inner-specie fallacy p. 46-65 and the tactical patterns of deceptions amongst primates, which are especially interesting for behavioral science, p. 66-91.

²³ Klaus Lunau (as footnote 22), image 4, p. 19 (photographed by Klaus Lunau). I thank Prof. Klaus Lunau, University of Düsseldorf, for letting me use and reprint his images. – Lunau also offers a summary on the state of art for this highly intricate system of mimicry, cf. p. 18-19 in the same work.

head and thorax and lifts its front pair of legs into the air like an ant lifts its feelers. This visual deception is foremost directed to the female spider wasp (*Pison xanthopus*), the preferred prey of jump spiders. A sting paralyzes the prey, and then it is brought as living bait to the nest burrow where the larva feed on it. This ant-camouflage ensures the survival of the jump spider. Surprisingly the South American *Aphantochilus rogersi* operates morphologically and kinetically in a similar way, but it combines protective and aggressive mimicry. This spider specializes in ant hunting; it imitates the silhouette of its prey, copies their zigzag walk, and further mimics their feelers with its front pair of legs. Visually, the predator is barely distinguishable from its prey. It approaches its prey, attacks it from behind and immediately lifts the prey over its body. This is kinetic camouflage as well; for this is the way ants carry dead members of their species. The spider, however, uses the dead ant as protective shield and sucks it out in the middle of “enemy territory.”²⁴

Mimicry – this observation will be relevant for the textual analysis – is a system of visualization which is foremost oriented towards perspective. Mimicry demands the dissolution of the peculiarities of one's own form and movements in favor of a different, camouflaging appearance. This disintegration of one's own appearance (Morpho- or Somatalysis),²⁵ and of one's own pattern of motion, calls for the renunciation of differentiation from the environment. That this does not solely mean immobility is shown by the South Australian *phycodurus eques*, a mimet belonging to the family of seahorses.²⁶ The *phycodurus eques* camouflages its body with an algae that is typical of its habitat and that naturally moves with water (fig. 2).²⁷ Only the extinction of difference enables the necessary sensory deception of the other and to selectively redirect individual signals. As a consequence, the prey does not “see” the mimet as a whole, which means it cannot identify the mi-

²⁴ Klaus Lunau (as footnote 22), p. 20.

²⁵ Volker Sommer (as footnote 14), p. 30-33; Klaus Lunau (as footnote 22), p. 32-40. *Krypsis* is the disguising color adaptation to the background, *mimese* is considered to be the disguising shape adaptation to indifferent elements of the natural environment.

²⁶ Cf. *Empusa pennata*, Klaus Lunau (as footnote 22), image 13, p. 32.

²⁷ The *leafy seadragon* can be viewed online at the John G. Shedd Aquarium Chicago (<http://www.sheddnet.org>), at the Australian Museum (<http://www.amonline.net.au/fishes/fishfacts/fish/peques.htm>) and in several, good shots, on the web page <http://www.dragonsearch.asn.au/photolib/photolib.html> (viewed 10 January 2006).

met's own, personal value. The sea turtle *macrolemys temminckii* refers back to this strategy like all ambush hunters. Weighing up to ninety kilograms, the turtle lies motionless with a wide open mouth at the bottom of the sea like an alga covered rock. Only the red worm-like tongue projections constantly twitch to draw curious fish. Compared to the total body size of the turtle, the part which actually catches the attention of the fish is the tiny worm-like attractor (fig. 3).²⁸ The mimicry-systems of animals illuminate how strongly the eye is fixed on differential identification. The eye can only distinguish something and identify it as an object in its own right when it can be differentiated from the environment. The intentions for the masking of one's own appearance, but not of one's own being, vary – speaking of “intentions” means putting it anthropocentrically²⁹ – according to the profile of prey and predator. They converge in the motif of survival by appearing to be non-identical-to-self in order to create the necessary asymmetry of perception: eye-to-eye yet “invisible.”

Let's now include the function of media in this line of thought. As far as we know, there are no animal observers in the wild who chuckle while observing other living beings winning or losing a battle for survival. If there is anywhere an observer, it is the human being who is fascinated by these processes, which are presented to us in zoological reference books and films. The perceptual processing of counterfeited signals creates an amused wonder in which uncanny and comic aspects are permanently intertwined. In order to enjoy this spectacle, we (or at any rate the non-experts, who themselves do not do field-work) have to rely on the medialization of mimicry. Scientific articles and (static or moving) images of the visual media lure us to the sensual trap in which the prey falls due to being “blind” or due to signal deception. Thus, media make us “see;” it is through media that we recognize the trap in which the miming animal directs the eye of its prey.

This is the decisive function of media, as far as our fictional texts are concerned: they can open up mental display rooms and intensify the perspectives of different

²⁸ Cf. Klaus Lunau (as footnote 22), p. 35.

²⁹ Cf. Volker Sommer (as footnote 14), p. 45.

observers. This contrasts with the paintings, which are based on courtly narratives (cf. chapter 3). The texts analyzed in this study use their aesthetic difference for the empirical observation of animal mimicry. They play with several levels of observation, which are either inside or outside of the text. They let certain protagonists enter the sensory trap – just like the miming animal’s prey – and privilege the eyes by letting them see more than they actually could. The narrator grants them mental insight to the successful or failed perceptions of others; they hear their own and other people’s comments on the visually deceived and so they become observers of second-degree observers.³⁰ This differentiation of perspectives increases foremost the complexity of the succeeding passage, and greatly enhances its visuality in surprising ways. At this point, the media-aesthetic question joins to the courtly epic: which asymmetry of perception is developed amongst the protagonists in the two *Iwein*-epics, the French and the German version? And what possibilities are offered to the audience outside of the text?

2. Fallacy of the eye: courtly epic

*Invisibility quite simply means someone’s ,not being there’.*³¹

The courtly Arthurian world demands visible presence and transparent actions from its members. Everything that happens perceptively in public at court before eye- and ear-witnesses is therefore not to be doubted.³² Secret actions already represent a first form of invisibility. This is a rather conventional narrative motif and need not to be explored further in this epistemological context. Invisibility created through magic, however, is another matter. In line with the mimicry of animals, magical invisibility makes us believe that somebody is “not there.” Visual percep-

³⁰ Concerning the term “observation” (first order and any subsequent level), I refer to Claudio Baraldi, Giancarlo Corsi und Elena Esposito, *GLU. Glossar zu Niklas Luhmanns Theorie sozialer Systeme*, Frankfurt am Main ³1999 (suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft 1226), p. 123-128, to Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie*, Frankfurt am Main ⁷1999 (suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft 666) as well as to William Rasch, *Niklas Luhmann’s Modernity. The Paradoxes of Differentiation*, Stanford CA 2000.

³¹ „Unsichtbarkeit ist entscheidend dafür, dass jemand ,nicht da ist‘.“ Cf. Jan-Dirk Müller, *Spielregeln für den Untergang. Die Welt des Nibelungenliedes*, Tübingen 1998, p. 259.

³² For a differentiated analysis of the reverse condition refer to Rüdiger Brandt, *Enklaven – Exklaven. Zur literarischen Darstellung von Öffentlichkeit und Nichtöffentlichkeit im Mittelalter*, München 1993 (Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur 15).

tion, however, is only misled either by a falsification of visible signals or by the creation of a fallacy (as in *Iwein*). This invisibility has no sensory consequences other than bio-evolutional camouflage. Magical invisibility manipulates the eye, and as secret action in court society, it is viewed as fraud in front of eye witnesses. For that reason, magical invisibility violates court etiquette in two ways.

The fictional texts from the world of the heroic and the Arthurian epic document this breach. They offer different narrative perspectives; but they also differ in the way the fraud is socially sanctioned, if it is sanctioned at all. The mimicry of Siegfried, when wearing his magical camouflaging cloak, enables him to be invisible and yet physically present as someone superficially not identical with himself. He fights as “Gunther” and wrestles down Brünhild both in athletics and in bed. It is exactly this fallacy of perception that turns out to be the „Sprengsatz für die höfische Welt von Worms [detonation charge for the courtly world of Worms]“³³ in the catastrophic continuation of the *Nibelungenlied*. The camouflage techniques of Laurin are placed under the verdict of treacherous dwarf tricks and are completely obliterated from the world of the Dietrich epic in a quickly told elimination of the dwarves. Strangely, only Yvain and Iwein manage to rescue themselves without sanction thanks to a magic ring. The constraint which forces them to prove their worth as knights in the second course and thus be worthy of marrying Laudine has – at least from a narrative logic point of view - a different motivation than the trick of being invisible.

The scene involving the trap at the entrance, in which both Chrétien and Hartmann stage the fight of the avengers against the invisible Iwein, groups the internal figures of the text and the audience into two layers of observation. Each layer can be differentiated still further.³⁴ The inner layer includes both opposing parties: on the one hand, the lady of the castle, Laudine, with her slain husband Askalon und her servants, and on the other hand Iwein, the murderer of Askalon. Apart

³³ Jan-Dirk Müller (as footnote 31), p. 248.

³⁴ I am adapting the approach of Jan-Dirk Müller, who speaks of „Ringe[n]’ von Betrachtern [circles of observers]“ (Müller [as footnote 31], p. 250).

from the anonymous court inhabitants and mourners, the trickster figure Lunete is also part of Laudine's entourage. She, however, is a threshold figure because she secretly watches the scene and is aware of the special visual circumstances.³⁵ Moreover, we – in short, the everlasting narrators and listeners – need to be considered too, as we also know the reasons for the invisibility. The concurring information stems from the autopsy of the internal figures of the text and from the narrator. This information renders us "seeing" in contrast to no other internal figure of the text. Hartmann takes this aesthetics of operating with different perspectives in the battle against the invisible further than any other Arthurian or heroic epic text.

2.1. The captured knight in the entrance-way prison

As we know, Yvain and Iwein, the heroes of the French and the German version, are taken captive in the castle of the slain Askalon. How does this happen, and what happens as a result of the narrative's strategy of "blinding" almost all the figures internal to the text by means of magic? In a gregarious round of storytelling at Pentecost, Iwein hears the knight Kalogrenant tell a story about an unsuccessful *aventiure* [adventure]. Several years before, he had been forced to flee from Askalon's castle after having lost a battle near a mysterious source that causes thunderstorms. Iwein, who is mobilized by this information, secretly leaves the court and starts the *aventiure* and thus his involvement in a life threatening action. At the source, he triggers a storm and again, the source guardian, Askalon, comes galloping. A fight and a chase scene follow, in which Iwein pursues the severely wounded Askalon and tries to follow him into the castle. While reaching out for the final sword thrust, the deadly porticullis of the castle's entrance falls, just missing Iwein's back with such precision that he manages to survive (as opposed to his

³⁵ After Lunete says good-bye to Iwein (1257), she is not mentioned again. Only when she reappears the text states: *diu juncvrouwe sich dô stal / von dem gesinde dan* (1414-5). From this statement it can be deduced that she was present amongst the people surrounding her mourning mistress Laudine.

horse and Askalon, who both die). He, however, is now trapped in the closed-off entrance. It would be highly surprising if he survived.

Lunete, the lady-in-waiting to the now widowed Lady of the castle, and a very important trickster figure for this whole passage, enters on the scene. She secretly visits the trapped Iwein to announce his certain death. She says the servants of the Lady Laudine were experiencing “awful anger” (*grimmelichen zorn*, 1163). The protagonist wants to face the battle in as manly a fashion as possible, in keeping with the laws of the genre, an aspect that Hartmann accentuates even more in his re-write. Hartmann’s Iwein underscores the hero’s readiness to fight with a directness that makes the ensuing episode (in which, by lying invisibly on a bed, he does anything but put up a fight!) that much more ironic: “Be that as it may,” he declares, “I do not intend to forfeit my life like a woman, no one catches me off guard.” („so ensol ich doch den lîp / niht verliesen als ein wîp: / michn vindet nieman âne wer“).³⁶ Iwein’s determination to fight an obviously hopeless battle also motivates Lunete’s wish to help him more effectively, since she speaks of wanting to honor Iwein’s indisputable courage. Nonetheless, Lunete’s wish to redeem a debt is only barely constructed in the narration. Lunete immediately “recognizes” Iwein and calls him by name because she had met him earlier in Britain, an encounter not narrated in the text. At that time, he was the only one to have greeted her at court. She now wants to thank him for this gesture of honor.³⁷ In order to save him, she cunningly reaches for the magic ring, a pendant to the different models of invisibility cloaks worn by protagonists in fiction from the Middle Ages up to Harry Potter. If worn correctly – and Lunete instructs Iwein on just how to do that – the ring will hide its wearer “like wood under the bark”³⁸ The ring protects its wearer with magical invisibility,³⁹ making it impossible to either “see or

³⁶ *Iwein*, 1169-71.

³⁷ *Iwein*, 1181-1200; *Le Chevalier au Lion*, 1005-1020. In the Old French text the question concerning Lunete’s latent conflict of loyalty stays completely open, the Middle High German adaptation signals in one sentence that Lunete weighs her loyalty obligations (cf. 1178-9).

³⁸ *Iwein*, 1208-9.

³⁹ According to Hartmut Semmler in his phenomenology of courtly cunning, Hartmann von Aue is discrete in using „Schutzzauber in handlungstragender Funktion“ (Hartmut Semmler, *Listmotive in der mittelhochdeutschen Epik. Zum Wandel ethischer Normen im Spiegel der Literatur*, Berlin 1991 (Philologische Studien und Quellen 122), p 65). The ob-

find” him. This magic tool makes possible not only the physical fallacy of perception, it also enables second-order observers to reflect on its meaning. In the French text, the perceptual paradox initiated by the magic ring is emphasized through repetition: nobody could see the wearer of the ring, no matter how wide they had opened their eyes (*tant aix les iex ouvers*, 1035).

After ensuring Iwein’s invisibility, Lunete acts the good hostess under the circumstances. She entertains Iwein by asking him to sit in the entrance – in a courtly, decorated room with a richly covered bed – and serves him *guoter gâch-spîse gnuoc*.⁴⁰ The French text discusses in depth the architecture and technical details of the castle: both porticullises, the courtly decoration of the room and the menu served at the banquet.⁴¹ Hartmann, though, radically shortens this description. This streamlining accentuates the following events. As the loudly approaching avengers are heard after the light meal, Lunete augurs a visual spectacle to the murderer (and hence also to the readers of the text). The avengers of Laudine will not be able to kill the murderer of their master because of the fallacy of perception. Their pitiful failure should turn into an entertaining event for Iwein, providing he remains on the bed with the gem clasped in his hand. Thus, he will be able to see the threatening gestures of his “blinded” avengers. The pun is that they will seek his life unsuccessfully, even though he is sitting amongst them:

*nû wâ mite möht iu wesen baz,
dazs iu alle sint gehaz,
und ir sî seht bi iu stân
unde drônde umbe iuch gân,
und sî doch sô erblindent
daz sî iuwer niene vindent,
und sît doch rehte under in.*⁴²

servable shift of magic in the high-courtly epic into spheres within the human, thus turning magical forces into processes of the soul can be seen within this context. Semmler also recognizes that the porticullis episode has a self-referential dimension influenced by perception theory; he sees Hartmann’s interest in the episode based in the dilemma in which Laudine and her servants find themselves: to acknowledge that perception (of the hidden Iwein) is not possible knowing simultaneously that their senses are deceived.

⁴⁰ *Iwein*, 1222 (“a variety of tasty snacks”).

⁴¹ For the porticullis, see 905-929, for the courtly decoration of the room, see 960-965 and for the meal, see 1048-1054.

⁴² „Now how could you be better served / Than to have all those who hate you / Standing right next to you, / Menacing encircling you, / And yet so blinded / That they will never discover you, / Though you are right in their midst?“, *Iwein*, 1239-1245.

Lunete's rhetorical question grasps the essence of the paradox in this scene: Iwein will be absolutely "meant", i.e., he is in the target of his killers and gets therefore the full attention of all figures in the text, yet he nevertheless finds himself comfortably invisible in the midst of the action. Iwein, that much is predictable, cannot be held accountable for his murder due to the extraordinary conditions for sensory perception in this scene. This is a status not normally granted to humans, a fact of which Iwein is also aware. Chrétien emphasizes the frivolousness of the old French maid here even more. The maid announces the scene clearly as a visual spectacle, but only for the one who need not fear anything. Objectively, this can only apply to the observers outside of the text. For them, the strange movements of the blinded, fumbling pack and their blazing anger are especially amusing: *soulas et delis* (or according to the modern translation: „un sujet de joie et de divertissement [an object of joy and amusement]“).

*Che seroit soulas et delis
A homme qui paour n'aroit,
Quant gent si avoele verroit,
Qu'il seront tuit si avoelé,
Si desconfit et si maté,
Quë il errageront tuit d'ire.*⁴³

At this point, the parameters that determine the visual perception among the circles of bystanders and establish different orders of observation have been clarified. A fundamental asymmetry of perception characterizes the battle. Even though Laudine's followers, the avengers, are superior in number and weapons, and are emotionally far more passionately involved, to the point of all-consuming anger, than the camouflaged victim on the bed, they succumb to the fallacy of perception in an unpredictable way. The victim – or, viewed from a different perspective, the murderer – does not only escape deadly revenge. He is even allowed to enjoy this adventure and be a figure of identification for the audience. Together with the lis-

⁴³ „It will be an amusing sport / to a man who is unafraid / to see people so blinded; / for they'll be beside themselves with rage“, *Le Chevalier au Lion*, 1074-9.

teners and readers who have been informed by the narrative, he is visually confronted with the seeing-blind who are almost being fooled into desperation (cf. my discussion, to follow, of the South-Tyrolean wall-paintings of the *Iwein*-narrative). Their gestures, mimicry, and fighting would have to be interpreted as insanity and looming self-loss, were it not for the narrated omniscience. One can even ask oneself if the wild gesticulation of Laudine's angry followers, which resembles the depictions of dancers, angered, crazy, or possessed people in medieval iconography, contrasts with the order imposed on the courtly body in medieval aesthetics.⁴⁴ In addition, the same scene sheds light on the extensively described, very expressive mourning of Laudine. Despite her many topical elements drawn from the body language of mourning, the desperate widow seems to be depicted as a parallel to her enraged followers whose first and second chases frame her entrance into the scene. She enters the focal point of attention by clawing, scratching and tearing at her entirely strange yet beautiful appearance.⁴⁵ Her behavior appears to be motivated not only by her loss, but also by the murderer's invisibility, which has induced her fury. Chrétien explicitly associates the behavior of Laudine with that of the insane.

It is precisely at this point that a close comparison of the French and the German texts provides deeper insight into the perceptual asymmetry. Let us therefore go back to the very beginning of the encounter between the invisible murderer and his avengers. What occurs after Iwein's light meal and to whom? The consideration of perspective is imperative here. Iwein's situation is quickly outlined. He lies

⁴⁴ Cf. Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*. Translated Hugh Bredlin. New Haven, 2002. For high-medieval culture, see Stephen C. Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness. Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals. 939-1210*, Philadelphia 1985; Joachim Bumke, „Höfischer Körper - höfische Kultur“. In: Joachim Heinzle (ed.), *Modernes Mittelalter. Neue Bilder einer populären Epoche*. Frankfurt am Main 1994, p. 67-102. For a visualization of such a body-order and its moral implications see, e.g., the iconography of the Spanish *Beatus* manuscripts in the early Middle Ages, which impressively demonstrates that the status of redemption and, respectively, the condemnation of humans at the end of time is expressed in terms of disparate or harmoniously presented body parts. François Garnier discusses body movements and positions influenced by the Christian value system: *Le langage de l'image au Moyen Âge. Signification et symbolique*. 2 vols., Paris 1982 and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *La raison des gestes dans l'occident médiéval*. Paris 1990.

⁴⁵ *Iwein*, 1307-1349; for the topical arrangement of the mourning gestures see Dietmar Peil, *Die Gebärde bei Chrétien, Hartmann und Wolfram. Erec - Iwein - Parzival*, München 1975 (Medium Aevum 28); Martin J. Schubert, *Zur Theorie des Gebarens im Mittelalter. Analyse von nichtsprachlicher Äußerung in mittelhochdeutscher Epik. Rolandslied, Eneasroman, Tristan*, Köln et al. 1991 (Kölner germanistische Studien 31).

quietly on the bed and, abiding by the rules, clasps the ring with the magic stone in his palm, making him invisible. As the informed audience outside of the text, we lend the narrator great credibility concerning the magic effect of the ring, also because the reactions of the non-informed, perplexed figures in the text authenticate its concealing power. The immobile Iwein sees and hears the followers of Laudine approaching, as they search for the murderer. Chrétien describes these events explicitly and – in contrast to Hartmann’s more sober description – highlights the escalation of affect among the avengers: *Et ils le veoit erragier, / Et forserner et couroichier.*⁴⁶ Undoubtedly, the displayed passivity of an uninvolved observer is a rather odd and therefore somewhat comic attitude for a knight who wants to survive a personal attack.

Pouring in from both sides of the castle’s entrance, Askalon’s furious avengers now see things that they can immediately interpret: in front of the entrance-trap lies the hindquarters of the horse and inside the entrance-way trap they see forequarters of the horse with its saddle. Their conclusions are not exceptional. Every human being with normal perceptive and interpretative visual competence would conclude that the rider of the bisected horse would also be in between the two gates, and, further, that he would be immediately visible to the eye. This interpretation no doubt stems from a basic human confidence in one’s senses (nobody expects to encounter cognitive “blind spots” in their daily life, and certainly not magically induced ones). In addition, it manifests the processing of perception as conceptualized by Mersch. The sensory stimulus is assimilated passively, but is processed as part of an active, productive process – productive in that the process of perception creates the object out of the expectation awakened by the received sensory signals.⁴⁷ The avengers experience such a turning point, but magic prevents them from reaching cognitive closure: they see, yet simultaneously fail to see. With their eyes, they take in both halves of the horse, which both authors are

⁴⁶ *Le Chevalier au Lion*, 1088-1099, here 1109-10.

⁴⁷ Cf. Dieter Mersch, *Ereignis und Aura* (as footnote 17), p. 36: „Die Wahrnehmung nimmt von der Sache, den bestehenden Tatsachen der Außenwelt, ihren Ausgang, und zwar so, dass sie zunächst ein ‚Nehmen‘ bedeutet, das im Vollzug des Wahrnehmens gewendet wird, um es als Wahrgenommenes allererst hervorzubringen.“

at pains to describe in great detail, but not the knight. Both Chrétien and Hartmann elucidate the perception-influencing function, describing as if in slow-motion the falling of the razor-sharp porticullis, the leaning position of Iwein as he reaches for Askalon, which saves him by a hair's breadth, as well as the evidence of the horse, and (albeit only in Chrétien), spurs, which are visible from the inside and outside of the entrance way prison.⁴⁸ These are signals – according to Mersch – that invite the production of the sought after object as if they were saying: “There is more to see in this entrance-way-trap than just us.” But this “more” – the invisible Iwein – remains concealed from their eyes. The narrative plays with the premises of perception. The visible awakens visual expectations in the eye, but these then are duped by the invisible. As I will show, the deceived are aware of their own faulty perception. The fact that the audience can knowingly follow these events turns them into second-order-observers.

We should first consider more closely the scene to which Chrétien, in the French original, grants more narrative space than Hartmann. Chrétien's version depicts the step-by-step interplay of the correct perception of signals, the false processing of signals, and, in addition, the inappropriate actions of the avengers. In contrast, Hartmann's abbreviated account of perceptions appears rather abrupt.⁴⁹ The enraged avengers in the French version call out: “we see it [half of the saddle] well, but we see nothing of him [Iwein]” (*che veons bien,/ ne de lui ne veommes rien*, 1123-1124). In addition, their furious self-commentary is more explicit and, in the individual enumeration of the visually perceived signals, more repetitive. How is it, they ask themselves, that they cannot see him, because at most only a little bird, a squirrel, a little marmoset, or a comparatively tiny animal could escape the window - and door-less room, so to say, through the iron bars of the porticullis. They also evoke the additional evidence that proves Iwein's presence (the position of the bisected horse, the spurs cut off exactly at the heel).⁵⁰ The more their outrage

⁴⁸ *Iwein*, 1108-1118; 1268-1270; *Le Chevalier au Lion*, 932-951 (*C'au res du dos li vint raiant*, 948); 1093-1105.

⁴⁹ *Le Chevalier au Lion*, 1088-1099; *Iwein*, 1258-1262.

⁵⁰ *Le Chevalier au Lion*, 1111-1131.

grows, the more desperately they reassure themselves of their own visual faculties. It appears as if they did this tactilely, an act which would practically label them as “blind.” Like “a blind person who tentatively looks for something” (*comme aveule qui a tastons / va aucune chose querant*, 1142-3), “the angered strike at the air with senseless movements” (*ainsi trestuit d’ire escaufé*, 1132); desperate, they strike the walls with their clubs, causing pandemonium.⁵¹ The text mentions explicitly that the bed – and, as a result, the protagonist too – is still spared the blows: *Mais des caus fu quites et frans / Li lis ou il s’estoit couchiés, / Qu’il n’i fu ferus ne touchiés*; 1136-9).

These sentences grant the reader a rare visual privilege: the reader is permitted to “see” what the avengers themselves cannot see, in so far as the text informs him or her what Iwein is doing, despite his invisibility. Reading itself becomes tantamount to seeing and, at a certain level, understanding. This, at least for the “seeing” audience, is a comparatively exclusive spectacle. In addition, the audience sees in its imagination people whose perceptual fallacies put them in a rage while, amidst the turmoil, the invisible protagonist lies comfortably on a bed in the blind spot. The scene must have been just as bizarre as it was comic, due also to the complete lack of physical expenditure on the knight's part. The bed is still excluded from the blows, creating again a situation of suspense only for the audience outside of the text. We – the readers – already know that even though Yvain is visually deleted, he is materially “there,” his invisible body tactilely present, which means that it could be injured. These discrepancies in the tactile and visual perceptibility of Yvain actually offer an additional narrative opportunity to irritate the avengers further, for instance, by letting them catch a piece of him. There is no question that such a tactile experience would have intensified the visual aporia with the fragments of the horse! Yet neither Chrétien nor Hartmann does more than make the audience aware of this possibility. Their solutions differ insofar as Yvain remains motionless on the bed even though he is fiercely beaten, whereas

⁵¹ *Le Chevalier au Lion*, 1132-1143.

Iwein nimbly evades the beatings.⁵² This difference between the French and the Middle High German version in staging the hero's perceptibility contrasts with the camouflage scenes in the *Nibelungenlied*. Siegfried, acting as a replacement for Gunther wearing a camouflage cape, must appear as a corporeal but invisible fighter. The text stages a different, but analogous aporia of perception for Brünhild, just as Iwein and Yvain do for their avengers. Brünhild believes that the man who touches her, wrestles with her at the competition, and finally, also defeats her in bed is the same one whom she sees: Gunther. Instead, Gunther's fraud lies precisely in the discrepancy between seeing and touching. In contrast to the fraud perpetrated in the Iwein-narratives, that in the *Nibelungenlied* is much more belated. Moreover, its exposure has – for reasons that cannot be discussed here – far more profound implications than for Yvain and Iwein, primarily because it serves as the catalyst for the subsequent chain of revenge.

Turning back to Yvain, we can ask how his avengers in the French original interpret their fallacy of perception. It seems as if their slowly making their way through the entrance-way trap entails not only a corporeal, but also a cognitive groping and grasping, due to the mysteriousness of the experience. Clearly, it is a threshold experience for them. For that reason, they cloak themselves with the terms available for the liminal; especially with terms for the uncanny and the base. They are convinced the devil is involved in this trick of the senses, that he has duped, jinxed, or demonized their eyes.⁵³ Which role does the devil or – in Laudine's speech of anger (1208-1243; cf. below) – the demons play? They serve as a tool allowing interpretation of the fallacy of perception. According to ontological concepts of demons stemming from Late Antiquity that survived into the Middle Ages, demons were considered creatures of the air that lived on the threshold between heaven and earth, between the spiritual nature of the gods and the material body of human beings. The ethereal body of these princes of the air

⁵² *Si fu mout ferus et boutés / Mesire Yvains la ou il jut, / Mais ains pour che ne se remut* – «My lord Ivain was constantly / struck and jostled there where he lay», *Le Chevalier au Lion*, 1192-1194; cf. below, during the second chase.

⁵³ The speech mentions the devil three times; *Le Chevalier au Lion*, 1130-1131; 1200-1202; 1218-1242 (Laudine on the devilish phantom).

was thought to permeate every solid body, possess them and commit every sorts of perceptual fraud with them.⁵⁴ Two of the many qualities ascribed to them concern the sensory perceptibility of the body: the one, mobility, is shared by demons and humans alike, and the second, airy embodiment, is purely demonic.⁵⁵ The combination of both leads to a distortion of what is seen, since under demonic influence the visible is never what it seems to be. The reliability of the human aisthesis, especially of visual perception, is questioned as well as the authenticity of the visible objects in the outside world. From these two directions, then, people's control over their perception of the world and its interpretation slips from their hands.

Let's now turn to the Middle High German version of the first chase scene. In summary, the avengers experience similar things in *Iwein*. Moreover, their failures of perception also receive metaphysical explanation. They struggle with God and curse the devil, speak about the *zouberliste* of the wanted person and ask each other who could have taken their senses from them:

*sî sprâchen ,warst der man komen,
ode wer hât uns benomen
diu ougen und die sinne?
er ist benamen hinne:
wir sîn mit gesehenden ougen blint.
ez sehent wol alle die hinnen sint:
ezn wær dan cleine als ein mûs,
unz daz beslozzen wær diz hûs,
sone möht niht lebendes drûz komen:
wie ist uns dirre man benomen?
swie lange er sich doch vriste
mit sînem zouberliste,
wir vinden in noch hiute.
suochent, guote liute,
in winkeln und under benken.*

⁵⁴ This is one of the main causes of theological speculation on the subject, for example, in Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, CSEL 41, 597-618; Hrabanus Maurus, *De magicis artibus*, MPL 110, 1095-1110. Cf. Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief*, Chicago 2001; Jean-Claude Schmitt, „Le corps des fantômes, “. In: *Micrologus. Natura, scienze e società medievali. I discorsi dei corpi*, ed. Véronique Pasche, et al., Paris / Turnhout 1993 (Micrologus. Natura, scienza e società medievali. Nature, Sciences and Medieval Societies 1), p. 19-25 ; idem, *Les revenants. Les vivants et les morts dans la société médiévale*, Paris 1994 (Bibliothèque des histoires).

⁵⁵ (...) *daemones sunt genere animalia (...), corpore aëria* (Lucius Apuleius, *De Deo Socratis*, in: Apulée, *Opusculs philosophiques et fragments*. Éd. Jean Beaujeu, Paris 1973, ch. 13, § 148, S. 33, quoted and discussed in Stephen G. Nichols. „Melusine Between Myth and History. Profile of a Female Demon“. In: *Mittelalter. Neue Wege durch einen alten Kontinent*, ed. Jan-Dirk Müller and Horst Wenzel, Stuttgart / Leipzig 1999, p. 217-240, here p. 220-222.

erne mag des niht entwenken
erne müeze her vür.⁵⁶

When struggling with the fallacy of perception, they summarize their self-perception with a paraphrase of Matthew (Mt 13,13-14), commonly applied to Jews: “We are blind with seeing eyes.” Not only does this represent an addition compared with Chrétien's text, it also rhymes with the verse *ez sehent wol alle die hinnen sint*. It can be read not only as a self-referential comment asserting the avengers' ability to see (cf. McConeghy's translation: “not one of us here is blind”), but also as a second-order-observation (“all in this room can see well” that the avengers cannot see). Understanding the verse in this fashion implies that the avengers know that their eyes have been deceived and that others possibly could see what they, the avengers, cannot. But this insight does not prevent them from being furious. On the contrary, their self-reflection intensifies their irritation. It was “not [to] be prevented” (*ungewärllich*) that they too strike at nothing as if they are out of their minds, stab the air and fumble about like blind people. Without a doubt, they present a comic scene to the uninvolved observers.

Chrétien doubles the narrative motif by letting the avengers attempt to find Yvain, not once, but twice; Hartmann adheres both to this structure and the asymmetrical conditions of perception. The second attempt is infused with an element that stems from legal discourse: the conventional evidence for a murderer's physical presence. As the servants try to carry Askalon's corpse to the nearby palace, the wounds of the slain reopen. The fresh blood now takes on the same functions as the two horse halves and the spurs in the first scene; it provides proof that someone is present, but, in fact, invisible. The fresh blood of the corpse suggests that the murderer is “there,” that he is in the same room as the dead body. Again, perception is misled by visible and even judicially coded circumstan-

⁵⁶ „Where did he go,' they said / ,Have be been robbed of / Our sight and our senses? / The man must be here! / We are wide awake, but cannot see! / Not one of us here is blind, / And since this room was secured, / No living thing could have escaped, / Unless it were as small as a mouse. / How has this man eluded us? / But no matter how long he is kept alive / By his sorcery / We will still find him today. / Search well, good people, / In the corners and under the benches. / There is no way he can keep us / From flushing him out”, *Iwein*, 1273-1289.

tial evidence. Hartmann appeals to this general understanding because the judicial institution of the medieval bier test is conclusive:

*Nû ist uns ein dinc geseit
vil dicke vür die wârheit,
swer den andern habe erslagen,
und wurder vür in getragen,
swie langer dâ vor wære wunt,
er begunde bluoten anderstunt.
nû seht, alsô begunden
im bluoten sîne wunden,
dô man in in daz palas truoc:
wan er was bî im der in sluoc.⁵⁷*

Both authors stage the truth of the bier test in their own way, but both stay within Mersch's understanding of an event: Hartmann appeals directly to the eyes of his audience (*nû seht*, 1361), and Chrétien describes the observers standing around the bier, staring at the oozing blood (1178-1181; 1195-1198). Both evoke the performative quality of this visualization of a hidden truth by means of the fresh blood. The blood's visibility embodies law and would allow the murderer to be convicted – were he to find himself in the room. Folkloristic sources give evidence for such rituals of legal performance. Several records from the old Swiss confederation that stretch into the sixteenth century highlight this meaning of the bier test for the finding of justice. Actual stagings were organized. A suspect had to approach the corpse slowly, and if more blood gradually appeared, then the blood visualized the perpetration of the crime itself.⁵⁸ This incident exposes the principle of evidence, which, into early modern times, fulfilled its epistemological function of authenticity: “Faith is not the evidence of things not seen. No, faith is

⁵⁷ „Now there is a saying / And many believe it, / That if a man has been killed / And is carried past his murderer, / No matter how long he has been dead / He will begin to bleed again. / And sure enough, when the lord was carried / into the great hall / his wounds began / to bleed anew, / Since he was near the man who killed him”, *Iwein*, 1355-1364 (affirmative in a similar way *Le Chevalier au Lion*, 1177-1191).

⁵⁸ Cf. Leo Zehnder, *Volkskundliches in der älteren schweizerischen Chronistik*, Basel 1976 (Schriften der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Volkskunde 60), p. 392-394 and footnote 21 (with further literature). For further literature on the ordeal to which the bier test belongs, refer to footnote 71.

earned by the evidence that certain things have been seen – and touched [even if by someone else].”⁵⁹

Further, during the second chase scene, the deceived react as if they had gone berserk, harassed by the increased pressure to succeed. But their swords still attack nothing because their eyes are deceived. This time, however, they also strike the bed on which Yvain, respectively, Iwein, lies. In the French version, Yvain endures the apparently harmless blows. Hartmann, in contrast, has the bed only turn into *vil dicke wunt* (“hacked to shreds”).⁶⁰ In terms of narrative logic, he seems to take the sword strokes more seriously since he has Iwein continually dodge the blows and stabbings (*ouch muoser dicke wenken*, 1375). This detail can be interpreted as the genre-specific irony of the narrator, who expands the comic moment of the avengers’ gestures and motions to those of the invisible ‘fighter’ as well.

After the second attempt which forces the avengers to capitulate, the angry widow speaks up. She does this as expressively as when she was earlier mourning through mime and gestures. There are, however, significant differences in her speech in the versions of Chrétien and Hartmann. Hartmann lets Laudine have the last word of the whole passage; she emphasizes that he who is really present has cast a *zouber* on the *sinne* and accuses God, but only Him.⁶¹ On the whole, Hartmann cuts her angry speech (1382-1402), not only shortening it, but also diminishing that dimension that characterizes the struggle against the invisible subject in Chrétien. He eliminates the uncanny invisible and lessens its demonic qualities by having Laudine alone address God. In the French version, this invisible being is rendered highly present through Laudine’s intense emotional words, and by her channeling her anger directly against him. First, the despairing, screaming widow accuses God (*crioit comme hors de sens*, 1205) of acting unjustly were he to let the murderer escape. Further still, God would even commit a grave injustice by not permitting her see the one invisibly present (*que veoir mie ne me*

⁵⁹ Walter Stephens (as in footnote 54), p. 174.

⁶⁰ *Iwein*, 1372-1374.

⁶¹ *Iwein*, 1367-1369 (Hartmann gives parts of the speech of the avengers to Laudine); on the accusation see 1382-1402.

lais / Chelui qui est si pres de moi, 1216-7). Then, in an abrupt change of mind, Laudine argues that the invisibility points towards a ghost or a demon who has cast a spell on her (*qu'entre nous chi s'est chaiens mis / ou fantosmes ou anemis, / s'en sui enfantosmee toute*, 1219-21). Her angered speech, directed towards the devilish demon (cf. *diablie*, 1202) that killed her husband, is unique and found only in Chrétien:

„Ha! fantosme, couarde chose,
 Pour quoi es si acouardie,
 Quant vers mon seigneur fus hardie?
 Chose vaine, chose faillie,
 Que ne t'ai jë en ma baillie!
 Que ne te puis ore tenir!
 Mais comment puet che avenir
 Que tu mon seigneur ad ochis,
 S'en traïson ne le feïs?
 Ja voir par toi conquis ne fust
 Me sire, se veü t'eüst,
 Qu'el monde son pareil n'avoit,
 Ne Dix ne hom ne l'i savoit,
 N'il n'en y a mais nul de tix.
 Chertes, se tu fusses mortix,
 N'osaises mon seignor atendre,
 Qu'a li ne se pooit nus prendre.”⁶²

This lengthy invective demonizes the invisible. The metaphysical caricature of the knight nonetheless has a narrative function. The desperate widow develops the unique rhetoric of a lamentation for the dead that exaggerates the invincibility of a combatant. The fact that the battle happened under such apparent asymmetrical conditions of perception leads her to the plausible, albeit false, conclusion: her husband must have been killed by an “immortal.”

For both texts, the end of the scene can be narrated quickly. The protagonist stays hidden in the castle, still in the immediate vicinity of his victim's widow,

⁶² “Ah ! Phantom, cowardly creature, / why are you afraid of me / when you were so bold before my husband ? Empty and elusive creature, / if only I had you in my power! Why can't I get you in my grasp? / Yet how could you ever / kill my husband, / unless you did it through deceit? / Truly my husband would never have been / defeated by you, had you been able to see you, / for there was no one in the world his like, / neither God nor man knew his like, / and never was there another his match. / Indeed, if you had been a mortal man, / you would never have dared attack my husband, / for no one could capture him”, *Le Chevalier au Lion*, 1226-1243.

whom he observes in the subsequent mourning ceremony. He falls in love with her. Acting as a matchmaker, Lunete again does serious work: only 1000 verses later, Yvain (or Iwein) is engaged to Laudine amid courtly acclamations. Without a doubt, one can state that a protagonist of a courtly epic seldom escapes death so comfortably. It is even more seldom that he can ensure himself the glorious succession as protector of the source and of its mistress in such an adventurous manner.⁶³ Faced with the way the story continues and the way Iwein camouflages himself, one is reminded of the leaping spiders. Their actions seem to be more intentional than those of the fictional hero. In the end, his apparently random survival is due to a logic of narration and action which strictly focuses on the turbulent development of a knightly hero. For this reason, his fate is organized by this logic as long as the epic has not been told to its end.

3. Medium and material: the Yvain frescoes of Castle Rodenegg

We have seen how blind spots in visual perception play an important thematic role in the Iwein narratives. These blind spots work within and without the text to establish distinctions in knowledge, be it among the protagonists or between them and the audience for the narrative. When it comes to the issue of visibility, pictorial sources, or, more precisely, visual media, inherently raise a different set of questions. By his nature, the invisible combatant presents author and reader with all sorts of problems. He also, however, presents a possibility: by making the invisible protagonist visible to his audience, the author grants it the privilege of sharing in special knowledge as well as the feeling of exclusiveness that comes with the denial to others of such sensory and cognitive advantages.

⁶³ In this context it is interesting to note the study on historical traditions by Sandra Hindman, who, starting from the images of the French collective manuscript with the Arthur epic (Bibliothèque Nationale, MS 1433), does a socio-historical reconstruction of Yvain's function for the audience of his time; cf. Sandra Hindman, "King Arthur, His Knights and the French Aristocracy in Picardy". In: Daniel Poiron and N. Freeman Regalado (Ed.), *Contexts: Style and Values in Medieval Art and Literature*. New Haven 1991 (Yale French Studies. Special Issue), p. 133-144; idem, *Sealed in Parchment: Rereadings of Knighthood in the Illuminated Manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes*, Chicago 1994.

By virtue of a fortunate survival, we are in position to pursue our analysis of invisibility, not only in works of literature, but in a set of murals that take the Iwein narratives as their point of departure. Before turning to these images, however, it must first be observed, if only in passing, that the pictorial depiction of the invisible by no means represented an unfamiliar challenge for medieval artists. Consider the various ways in which the visualization of the invisible arises in a very different, yet nonetheless very relevant context, that was dictated by the doctrine of the Incarnation.⁶⁴ The question of how to make the invisible visible was central to Christianity from its inception, as was the notion of making the blind see. Moreover, from Late Antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages, the theology of the *imago Dei* had a manifest impact of visualizations of the deity, playing an important role in the development of image theory. During the High and later Middle Ages, it also became increasingly important in relationship to another body of texts, the visualizations of the hidden God attributed to charismatic visionaries.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ The possibility of a connection between the Iwein frescoes and sacral mural programs and art in South Tirol is a topic that heretofore has only been broached by Michael Curschmann, who inquires into the intellectual climate and whatever other considerations might have motivated the Rodenecks and the artists they commissioned to undertake such a novel and ambitious program of decoration. Curschmann considers it beyond doubt that only a prestigious and well-established workshop, such as might have been available in nearby Brixen, could have undertaken the task. In support of his thesis, Curschmann argues (in ways comparable with Hindman's analysis of Paris, BN MS 1433 [see footnote 63]) for the visualization of a didactic agenda, aimed at the nobility, especially its youth, and based in part on theological traditions, specifically, the early medieval Gregorian dictum that images were the bible of the illiterate (*pictura liber laicorum*). He demonstrates that the world of knightly *aventiuren* had to be visualized according to certain theological models (and by artists of corresponding background or experience); cf. Michael Curschmann, „*Der aventiure bilde nemen*. The Intellectual and Social Environment of the Iwein Murals at Rodeneck Castle,” In: *Chrétien de Troyes and the German Middle Ages. Papers from an International Symposium*. Edited with an introduction by Martin H. Jones and Roy Wisbey. Cambridge / London 1993 (Arthurian Studies 26), p. 219-227.

⁶⁵ See Jeffrey F. Hamburger, “Rewriting History: The Visual and the Vernacular in Late Medieval History Bibles.” In: *Retextualisierung in der mittelalterlichen Literatur*. Edited by Ursula Peters and Joachim Bumke (Sonderheft der Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie, 2005), 259-307; Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (eds.), *The Mind's Eye. Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, Princeton 2005; Herbert L. Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing. Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art*, Philadelphia 2000 (The Middle Ages Series); idem, “Real Absence: Early Medieval Art and the Metamorphosis of Vision.” In: *Morfologie sociali e culturali in Europa fra tarda antichità e alto medioevo*, 3-9 Aprile 1997, 1157-211. Spoleto 1998 (Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'Alto Medioevo 45), p. 1157-1211; idem, “Facies Bibliothecae Revelata: Carolingian Art as Spiritual Seeing.” In: *Testo e immagine nell'alto medioevo*, 15-21 aprile 1993, vol. 2. Spoleto 1994 (Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'Alto Medioevo 41), p. 533-94; idem: *Spiritual Seeing. Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art*, Philadelphia 2000 (The Middle Ages Series). See also Moshe Barasch, „Das Gottesbild: Studien zur Darstellung des Unsichtbaren,” München 1998; in idem, *Blindness. The History of a Mental Image in Western Thought*, New York / London 2001; Alois M. Haas, „Bildresistenz des Göttlichen und der menschliche Versuch, Unsichtbares sichtbar zu machen. Feindschaft und Bild in der Geschichte der Mystik.” In: Gottfried Böhm (ed.), *Homo Pictor*, München / Leipzig 2001 (Colloquium Rauricum 7), p. 283-301.

The Iwein-narratives serve as the source for a series of South Tyrolean wall-paintings that have survived to the present day at Castle of Rodenegg (Southern Tyrol). The frescoes were painted shortly after the composition of Hartmann's novel. I will focus on scene 10 in the middle of the south wall of the Ywain room (fig. 4 and 5).⁶⁶ First though, a word about the topography of the castle: the wall paintings are located in a room that is only accessible over long wooden bridges and several gateways, one of which could be closed with a porticullis, a protective mechanism which is exceedingly rare in Tyrolean castles, even in the late Middle Ages and, in fact, at first totally unknown in Southern Tyrol (fig. 6).⁶⁷ Whoever recited the story could have made use of this architectural parallel between the place of the frescoes (the castle of Rodenegg) and the site of the innertextual narrative action (the castle of Laudine) in a performance involving two media. He could build upon the concrete spatial experience of the audience and explicitly refer to the extraordinary porticullis in the castle – the device which turns it into Iwein's prison. There is no evidence for a dual-media presentation of the Iwein narratives at Rodenegg, but in view of the evidence from other South Tyrolean castles, one may reckon with such a possibility. For example, at Runkelstein, the most famous South Tyrolean castle, there is solid evidence for certain customs in performance. Here it can be shown that Niklaus Vintler employed a speaker in addition to other entertainers, especially musicians (their pay for the year 1401 is registered in the Schlandersberg book of accounts); such performance artists probably performed mostly in rooms with frescoes or wall-paintings decorated with literary motifs.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ To the (partially contradictory) dating propositions see Volker Schupp and Hans Szklenar, *Ywain auf Schloß Rodenegg. Eine Bildergeschichte nach dem Iwein Hartmanns von Aue*, Sigmaringen 1996, p. 105-112. On the Ywain cycle refer additionally to Michael Curschmann, *Vom Wandel im bildlichen Umgang mit literarischen Gegenständen. Rodenegg, Wildenstein und das Flaarsche Haus in Stein am Rhein*, Freiburg (Schweiz) 1997 (Wolfgang Stammerl Gastprofessur für Germanische Philologie. Vorträge 6); Achim Masser, *Die Iwein-Fresken von Burg Rodenegg in Südtirol und der zeitgenössische Ritterhelm*, Innsbruck 1993; Norbert H. Ott, „Rodenegg revisited oder Zur Veränderung von Struktur und Gebrauchssituation literarischer Bilderzeugnisse im historischen Prozess.“ In: *helle döne schöne. Versammelte Arbeiten zur älteren und neueren deutschen Literatur*. Festschrift für Wolfgang Walliczek. Edited by Horst Brunner a.o., Göppingen 1999 (GAG 668), p. 61-86, and on the choice of scenes especially p. 65-68.

⁶⁷ Cf. Volker Schupp and Hans Szklenar (as footnote 66), p. 39-40 and footnote 125.

⁶⁸ Cf. Ott (as footnote 66), p. 69-71; René Wetzel, „Quis dicit originis annos? Die Runkelsteiner Vintler – Konstruktion einer adligen Identität.“ In: *Schloss Runkelstein. Die Bilderburg*, edited by the city of Bozen with the help of the

Central to our investigation is the question: how to portray someone invisible? In modernism, attempts to convey images of invisibility using the eye often result in the self-referential showing of the showing, or, for that matter, the showing of not being able to show. Scene 10 in the Yvain frescoes solves this representational problem by referring back to a perspective established within narration, one involving the initiated circle of observers. The reconstruction of the illustration's design, however, remains an open question due to partial damage to this segment of the painting. Nonetheless, a fragment of a hand and a forehead is recognizable as most likely belonging to Iwein, who appears lying on the patterned bed-covers (fig. 7). If this hypothesis is correct, then the invisible Iwein was depicted visibly as a figure. In this case, the conception of the image does not represent the experienced perception of the deceived, who swing their weapons throughout the room and point their fingers at their own eyes and at the eyes of others. Instead, the fresco tries to transpose the omniscience of the novel's audience to its medial equivalent; it tries to create a sort of "omnivisuality" of the frescoes, which wrap around the room.

The experience of the invisibly-visible protagonist necessarily relies on both media: "The 'ironic story' represents [...] a productive and extremely self-conscious engagement with literary narration."⁶⁹ As has been demonstrated, the latter opens an inner-mental space of visibility, in which all figures are shown before the inner eye by the narration. More than any other scene, the segment depicting the visible-invisible Iwein depends strongly on its medial opposite in a performative situation – the oral presentation supported by mimicry and the gestures of a possibly professional recitator. How else would the audience have "seen" that the pictorially visible Iwein was actually invisible on the level of action? How else would the audience have recognized that this explains why the avengers grapple with

Southern Tyrol institute of culture, Bozen 2000, p. 291-310, especially p. 303, and idem, "L'image du monde dans un monde d'images. Les fresques littéraires et courtoises de Castelroncolo dans leur contexte socioculturel et historique (Haute Adige, XIV-XV^e siècles)." In: *L'histoire dans la littérature*, edited by Laurent Adert and Eric Eigenmann, Genf 2000, p. 139-150.

⁶⁹ Norbert Ott (as footnote 66), p. 70: "Die 'ikonische Erzählung' repräsentiert [...] eine höchst bewusste, weil produktive Auseinandersetzung mit der literarischen Erzählung."

their weapons and point at their eyes? Thus, both media generate a visual event for their audience. Through the courtly epic, the narrative intervention on its own conveys the perspectival complexity. Only it can distinguish between the informed and the deceived.

Today, we no longer can see the frescoes of Rodeneck, as they would have been perceived by their original audience. Time has defaced scene 10, causing a performance failure. Apart from the above mentioned fragments, the formerly visible-invisible Iwein has vanished from the colored layer of chalk and has been replaced with a white area of restoration.⁷⁰ This act of replacement lifts the medium as well as the portrayed motif (invisibility) into consciousness; an act which could not be more suitable even though it is only a coincidental media-aesthetic trick of time. It is the substantiality of the medium itself that now obviously compensates for the meagerness of the representation.⁷¹

4. The fight against the invisible as a ritual of law: *Sachsenspiegel*

I would now like to return to my starting point, to the battle against an invisible opponent narrated from a specific perspective. In the courtly epic, this asymmetric confrontation actually occurred, even though one of the principle participants remained invisible to his opponent, both “there” and “not there.” The same could be said of the animal mimicry traps presented earlier. The legal ritual I wish to introduce here, however, represents a case apart, even though it too involves a battle against an opponent who is invisible because, quite simply, he is not present to take part in the duel. The actual absence of one of the two participants under-

⁷⁰ Concerning the painting technique, I refer again to the investigation at Runkelstein, which can, with provisos, also be applied to Rodeneck; cf. Christine Kenner, „Maltechniken und Arbeitsprozesse bei der Ausführung der Wandmalereien.“ In: *Schloss Runkelstein* (as footnote 68), p. 217-233.

⁷¹ Dieter Mersch, *Ereignis und Aura* (as footnote 17), p. 63: „Materialitäten werden insonderheit auffällig, wo Störungen eintreten oder Geräte versagen. Sie drängen sich auf, wo sie irritieren: in ‚Dysfunktionalitäten‘ wo die Strategien der Mediatisierung scheitern oder Programme abstürzen, wo sich ein Nichtwiederholbares in den Wiederholungen einschreibt oder die Lektüren verwischen“ – „Material things now become especially noticeable in so far as disturbances occur or devices fail. They obtrude as they irritate: in disfunctional moments in which various media-based strategies fail or programs crash, in which things that can’t be repeated inscribe themselves in repetitions or various readings interfere with one another.“ For the context (of the „duplicity of the medium“) refer to *ibid.*, p. 54-66.

scores the ritualized and, hence, controlled character of the ceremonial battle. The battle in question is a particular type of duel at court, an instrument of judgment that was used in lieu of a trial. The duel at court has to be viewed in the context of medieval strategies for resolving conflicts. It later became an independent method of establishing evidence at trial, a means of rule-oriented conflict management that evolved into less violent verbal processes still in use in courts.⁷² Under special circumstances, the duel could also take place as a fight against someone invisible without seeming to be irritating or funny. If the opponent – namely the accused – did not appear in the arena and did not take his place opposite the accuser, then the fight was staged publicly with a single fighter according to strict, ritualized rules of movement.

The regulations governing this late-medieval trial process, both the equipment and the personnel, are described in minute detail in Eike of Reggow's *Sachsenspiegel* (written between 1209 and 1233), which is one of the oldest and most influential law books written in the German language.⁷³ The five paragraphs of the *Landrecht* I 63 contain extensive descriptions of the *iudicium pugnae*,⁷⁴ which are illustrated in three of the four available manuscripts (cf. below). Eike drew up his law writings between 1225 and 1235. At this time, the court duel had already been subjected to clear restrictions due to its damnation at the fourth Lateran-council (1215).⁷⁵ In his writings, the author supports his statements with common law

⁷² Cf. Gerd Althoff, *Spielregeln der Politik im Mittelalter. Kommunikation in Frieden und Fehde*, Darmstadt 1997; Thomas W. Gallant: „Honor, Masculinity, and Ritual Knife Fighting in Nineteenth-Century Greece.“ In: *American Historical Review* 105 (2000), p. 358-82. – For the duel in court and its genesis out of the church ordeal, refer to Adalbert Erler, art. ‚Gottesurteil‘, in: Adalbert Erler and Ekkehard Kaufmann (eds.): *Handwörterbuch zur deutschen Rechtsgeschichte*, 5 volumes, Berlin 1971-1998 (quoted as HRG), vol. 1, col. 1769-1773, especially. col. 1770ff.; Karl Demeter, art. ‚Duell‘, in: HRG, vol. 1, col. 789-790; D. Brennecke, art. ‚Kempfe‘, in: HRG, vol. 2, col. 700-701, idem, art. ‚Lohnkämpfer‘, in: HRG, vol. 3, col. 31-32; Dagmar Hüpper-Dröge, „Der gerichtliche Zweikampf im Spiegel der Bezeichnungen für ‚Kampf‘, ‚Kämpfer‘, ‚Waffen‘.“ In: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 18 (1984), p. 607-661, on the *Sachsenspiegel* especially, p. 659-661.

⁷³ Eike von Reggow. *Der Sachsenspiegel*. Edited by Clausdieter Schott, Zürich ²1991 (Manesse Bibliothek der Weltliteratur), municipal law I 63, p. 84-88; Eike von Reggow: *Sachsenspiegel. Landrecht und Lehnrecht*. Edited by Friedrich Ebel, Stuttgart ²1999 (RUB 3355), p. 66-68).

⁷⁴ Ulrike Lade-Messerschmied, „Die Gebärdensprache der Wolfenbütteler Bilderhandschrift des Sachsenspiegels.“ In: *Die Wolfenbütteler Bilderhandschrift des Sachsenspiegels*. Commentary volume to the facsimile edition Edited by Ruth Schmidt-Wiegand, Berlin 1993, p. 185-200, here p. 198.

⁷⁵ Cf. Dagmar Hüpper-Dröge (as footnote 72), p. 660.

(“Gewohnheitsrecht”; cf. the preamble in verse, Vs. 151-158), which had been practiced for generations. The elaborateness of his rules documents a long established tradition of court battles. These rules also structure combat against an accused who did not appear at court – a highly ritualized performance. Such a fight executed an as-if-action against the other combatant who was considered to be present in absentia. The final *sentence* (*Landrecht* I 63 §5) makes this explicit by affirming that the performance (concretely, the strictly monitored course of movements) justifies the judgment in favor of the present fighter: “With this, the accused was convicted of whatever it was of which he stood accused, on account of which he had been challenged to a duel. And the judge was then to judge the accused as if he had been defeated in combat.”⁷⁶ The visual perception of the performance was transparent for everyone involved. The accused who failed to appear was nonetheless invisibly present, due not to magic but rather to an agreement inherent in the ritual. It was the only way to carry out the ritual and to resolve the conflict.

At first, the text describes the circumstances under which a plaintiff could demand a duel with the defendant.⁷⁷ Only the last paragraph (*Landrecht* I 63 §5) discusses the exception that is interesting here: if the accused does not appear in the arena, then the court bailiff, accompanied by two lay assessors, should summon him once, and if necessary, twice more to fight. If he still defaults, the trial takes an extraordinary course:

*En kumt her [der Beklagte] zu der dritten ladunge nicht vor, der kleger sal uf sten unde sich zu kamphe erbiten, unde sal zwene slege unde einen stich ton wider den wint.*⁷⁸

This description exemplifies the underlying rules of battle, consisting of an actual choreography of movement – apart from the rules for equipment and personnel

⁷⁶ Eike von Repgow: *Der Sachsenspiegel*, Ldr. I 63 §5, ed. Schott (as footnote 73), p. 88: „Damit hat er jenen solcher Klage überführt, derentwegen er ihn zum Zweikampf herausgefordert hat. Und so soll denn der Richter den Angeklagten richten, als ob er im Zweikampf überwunden worden wäre.“

⁷⁷ Eike von Repgow: *Der Sachsenspiegel*, Ldr. I 63 §1-4, ed. Schott (as footnote 73), p. 84-88.

⁷⁸ Eike von Repgow: *Der Sachsenspiegel*, Ldr. I 63 §5, ed. Ebel (as footnote 73), p. 68 (If the accused does not present himself after having been invited a third time, the plaintiff shall rise and begin the fight, executing two blows and one stab against the wind).

(eye witnesses must be present!). The plaintiff has to rise from the battle chair, consent to the fight and execute two blows and one stab against the wind. These clearly regulated elements of body-language visualize law – a performative feature which strongly characterizes the Germanic-German concept of law: “The bodies of the persons participating in the legal process functioned to a certain extent as concrete embodiments of abstract concepts, of the law itself.”⁷⁹ This function of gestures raises a methodological problem, namely: how to abstract the law-performing gesture from signs that had other functions, for example, communicative or referential gestures. Ott argues that “their actual use in the judicial process” has hardly ever been described. In our case, however, it seems to be unmistakably encoded. The ritualized physical procedure imparts a clear function to invisibility. Contrary to the examples that have been presented thus far, invisibility does not represent an insidious threat and attack by an invisible aggressor (as, for example, in the wild or in the *Nibelungenlied*, when Siegfried acts under the invisibility cloak. The legal ritual also does not entail for any of the participants a fallacy in perception or a loss of control. It is, as it were, the exact opposite: the result of an agreement by all persons involved. The invisibility of the accused stands for his virtual presence in the duel and provides the legal basis for the performance of a battle with two fighters of whom only one is visible. As a result, the interpretation of all visual signals follows this joint convention.

As previously mentioned, the extensive textual description of the duel with the invisible opponent is illustrated in three of the four extant manuscripts with pictures (it is omitted in the manuscript from Heidelberg). How do the illustrated manuscripts, which have a common model, visualize the conflict-solving ritual in this special case? I will focus on the relevant folio in the latest illuminated codex

⁷⁹ Norbert H. Ott, „Der Körper als konkrete Hülle des Abstrakten. Zum Wandel der Rechtsgebärde im Spätmittelalter.“ In: *Gepeinigt, begehrt, vergessen. Symbolik und Sozialbezug des Körpers im späten Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*. Edited by Klaus Schreiner and Norbert Schnitzler, München 1992, p. 223-241, here p. 226-227: „Der Körper der am Rechtshandeln beteiligten Personen fungiert gewissermaßen als konkrete Hülle des Abstrakten, des Rechts selbst.“

(W, fol. 26^r, picture register 3).⁸⁰ The Wolfenbüttel Codex is essentially an exact copy of the pictorial manuscript of Dresden and was written no later than 1375. It differs only minutely from the illustration in the Dresden manuscript (the “head of the wind” has a slightly more coarse physiognomy and he rests on a house of clouds). The comparable illustration in the Oldenburg manuscript is laterally inverted. The “head of the wind” is in the upper right corner, whereas the judge sits on the left, enthroned over the plaintiff, who is on the right. Contrary to the other two judges, he is shouldering a sword on his left and is executing a demonstrative and commanding gesture towards the “head of the wind.”

The Wolfenbüttel Codex represents the scene as a whole. As far as our special case is concerned, its illustrations remain true to the text, which is located in the right column of the same folio, to which the illuminations in the registers are anchored by rubricated initials. The miniaturist adheres precisely to the legal prescriptions (fig. 8).⁸¹ The same approach also holds true in those instances in which the illumination at first seems abstract or not very close to the text, for example, as with the two duels depicted at the edge of the picture.⁸² The sun shines on both opponents and watches over them because this is the way in which the image is anchored to the text: the sun, respectively, the shadow, needs to be distributed equally over both figures (fig. 9).⁸³ At first glance, the blue, blowing face in the upper left-hand corner of the illustration of the fight against the invisible opponent also seems to represent an abstraction. Here again, however, the text provides an explanation: the face personifies the wind against which the plaintiff has to

⁸⁰ Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, cod. Guelf. 3.1. Aug. 2^o; Facsimile: Eike von Repgow, *Sachsenspiegel*. The Wolfenbüttel pictorial manuscript of the *Sachsenspiegel*. 3 volumes, Facsimile-volume. Edited by Ruth Schmidt-Wiegand, Berlin 1993.

⁸¹ Eike von Repgow: *Der Sachsenspiegel*, Ldr. I 63 §4, ed. Schott, p. 87 (Cod. W, fol. 26r); cf. the introductory remarks to the iconography of gestures by Ulrike Lade-Messerschmied (as footnote 74), p. 185-188.

⁸² See Clausdieter Schott, „Zur bildlichen Wiedergabe abstrakter Textstellen im *Sachsenspiegel*.“ In: *Text-Bild-Interpretation. Untersuchungen zu den Bilderhandschriften des Sachsenspiegels*. Edited by Ruth Schmidt-Wiegand. München 1986 (Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften 55/1), S. 11-58; and also, in the same volume, Ruth Schmidt-Wiegand, „Text und Bild in den Codices picturati des ›Sachsenspiegels‹. Überlegungen zur Funktion der Illustration,“ p. 189-203; for the iconography of law and, more concretely, the modes of visualisation in lawtexts see Colette Brunschwig: *Visualisierung von Rechtsnormen*. Legal Design, Zürich 2000 (Zürcher Studien zur Rechtsgeschichte 45), on the iconography of the *Sachsenspiegel* see p. 116-216.

⁸³ Eike von Repgow: *Der Sachsenspiegel*, Ldr. I 63 §4, ed. Schott, p. 87 (Cod. W, fol. 26r, picture rail 1).

fight (fig. 10).⁸⁴ In addition, the blue face functions as a real substitute for the combatant who has, as it were, vanished into thin air. He loses the case as soon as the blows and the stab against the wind have been executed.

The Wolfenbüttel codex demonstrates in exemplary fashion the relevance of the bond between the two media (word and image). It also offers insights into the meaning of invisibility. Text and picture remain bound to each other both in the *Sachsenspiegel* and, as has already been shown, in the Iwein-frescoes at the castle of Rodeneck. The descriptive text of the legal ritual – as well as the narrative of the magic fighter – adds to the transparency of the image. In the first instance, they express the consensual basis for the visual perception of the battle. In the second case, they shape the audience's perception of the visualized invisibility – precisely that element that is interpreted so differently in the sources discussed in this essay.

5. Conclusion

*“The alternate reality of the Middle Ages was a slippery and dangerous world of motion.”*⁸⁵

Whoever orients himself in this world with the help of his eyes is exposed to an invisible aggressor; whoever wants to avenge himself against an invisible opponent and physically attack him, runs the great risk of ridiculing himself – at least in front of the informed observers of the battle. This is probably true for all historically possible worlds. Whereas under the omen of terrorism, late modernism is forced to accustom itself to such uncanny opponents, the Middle Ages never seemed to have lost sight of them. Moreover, literature and the arts seemed to have suggested such visual images to their audiences in order to explore the inner-mental liminal grounds in which the eyes cannot add any knowledge. These literary fictions did not only offer amusing visual spaces to the audiences for epic. They also have enabled cautious fumbling in a world that causes disorientation. Visually observing the outside world meant to secure one's self as much as possi-

⁸⁴ Eike von Repgow: *Der Sachsenspiegel*, Ldr. I 63 §4, ed. Schott, p. 87 (Cod. W, fol. 26r, picture rail 3).

⁸⁵ Stephen G. Nichols. “The New Medievalism. Tradition and Discontinuity in Medieval Culture,” in: *The New Medievalism*. Edited by Marina S. Brownlee, Kevin Brownlee and Stephen G. Nichols, Baltimore / London 1991, p. 1-26, here p. 23.

ble in an obscurely ordered world. Not knowing how to orient oneself in that world was tantamount to being lost. Perhaps it was so much more reassuring to be told stories in such a way that one could open one's inner eye and then be amused with sovereignty by those who had been visually deceived.

Whoever exposes the invisible endangers its telos in the battle for survival. Wild animals and knights battling for courtly honor avoid this in order to ensure their own life. He, however, who in paradoxical fashion makes the invisible present to the physical eye, creates opportunities for deepened theoretical insight into the nature of perception. In this telos, the courtly epic does not differ from the visionary literature of the Middle Ages. Both the courtly narrators Chrétien de Troyes and Hartmann von Aue use the narrative's power of exclusion to this end. They build on a selective transparency that favors their audience in a special way. Using the characteristic irony of the narrator, they honor their audience with a wink by letting it participate in a liminal experience that forces open every restriction in human perspective. This ironic point of view also serves as an amusing didactic commentary on visibility, even as it remains a source of severe distress for both the avengers and Laudine. Chrétien and Hartmann grant the narration its best and most powerful opportunity. This chance can be termed an "art of distinction." But what does distinction mean within the context of seeing or not-seeing? The narrative assigns to some participants aporias of perception, and as a result, they remain furious. To others, however, namely, the reader, it offers the possibility of presence and sovereign, reflective amusement.

Captions

Fig. 1: *Myrmarachne formicaria*, Ghanaian Leaping Spider. Photo: Klaus Lunau.

Fig. 2: *Phycodurus eques*, 'Sea Dragon', belonging to the Family of Sea Horses. Photo: John G. Shedd Aquarium Chicago.

Fig. 3: *Macrolemys temminckii*, Sea Turtle. Photo: Klaus Lunau.

Fig. 4: Schloss Rodeneck / Entrance to Room with Frescoes. Photo: Reproduced from Schupp / Szklenar.

Fig. 5: Division of scenes in the Yvain-frescoes at Schloss Rodeneck. Foto: Reproduction from Schupp / Szklenar.

Fig. 6: Porticullis at Schloss Rodeneck. Foto: Reproduction from a postcard.

Fig. 7: Yvain-frescoes at Schloss Rodeneck, scene 10. Photo: Reproduced from Schupp / Szklenar.

Fig. 8: Eike von Repgow: *Der Sachsenspiegel*, Landrecht I 63,5, after: Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, cod. Guelf. 3.1. Aug. 2o, fol. 26r. Photo: Reproduced from the facsimile.

Fig. 9: Eike von Repgow: *Der Sachsenspiegel*, Landrecht I 63,5, after: Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, cod. Guelf. 3.1. Aug. 2o, fol. 26r, image register 1. Photo: Reproduced from the facsimile.

Fig. 10: Eike von Repgow: *Der Sachsenspiegel*, Landrecht I 63,5, after: Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, cod. Guelf. 3.1. Aug. 2o, fol. 26r, image register 3. Photo: Reproduced from the facsimile.









I

XVI

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Sus sal ma ouch vor wunde ein tot. **lxvii**
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mit bit hegen en buyt ad em des tore
mae wer he si en vor zu stene ni kampfhe
d vor leget alle ge zuge wen so mag man en
ane kampf nich gewine he en si denne
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