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“ein krücke was sîn stiure”

Literary Perspectives on Old Age and Disability in Medieval Courtly Romances (“Eneas”, “Erec”, “Iwein”/“Yvain”)

Abstract

Old age and the process of ageing have received a lot of attention in recent research on medieval literature, mainly in historical studies on rhetoric, topoi, genealogy and gender. My paper focuses on ageing and old age as a relevant subject for premodern literary disability studies. Elderly characters in medieval literature appear to be in a complex situation between ability as a positive mark of distinction and privilege (honouring their wisdom and experience) and disability as impairment, weakness, and privation that may cause a general handicap in human life. After an overview my paper focuses on elderly characters in selected romances by Heinrich von Veldeke (“Eneasroman”), Hartmann von Aue (“Erec”¹ and “Iwein”), and their Old French sources. Even though the elderly figures in medieval vernacular narratives usually play rather marginal roles in the plot, they are connected to important subjects such as intergenerational relationships, succession to the throne, (lack of) physical strength in battle, experience, wisdom, and the (un)willingness to step back behind the younger characters.

From a physical perspective, many aspects of ageing and old age seem to be naturally determined biological facts, part of evolution or at least to have remained constant over centuries in the sense of *longue durée*.² Social sciences tend to have a different view: they

1 The quotation “ein krücke was sîn stiure”, “A crutch supported him”, is taken from Hartmann von Aue’s “Erec” (Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*. *Mittelhochdeutsch/Neuhochdeutsch*, ed., transl. and comment. by Volker Mertens, Stuttgart 2008 [RUB 18530], v. 290 (E); English translation: Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*, ed. and transl. by Cyril Edwards, Suffolk 2014 [German Romance V], p. 17).

2 Christian A. Neumann, *Perspektiven einer Gerontomediävistik*, in: *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 98 (2018), pp. 387–405, at p. 388; Jürgen Wiener, *Einleitung*, in: id. (Ed.), *Altersphantasien im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Düsseldorf 2015 (*Studia humaniora* 49), pp. 7–15, at pp. 7, 10.

regard old age primarily as a cultural and historical construct that is regarded differently in varying times and societies.³ Archaeological and anthropological studies which seem to be closest to a historical ‘reality’ teach us that both views cannot be separated or measured up against each other.⁴ Within this discourse, that requires interdisciplinary approaches, literary studies seem to be relatively free of limitations. Their sources naturally do not ‘operate’ without connection to a historical and sociocultural context. However, they give a voice to hopes, dreams, fears, dangers, and alternatives, and they present imaginations and abstract concepts.⁵ Like any other form of art, they are free to experiment, and this has consequences for the way literary texts depict and reflect old age and ageing.

1 Old Age and Disability in Medieval Literature. An Overview

The most common premodern cultural model for ageing is the understanding of life as a sequence of stages, often represented by sections of a wheel or steps on a staircase, each representing a certain number of years. As pictures show, every stage is connected with certain activities, clothes, accessories, and a standing in society that decreases from the middle of life onwards. Old age usually begins around the age of 50 years and persons in the phases of life starting from 60 to 70 years onward are considered to be very old. Textual representations connect these advanced stages of life with terms such as “weak”, “decrepit”, and “withering”.⁶ This model does not leave much room for individual physical or mental conditions connected to ageing, and it gives the impression that impairments

3 Cf. e.g. Lynn Botelho, *Old Age and Menopause in Rural Women of Early Modern Suffolk*, in: ead./Pat Thane (Eds.), *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500*, Harlow et al. 2001, pp. 43–65.

4 Cf. e.g. Eva Stauch, *Alt werden im Frühmittelalter*, in: Brigitte Röder/Willemijn de Jong/Kurt W. Alt (Eds.), *Alter(n) anders denken. Kulturelle und biologische Perspektiven*, Köln 2012 (*Kulturgeschichte der Medizin* 2), pp. 133–160.

5 Tory Vandeventer Pearman: “[L]iterary discourse’s proliferation of the disabled body allows for a complex interrogation of the social, historical, and cultural understandings of the construction of the body and its race, sex, gender, class, and ability that does not exist in other discourses” (Tory Vandeventer Pearman, *Women and Disability in Medieval Literature*, New York 2010, at p. 21); cf. also Andreas Kraß, *Einführung: Historische Intersektionalitätsforschung als kulturwissenschaftliches Projekt*, in: Nataša Bedeković/id./Astrid Lembke (Eds.), *Durchkreuzte Helden. Das “Nibelungenlied” und Fritz Langs Film “Die Nibelungen” im Licht der Intersektionalitätsforschung*, Bielefeld 2014 (*GenderCodes* 17), pp. 7–47, at p. 18.

6 See also the chapter by Andrea von Hülsen-Esch in this volume; for literature in summary Sonja Kerth, *Alter(n) und Dis/ability in der mittelalterlichen Literatur*, in: Cordula Nolte/Bianca

are considered ‘normal’ and inevitable for a human being of a certain age.⁷ Wheels and stairs do not consider intersectional factors such as gender or social rank, because only men and members of the social upper class are depicted. These models are very common in premodern literature, especially in didactic contexts that teach people how to behave properly according to their status and stage of life. Due to this, literary studies researching age and ageing have specifically focused on aspects and questions connected with the stages of life and analysed a wide field of sources, especially lyrics, didactic and epic literature.⁸ Some of the topoi connected to old age are positive, others are negative; they tend to be normative and stereotypical.⁹ For old age and disability in complex narratives, the life stage model is not sufficient for interpretation.

Frohne/Uta Halle/Sonja Kerth (Eds.), *Dis/ability History der Vormoderne. Ein Handbuch. Pre-modern Dis/ability History. A Companion*, Affalterbach 2017, pp. 210–211.

7 Neumann, *Perspektiven* (see note 2), pp. 399–400.

8 Groundsetting: Ernst R. Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, Bern-München 1973, pp. 108–115. Cf. also Thorsten Fitzon/Sandra Linden/Kathrin Liess/Dorothee Elm von der Osten (Eds.), *Alterszäsuren. Zeit und Lebensalter in Literatur, Theologie und Geschichte*, Berlin-Boston 2012; Dorothee Elm/Thorsten Fitzon/Kathrin Liess/Sandra Linden (Eds.), *Alters-topoi. Das Wissen von den Lebensaltern in Literatur, Kunst und Theologie*, Berlin-New York 2009; Ruth Sassenhausen, *Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen in der Periodisierung menschlicher Lebensalter. Zu ‘Schwellenzuständen’ in der Artusepik des hohen Mittelalters*, in: Ulrich Knefelkamp/Kristian Bosselmann-Cyran (Eds.), *Grenze und Grenzüberschreitung im Mittelalter. 11. Symposium des Mediävistenverbandes vom 14.–17. März 2005 in Frankfurt a. O.*, Berlin 2007, pp. 200–212; Claudia Brinker-von der Heyde, *Junge Alte – alte Junge. Signale und paradoxe Verschränkungen des Alter(n)s in höfischer Epik*, in: Elisabeth Vavra (Ed.), *Alterskulturen des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit. Internationaler Kongress Krems an der Donau 16.–18. 10. 2006, Wien 2008* (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit 21), pp. 141–155; For appropriate behaviour of old people in the context of didactic literature, cf. e. g. Ingrid Bennewitz, “wann alte weib und änten gehören in ainen see.” Ratschläge zum Umgang mit älteren Frauen und Männern in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, in: Vavra (Ed.), *Alterskulturen* (see above), pp. 117–128; Wernfried Hofmeister, “Hânt alte liute jungen muot, die jungen alten, deist niht guot.” Das ‘sprichwörtliche Alter’ in Freidanks “Bescheidenheit”, in: Vavra (Ed.), *Alterskulturen* (see above), pp. 129–140; Sonja Kerth, “myn heubt daz ist mir worden gra / myn ruck hat sich gebogen” – Alter(n) in der Sangspruchdichtung von Reinmar von Zweter bis Michel Beheim, in: JOWG 21 (2016–2017: Horst Brunner/Freimut Löser [Eds.], *Sangspruchdichtung zwischen Reinmar von Zweter, Oswald von Wolkenstein und Michel Beheim*), pp. 59–72; Sonja Kerth, “Homo debilis”. Dis/ability and Alter(n) in kleinepischen Verserzählungen, in: Ingrid Bennewitz/Jutta Eming/Johannes Traulsen (Eds.), *Gender Studies – Queer Studies – Intersektionalität. Eine Zwischenbilanz aus mediävistischer Perspektive*, Göttingen 2019 (Berliner Mittelalter- und Frühneuezeitforschung 25), pp. 269–292.

9 For topoi and metaphors used, cf. Simone Loleit, *Zeit- und Alterstopik im Minnesang. Eine Untersuchung zu Liedern Walthers von der Vogelweide, Reinmars, Neidharts und Oswalds von Wolkenstein*, Berlin 2018 (Beiträge zur Mittelalterforschung 30), pp. 31–52, 155–180.

The research on old age and disability (and intersectionality) in medieval literature is still in its early stages.¹⁰ This can be seen in the context of a certain reluctance (especially in German literary studies) to work with the methodological tools offered by disability history and intersectional studies in general. It is also a consequence of the way the texts themselves deal with old age: vernacular medieval love lyrics, for example, usually portray young, beautiful people in love affairs that are (hopefully, but not likely) about to start. According to the principle of *kalokagathia*, an old and unattractive body stands for deficit – both outward and inward – and therefore does not conform to the idealized lady in most of Trobadors', Trouvères' and Minnesänger's lyrics.¹¹

In narratives (for example in courtly romances and heroic epics), aged persons are usually minor figures and remain far from the centre of the plot and the narrator's main focus.¹² Courtly romances typically present the life of young knights growing into an adult ruler's responsibility through fighting and experiencing love and marriage. The focus is usually on finding a wife and a place in the (fictional) feudal society. Ageing noblemen who rule their lands in a peaceful and orderly way, who live a courtly life and turn over their property to their sons only play supporting roles in the plot¹³ and their

10 Detlef Goller, "die jungen zir gelichen, die alten zuo den alten." Der Platz alter Menschen in der höfischen Literatur, in: Cordula Nolte (Ed.), *Homo debilis. Behinderte – Kranke – Versehrte in der Gesellschaft des Mittelalters*, Korb 2009 (Studien und Texte zur Geistes- und Sozialgeschichte des Mittelalters 3), pp. 149–163; Rasma Lazda-Cazers, *Old Age in Wolfram von Eschenbach's "Parzival" and "Titurel"*, in: Albrecht Classen (Ed.), *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, Berlin-New York 2007 (Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture 2), pp. 201–218; Sonja Kerth, *Wolframs Greise. Alter(n) im "Parzival", "Titurel" und "Willehalm"*, in: *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 144 (2015), pp. 48–76.

11 Cf. e. g. Volker Mertens, *Alter als Rolle. Zur Verzeitlichung des Körpers im Minnesang*, in: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 128 (2006), pp. 409–430; Loleit, *Zeit- und Alterstopik* (see note 9).

12 Cf. esp. the articles by Goller, "Die jungen" (see note 10); Barbara Haupt, *Alte Männer – alte Frauen in der volkssprachigen (deutschen) Epik des Mittelalters*, in: Wiener (Ed.), *Altersphantasien* (see note 2), pp. 41–68; Brinker-von der Heyde, *Junge Alte* (see note 8).

13 Ines Heiser, *Generationenkonflikte? Erbrecht und Elternfürsorge in der mittelhochdeutschen Literatur*, in: ead./Andreas Meyer (Eds.), *Aufblühen und Verwelken. Mediävistische Forschungen zu Kindheit und Alter. 4. Tagung der Arbeitsgruppe "Marburger Mittelalterzentrum (MMZ)". Marburg, 17. November 2006, Leipzig 2009*, pp. 145–158; Detlef Goller, "Denn was wäre die Literatur ohne die Erzählung von Familiengeschichten, Nachfolge- und Erbstreitigkeiten." *Nachlassfragen in den höfischen Romanen des hohen Mittelalters*, in: Christoph Oliver Mayer/Alexandra-Kathrin Stanislaw-Kemenah (Eds.), *Die Pein der Weisen. Alter(n) in Romanischem Mittelalter und Renaissance*, München 2012 (Mittelalter und Renaissance in der Romania 5), pp. 179–196.

wives receive even less attention. In many romances, the parental generation has already passed away, or is not even mentioned.

In heroic epics and German *chansons de geste*, elderly characters traditionally play more active and prestigious roles as wise counsellors, experienced warriors and rulers. Still, they are usually supporting young protagonists as well, as seen in the case of old Hildebrand in “Nibelungenlied” (around 1200) and Dietrich von Bern epics (13–15th century). Other examples include old Heimrich in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s “Willehalm” (around 1220–1225) and old Berchtung in the “Wolfdietrich epics” (versions range from 13–15th century) who try to fight like the young ones, but experience handicaps due to physical weakness at times.¹⁴ There seems to be only one elderly character at the centre of attention: In “Karlmeinet-Kompilation”, old Charlemagne still rules and fights undisputedly, but at times he also looks back passively and with melancholy on the defeat at Roncesvalles, when young Roland and Olivier fell in battle. On occasions like these, the mental, sensual and physical conditions of older male figures may be mentioned. Older women are hardly found in heroic epics. If they are named and singled out at all, it is because they support their husbands, sons, and nephews and form the emotional centre of the family, just like old Ute in the Dietrich epics and old Irmschart in “Willehalm”. This short synopsis suggests that epic narrations determine old figures less by general topoi about ageing and old age than by literary factors connected with individual texts: they are more or less fictional, determined by genre, plot, and themes, by figure concepts, narratology, and aesthetics.¹⁵

In spite of genre-related trends, every text needs to be examined with regard to its specific view on old age: are elderly figures presented at all? Which gender do they have, and what part do they play in the general plot? How are they viewed by the narrator and by other figures? Are they presented as being healthy, active, and integral in society or are they portrayed as handicapped, relying on the help of others and excluded? If elderly characters are shown to keep or acquire honourable roles like counselling, teaching, and

14 Cf. e. g. Wolfgang Dinkelacker, *Der alte Held. Belege aus mittelalterlicher Heldendichtung und ihr kulturhistorischer Quellenwert*, in: Vavra (Ed.), *Alterskulturen* (see note 8), pp. 183–202; Kerth, *Wolframs Greise* (see note 10). The lament about physical weakness is a traditional topos in heroic epics, starting with Nestor in “Ilias” (Hartwin Brandt, verbal communication).

15 Cf. also the chapter on “Beowulf” in the following monograph by Thijs Porck: Thijs Porck, *Old Age in Early Medieval England. A Cultural History*, Woodbridge 2019 (*Anglo-Saxon Studies* 33), pp. 177–211; cf. also by the same author: id., *Vergrijzing in een Oudengels heldendicht. De rol van oude koningen in de Beowulf*, in: Madoc. *Tijdschrift over de Middeleeuwen* 26 (2012), pp. 66–76.

judging,¹⁶ they stand for wisdom, purity, and merit and ask for authority, respect, and awe. They might be presented as having developed strategies of survival and adaptation through life experience. They seem to be blessed by being granted a long life and may appear to be the emotional centre of the family ('grandma-/grandpa-effect'). In these cases, having 'white hair' stands for a positive distinction, a privilege and special ability.¹⁷

However, if elderly characters fail to acquire or keep honourable roles, the texts demonstrate marginalization and devaluation. Elderly characters might be subject to an increase in illness and other impairments, such as a decline of the senses and physical and mental weakness. Old age might even be portrayed as being a chronic disease itself. Holding on to property, office, influence, sexuality, and other worldly joys is often considered to be inappropriate for the elderly and to pose a threat to the young:¹⁸ many texts voice the opinion that all of these things should be left to the young, while the old should focus on death and afterlife.¹⁹ If regarded this way, old age appears to be a kind of *debilitas*, meaning impairment, weakness, and privation. Following this logic, old age may be regarded as a general handicap in human life²⁰ and thus be considered as a disability.²¹

16 Rolf Sprandel, Modelle des Alterns in der europäischen Tradition, in: Hans Süssmuth (Ed.), Historische Anthropologie. Der Mensch in der Geschichte, Göttingen 1984 (Kleine Vandenhoeck-Reihe 1499), pp. 110–122; Hans-Joachim von Kondratowitz, 'Alter' und 'Krankheit'. Die Dynamik der Diskurse und der Wandel ihrer historischen Aushandlungsformen, in: Josef Ehmer / Peter Gutschner (Eds.), Das Alter im Spiel der Generationen. Historische und sozialwissenschaftliche Beiträge, Wien-Köln-Weimar 2000 (Grenzenloses Österreich), pp. 109–155.

17 Hans-Werner Goetz, Alt sein und alt werden in der Vorstellungswelt des frühen und hohen Mittelalters, in: Vavra (Ed.), Alterskulturen (see note 8), pp. 17–58, at pp. 41–42, 48–49; cf. also Detlef Goller, Von dem grauen Haar: Eine Spurensuche in der mittelhochdeutschen Literatur, in: Kurt Gärtner / Hans-Joachim Solms (Eds.), "Von Ion der wisheit". Gedenkschrift für Manfred Lemmer, Sandersdorf 2009 (Edition Scriptorum), pp. 95–106.

18 This perspective dominates the attitude towards old age in the pre-Reformation Church, cf. Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, „Die Kindlein spotten meiner schier.“ Quellen und Reflexionen zu den Alten und zum Vergreisungsprozess im Mittelalter, Hamburg 2006 (Hergemöllers historiographische Libelli 4), pp. 68–69, 84; cf. also Sprandel (see note 16), p. 115.

19 Kerth, "myn heupt" (see note 8).

20 Hans-Werner Goetz, "Debilis". Vorstellungen von menschlicher Gebrechlichkeit im frühen Mittelalter, in: Nolte (Ed.), "Homo debilis" (see note 10), pp. 21–55, at p. 46.

21 For general concepts of premodern disability history, cf. e. g.: Nolte et al., Dis/ability History (see note 6); Irina Metzler, A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages. Cultural Considerations of Physical Impairment, New York-London 2013 (Routledge Studies in Cultural History 20); Bianca Frohne, Leben mit "kranckhait". Der gebrechliche Körper in der häuslichen Überlieferung

The literary sources I use for my considerations about old age and disability are vernacular courtly romances dating back to the late 12th and early 13th century: “Eneas” by Heinrich von Veldeke, “Erec” and “Iwein” by Hartmann von Aue and their Old French sources.²² My analysis begins with an adaptation of the Bechdel test²³, which is a list of questions developed by feminist researcher Alison Bechdel to evaluate US-American films with regard to their gender focus. Adjusted to my subject, one needs to ask:

1. Do the analysed romances portray at least two elderly characters? Are their names known?
2. Do the elderly characters talk to and interact with each other?
3. Do they talk about something other than about the younger characters? Do they act independently from the needs and goals of the younger characters?

After my text analysis, I will try to examine the portrayal of old age in relation to disability and to analyse the potential of literary conceptions of ageing and old age for the recipients.

2 “Eneas”

The Middle High German romance “Eneasroman” was written in the time period 1170–1180 by Heinrich von Veldeke.²⁴ It is based on the Old French “Roman d’Eneas”²⁵, which was written around 1160 by an unknown author. In addition, Veldeke uses Vergil’s “Aeneis”, a Vergil-commentary by Servius and poetry by Ovid as sources.²⁶

des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts. Überlegungen zu einer Disability History der Vormoderne, Affalterbach 2014 (Studien und Texte zur Geistes- und Sozialgeschichte des Mittelalters 9).

22 See also Bernard Ribémont’s chapter about old age in French medieval literature in this volume.

23 Website: <http://bechdeltest.com/>; 7. 6. 2022.

24 Heinrich von Veldeke, Eneasroman. Mittelhochdeutsch/Neuhochdeutsch. Nach dem Text von Ludwig Ettmüller, transl. and comment. by Dieter Kartschoke, Stuttgart 1986 (RUB 8303) (ER). English Translation: Rodney W. Fisher: Heinrich von Veldeke, “Eneas”. A Comparison with the “Roman d’Eneas” and a Translation into English, Bern et al. 1992 (Australian and New Zealand Studies in German Language and Literature 17).

25 Le Roman d’Eneas, transl. and introd. by Monica Schöler-Beinhauer, München 1972 (Klassische Texte des romanischen Mittelalters in zweisprachigen Ausgaben 9) (RdE). English translations by S.K.

26 For general information, cf. Joachim Hamm/Marie-Sophie Masse, Aeneasromane, in: Geert H. M. Claassens/Fritz Peter Knapp/Hartmut Kugler (Eds.), Historische und religiöse Erzählun-

Eneas leaves the burning city of Troy by order of the gods. In Carthage, he begins an affair with Queen Dido, whom he leaves in order to continue his journey to Italy where he is to found a new Troy. After a journey to the underworld, Eneas travels to Italy in order to marry princess Lavinia. Her fiancé, Turnus, refuses to give up his claim on the princess and the inheritance connected to her. Both men and their allies get involved in heavy fighting. Lavinia's elderly father, Latinus, supports Eneas, which is contrary to his former promises to Turnus. Lavinia's mother, on the other hand, stays loyal to Turnus and tries to prevent the marriage with Eneas by all means. During the negotiations and fights, Eneas and Lavinia see each other and fall deeply in love. After Eneas wins the battle against his opponent and kills Turnus, he marries Lavinia and becomes Latinus's successor. The old queen dies miserable and full of rage.

There are few elderly characters in "Eneasroman", and most of them are male. They are identified as being old by means of the use of the Middle High German word "ald(e)", and with distinctive attributes such as grey hair and bodily frailty, and sometimes with traits such as stubbornness. Some of them hold prestigious roles such as experienced counsellors or warriors, heads of families and rulers, and are seen as being at the point of settling all affairs for the future (or refusing to do so). Thus, important subjects such as intergenerational relationships, succession of rulership, and cooperation with vassals in times of change are dealt with in the context of ageing; these are topics that are also relevant to premodern elites beyond the literature itself.²⁷

Intergenerational relationships and matters of succession are discussed in the scenes featuring the royal family in Pallanteum: Eneas asks them for help in his struggle against Turnus. The king and queen welcome Eneas warmly. They give him precious gifts and even let him take their only son, Pallas, who is barely an adolescent, into battle. The old (ER v. 6116), wise (ER v. 6297) und famous (ER v. 6189) king is named Evander, while the queen remains nameless. Evander tells Eneas about his long friendship with Eneas's father, Anchises, and the emotional closeness is transferred to the next generation. After Pallas is killed by Turnus, his elderly parents are left behind without any positive perspective on life: they lost their only son and successor, and they mourn excessively, even fainting from sorrow (Evander's frailty and vulnerability appear even more strongly in "Roman d'Eneas": vv. 4760, 6301–6315). Especially the queen abandons all hope. In the German romance, she curses Eneas and threatens to turn away from her gods if they

gen, Berlin-Boston 2014 (Germania Litteraria Mediaevalis Francigena IV), pp. 79–116; Elisabeth Lienert, *Deutsche Antikenromane des Mittelalters*, Berlin 2001 (Grundlagen der Germanistik 39), pp. 72–102.

27 Wiener, *Einleitung* (see note 2), p. 11.

fail to avenge Pallas (ER vv. 8172–8177, 8200–8234). The loss of their only son leads the elderly couple to extremes of emotion, to hopelessness, and finally, to exclusion from the plot: after the lavish burial of Pallas, they disappear from the narrator’s attention.²⁸

My first examples present elderly characters appearing in minor parts of the plot. This is different to the royal couple of the kingdom Latium,²⁹ who play a central role in the conflict regarding the marriage of Lavinia and Eneas and the succession of the kingdom. The king is named Latinus (according to the mythological and literary tradition) while the queen is nameless in both medieval Eneas-romances (Vergil calls her Amata). Latinus stands for divine orders given and for the royal right to reverse a decision that has been made. At times, he appears to be a wise ruler and husband in a severe political and personal conflict, but occasionally he acts without sovereignty and strength. His wife legitimizes her actions based on the argument of oaths once made being sacrosanct, old legal customs and a general knowledge of human nature and culture. However, she is also depicted as being high-handed, manipulative, and full of rage.

28 For differences between “Roman d’Eneas” and Veldeke’s “Eneas” in the presentation of the royal couple cf. Fisher, Heinrich (see note 24), pp. 52, 59 and *passim*. For the scene in ER, cf. also Christoph Schanze, *Kampfzorn, Gewalteskalationen und Gemeinschaftshandeln im “Eneas” Heinrichs von Veldeke*, in: Claudia Ansorge / Cora Dietl / Titus Knäpper (Eds.), *Gewaltgenuss, Zorn und Gelächter. Die emotionale Seite der Gewalt in Literatur und Historiographie des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*, Göttingen 2015, pp. 45–87, at p. 67; Marion Oswald, *Gabe und Gewalt. Studien zur Logik und Poetik der Gabe in der frühhöfischen Erzählliteratur*, Göttingen 2004 (Historische Semantik 7), pp. 210–215. The old nobleman Tyrreus, and the old, famous counsellor and warrior Mezzentius, meet a similar fate after losing their sons. When the latter hears that his son Lausus was killed in battle, he wants to take revenge by all means even though he is wounded. He dies by the hand of the much younger Eneas, and his behaviour is marked as “tumbheit” (“folly”, v. 7901), even though his wish for revenge seems to result from pain, both emotional and from his wound, rather than from senility.

29 For Latinus in “Eneasroman” and in “Roman d’Eneas” cf. Fisher, Heinrich (see note 24), *passim*; Saskia Gall, *Erzählen von “unmāze”. Narratologische Aspekte des Kontrollverlustes im “Willehalm” Wolframs von Eschenbach*, Heidelberg 2018 (Beihefte zum Euphorion 101), pp. 13–15 and notes 2–3 with further references; Jonathan Seelye Martin, *Monopolizing Violence. “Gewalt”, Self-Control, and the Law in Heinrich von Veldeke’s “Eneasroman”*, in: *The German Quarterly* 91,1 (2018), pp. 18–33, at pp. 21–22; Oswald, Gabe (see note 28), pp. 205, 244–245; Christopher Baswell, *Men in the “Roman d’Eneas”. The Construction of Empire*, in: Clare A. Lees (Ed.), *Medieval Masculinities. Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, Minneapolis-London 1994 (Medieval Cultures 7), pp. 149–169, at p. 156. For the queen in ER and RdE cf. Fisher, Heinrich (see note 24), *passim*; in ER Gall, (see above); Schanze, *Kampfzorn* (see note 28), pp. 84–85; Silvia Schmitz, *Die Poetik der Adaptation. Literarische “inventio” im “Eneas” Heinrichs von Veldeke*, Tübingen 2007 (Hermaea NF 113), pp. 200–202 and *passim*; Baswell, *Men in the “Roman d’Eneas”* (see above), pp. 162–163.

Both the king and queen mainly focus on the marriage of the heiress and the succession of the kingdom, but at the same time, a struggle for power between the two takes place. The queen presents herself as being focused, well informed, and highly educated, but also as being furious and uncontrollable. She acts against the order of the gods and the wishes of her husband concerning the wellbeing of the kingdom and of her daughter. Thus, she is the horrifying portrayal of a medieval queen and wife.³⁰ This image is not explicitly connected to her old age for much of the text. Her devaluation takes place on a normative level by showing topoi of misogyny: women ruling over men in marriage are generally judged negatively in premodern times.³¹ She is called “old” only once (vv. 13013) when she gives up her claims and abandons her attempts to sabotage her daughter’s wedding celebration that she could not prevent in the end: “diu alde kuneginne” (“the old queen”) lies in bed for days and looks ill – rage, powerlessness and world-weariness cause her to be old and ugly and bring her life to a bad, cruel end (vv. 13089–13092).³²

Her husband appears to be weak, both physically and in family matters (which are far from ‘private’). He also demonstrates the ambivalence of old age. On occasion, Latinus is called wise and powerful (vv. 4257–4258), but also old and physically frail (vv. 4022–4025). He is a positive example of a feudal ruler when he asks his lords for their opinion and counsel, but he appears to be indecisive and at the same time reluctant to commit because he does not act resolutely in a crisis. He explicitly justifies his indecisiveness with his old age and physical weakness: “ich bin aber ein alt man, / also ir selbe wol gesiet: / ichn mach hinnen vort niet / vehten noch strîten / noch gewâfent rîten: / mir wâre zîtiger gemach” (vv. 4020–4025; “But I am an old man, as you yourselves can clearly see. I cannot go out fighting or campaigning, nor even ride in

30 Lienert calls her a “monströse Karikatur” (Lienert, *Deutsche Antikenromane* [see note 26], p. 96), but Gall states that the queen has positive traits, too, and appears ambivalent: she is an expert on love and teaches her daughter about this – her counselling and teaching both from life experience and knowledge of Ovid can be considered positive (Gall, *Erzählen* [see note 29], pp. 274–275). Cf. also Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters in Medieval German Literature*, Syracuse NY 1997, pp. 29–65.

31 The fact that she is nameless both in “Roman d’Eneas” and “Eneasroman” can be regarded as a devaluation, see the commentary by Hans Fromm in: Heinrich von Veldeke, *Eneasroman*. Die Berliner Bilderhandschrift mit Übersetzung und Kommentar, ed. by id., Frankfurt a. M. 1992 (Bibliothek des Mittelalters 4), p. 822.

32 There is no parallel in RdE; cf. Fisher, Heinrich (see note 24), p. 81; for ER cf. Haupt, *Alte Männer* (see note 12), p. 47.

armour anymore. Peace and quiet are more appropriate for my age.”³³ When Latinus advises Turnus to negotiate with Eneas and to choose another woman as his wife, Turnus openly swears at him and accuses Latinus of breaking his promise and oath (vv. 9580–9713). Latinus is not able to stop this, or to prevent his vassals from turning away from him, taking Turnus’s side on the occasion.³⁴ When the king hears about the horrible battle between the two suitor’s armies, he becomes fearful and flees in panic, leaving most of his idols behind him (vv. 11838–11850; less derogatory in RdE: vv. 9439–48). This is another manifestation of weakness and disorientation. But later on, when a single combat between Eneas and Turnus is to take place, he appears to be wise and acts in sovereign manner: he takes hostages to prevent acts of revenge and feuds after the duel (vv. 12184–12198; not in RdE). He also negotiates a proper date for the wedding after Eneas’s victory.

During the preparations for the wedding, he steps back behind Eneas and starts to recede from the narrator’s attention. The old king is now presented in the positive role of the father and ruler who retires at the right moment and hands over his daughter and kingdom to the young, active and powerful hero. Through this, the ambivalence of Latinus changes for the positive: even though he himself has become weak and old (v. 13289: “unmachtich”, and “alt”), he has found a son and successor (ER vv. 13287–13288) with the best traits to take over his kingdom. In this situation, Latinus’s own weakness sets a strong contrast for Eneas’s strength, ability to enforce his will and generosity. Latinus’s dynasty faces a bright future in the upcoming Roman Empire, even though the old king himself steps back. “Roman d’Eneas” has a very short version of this, stating only that Latinus welcomed Eneas, declared him to be the heir and turned over his lands to him (vv. 10091–10101; 10124–10130). Thus, in “Roman d’Eneas”, Latinus’s old age does not play as significant a role as in the “Eneasroman”. Latinus gets less attention during the

33 In RdE, Latinus states only that he is a very old man without a male heir (v. 3230).

34 Power is clearly connected to property: Latinus had already turned over his castles and territories to Turnus when he promised him Lavinia’s hand. Now, when he changes his opinion and the conflict with Turnus becomes virulent, the lords of his kingdom stay on Turnus’s side. Cf. Sonja Feldmann, *Gewalt und Gemeinschaft im “Eneasroman” Heinrichs von Veldeke*, in: Cora Dietl/Titus Knäpper (Eds.), *Rules and Violence. On the Cultural History of Collective Violence from Late Antiquity to the Confessional Age. Regeln und Gewalt. Zur Kulturgeschichte der kollektiven Gewalt von der Spätantike bis zum konfessionellen Zeitalter*, Berlin-Boston 2014, pp. 63–81, at pp. 67–70, 74. In RdE, the barons left Turnus, who was now in a position of isolation. Latinus expressed his personal sympathy for Turnus and offered him half of his belongings; Turnus called him childish and unfair but seemed calmer (vv. 7728–7828; cf. Fisher, Heinrich [see note 24], pp. 65–66).

whole conflict and at the nuptials, where the focus is clearly on Eneas and Lavinia. The queen and her death are not mentioned at all in this final scene.

A similar focus determines the appearance of Anchises, Eneas's aged, deceased father, in the underworld. Due to physical weakness, he had to be carried out of the burning city of Troy (ER vv. 133–136) in the first parts of the narrative, and he died during the voyage through the Mediterranean Sea. He later reappears in Eneas's dreams and advises him to visit the underworld; there, in Elysium, the two meet again (v. 3578 ff.). Anchises is more than happy to see Eneas and foretells his son's future on instruction of the gods. This future will contain battles and losses, but also the marriage to Lavinia that will lead to a glorious future of the dynasty.³⁵ The image of the weak old man³⁶ from the opening part of the narrative is now substituted with the prestigious role of the wise, old counsellor and prophet. But, this is focused completely on Eneas, who will not only have glorious descendants (who are named until Romulus, and later until Julius Caesar and Augustus), but also has a dignified ancestor.³⁷ "Roman d'Eneas" describes the father-son-relationship more emotionally: unlike Veldeke's Eneas, the French Eneas himself had carried his old father out of the burning city of Troy (RdE vv. 55–56), and their reunion and subsequent farewell in the underworld are described far more affectively (vv. 2831–2872, 3005–3014). Anchises is also closer to the gods: he summons up the generations following Eneas, and his words and deeds in Elysium are limited by the god's orders.

A very different aspect of old age is demonstrated by Sibylle, who guides Eneas through the underworld. She gives him good advice and protects him. Her social status remains unclear, and she seems to be rather 'a' Sibyl (i. e. prophetess) rather than a specific person who needs to be introduced to the listeners and readers. Heinrich von Veldeke draws far more attention to the figure than do the Old French anonymous or Vergil. Veldeke's interest is focused on her ageing female body; old age therefore becomes a matter of gender-specific aesthetics. Sibylle appears to have shrunk, she is only skin and bones, and her teeth are sparse and yellow. Her grey hair is long and dishevelled, her wrinkly neck and her mouth are black; there is curly, moss-like hair growing out of her ears which prevents her from hearing properly (ER vv. 2702–2741). This description connects old age to physical ugliness, but it does not lead to a complete devaluation of

35 Haupt, *Alte Männer* (see note 12), p. 44, Fisher, Heinrich (see note 24), pp. 34–35, 39–40.

36 There is no evidence of an earlier lameness, as mythology reports. Cf. Marie-Luise Dittrich, *Die "Eneide" Heinrichs von Veldeke. Quellenkritischer Vergleich mit dem "Roman d'Eneas" und Vergils "Aeneis"*, Wiesbaden 1966, p. 66.

37 Anchises himself expresses the discriminatory opinion that Eneas should not take old warriors into battle, because their physical and mental power might be limited: ER vv. 2573–2576.

the figure according to the learned principle of *kalokagathia*, because Sibylle is a kind, helpful and highly educated woman. From long personal experience, she knows the dangers connected with the underworld, and she has solutions to all problems at hand. She reassures the fearful Eneas³⁸ and helps him to find his way. Her age-related ugliness corresponds to great knowledge and special abilities that help the protagonist and is therefore not a disability. On the other hand, she is an outsider, showing features almost like those of a shaman. After helping Eneas through the underworld, she disappears from the plot without a trace. There is no room for her in the world of war, love and rulership that Eneas experiences in Latium.

The French Sibilla is not depicted as being quite as gruesome as her German equivalent. Only some features mark her as being rather unattractive and frightening:³⁹ “Ele seoit devant l’entree / tote chenuie, eschevelee; la face aveit tote palie / et la char et neire et froncie” (vv. 2267–2270: “She sat in front of the entrance with white, long, and wild hair; her face was completely pale, and her flesh was black and wrinkled.”, cf. also vv. 2289–2295). A specific interest in her aged female body is not noticeable, and the impression she makes seems to be directed towards the recipient, not Eneas: “peor preneit de son reguart, / femme senblot de male part” (vv. 2271–2272, “one felt fear from the way she looked, she seemed to be a woman from hell.”). Just like her German pendant, she does not have any further significance for the plot from this point onwards.

Heinrich von Veldeke’s “Eneasroman” and its source, “Roman d’Eneas”, do not generally differ in their basic concepts of old age. Neither ageing nor old age seem to be very important matters of themselves. Older figures are primarily regarded in the contexts of legitimacy, genealogy and handing over power, while in other cases they are supportive counsellors. But in the end, the young ones settle all issues by themselves and take over control.

38 Sabine Obermaier, Höllenangst, Kriegerangst, Liebesangst. Narrative Räume für Angst im “Eneasroman” Heinrichs von Veldeke, in: Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung 12,1 (2007: Annette Gerok-Reiter/ed., Angst und Schrecken im Mittelalter. Ursachen, Funktionen, Bewältigungsstrategien), pp. 144–160.

39 Fisher, Heinrich (see note 24), pp. 35–36; Dittrich, Die “Eneide” (see note 36), pp. 17–19; Haupt, Alte Männer (see note 12), pp. 44–45; Ulrich Ernst, Haut-Diskurse. Semiotik der Körperoberfläche in der Erzählliteratur des hohen Mittelalters, in: Friedrich Wolfzettel (Ed.), Körperkonzepte im Arturischen Roman, Tübingen 2007 (Schriften der internationalen Artusgesellschaft 6), pp. 149–200, at pp. 173–175.

3 “Erec”

The romance “Erec” by Hartmann von Aue⁴⁰ is dated to around 1185 and adapts the Old French romance “Erec et Enide” by Chrétien de Troyes from around 1170⁴¹. “Erec” is the oldest Middle High German Artus-romance and ground setting. Hartmann changes many details from his source, but the main plot roughly stays the same.⁴² The young and unarmed knight Erec, son of King Lac, is insulted by an uncourtly knight and his dwarf in the presence of Queen Ginover. He secretly follows his opponents and reaches a strange city. He finds a place for the night in the run-down castle of an impoverished old count. The nobleman lets Erec have his own old armour and his beautiful young daughter, Enite, as company for a tournament. After the victory, Erec takes Enite with him as his bride to King Artus’s court. Erec and Enite return to his father’s kingdom after the wedding. There, the young couple makes a significant mistake: they are so much in love with each other that they hardly leave their bedroom anymore. King Lac’s knights start to complain about Erec neglecting his duties because of his new wife. Erec leaves home unprepared, takes Enite with him, and searches for adventures. In the following combats he proves under great pains that he is learning to pay tribute to both his personal wishes and his courtly duties. In the end, the damaged honour is restored and in harmony with the marriage. After King Lac’s death, the couple live as a shining example together with Enite’s parents, who join the court.

Just as in “Eneasroman”, the number of elderly protagonists in “Erec”, and the attention given to them, is limited. Several rich old kings who are invited to the wedding of the protagonists are only part of the crowd in both Hartmann’s and Chrétien’s romances. They do, however, demonstrate the great importance of the celebration as being an assembly of noblemen, uniting old and young. In Hartmann’s “Erec”, the old kings are

40 For the edition quoted, see note 1 (E).

41 Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide. Erec und Enide. Altfranzösisch / Deutsch*, transl. and ed. by Albert Gier, Stuttgart 1987 (RUB 8360) (EE). English translations by S. K.

42 For general information, cf. Volker Mertens, *Der deutsche Artusroman*, Stuttgart 2007 (RUB 17609), pp. 24–44, 49–63; Christoph Cormeau / Wilhelm Störmer, *Hartmann von Aue. Epoche – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. by Thomas Bein, München 2007 (Arbeitsbücher zur Literaturgeschichte), pp. 160–193; Marie-Sophie Masse, *Chrétien und Hartmanns Erecroman*, in: René Pérennec / Elisabeth Schmid (Eds.), *Höfischer Roman in Vers und Prosa*, Berlin-Boston 2010 (Germania Litteraria Mediaevalis Francigena 5), pp. 95–133; Jürgen Wolf, *Einführung in das Werk Hartmanns von Aue*, Darmstadt 2007 (Einführungen Germanistik), pp. 46–68.

named and they are fit enough to take part in the hunt.⁴³ Some of them are rich dwarf kings with the youngest of their companions being 140 years old (E vv. 2073–2113). In Chrétien’s romance, only King Quirion of Orcel and his entourage of 200 white haired liegemen, each at least 100 years of age, are explicitly called “old”. King Lac’s invitation to the wedding was issued from a position of authority, the narrator claims, so they all came to the celebration from far away.⁴⁴ Their visit makes King Artus very happy (EE vv. 1873–1881; 1933–1940).

Erec’s father, old King Lac, is also of limited importance for the plot. Still, important issues in the context of succession are connected with him: Lac is a model father who passes on royal blood and a kingdom to Erec without showing any egoistic traits or causing any disturbance. He greets his son with courteousness and joy, when Erec returns home after living at King Artus’s court for several years (E vv. 2867–2868, 2888–2892). He shows even more enthusiasm when he welcomes his new daughter-in-law, the beautiful Enite (E vv. 2904–2917; more details in Chrétien’s “Erec et Enide”: vv. 2273–2395⁴⁵). King Lac asks Erec and Enite to participate in ruling the kingdom soon after the wedding (E vv. 2918–2923, not in EE)⁴⁶ and dies at an ‘appropriate moment’, namely right after Erec’s last adventure, when the protagonist is free from other obligations and is ready to take over the kingdom.⁴⁷ The last referral to him in Hartmann’s “Erec” is in a posthumous praise at Erec’s coronation celebration (E vv. 10064–10071; not in EE). King Lac’s wife, Erec’s mother, is not mentioned at all.

Old age gains more prominence in the case of another figure namely Enite / Enide’s father Koralus (E), or Licorant (EE). The girl’s family has already been the subject of research on several occasions,⁴⁸ but the focus was usually more on the matter of Enite /

43 For signs of irony in Hartmann’s “Erec”, cf. Barbara Haupt, *Das Fest in der Dichtung. Untersuchungen zur historischen Semantik eines literarischen Motivs in der mittelhochdeutschen Epik*, Düsseldorf 1989 (*Studia humaniora* 14), pp. 146–147.

44 Uta Störmer-Caysa, *Grundstrukturen mittelalterlicher Erzählungen. Raum und Zeit im höfischen Roman*, Berlin-New York 2007 (*De Gruyter Studienbuch*), pp. 46–47.

45 Cf. the commentary by Manfred Günter Scholz: *Hartmann von Aue, Erec*, ed. by id., Frankfurt a. M. 2009 (*Bibliothek des Mittelalters* 5), pp. 730–731.

46 Cf. the commentary by Volker Mertens: *Hartmann von Aue, Erec*, ed. by id. (see note 1), pp. 651–652, and Scholz, *Stellenkommentar* (see note 45), pp. 730–731, 989–994.

47 King Lac’s death is reported in E vv. 9969–9970; more detailed in EE, vv. 6452–6484, with a description of the obsequies at King Artus’ court. Cf. Mertens, *Kommentar* (see note 46), pp. 696–697.

48 Nigel F. Palmer, *Poverty and Mockerey in Hartmann’s “Erec”*, v. 525 ff. *A Study of the Psychology and Aesthetics of Middle High German Romance*, in: Timothy McFarland / Silvia Ranawake

Enide's descent and her first meeting with Erec. Enite's father, Koralus, is an impoverished count who lives in an old masonry on the outskirts of a market town. He is not a member of the highest nobility, even though he is married to the sister of a prince. Koralus was deprived of his heritage by powerful peers "vil gar unlasterliche" (E v. 403, "through no disgrace on his part" [p. 23]). He lost his possessions in many feuds that he could not possibly have won against the superior strength of his opponents. He therefore is at no fault for the loss, as the narrator emphasizes (vv. 406–410). Now there was not a single servant, not one piece of rich clothing, no beautiful furniture nor lavish food left to the family. Still, Koralus firmly holds on to courtly behaviour. In the scene, old age is presented within the discourse of poverty, even though the focus is not on the material or social aspects but rather on ethical matters. The narrator stresses the fact that the old man lives as a model of courtly behaviour, paying greatest attention to his looks and appearance (vv. 277–286).⁴⁹ The crutch Koralus has with him (v. 290) seems to be more of a symbol of age-related *sapientia*⁵⁰ ("wisdom") than an indication of physical impairment. The young prince Erec humbly stretches out both hands to the old man and turns red from shame when he asks the old man for a bed for the night (vv. 298–299, 303).⁵¹

Koralus obviously does not see a chance to regain his former possessions on his own. He has kept his old, splendid armour just in case a friend or relative might need it for fighting. Too old and weak to fight himself, he is happy to loan it to Erec, together with his shield and spears (vv. 589–612).⁵² The potential of his daughter being able to secure a favourable marriage also seems to be outside of Koralus's focus; the old man cries with shame when Erec asks if he may marry Enite as a reward for Koralus having allowed Erec to take the girl with him to the tournament. Koralus thinks this must be insolent mockery (vv. 525–549, 557–559). In this scene, Koralus seems to be insecure, a helpless

(Eds.), Hartmann von Aue. *Changing Perspectives*. London Hartmann Symposium 1985, Göttingen 1988 (Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 486), pp. 65–92; Rosemarie Deist, *Gender and Power. Counsellors and Their Masters in Antiquity and Medieval Courtly Romance*, Heidelberg 2003; Jessica Quinlan, *Vater, Tochter, Schwiegersohn. Die erzählerische Ausgestaltung einer familiären Dreierkonstellation im Artusroman französischer und deutscher Sprache um 1200*, Heidelberg 2013 (Studien zur historischen Poetik 7).

49 Masse, *Chrétien und Hartmanns Erecroman* (see note 42), pp. 117–118; Scholz, *Stellenkommentar* (see note 45), pp. 632–633.

50 Scholz, *Stellenkommentar* (see note 45), p. 633.

51 Mertens, *Stellenkommentar* (see note 46), p. 630.

52 None of his peers are mentioned to have helped him, but Koralus's rich brother-in-law offers financial support: see Scholz, *Stellenkommentar* (see note 45), p. 650.

victim of bad circumstances who suffers more from the visible signs of his poverty than from poverty itself: “dem wirte was diu arbeit / die er von grôzer armuot leit / dâ wider sûeze als ein mete / dâ engegen und im diu schame tete” (vv. 424–427; “For that host the hardship which he suffered out of great poverty was sweet as mead compared with how the shame of it hurt him” [p. 25]). The only power and control he still has is over his wife and daughter (vv. 348–353); beyond that he seems to be weak, passive, and excluded from the inner circles of nobility.

At the same time, Koralus fulfils his role perfectly by hosting the young prince, supplying him with armour and a lady as a companion, as well as essential information about the “costume” (“legal custom”).⁵³ He even turns out to be an old friend of King Lac (vv. 550–556); therefore, he is a suitable father-in-law for Erec after all. It seems to be only appropriate that Erec takes care of him and his wife Karsinefite after the victory over his opponent and on the occasion of his marriage to Enite. Erec asks King Artus to send treasures from the king’s treasury, and he asks his own father, King Lac, to let Koralus have two castles as his own property (vv. 1806–1837). As a result, the elderly couple has a secure perspective for a safe, courtly life. They join their daughter and son-in-law for the coronation celebration, and later on they stay at Karnant as highly appreciated company for the new king and queen.

Old Karsinefite stands in the background behind her husband in “Erec”. The narrator mentions the fact that she is from higher descent than Koralus and is the sister of a prince. But he does not use this information for any purpose (like making a statement about a mesalliance, for instance). She also plays only a marginal role in the hosting of the young knight at her run-down home, where neither luxurious blankets nor rich food can be supplied. The only time that she is at the centre of attention, is on the occasion of Enite leaving home for King Artus’s court, when Karsinefite cries even harder than Koralus does. Here she is presented as an important person in matters of emotion (vv. 1456–1465).

Hartmann changes Chrétien’s father figure (in EE named Licorant) significantly. This begins with the first appearance: Koralus sits silently in a corner of the rather isolated masonry that cannot be seen from outside, holding on to his crutch. Licorant in “Erec et Enide” rests on the outer stairs of his home, that seems to be in the middle of the town. He is by himself and lost in thought, but when he sees the stranger appearing, he jumps up and gives him a warm welcome (EE vv. 373–389). Unlike Koralus, Licorant

53 For Dennis H. Green, the engagement seems to be more of a business trade than a courtly wooing; cf. *id.*, *Women and Marriage in German Medieval Romance*, Cambridge 2009 (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 74), p. 84.

is a *vavator* (a vassal's vassal, EE v. 375) and below a count in rank.⁵⁴ Still, he is doing better. He has no crutch. His household is rather poor (v. 376; wife and daughter are busy in the workshop: vv. 397–399), but, in contrast to Koralus' family, they were able to continue a life suitable to nobility. Licorant and his wife Tarsenesyde have a servant, they are able to present pillows, carpets, tablecloths and platters with fowl and meat to their guest (EE vv. 479–500). In this situation, Erec is even more puzzled about Enide's poor clothing, and he asks why she is so simply dressed.

The old man explains that he spent all his life as a warrior. As a result of this, he lost his whole property over the years. There is no comment or judgement; the issue of guilt is not raised. Poverty seems to be the inevitable consequence of a long-lasting warrior's life.⁵⁵ Licorant continues to explain that he refused help from his rich brother-in-law (who is a count in "Erec et Enide"), because he had always hoped for a rich son-in-law. He also declined the proposals for marriage that several members of the local gentry made Enide's father: Licorant absolutely wants a count or king to take beautiful Enide with him as his wife (vv. 509–536). The fact that a king's son is standing right in front of him at that moment obviously does not surprise or embarrass the old man. Licorant presents himself as a self-confident and agile father who wants his daughter to make a good match in the future. He seems to be well integrated in his peer group.⁵⁶ Licorant is well informed about the "costume" and is able to provide Erec with a lady and a suit of armour; unlike Koralus, Licorant owns a brand new and beautiful set of armour (EE vv. 611–620).

After the wedding, Erec fulfils his promises and sends precious gifts to his parents-in-law. He asks them to come to King Lac's kingdom, where they get two castles. The narrator stresses that these castles were beautiful and in an excellent location. He also mentions that they were invincible in case of war and siege (vv. 1829–1832) – this is possibly a reference to Licorant's bad experiences with war. King Lac is happy to hear that the two want to settle in his kingdom and guarantees for their safety and rank (vv. 1852–1856). Therefore, the news Erec gets about the old couple is "boenes et beles"

54 Deist, *Gender* (see note 48), pp. 53–55, 178–185; Scholz, *Stellenkommentar* (see note 45), p. 642; cf. also Quinlan, *Vater* (see note 48), p. 261.

55 Deist, *Gender* (see note 48), pp. 182–183, for parallels to real social consequences of a warrior's life.

56 Still, Quinlan sees a certain sensitivity towards his rich brother-in-law (Quinlan, *Vater* [see note 48], pp. 266–274). When it comes to possible gifts for Enide after the tournament, the rich uncle negotiates with the new groom Erec, and not with Licorant (EE vv. 1349–1437). But the conflict is not the object of further attention from the narrator, and Tarsenesyde remains as marginal as Karsinefite in Hartmann's "Erec".

(“good and beautiful”, v. 1864). After King Lac’s death, Enide’s parents gain attention once more: they are the first ones to be invited to the wedding and they travel to Nantes with a great entourage. The narrator emphasizes that their company was not made up of clerics or “useless stupid men” (“n’ot pas rote de chapelains / ne de gent fole n’esbaie”; vv. 6518–6519), but rather of excellent knights and courtly people in fine clothes. They are able to travel the long distance in a few days, and welcome their daughter and son-in-law gently and happily, “si com il durent” (v. 6533, “as it was supposed to be”). Together with Erec and Enide, they step in front of Artus und Guenièvre, to whom they are introduced in detail by their son-in-law (vv. 6540–6555). King Artus does not tire of praising them, though mostly in their role as suitable parents of the noble, beautiful Enide (vv. 6556–6567), who is happy to see them again after a long time. Afterwards, the old couple lose the attention of the narrator, who concentrates on the details of the coronation ceremony and the activities of the royal couples Erec and Enide, and Artus and Guenièvre. The last time Licorant and Tarsensyde are mentioned, is when they are crying for joy (vv. 6830–6835).

Chrétien’s Licorant is a figure that is far more active than Hartmann’s Koralus, who represents powerlessness, exclusion, and lack of perspective (despite the fact that he is model of courtesy) until Erec takes care of him.⁵⁷ Even though count Koralus has a higher rank than Licorant, he appears as being far more victimized and pitiable. The reason for this is the detailed description of the bad material situation that the family lives in and their “schame” (“shame”).

This negative perception might be a modern one, however, as the contrast between material poverty and inner richness is a common and important topos in medieval religious literature. Hartmann could have used it to paint the courtly Koralus and his family in a positive light in order to increase the listener’s or reader’s empathy towards them:⁵⁸ “swen dise edelarmen / niht wolden erbarmen, / der was herter dan ein stein” (E vv. 432–434; “Anyone who would not take pity upon these noble poor folk, must have had a heart harder than stone.” [p. 25]). The rise from terrible, and undeserved poverty to richness and honour might serve to increase the joy about the happy end of the plot. It adds to the fairy tale-like outcome of the romance: it is not only the young couple,

57 E vv. 1806–1815; cf. Quinlan, Vater (see note 48), p. 285. In all, the elderly characters seem to be important mostly through the focus on the younger ones once again; Erec helps his parents-in-law because of his new wife.

58 Alois Wolf, Die “adaptation courtoise”. Kritische Anmerkungen zu einem neuen Dogma, in: Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift 27 (1977), pp. 257–283, at p. 271; Palmer, Poverty (see note 48), pp. 70–71, 77–78, 87–89, 91; Masse, Chrétiens und Hartmanns Erecroman (see note 42), pp. 117–118.

but also the old parents, who live happily ever after. Thus, Chrétien's whitehaired *vavasor* lacks some of Koralus's narrative potential, even though he appears to be more vital and in better control of his life.

4 "Iwein" / "Yvain"

Hartmann von Aue's second Artus romance, "Iwein",⁵⁹ is dated at around 1200 and is also based on a source by Chrétien de Troyes ("Yvain", around 1180).⁶⁰ The young knight Iwein leaves King Artus's court in order to undertake an adventure that involves a magic well. He kills the defender of the well and hides in a tower of the castle. Through a window he observes the mourning widow, Laudine, and falls in love with her. Her maid cleverly manages to arrange a marriage between the two. King Artus's court arrives for the wedding, and on this occasion, knight Gawein advises Iwein to not live exclusively for love as their friend Erec did. The two of them leave for tournaments and adventures and the newly wed Laudine demands his word that he will come back within a year. Iwein misses the date by mistake and Laudine leaves him. The young knight loses his mind from shame and sorrow and lives like an animal in the woods. After he is miraculously healed from insanity, he has to prove under pains that he is learning to live up to his responsibilities and to respect dates. He wins the friendship of a lion that helps him to fight and gives him a new identity as "The Knight with the Lion". In the end, the maid succeeds in bringing Laudine and Iwein back together. They live happily ever after.

Neither Iwein/Yvain nor Laudine have elderly relatives appearing in the plot. Therefore, ageing and old age seem to be even less important here than in the romances about Eneas and Erec. There is only one *aventure* in the second part of "Iwein" with figures described as being old: they are the nameless owners of the "Castle of the Dire Adventure". The connection between age and personal strength is central for the whole

59 Hartmann von Aue, Gregorius. Der arme Heinrich. Iwein, ed. and transl. by Volker Mertens, Frankfurt a. M. 2008 (Deutscher Klassiker-Verlag im Taschenbuch 29). (I). English translation: Hartmann von Aue, Iwein or the Knight with the Lion, ed. from Manuscript B, Gießen, Universitätsbibliothek Codex Nr. 97, and transl. by Cyril Edwards, Cambridge 2007 (German Romance 3).

60 Chrestien de Troyes, Yvain, transl. and introd. by Ilse Nolting-Hauff, München 1962 (Klassische Texte des Romanischen Mittelalters in zweisprachigen Ausgaben 1) (Y). English translations by S. K. For general information, cf. Mertens, Der deutsche Artusroman (see note 42), pp. 63–87; Cormeau/Störmer, Hartmann (see note 42), pp. 194–226; Elisabeth Schmid, Chrétien's "Yvain" und Hartmann's "Iwein", in: Pérennec/Schmid (Eds.), Höfischer Roman (see note 42), pp. 135–167; Wolf, Einführung (see note 42), pp. 69–93.

mysterious *aventure*, but at first it is youth that stands for deficit: a young king wanted to fight against two devilish giants out of pure levity (I vv. 6328–6331). With his 18 years, he proved to be too weak and frail in body to stand a chance. Thus, he had to concede the victory to the giants without ever fighting them, in order to save his life.⁶¹ As the result of this, the king had to send 30 noble young ladies from his kingdom each year who were forced to do hard labour in the “Castle of the Dire Adventure”. One of the pitiable girls tells Iwein the story when he arrives at the castle searching for a place to stay for the night while on his way to another adventure.

While the ladies from the “Damsel’s Wharf” live in a state of desperation and exploitation, the young, beautiful daughter of the owner of the castle lives a life of tranquil luxury. Iwein meets her in a park where she is reading a book to her elderly parents. Iwein sees a very idyllic scene without worries and burdens:

“dar in het sich durch gemach / ein altherre geleit ... der herre hêrlîche lac. / er het einen schoenen alten lîp: / unde waene wol, si was sîn wîp, / ein vrouwe diu dâ bi im saz. / si ne mohten beidiu niht baz / von sô alten jâren / getân noch gebâren. / unde vor in beiden saz ein magt / diu vil wol, ist mir gesagt, / wâlsch lesen kunde: / die kurzte in die stunde. / ouch mohte si ein lachen / lîhte an in gemachen” (I vv. 6440–6460; “To take his ease, an old nobleman had laid down there ... That lord lay in lordly fashion. He had a handsome old person, and, I believe, she was his wife – the lady who sat by him there. Neither of them could, being so old in years, be of better figure nor demeanour, and in front of the two of them sat a maiden who could, so I am told, read the Romance language most readily. She shortened the hours for them. Moreover, she could readily provoke a smile from them.” [p. 305]).

The old couple welcome Iwein warmly. The girl takes off his armour and offers him luxurious leisure clothes. Afterwards, the young people retreat to another corner of the park to talk privately. The narrator stresses the difference between the two couples: the young ones long for summer, joy, and love, while the old ones have different subjects:

61 In Chrétien’s “Yvain” he is explicitly called a coward (v. 5279). Youthful immaturity is also the reason for problems and failure in case of Kalogreant, cf. Joseph M. Sullivan, *Youth and Older Age in the Dire Adventure of Chrétien’s “Yvain”, the Old Swedish “Haerra Ivan”, Hartmann’s “Iwein” and the Middle English “Ywain and Gawain”, in: Bart Besamusca/Frank Brandsma (Eds.), The European Dimensions of Arthurian Literature, Cambridge 2007 (Arthurian Literature 24), pp. 104–120, at p. 106.*

“dô redten aber die alten / sî waeren beidiu samt alt / unde der winter wurde lichte kalt: / sô solden si sich behüeten / mit rûhen vuhs hüeten / vor dem houpt vrostē. / si schuofen ir koste / ze gevüere und ze gemache: / si ahten ir sache / nâch dem hûs rate” (I vv. 6532–6541; “The old people, on the other hand, were talking then of how they were both old together, and the winter would perhaps be cold – then they ought to protect themselves with hairy fox-skin hats against the frost affecting their heads. Thus, they were weighing up the costs of ease and comfort – they were attending to household needs.” [p. 309]).⁶²

The scenery seems to be peaceful, though pensive; the focus of attention is once again on the young people, with the elderly parents seeming to be set as a contrast.

The feeling of leisure, harmony and timelessness⁶³ abruptly ends during the dinner that Iwein is invited to attend. The father informs Iwein of the “costume” that the evil giants have imposed on the castle and of the prize waiting for whoever may defeat them: the daughter’s hand and the succession in ruling. Without a success in battle, there is no way for the father to marry off his daughter (vv. 6602–6613). Thus, the old nobleman has a clear interest in the end of the “costume”. At the same time, he apparently has an advantage from it continuing: the working rooms of the damsels are in his castle, and his rich and leisurely life seems to result from the revenues generated by their handcraft. There seems to be some kind of cooperation between the old nobleman and the giants, and this places the responsibility for the damsels’ fate on the old man. There are several hints that the castle’s owner is not a mere victim, not a helpless old man who cannot do anything against the injustice because of old age, physical weakness and an inability to fight. The idyllic scenery and the peace and comfort the old couple enjoy may be the result of asocial and exploitative behaviour; the old man might actually be acting in an egocentric and unethical way.⁶⁴ He appears to be more of an accomplice than a victim of the giants. But the whole *aventure* at the “Castle of the Dire Adventure” somehow

62 For the scene, cf. Mertens, Stellenkommentar, in: Hartmann (see note 59), p. 1042; Ulrich Barton, Iweins Lob der Nacht. Tageszeiten-, Jahreszeiten- und Lebensalter-Metaphorik als Deutungsperspektive für Hartmanns “Iwein”, in: Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch der Görres-Gesellschaft 53 (2012), pp. 147–174, at pp. 149–151.

63 Rebekka Becker, Muße im höfischen Roman. Literarische Konzeptionen des Ausbruchs und der Außeralltäglichkeit im “Erec”, “Iwein” und “Tristan”, Tübingen 2019 (Otium 12), pp. 302–308.

64 Quinlan, Vater (see note 48), pp. 158, 160–161.

remains mysterious;⁶⁵ as underlined by the fact that neither the parents nor the daughter have a name.

In Chrétien’s “Yvain” the castle’s owner even more clearly appears to profit from the forced labour: one of the damsels states that “he” (v. 5319; not “they”, the giants) got rich through their hard work and pains (Y vv. 5317–5319). The “prodome” (“nobleman”) rests on a silk blanket when Yvain first sees him (vv. 5363–5364) – maybe one of the damsel’s handiwork.⁶⁶ Unlike Hartmann’s castle owner, he is not called old, though, and the episode connecting him and his wife with winter and the need to take care of their health is missing. The only aspects of importance seem to be the fact that the “prodome” is the father of a daughter to be married, and the connection to the “Castle of the Dire Adventure”.⁶⁷

5 Summary

To summarise, we can see that in the courtly romances analysed, negative attributes dominate over positive ones when it comes to descriptions of old age. Old age stands more for disadvantage and the loss of opportunities than for advantage and new chances; this is especially true for female figures. None of the elderly characters are true protagonists. Many of them have names, they talk and act, but they are very much focused on the young protagonists, who are usually sons, sometimes daughters and children-in-law. Still, a general characterisation of old age as a phase in life defined by extreme physical weakness,

65 According to this, research sees the *aventure* as a *mise en abyme*, an allegory ‘beside’ the main plot with the function of a mirror; cf. Roberta L. Krueger, Chrétien de Troyes and the Invention of Arthurian Courtly Fiction, in: Helen Fulton (Ed.), *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, Chichester 2009 (Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture 58), pp. 160–174, at p. 169; Barton, Iweins Lob (see note 62), pp. 148–149.

66 Quinlan, Vater (see note 48), pp. 160, 162, 186–189: Even though it appears that the material side of the cooperation is more apparent in “Yvain”, the *prodome* seems to be more dependent on the giants; cf. also Sullivan, Youth (see note 61), pp. 115–117, Ricarda Bauschke, “adaptation courtoise” als “Schreibweise”. Rekonstruktion einer Bearbeitungstechnik am Beispiel von Hartmanns “Iwein”, in: Elizabeth Andersen / Manfred Eickelmann / Anne Simon (Eds.), *Texttyp und Textproduktion in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*, Berlin-New York 2005 (Trends in Medieval Philology 7), pp. 65–84, at p. 71.

67 Only one woman from the village below the castle is old; she tries to warn Yvain and gives him essential information – thus, she has the honourable role of a (rare) female adviser and is characterised as “cortoise et sage” (Y v. 5144, “courtly and wise”; in I v. 6125 she is only a “vrouwe”, a “lady”).

illness, disability and immanent death is not to be found either.⁶⁸ Sensual impairments are hardly mentioned in my sources; none of the elderly characters needs to be nursed in bed⁶⁹ or suffers from dementia. The actual process of ageing is also not the subject of any of the analysed texts;⁷⁰ the characters are old, they do not become old. The only change to be noted is death. But surprisingly, ageing can be reversible in some cases: old Koralus does not need his crutch anymore when his rich and strong future son-in-law shows up, and Eneas's father Anchises even seems to be revitalized in the underworld.⁷¹

Therefore, the courtly romances analysed neither present old age as a biological nor a chronological 'fact' marked by the passage of a number of years. Old age seems to be more determined by sociocultural aspects: are elderly characters able to act on their own wishes – or not?; are they independent from younger figures – or not?; are they agile and mobile – or not? Still, the most important factors are literary ones: the general plot, the constellation and characterisation of figures might ask for old age to be highlighted – or not.

The question remains open as to whether the target audience expected a realistic description of the impairments and disabling factors connected with old age on the one hand, and of the privileges and positive aspects on the other hand. Modern research probably has to set a wide level of tolerance regarding what was acceptable in literature without being regarded as purely imaginary and without connection to 'reality'. This includes narratives of intergenerational relationships and succession, loss of sensual, physical and mental strength and functionality, as well as gains in prestige and influence.⁷²

68 Goller, "Die jungen" (see note 10), p. 159.

69 This is different with old Titurel in Wolfram von Eschenbach's "Parzival", cf. Kerth, Wolframs Greise (see note 10), pp. 59–61.

70 The lack of growing (very) old stands in clear opposition to the high importance of the process of growing up from a young to an adult warrior; cf. Sassenhausen, Grenzen (see note 8), p. 207; for general aspects Fitzon et al. (Eds.), Alterszäsuren (see note 8).

71 This is not explained by magic or miraculous influence, as the common topoi of the tree/fountain of youth or the Holy Grail in some texts and pictures suggest.

72 Neumann, Perspektiven (see note 2).