

Handbook of Diachronic Narratology

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Florian Remele

Eventfulness in Medieval and Early Modern German Literature

1 Definition

Not every occurrence is an event. Whether an occurrence is considered an event depends on its eventfulness, i.e., the degree to which it qualifies as a relevant change of state that differs from conventional expectations (Schmid 2003, 24–25). Since these expectations and the evaluation of an occurrence as relevant vary according to the observer’s perspective and prior knowledge, the eventfulness of an occurrence cannot be assessed objectively (Hühn 2009, 90). There are no events per se (Renner 2004, 362). Events are rather the result of eventfulness, which emerges as part of the interaction between observer and occurrence (Bleumer 2020, 21). For narratives, the concepts of “event” and “eventfulness” are crucial, since narratives are constituted by changes of state and often operate with the tension between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the conventional and the unconventional, the expected and the unexpected. Therefore, narratology sets out to analyze and categorize how eventfulness and events emerge on different levels of a narrative.

2 Narratological Approaches to Events and Eventfulness

Based on Jurij Lotman’s influential postulate that an “event in a text is the shifting of a persona across the borders of a semantic field” ([1970] 1977, 233), Wolf Schmid defines “event” in a broader sense “as a change of state that fulfils certain conditions” (2003, 24). Since not every change of state qualifies as an event, Schmid suggests two indispensable conditions and five gradational features for categorizing an occurrence as an event and determining its degree of eventfulness (1992, 108–109; 2003, 24–29; 2014, 14–19; 2017b, 68–81). The first condition that must be fulfilled to classify something as an event concerns the event’s status as “factual, or real” (Schmid 2003, 24). In this case, “factual” and “real” do not refer to an extra-textual reality; the terms rather emphasize that the event must actually happen within the narrated world (24). The second mandatory requirement is “Resultativity,” and demands that the change of state “reaches completion in the narrative world of the text” (24). While these two conditions are binary categories, the five additional crite-

ria are designed as gradational features. These criteria are (1) relevance, (2) unpredictability, (3) persistence, (4) irreversibility, and (5) non-iterativity, which means that events must, to some degree, be (1) relevant to the observer of the event, (2) a deviation from conventional expectations, (3) consequential within the narrated world, (4) unlikely to be reversed to a previous state, and (5) unlikely to occur again (Schmid 2003, 26–29).

Hartmut Bleumer (2020, 38–64) has most recently argued that Schmid's categories were developed on the basis of modern realist literature and must therefore be modified to be applicable to premodern narratives. He especially questions the prioritization of the category "real" and assigns a higher priority to the remaining features (61). While Schmid's ranking might be appropriate for modern realist literature, the categories "relevance" and "unpredictability" are, from a historical perspective, considerably more significant (62). Bleumer's approach is explicitly hermeneutical in that he stresses that events cannot be assessed objectively, since they come into existence through narration and emerge in the interaction between observer and occurrence (59, 21; also Schulz 2012, 180–181; Waltenberger 2016, 39–43). Schmid's categories remain, nevertheless, crucial for describing how a narrative creates eventfulness. In a hermeneutical perspective, however, these features are not understood as mandatory requirements that need to be fulfilled, but rather as narrative strategies that encourage the observer to perceive an occurrence as an event. Since these narrative strategies depend on historical, cultural, and literary contexts, certain criteria need to be modified, added, or dismissed when applied to premodern times.

Although there are many disputes over the defining features of events (Rathmann 2003), the majority of researchers agree that events emerge by differing from what an observer deems expected and/or ordinary (e.g., Lotman [1970] 1977, 234; Bruner 1991, 11; Suter and Hettling, 2001 24; Schmid 2003, 26; Mersch 2008, 28; Hühn 2009, 89; Gruber 2014, 98; Bleumer 2020, 22). Depending on the narrative level, an event contrasts (1) with the order within the narrated world, (2) with the previous established attitude of the narrator, (3) with conventional narrative patterns, or (4) with social and cultural norms in the reality of the recipient. Peter Hühn and Jörg Schönert call these different types of event (1) "event in the happenings," (2) "presentation event," (3) "mediation event," and (4) "reception event" (2005, 7; see similar Gruber 2014, 67). To identify the discrepancy between norm and occurrence, the norm against which the occurrence stands must be determined, which poses particular methodological challenges, especially in historical contexts.

For the first two types of event (event in the happenings, presentation event), the assessment is relatively straightforward, since most literary texts provide information both on the conventional setup of the narrated world and the narrator's attitude (Schmid 2014, 21). However, this is not the case for mediation events and

reception events. Describing an unexpected change in the way the story is narrated or a transformation of the recipients' ideological position requires reconstruction of the contemporary expected narrative conventions and dominant social and cultural norms. In most cases, research on modern literature can rely on available contextual data to ascertain the literary conventions of a specific time period (Michler 2015, 37); however, extra-literary information on the medieval conditions of producing and receiving literature remain scarce. Medievalists mostly still need to reconstruct the literary field and its conventions based on indications within literary texts (Grubmüller 1999, 195; Gerok-Reiter and Robert 2019, 20–21). There are no extra-literary poetological treatises in the vernacular which prescribe the features of a certain genre or document the common literary practice. Nor is there a functionally differentiated literary system providing a contextual theoretical discourse on literature and its conventions.

To avoid ahistorical hypotheses, it is thus necessary to focus on an aspect that, according to Schmid (2014, 22), is often underestimated when discussing events and eventfulness: intertextuality. Examining intertextual references allows the determination of the contexts and expectations that are evoked by the texts themselves. This perspective is, of course, not unique to medieval literature, but it is especially relevant for historical periods for which there is little contextual information. Instead of deciding in advance that a narrative should be interpreted in light of certain abstract patterns, which might not even have been established at the time, it is methodologically more precise to reconstruct the conventions against which mediation events stand by analyzing the tangible references to other texts (Remele 2021). By referring to a previous text, a narrative can suggest a given reception against the background of the referenced pre-text. Intertextuality can be used as a narrative strategy to evoke certain narrative expectations, in order to subsequently offer alternatives that differ from the prompted expectations and are, for this reason, regarded as eventful (Schmid 2014, 22). Moreover, this perspective takes into account the fact that texts do not only refer to narrative phenomena that are already considered conventional. Texts can also stage a referenced narrative phenomenon in a certain manner so that it appears as conventional. Consequently, the convention against which an event stands is not necessarily previously given; it can also be created in the process of narrating an event. Conventions and events are mutually dependent and generate each other: an event needs to differ from a convention to be considered an event, and a convention appears as conventional by being compared to an extraordinary event (Remele 2020, 254–255).

For earlier periods of literary history in particular, this approach to reconstructing conventional expectations and their relationship with events ensures a historically appropriate assessment of what is considered eventful or conventional at a certain point in time. This method is specific to the analysis of medi-

ation events, in other words, the changes in the way a story is narrated that are perceived as unconventional by contemporary recipients. This aspect touches on pivotal questions in medieval studies including re-narrating or the formation of narrative alternatives. In the context of these characteristic phenomena of medieval literature, the historical applicability of the categories of “unpredictability” and “iterativity” in particular must be reviewed.

3 Literary Practices: Re-Narrating and Eventfulness

Large parts of medieval narrative literature in the vernacular were rewritings of well-known stories. Consequently, narrating in the Middle Ages means re-narrating (Bumke and Peters 2005; Zacke et al. 2020), which is why some plot elements might have been anticipated by the recipients and thus have appeared less eventful to them. It was not uncommon for the recipients to be familiar with the general plot of a narrative because the same or a similar story had been told before. Sometimes, as in the *Nibelungenlied* (ca. 1200), the narrator even outlines at the beginning how the story will end (1, 6; edition: Heinzle 2013). In modern times, most recipients would be bemused by the lack of suspense, whether a certain event occurs or not. The books *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996 to present), and especially their TV adaptation *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019), for example, were celebrated for their extremely unpredictable and eventfully staged deaths of important characters, as during the Red Wedding. In the *Nibelungenlied*, in contrast, the eventual death of almost everybody is in no way surprising or unexpected, since the narrator emphasizes in the beginning and throughout the text that the story will end in disaster and that most of the characters will die. Regarding these differences, Clemens Lugowski ([1932] 1994, 40–41) introduced the distinction between *Ob-Überhaupt-Spannung* (whether-at-all-suspense) and *Wie-Spannung* (how-suspense) to distinguish between whether something happens at all and how something that is known to occur happens.

Regardless of Lugowski’s controversial assumptions about the connection to mythology, the difference between “whether” and “how” might be helpful for specifying the category of unpredictability when investigating medieval narratives. For medieval texts, it is mostly the way in which the plot is narrated that is unpredictable or different from expected conventions, while the plot itself is mostly already known. Of course, re-narrating and the predictability of plot elements are not exclusive to the Middle Ages (Hufnagel 2020a, 55–62). In modern times, however, those texts are often judged as less original and “regarded as having low aesthetic value” (Schmid 2017a, 242). This is not the case in medieval times. When reading

or listening to the *Nibelungenlied*, the medieval recipients presumably did not focus on whether the story ends well or not, but on how it is narrated and why the displayed conflict inevitably leads to the well-known demise of the Burgundians (Müller 1998). Nadine Hufnagel (2020a, 2020b) has recently shown that not only the earliest preserved versions of the *Nibelungenlied*, but also its re-narrations in the fifteenth century, predominantly uphold the main plot elements but differ greatly concerning the narrative construction of the characters' motivations. From the recipients' point of view, the eventfulness of those versions of the text thus emerges not because the plot is particularly different from that of the *Nibelungenlied* around 1200, but because of its specific narrative mediation.

The same holds true for the adaptations and re-narrations of Arthurian romances around 1200. The relationship between the Arthurian romances by Hartmann von Aue and the earlier texts by Chrétien de Troyes can be described neither as a mere translation nor as a complete reworking of the plot (Worstbrock 1999). Hartmann's texts are rather re-narrations in which the main plot elements are retained but the way the story is narrated changes – drastically in some cases. Researchers have pointed out, for example, that in Hartmann's *Erec* (ca. 1180) the narrator has a more pronounced status (Ridder 2001, 545), that Enite and her lament are portrayed quite differently (Worstbrock 1985), or that the poetological descriptive passages are sometimes increased in comparison to Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* (ca. 1170; Mertens 1998, 53). Recipients who already knew the story about Erec and Enite would have anticipated the occurrences in Hartmann's text but nevertheless perceived the narrative mediation as eventful, since it differs greatly in some respects from Chrétien's version. Similar phenomena have been observed for Hartmann's *Iwein* (ca. 1200), such as the alternative conceptualization of *minne* (Ridder 2001, 555) or the change of Laudine's social rank insofar as she is the daughter of a duke in Chrétien's version and a reigning queen in the Middle High German text (Mertens 1978, 36). Additionally, and especially for Hartmann's *Iwein*, the eventfulness of some passages might emerge when recipients read or listen to different versions of the text, because the manuscripts in which *Iwein* is transmitted vary significantly in pivotal aspects. One difference, which has been discussed at length in the literature, is Laudine's kneeling before Iwein during their reconciliation, which is narrated in some manuscripts while omitted in others (Bumke 1996, 122). For recipients familiar with one version, reading or listening to the alternative ending causes the scene to appear eventful. Laudine's behavior is, from this perspective, quite unexpected and has an impact on the gender and power dynamic between the characters (Bumke 1996, 122; Hausmann 2001, 91–92). Although the overall ending of *Iwein* stays the same and is not unconventional (Iwein and Laudine are reconciled), the manner in which the reconciliation is staged changes and can, under certain circumstances, be perceived as a mediation event.

Other literary genres which, though not directly connected to a narrow sense of re-narrating, contain relatively fixed plot elements are hagiography and legends. Schmid, for example, states that miracles are by no means unexpected in legends, but rather a common aspect of hagiography (2014, 25; 2017a, 239). This can hardly be denied, but in a historical perspective the iterativity and predictability of miracles should not be dismissed as “unoriginal” (Schmid 2014, 25). Narrating miracles and holiness poses, in fact, religious and aesthetic challenges which are partly solved by iterativity and re-narration. Holiness per se is inaccessible and incommensurable, which is why legends merely attempt to bridge – not to suspend – the distance between secularity and sanctity through narration (Strohschneider 2000, 105). Narrating miracles is one way of demonstrating God’s salvific power and proving the saint’s holiness (Hammer 2015, 2; Weitbrecht et al. 2019, 30–31). However, the narrators never claim that they are able to access directly the truth behind the miracles; rather, they constantly point out their incommensurability (Köbele 2012, 373). This results in the problem of how evident a miracle can be if even the narrators cannot guarantee that the miraculous occurrence is indeed a result of God’s transgression from transcendence to immanence. Holiness is not self-evident but is dependent on infinite testimony and needs to be believed (Köbele 2012, 378; Bleumer 2010, 250; Koch 2020, 102). One strategy for creating evidence is re-narrating and thus permanently generating testimony of miracles, saints, and God’s salvific power: legends confirm evidence by repeatedly narrating against the loss of evidence (Köbele 2012, 373). In a historical and religious understanding, these iterations cannot simply be categorized as redundant and uneventful, because every miracle is considered a realization and repetition of the one miraculous event of salvation, the incarnation of God (Bleumer 2020, 157–158). The iterations of this event are not perceived as less eventful. On the contrary, the narration of miracles creates anew each time the singular, highly relevant, irreversible – in short, eventful – presence of God’s salvific power. Repetition, therefore, does not diminish the eventfulness of miracles, but generates it in the first place, since iteration actualizes the eventfulness of the original event of salvation.

As a consequence, the concepts of iterativity and predictability must be evaluated differently when interpreting medieval texts. The categorization of a narrative as less eventful due to its well-known or frequently narrated plot would transfer the modern concept of “originality” to premodern times, in which re-narration is one of the most common aesthetic phenomena. It would be ahistorical to associate the iterativity of an occurrence with a loss of eventfulness, since repetitions might have a specific function within a historical culture. Nevertheless, there are prime examples of unpredictable and unconventional mediation events in medieval literature, which is why the categories “unpredictability” and “non-iterativity” are still relevant for analyzing eventfulness in medieval narratives. It is important, however, to

distinguish between the various narrative levels of a text and to take into account the literary and cultural preconditions in order to determine how “unpredictability” is perceived in different contexts. In the following, a concrete textual example will be used to demonstrate which categories can usefully be applied at what levels of a medieval narrative. As in the previous examples, it will become apparent that, with regard to mediation events, “unpredictability” strongly contributes to the emergence of eventfulness, while, with regard to plot, it has little significance. Moreover, it will be shown that the differentiation between the characters’ and the recipients’ perspective is – as for any narrative – crucial, since occurrences are ascribed a different level of eventfulness by the various observers.

4 Conventuality and Eventfulness in Thirteenth-Century Arthurian Romances

4.1 Narratives of Abduction: Eventfulness within the Narrated World

A prerequisite for abductions to succeed is that they are unexpected. In Arthurian romances, however, abductions become an increasingly frequent plot element during the thirteenth century, such that the recipients might eventually have expected abductions to occur. The characters within the narrated world, by contrast, hardly ever suspect that a member of the Arthurian court might be abducted. These differences make narratives of abduction a prime example with which to discuss the dependency of eventfulness on the observer’s perspective.

A particularly interesting scene is the beginning of *Wirnt von Grafenberg’s Wigalois* (ca. 1220). After the prologue, the narrator explains that there is a custom at King Arthur’s court according to which Arthur does not eat anything until he has heard the tale of an adventure (*âventiure*, line 251; edition: Seelbach and Seelbach 2014). This time, however – a first, according to the narrator – it is well past noon, and nobody has got word of an *âventiure*. All the members of the court complain about the lack of *âventiure*, and Queen Ginover goes to her chamber. From there she looks down the castle wall and sees a foreign knight waiting for her. The foreign knight, Joram, demands a boon from Ginover without her knowing what it is; but Ginover insists on hearing first what the request will be. Joram wants her to take a valuable belt from him and to keep it until the next day to decide whether she wants to accept or decline the gift. If she decides to refuse the belt, Joram would not simply take it back, but would reclaim it in battle against an Arthurian knight.

Ginover agrees to the terms and takes the belt. She is fascinated by it, but Gawein, one of the most respected knights of the court, convinces her to give it back. Joram returns the next day, is furious about Ginover's decision to return the belt, and demands a fight with an Arthurian knight. One by one, the knights Keie, Didones, Segremors, and Gawein fight him, but all of them are defeated, and Joram eventually abducts Gawein.

The narrative strategies used in this scene create the eventfulness of these occurrences within the narrated world. The narrator's emphasis that the court has never had to wait this long for an *âventiure* to appear introduces the situation as exceptional. Throughout this part of the text, there are comments by the narrator which highlight that nearly everything about this occurrence is extraordinary: the belt that Joram offers to Ginover is described as the most valuable and magical one, which nobody could ever manufacture again in a similar quality (lines 327–328); the defeat of Keie, Didones, and Segremors in combat is called the worst dishonor the court has ever suffered (lines 512–513); Gawein is introduced as the most honorable and fearless knight of Arthur's court who has never been vanquished (lines 504–505), even though in the end, Joram manages to subdue him. Since this is so outrageous, the narrator even seems to feel the need to defend Gawein and explains that Joram was only able to defeat him because of the belt's magical powers (lines 567–568).

The court's subsequent lament about this situation is extreme because these occurrences are highly relevant to the court's internal organization and functioning. First, it is necessary to understand why Queen Ginover could not have simply accepted the belt and thus prevented the combats. Various researchers have explained that the transfer of the belt is a symbol both for the transfer of power over the married queen (Fasbender 2010, 57) and for the queen's sexual integrity, which would be questioned had she agreed to keep the belt (Eming 1999, 150). Armin Schulz (2010b, 121) has concluded that in scenes in which foreign knights try to gain power over Ginover, the claims to rule over Arthur's realm are metonymically negotiated via the queen's body. This political dimension makes Joram's request eminently relevant to the court, since it challenges the very foundation of its existence. Gawein is also of high importance to the court. He is regarded as the ideal Arthurian knight against whose example the behavior of the other knights is measured, given that he embodies the Arthurian virtues (Cormeau 1977, 140). In *Wigalois* this idea of Gawein is highlighted in that Ginover asks him for advice and praises his unwavering morality (lines 357–358). Gawein's pivotal importance at court is also expressed in the text by the fact that his absence causes great despair, with Arthur still lamenting his disappearance half a year later (lines 1134–1136). Another reason why the court is this devastated is that its members believe that Gawein is dead due to the fact that nobody had observed the combat. The narra-

tive strategy for making the characters believe that Gawein is dead increases the eventfulness of this scene in the narrated world. While Gawein could be saved from an abductor, death is an irreversible and persistent state. Although the recipients, Gawein, and Joram know that Gawein is in fact not dead, the characters at court take it to be true that he is.

The way Gawein's abduction is narratively constructed generates a significant degree of eventfulness within the narrated world. From the perspective of the characters at court, Gawein's disappearance is real, resultative, of high relevance to them, and unpredictable, since Gawein normally always succeeds in combats; it is also persistent, irreversible, and impossible to happen again because the members of the court believe that Gawein is dead. Later in the text, the occurrences might seem less eventful in retrospect because Gawein returns to Arthur's court unharmed, and the narrator even states that everything at court is like before (lines 1161–1162). The eventfulness of an occurrence – not only in medieval texts, but in every narrative – needs to be determined for both a specific point in time within the narrative and a particular perspective. The degree to which an occurrence is eventful cannot be assessed objectively; nor is it valid throughout the text. It is rather necessary to analyze the narrative strategies through which an occurrence temporarily appears as eventful from a certain point of view.

4.2 Eventfulness of Narrating Abductions: The Recipients' Perspective

For the recipients, the eventfulness of Gawein's abduction is not created through the same narrative means. Since the recipients know that Gawein is not indeed dead, to them the plot is not as eventful as it is to the characters. For answering the question as to whether Gawein's abduction is considered eventful from the recipients' point of view, the focus thus needs to lie on the unexpected manner of narrative mediation. For this purpose, it is necessary to reconstruct the recipients' expectations regarding narratives of abduction in order to determine whether the way of narrating in *Wigalois* is perceived as an eventful variation. As discussed above, a useful historical approach to identifying recipients' expectations includes analyzing intertextual references, since such indications prompt certain narrative expectations against the background of which an occurrence potentially emerges as eventful.

In *Wigalois*, there are several intertextual references that link Gawein's abduction to the abduction of Ginover in Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein* (Remele 2021, 20–21). The general setting, for example, is quite similar: in *Iwein*, a foreign knight appears at Arthur's court and demands an unconditional promise from the king.

Arthur has to agree, since his reputation is based on his limitless generosity. The foreign knight, Meljaganz, subsequently demands Queen Ginover and abducts her. The Arthurian knights Keie, Didones, and Segremors try to free Ginover, but it is Gawein who eventually manages to defeat Meljaganz and to return the queen to Arthur's court. In *Wigalois*, there are unambiguous intertextual references to this specific passage in *Iwein*: the knights who try to defeat Joram in *Wigalois* are the same knights who attempt to subdue Meljaganz in *Iwein*. Moreover, in both texts, the members of the Round Table prepare for the fight against the foreign knight with the same phrase: "harnasch unde ors her" (Bring me armor and horse!; *Iwein*, line 4626; edition: Benecke et al. 2001; *Wigalois*, line 448). These literal references to Hartmann's *Iwein* encourage recipients to associate Gawein's abduction with Ginover's abduction. The expectation thus produced in *Wigalois* is that, as in *Iwein*, Ginover will be abducted due to an unconditional promise and ultimately freed by Gawein. This intertextually created expectation, however, is not fulfilled; instead, the text offers a narrative alternative. The knight who rescues the abducted queen in *Iwein* now becomes the victim of the abduction himself. The text intertextually establishes an expectation that is subsequently used to frame Gawein's abduction as an unexpected way of narrating abductions in Arthurian romances, since the intertextual reference suggests that conventionally it is the queen who gets captured. This alternative to the induced expectation contributes to the recipients' perception of the opening scene in *Wigalois* as an eventful mediation event.

While at the time *Wigalois* was created this turn of events was rather unexpected for recipients, abductions become increasingly conventionalized in the thirteenth century, since nearly all of the Arthurian romances include the abduction of a character. In *Lanzelet* (ca. 1200) by Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, Ginover is abducted by a foreign knight, but Arthur also loses his knights Walwein and Erec in the process of her retrieval due to an unconditional promise; in the *Crône* (ca. 1230) by Heinrich von dem Türlin, Ginover is taken, first by her brother, who wants to kill her, and then by a knight, who initially intends to rescue her but then tries to rape her so that Gawein needs to free the queen; and in *Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal* (ca. 1230), it is not Ginover who is captured, but Arthur himself. Within the narrated worlds, these abductions are always presented as extremely eventful in that, as in *Wigalois*, they are unexpected for the characters, relevant to the court, and mostly unique cases. For recipients who know the history of the genre, the occurrence of abductions becomes gradually less eventful, since they are frequent, become more foreseeable, and always end with the happy rescue of the abductee. However, constant changes in narrative mediation cause the narration of abductions to continue to be perceived as eventful. It is not the occurrence of the abduction that is eventful to the recipients, but its ever-changing narrative mediation.

4.3 Eventfulness and the Act of Narration: The Logic of *âventiure*

Based on the opening scene in *Wigalois*, it can also be demonstrated how Arthurian romances themselves reflect upon eventfulness as a crucial element of both Arthur's court and Arthurian narration. Arthur's custom of not eating until he has heard of an *âventiure* refers to a lack of eventfulness which hinders the court from taking its usual course. This not only occurs in *Wigalois*, but also, in different forms, in Chrétien's *Le Conte du Graal* (ca. 1190), in Wolfram's *Parzival* (ca. 1210), in Ulrich's *Lanzelet*, in Heinrich's *Crône*, in Stricker's *Daniel*, and many more (Wandhoff 2002, 130–131). Peter Strohschneider (2006, 378) has explained that Arthur's fast establishes the connection between narration and community: the constitution of the Arthurian community through the shared meal presupposes the narration of *âventiure*. Narrating *âventiure* is a fundamental prerequisite for the existence and functioning of Arthur's court. One reason why narrating *âventiure* is that important to Arthur and his knights is that their honor (*êre*) depends on being permanently demonstrated (Wandhoff 2002, 131). The lack of *âventiure* reveals, on the one hand, that no challenges have come to Arthur's court through which the knights could gain honor. On the other hand, the absence of *âventiure* shows that none of the knights has mastered an *âventiure* that they could talk about. Since honor cannot be preserved over a longer period of time, the shortage of *âventiure* endangers the reputation of the court (Wandhoff 2002, 131–132). In *Wigalois*, Joram threatens the court that he will never speak of Arthur and his knights again and that he will claim that *âventiure* has never taken place at this court (lines 437–440). The absence of narration about the court's *âventiure* would lead to its demise, since it is the very foundation of its reputation.

Âventiure, however, cannot be mechanically sought out to increase one's honor, for it is something that approaches the knight (Latin *advenire*), something that happens to him. Although *âventiure* is constantly expected and desired by the members of Arthur's court, it occurs abruptly and is completely different from what was expected (Bleumer 2020, 112). And precisely because *âventiure* is extraordinary, unusual, and barely manageable, mastering it dramatically increases the prestige of the knight and hence of the court (Fischer 1983, 24). Consequently, *âventiure* is dependent on being narrated: if nobody observes the *âventiure* or if it is not narrated at court, the knight cannot receive praise from his peers. In Hartmann's *Iwein*, for example, Iwein worries that there are no witnesses to the fact that he defeated the foreign knight Ascalon (line 1069). Iwein needs proof in order to return to the court and be honored for his victory. The *âventiure* only emerges in the process of being narrated and in the perception by the public that assigns the status of an event to the occurrence (Schnyder 2006, 369–370). The word *âventiure* itself refers both to the event and to the narration of

the event, which highlights the intertwined relationship between event and narration (Mertens 2006, 339). This is one reason why Bleumer is right when he states that it is historically more appropriate to stress the performativity of narrativity (2020, 51). *Âventiure*, which encompasses all elements of eventfulness, is historically thought to come into existence through narration. The status of an occurrence as relevant and extraordinary is not considered a given, but rather a product of being narrated and acknowledged as eventful.

5 Coping Strategies for Eventfulness in Early Modern Prose Romances

The way characters deal with eventfulness in medieval texts is quite different from the characters' strategy for handling eventfulness in early modern literature. While in Arthurian romances characters are portrayed as wishing for eventful *âventiure* (as seen in *Wigalois*), early modern characters are depicted as desiring to control the eventfulness of occurrences. It is of course an overgeneralization to claim that there is a coherent development from the Middle Ages to the early modern period or that the phenomena that will be discussed are exclusive to one of the two periods. With regard especially to "predictability," researchers have sometimes too broadly claimed that in the Middle Ages, unpredictability is mostly non-existent due to salvation-historical providentialism, while the early modern period marks the birth of modern contingency (von Graevenitz and Marquard 1998, xii). At least since the anthology edited by Cornelia Herberichs and Susanne Reichlin (2010; also, Hufnagel et al. 2017), it has become clear that this master narrative does not apply in this radical form. Closely related to literary contexts, the question is not so much whether an occurrence is either predetermined or contingent, but whether it is depicted or perceived as being more predetermined or more contingent (Reichlin 2010, 45). Depending on the observer's perspective and prior knowledge, the perception of an occurrence as being predetermined or contingent may as result vary between characters, narrator, and recipients.

Nevertheless, trends can be detected as to how the perception and, more importantly, the literary depiction of eventfulness changes progressively from the Middle Ages to the early modern period. Susanne Knaeble (2019) has demonstrated that there is a significant shift from medieval to early modern configurations of narrating the future. She identifies a pluralization of conceptions of time in the early modern period, when the concept of an "open future" was introduced alongside medieval eschatological, genealogical, and mythical logics of time (Knaeble 2019, 32). "Open future" denotes an indefinite period of time that needs to be filled with

plans, wishes, calculations, and so on, and that can be shaped by the characters, for example (1). Although the Early New High German word *kunfft* or *zuokunfft* continues (as does *âventiure*) to denote something that advances toward someone or the occurrence of a predetermined incident, in early modern prose romances there is a tendency for characters to begin to shape their future (2–3). This can be observed in the increased depiction of planning and in the way the texts provide insight into the characters' calculations as they weigh up different courses of action (2). Of course, there are also scenes in medieval texts in which characters reflect upon their future and make plans (Eming 2017), but the result, or at least the desired outcome, of their actions is for the most part already known by the characters. In early modern prose romances, these elements are amplified, and the characters' attempts to control and change impending occurrences increase. While it is precisely the unpredictability and outright otherness of *âventiure* that makes it desirable to Arthur and his court, early modern prose romances focus more on the characters' strategies for dealing with unpredictability. In medieval texts, the characters often cope with contingency through how they believe *âventiure* is supposed to take place, considering that the knight who accepts it is chosen to master the task. Therefore, those texts often do not present contingency as a problem that needs to be negotiated, for it is embedded in an encompassing order that generally guarantees a favorable outcome (Schulz 2010a, 209). There are still similar phenomena in early modern prose romances, but these texts additionally demonstrate a different approach to contingency. The characters try to overcome contingency and render it predictable by planning their actions and considering possible alternatives instead of placing trust unreservedly in a predetermined order. The narratives are thus designed to convey the experience of contingency to the recipients by making the process of decision-making and planning visible (Knaeble 2019, 37).

Concerning eventfulness, early modern prose romances are thus prime examples for analyzing both the narrative production of eventfulness and the narrative strategies employed to demonstrate how characters cope with eventfulness. The mid-fifteenth century *Melusine* by Thüring von Ringoltingen may be suitable for showing that this new way of dealing with eventfulness was not an abrupt or radical change, but that different ideas for dealing with unpredictability overlap in early modern texts. At the beginning of the text, the powerful and rich Count Emerich visits the Count of the Forst, who is impoverished and burdened with many children. During a feast, Emerich thus offers to raise one of the Count of the Forst's as his own. The latter agrees, and Emerich chooses the youngest son, Reymund, who immediately goes with him. One day, during a hunt, Emerich and Reymund lose track of the hunting party while chasing a wild boar and get lost in the forest until late at night. Emerich reads in the stars that whoever kills his lord at that hour will one day come to rule over a rich and powerful realm. Reymund ful-

fills this prophecy shortly thereafter. Attempting to save Emerich from an attacking boar, he misses the animal and slays Emerich with a spear.

The death of Emerich in this scene is an interesting example of eventfulness, for it oscillates between providential predestination and human agency. Although Emerich reads in the stars “*ettwas künfftiger ding*” (something about future things; 18.14; edition: Müller 1990), his prediction is quite abstract and is not directly connected to his or Reymund’s personal future (Knaeble 2019, 154). Neither Emerich nor Reymund are depicted as particularly worried about whether the prediction about a lord’s death by his servant’s hand might refer to them. The recipients might certainly associate the prophecy with the characters, but the text does not give any insight into the characters’ interpretation of it (Knaeble 2019, 154–155). There are, however, indications that encourage the recipients to assume that neither of the characters expects the prophecy to be fulfilled by them. The actual killing of Emerich, for example, is narrated as an instantaneous and (for the characters) unpredictable event. The narrative pace increases dramatically, as suddenly a wild boar bursts out of the undergrowth and Reymund and Emerich reach for their weapons. Reymund tells Emerich to climb a tree, but he refuses. Emerich tries to stab the boar but fails to hit it, so Reymund grabs the spear, misses the boar as well, and stabs Emerich. The scene is narrated in such a way that the characters do not reflect for one second on their decisions or on the consequences related to the prophecy, so that Emerich’s death appears as an unforeseen accident (Knaeble 2019, 156; Müller 1990, 1046). Reymund himself is shocked by the event and starts to lament Emerich’s death. Knaeble (2019, 158–159) has shown that Reymund offers two conflicting concepts of responsibility in reaction to his actions: on the one hand, Reymund is worried that the court will accuse him of killing Emerich intentionally, but on the other hand, he describes himself as a victim of the events that Fortuna has allowed to occur. In the narrated world, Emerich’s death is not perceived simply as something that needed to happen and over which Reymund had no control. The conflict between predestination and human agency is much more complicated and remains unresolved by the text. There is no authority within the narrative that would once and for all decide whether Reymund is to blame for his actions or whether his path was determined from the beginning, or whether even both could be true. It is Reymund who decides to view himself as being at the mercy of fate in order to reduce his moral responsibility for Emerich’s death (Knaeble 2019, 159). Since the scene oscillates between predestination and human agency, the recipients are presented with different ways of dealing with eventfulness. Unforeseen events do not necessarily have to be interpreted as divine Providence; rather, they are situated between the two extremes of total predestination and total human responsibility. Eventfulness is no longer a desired challenge that a knight tackles head on, but rather something that can be interpreted and dealt with

in different ways. It is the process of negotiating these various options of how to handle eventfulness that makes early modern prose romances an important source for narratological questions regarding eventfulness.

In the following, and last, example, the focus will lie on a different aspect: relevance. The question will be how literature incorporates historical occurrences that are already considered eventful outside of literature, and how texts increase their eventfulness for the recipients through literary means.

6 Creating Relevance: The 1631 Eruption of Vesuvius in Early Modern Literature

On 16 December 1631, the volcano Vesuvius terrified the area around Naples with the most powerful eruption since 79 CE. The eruption lasted several days, and smaller aftershocks were still felt until early 1632. This eruption became an event that drew attention throughout Europe and was discussed in various forms (Schreurs 2008). A broadside from 1631/1632, printed in Augsburg (*Warhaffter Bericht / und eigentliche Contrafaktur / der erschrocklichen Erbidem / und Fewrsgewalt / so auß dem Berg Vesuvij . . . nicht weit von Neapoli / entsprungen / im Jahr 1631. den 15. Decem-ber. Gedruckt zu Augspurg / bey Daniel Mannasser, 1631; BSB Munich*), informed the German-speaking public about the eruption, underscoring its unpredictability and improbability and stressing that nobody had ever heard of something so horrible. The broadside also reported on the irreversible damage, amounting to two million *Cronen*, and mourned the death of at least four thousand people. A different broadside from 1632, whose place of printing is unknown (*Eygentlicher Abriß vnd Beschreibung Deß grossen Erdbebens / vnd erschrocklichen brennenden Bergs im Königreich Neapolis, 1632; The British Museum*) also reported the death of several thousand people and the devastation of Naples and its surrounding areas. It can hardly be denied that the eruption of Vesuvius was at the time depicted as real, resultative, unpredictable, consequential, irreversible, and unlikely to happen often.

However, the question as to why the eruption should be relevant to people outside of Campania was not obvious, and was discussed at the time. Both broadsides include a copper engraving showing the immediate effect the eruption had on the Neapolitan population. The second broadside even offers a legend to its engraving, on which the various landmarks in Naples and its surroundings are indicated in order to describe precisely which areas were afflicted by Vesuvius. But the broadside also raises the more general question as to why this eruption occurred: “Was nun diese erschrockliche Wunderzeichen bedeuten / vnnd ferner mit sich bringen werden / ist allein Gott dem allmächtigen bewust” (Only God Almighty

knows what these terrible miraculous signs mean and what they will bring with them). The broadside from Augsburg does not wonder about the meaning of this catastrophe, but nevertheless offers an interpretation: it hopes that “es werde die letzte Warnung der vnbußfertigen Menschen sein. GOtt der Allmächtig wölle vns vnser Sünden vnd Missethaten / durch sein grosse Barmhertzigkeit / gnädig vnd vätterlich verzeyhen” (it will be the final warning to unrepentant people. May God Almighty graciously and fatherly forgive our sins and misdeeds through his great mercy). The words *Wunderzeichen* and *Warnung*, in particular, connect the eruption of Vesuvius to the common idea that natural disasters can be interpreted as a sign and warning from God (Schenda 1997, 15–16). Accordingly, the broadside from Augsburg interprets the catastrophe in Naples as a punishment and warning for the sinful, but it does not specify for which sins the people are being punished.

In his didactic poem *Vesuvius: Poëma Germanicum* (1633), Martin Opitz is much more specific in this regard. He links the eruption of Vesuvius to occurrences in the Holy Roman Empire and thus generates the relevance of the natural disaster in Naples for his German-speaking audience. Although the poem is not entirely narrative in a narrow sense, it includes narrative passages that are mostly concerned with endowing the eruption with eventfulness and making it relevant to recipients. In the first part of the poem, Opitz outlines the mechanics of volcanic eruptions without theological interpretation. He explains that volcanos erupt because there is too much air in the underground tunnels of the earth, causing the air to push outward and eject sulphur and other flammable substances with it. This theory corresponds to the scientific knowledge of the time (Zittel 2008, 412–414). However, Opitz is not only interested in how volcanos erupt, but also in why Vesuvius, in particular, erupted in 1631. Like the broadsides, Opitz interprets the natural phenomenon as a miraculous sign from God which is no longer recognized by people (Häfner 2009, 44; Robert 2018, 206). The eruption of Vesuvius cannot be dismissed as a mere natural phenomenon or as something that happened in Campania devoid of relevance to the people in the Holy Roman Empire. Opitz strongly emphasizes that, metaphorically, the eruption of Vesuvius is everywhere:

Dein Vesuvius ist hier. Der leib der seele wagen /
 Der kercker den der mensch muß an dem halse tragen /
 Der mensch des Glückes ball / die fantasey der zeit /
 Darff nicht erwarten erst biß Etna fewer speyt /
 Biß plitz vndt donner kömpt / biß stadt vndt landt versinken. (295; edition: Bamberger and Robert 2021)

(Your Vesuvius is here. The body, the wagon of the soul, the prison which man must carry around the neck. Man, the plaything of Fortune, the illusion of time, cannot wait until Etna spits fire, until lightning and thunder begin, until city and surroundings perish.)

Opitz asks people to take heed of their mortality and of the current situation in Europe. To him, the reason for the eruption is the Thirty Years War and the barbaric acts committed by man:

[. . .] Das bürgerliche schwerdt
Hatt Deutschlandt durch vndt durch nunmehr fast auffgezehr[t] [. . .]
Die Elbe roth gefärbt / (wer ist der nicht berewt
Die arme Stadt dabey!) (298)

[. . .] The civil sword has now almost completely destroyed Germany through and through.
[. . .] The Elbe was dyed red. Who does not lament the poor city next to it!

The “poor city” on the Elbe can be identified as Magdeburg, which was destroyed during the “Magdeburg Wedding” (commentary in Bamberger and Robert 2021, 298). General Tilly besieged and eventually conquered the city of Magdeburg in May 1631, killing thousands of people in the process. Already at that time, the conquest of Magdeburg was perceived as one of the most gruesome events of the war, and news of the disaster spread in the media accordingly (Dröse 2018). Opitz directly connects the natural disaster of the volcanic eruption in Naples with a human catastrophe taking place within the Holy Roman Empire. Although the people in the Empire are not directly affected by the eruption, Opitz instills the relevance of this event in his German-speaking audience by interpreting it as God’s punishment for the atrocities committed during the Thirty Years War. For the German-speaking public, the relevance of the destruction wreaked by Vesuvius on its surroundings is not a given. Rather, its relevance and eventfulness is wrought by Opitz in establishing a connection between the eruption and a well-known local situation. This example shows that the “relevance” category is not inherent to the event itself, but that it depends on the perspective of the observer and can also be established through literary means.

7 Conclusion

The analysis of these quite diverse literary examples has shown that the various aspects of eventfulness require further modifications when applied to premodern narratives. First of all, one comes closer to a historical understanding of events by stressing the performativity of eventfulness and narrativity. As the discussion of *aventure* in Arthurian romances has shown, events and eventfulness are, even within the narrated world, considered to emerge through narration. The characters find themselves in a tight spot if there are no witnesses around to recount what has occurred and to vouch for the knight’s honorable deeds. It is the process of

narration at the court that generates the eventfulness of an occurrence, since only then can the knight receive the recognition of his peers. If nobody observes and narrates an occurrence, eventfulness cannot unfold. There are no occurrences that are inherently relevant or unexpected; relevance and unexpectedness, and with it eventfulness, emerge in the process of narration and in the interaction between observer and occurrence.

The dependence of eventfulness on the observer also affects the various features proposed by Schmid, especially when analyzed in a historical perspective. The prerequisite that an occurrence must be real to be categorized as an event might – not just in regard to medieval narratives, but in general – need to be phrased more precisely. The occurrence must be *believed* to be real: the members of Arthur's court in *Wigalois*, for example, believe that Gawein has not only been abducted, but that he is dead. For them, the occurrence of Gawein's disappearance is much more eventful, since death is an irreversible change of state, while characters could be saved from abduction. The recipients know that Gawein is still alive and safe, but this does not make the occurrence less eventful to the characters within the narrated world. Consequently, eventfulness must always be described from a specific point of view, and researchers need to assess what counts as real for an observer at a specific point in time.

The same holds true for the concepts of resultativity and irreversibility. At a certain point in *Wigalois*, Gawein returns to Arthur's court and its members realize that he is not dead after all. This, however, does not change the eventfulness of his abduction at the time it occurred. The abduction might appear less eventful in retrospect, since it did not result in his irreversible death. But at the time, when he disappeared, the occurrence was extremely eventful because it was believed to be irreversible and resultative. The question is not whether an occurrence is objectively eventful; rather, it must be determined what occurrences emerge as eventful at a certain point in time and whether, in retrospect, their eventfulness decreases due to a later change in the characters' or recipients' knowledge about the resultativity and the irreversibility of the occurrence.

The same applies to the category of "relevance." Occurrences are not relevant on their own but become relevant in the eye of the observer. The analysis of early modern broadsides and Opitz's *Vesuvius* has shown that texts can produce relevance for occurrences by connecting them to the recipients' immediate environment. Opitz interprets the eruption of Vesuvius, which occurred in distant Naples, as a warning and punishment from God for the gruesome crimes committed during the Thirty Years War, especially the siege of Magdeburg in the Holy Roman Empire. The eruption of Vesuvius is not immediately relevant to Opitz's German audience, but becomes so by being linked to the reality of the recipients' lives.

Unpredictability and iterativity have proven to be the two most difficult aspects of eventfulness when analyzing premodern narratives, especially from the medieval period. While in modern times the originality and singularity of a literary text are considered crucial in determining its aesthetic value, medieval narratives are mostly re-narrations and are not judged by the uniqueness of their plots. Medieval narratives tend to be eventful in their narrative mediation. Since the overall plot is often already known, it is the way this plot is narrated that is potentially eventful for the historical audience. Consequently, medieval narratives offer various versions of how a story can be narrated, thus creating unexpected narrative alternatives that are perceived as eventful by the recipients. Concerning mediation events, however, it is of great importance to reconstruct the historical expectations against which a certain type of narration can be perceived as eventful. Focusing on intertextual references that evoke a certain expectation which is subsequently not fulfilled is one way to avoid generalizations or ahistorical applications of modern expectations. Furthermore, a historical perspective reveals that iterativity has not always been perceived as a reason to dismiss a narrative as less eventful. In some contexts, iterativity even has the specific function of creating eventfulness. In legends, for example, the persistent re-narration of well-known miracles serves the purpose of continually re-establishing evidence of God's salvific power and actualizing the eventfulness of the original event of salvation.

Another important matter that needs to be considered when analyzing unpredictability is the difference in how characters or the narrator deal with unexpected eventfulness in the Middle Ages and in early modern times. Although there is no abrupt change from total providentiality to absolute contingency, gradual transformations can be detected. The pluralization of narrative conceptualizations of the future in early modern prose romances, for example, leads to a juxtaposition of various ways that characters cope with eventfulness. The scenes in which characters begin to plan their futures or reflect on how to deal with the tension between predestination and human agency increase significantly. A historical perspective on unpredictability thus needs to take into account the fact that the understanding of unpredictability is historically and culturally dependent and that the characters' approach to unpredictability changes with time.

In the end, the question remains as to whether the concept of eventfulness, which does not yet belong to the concepts generally employed in Medieval German Studies, offers new insights into medieval narratives. One might argue that many of the phenomena discussed in this article have been analyzed before, using other narratological terms. Eventfulness, however, could be a concept that brings these very different phenomena into a systematic order. While individual features have certainly been well researched, the principle of eventfulness may enable researchers to identify overlaps and interdependencies in existing research and thus to open up new paths of inquiry.

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