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Fictionality and the Alterity of Premodern Literature

1 Preliminary Remarks

The term "fictionality" describes a quality of those texts (or other media) that are considered "fiction" inasmuch as they are attributed a special status with regard to their claim to truth. In spite of this intuitively clear explanation, formulating an analytically precise definition of fictionality can be considered one of the main problems of literary theory (Klauk and Köppe 2014). This is all the more pressing where a diachronic perspective is concerned, given the alterity of the worldview of the medieval and early modern epoch, which, from the outset, impedes thinking in terms of artistic autonomy, human creativity, a reality-based concept of truth, or the ability to operate outside the constraints of veracity, all of which, being self-evident from today's perspective, are axiomatic components of fictionality in literary theory. If the question of premodern fictionality has, nonetheless, been a much-discussed topic in medieval German studies for decades, this debate has taken place on quite different grounds and under different analytical premises from those of modern literary theory. A careful methodological approach is therefore needed when developing a diachronic perspective on fictionality, one that builds on the analytical achievements of contemporary theory while taking into account the premodern literary situation.

The present article aims to establish the necessary analytical basis for a historical view of premodern literary practices that can potentially be classified as fictional, while maintaining the objective of outlining how to describe the corresponding literary phenomena in their own historical particularity. Taking general literary theory as a starting point, an approach is set out that can be applied to potentially fictional medieval and early modern narratives (see my article "Fictionality in Medieval and Early Modern German Literature" in this volume).

2 Current Definitions of Fictionality

2.1 Orientation

The formation of theories of fictionality in recent decades has been interdisciplinary and highly diverse (overviews in Zipfel 2001; Gertken and Köppe 2009; Klauk and Köppe 2014; Zetterberg Gjerlevsen 2016; Missinne, Schneider, and van Dam

2020), with the majority of theories being based on the question of whether or not a given text can be classified as fictional, not factual, and by whom or what this is determined. Depending on which part of the model of literary communication these theories emphasize, they can, albeit not without overlaps, be grouped into text-oriented, production-oriented, reception-oriented, and context-oriented approaches (Gertken and Köppe 2009; Klauk and Köppe 2014). *Text-oriented* theories identify fictionality on the basis of linguistic properties, for instance free indirect discourse or the grammatical peculiarity of an "epic preterit" ("episches Präteritum" as in "Tomorrow was Christmas"; Hamburger [1957] 1994), but also on the basis of textual signposts of fictionality (Cohn 1990, 1999; cf. Zipfel 2014). These signals can be located on the level of the story, as for instance in the case of fantastic or other clearly unreal elements, or on the level of discourse, as for instance when the narrator's insight into characters' inner thoughts and feelings is displayed. In a wider sense, paratextual signposts also fall into this category, including, in the simplest case, a genre designation like "fiction" or "novel" on the title page. In Klauk and Köppe's (2014) classification, text-oriented theories also include those approaches which are based on the semantic functioning of reference in a text. Drawing on modal logics and possible world theories, these approaches define fictional texts by their reference to objects, circumstances, and events that do not exist or, more precisely, possess an ontologically distinct status in that they are part of a possible (fictive), not the actual world (Pavel 1986; Doležel 1988; Ronen 1994; cf. Klauk 2014). In Gabriel's (1975) influential theory, fictional texts are characterized by not raising any claim to reference. In contrast to this, *production-oriented* approaches base their definition of fictionality primarily on the author's intention and his relation to the text. The most prominent of these is John Searle's speech act theory, which describes fictional discourse as the pretense of an illocutionary act, or a series of illocutionary acts, which become suspended by convention and thus do not relate to the world as they normally would (Searle 1975; cf. Onea 2014). *Reception-oriented* approaches, on the other hand, connect the fictionality of a text primarily with the way in which it is processed by the recipient. In Kendall Walton's influential theory, representational art is understood as a game of "make-believe" in which narrative representations are seen as props for the recipient that prompt them to imagine things (Walton 1990; Bareis 2008, 2014). Finally, *context-oriented* theories, which typically comprise components of text-, production-, and reception-oriented approaches, emphasize the social norms and conventions that determine the behavior of both authors and recipients in the narrative process, and thus describe fiction as a communicative practice. Examples are the models of Gregory Currie (1990), who understands fiction as constituted by a "fictive intention" on the part of the author and by an attitude of "imaginative involvement" on the part of the reader, or of Richard Walsh (2007), who presents a

pragmatic explanation of fictionality as a mode of interpretation deployed by the recipient in order to maximize the relevance of the message in a given context (see also Nielsen, Phelan, and Walsh 2015).

Although there is no universally accepted theory, the currently prevailing definition of fictionality corresponds most closely to the context-oriented category. Recent literary theory tends to consider fictionality as an *institution* (Currie 1990; Lamarque and Olsen 1994; cf. Köppe 2014): a coordinated social practice based on shared knowledge of conventions and rules on how to signpost, recognize, and process fictional texts, both on the side of the author and on the side of the recipients. At the same time, fictionality is considered to be predominantly determined by the author, who, in producing a text, intends his recipients to adopt an attitude that lends itself to fiction, termed "fictive stance" by Lamarque and Olsen (1994) – treating the fictional statements as true, while knowing that they are not – and who furthermore assumes that the recipients will, on the grounds of a shared social practice, have sufficient reason to do so. The fictional stance of reception implies following a complex set of semantic rules and restrictions, as well as following the prompts to imagine conveyed by the text. In contrast to Searle's definition, Konrad (2014, 288–372; 2017, 54) describes the underlying speech act as a genuine assertive illocution, but with the distinct, twofold characteristic – unique to fictional discourse – that it demands *imagining* its propositional content, including filling in what is indeterminate, but at the same time demands *imagining* this same illocution to be of the normal assertive type.

2.2 Range and Scope

While the approaches mentioned so far all aim to set out criteria with which to identify fictionality in a given text or narrative communication, most of them can also be grouped according to how they are oriented toward the range and scope of fictionality in relation to factuality (Blume 2004; Konrad 2014, 2017). Apart from the radical constructivist theory of *panfictionalism*, which considers all human models of reality as fiction and denies any difference between fictionality and factuality, most theories can be classified as either *autonomist* approaches, which postulate the complete autonomy of fiction from the factual, or *compositionalist* approaches, which take an intermediate position in that they acknowledge the potential existence of factual components in fictional texts, thus considering fictional discourse a possible mixture of both elements.

Further, recent literary theory has emphasized that fictionality can be effectively defined in relation to factuality (Fludernik 2001, 2015; Hempfer 2018, 96–106; Fludernik and Ryan 2020) or, along similar lines, to the intermediate status of

non-fictionality (Missinne, Schneider, and van Dam 2020, 30–36). This view is based on the premise that the distinction between fictionality and factuality, or non-fictionality, is scalable: just as texts can display absolute or gradational attributes of fictionality, they can be received in different ways. In many cases, this perspective widens the scope to include intermediate positions on the scale of fictionality. Depending on the cultural standpoint of the recipient, certain texts, for instance travelogues or narratives based on mythological material, can be read purely factually; or non-fictionally, but with little concern for their factual relevance; or, finally, purely fictionally, as intentionally crafted pieces of narrative art without any claim to truth (Fludernik 2018). This perspective is not only recipient-related but can be linked back to authorial intention (Karnes 2020).

2.3 Historical Accentuation

Regarding the difficult question of whether and how the modern concept of fictionality can be applied to premodern literature, or, alternatively, whether and how premodern practices of fictionality can be described differently, the wider compositionalist view offers the most potential, all the more so if it allows for a scalar conception, including intermediate shades between the dichotomies of the fictional and the factual. The specification of a unique fictional speech act (Konrad 2014, 2017) can in this sense be adapted such that its second demand – to imagine the demand to imagine as being an assertive act – is scalable rather than absolute, thus providing more scope regarding the methodological questions of a special truth value of fiction and the problem of reference to reality, both of which are difficult to reconcile with medieval concepts of truth and reality (see below, 3.4). Where the point of reference that determines fictionality is concerned (see 2.1), the prevailing theory – of fiction as institution – offers the advantage of being intrinsically open to cultural and historical variability (Orlemanski 2019; Gittel 2020; Manuwald 2020; Konrad 2020).

A working definition of fictionality (cf. Konrad 2014, 477–478, 2017, 55, slightly modified here) for the following exposition could read as follows. A text, or parts of a text, are considered fictional if they comply with institutional presuppositions consensually acknowledged by the author (*convention of decision*) and the intended reader (*convention of execution*), according to which the author has two intentions: first, the fictional intention that the reader will receive those sentences of the text that are not signposted otherwise as demands for imagination according to their propositional content, while at the same time either imagining them to be assertive speech acts or being indifferent in this regard (*convention of gradational specification*); second, the reciprocal intention that the reader will recognize the fictional

intention and judge it appropriate to process the text accordingly (*convention of reciprocity*). At the same time, the author must convey his intention in a conventional way by the means of signposts (*convention of signalization*).

3 Outline of the Problem

3.1 Lines of Research

While there are few genuinely universalist theories of fictionality (but see Currie 2014), the "invention" of fiction in occidental culture has been asserted for several points in history, depending on the disciplinary perspectives and methodological assumptions in any given case. They range from Aristotle's *Poetics*, the Greek novel, the medieval vernacular romance, and the Renaissance to the eighteenth-century realist novel (Fludernik 2018; Orlemanski 2019). This is in line with recent literary theory, which considers fictionality a culturally varying practice rather than an ontological absolute, and accordingly allows for historical fluctuations (Lavocat 2016). However, theories that proclaim the emergence of fictionality at a particular point in time have justifiably been criticized as being teleologically biased toward modern literature, especially the cultural norms set by the novel (Orlemanski 2019). Mirroring the epistemic path that led to the modern concept of fictionality, famously expressed by Philip Sidney (2002, 103) as "of all writers under the sun the Poet is the least liar," teleological theories typically base their assertion on the premise that at one particular point, the participants of literary discourse developed an awareness of the distinction between fact, falsehood, and – as a newly recognized third possibility that neither claims literal truth nor intends to deceive – fiction (Gallagher 2006).

This reasoning is also at the core of the most influential theory on the emergence of fictionality in the Middle Ages in German research, that of Haug ([1985] 1997), and it is precisely this point in Haug's argumentation that has subsequently been contested from various perspectives. Haug's starting point is the prologue to Chrétien de Troyes's (1994) Arthurian romance *Érec et Énide* (ca. 1170), in which it is stated that Chrétien "tret d'un conte d'avanture / une mout bele conjointure" (derives from a story of adventure a beautifully constructed composition; lines 13–14). This idea of a certain authorial liberty – to rearrange freely the components that have been transmitted and to create a new, experimental composition that is different from the sources and only gains its meaning in this new form – is interpreted by Haug as an expression of a new fictional awareness, the "discovery of fictionality" (Entdeckung der Fiktionalität, Haug 2003, title). While fictionality in

a modern sense may have existed before, it is, according to Haug, understood from this point onward as "defined by a new, free relationship to truth, a relationship that implies detachment from any previously given truth in favor of a truth which is to be newly constituted" (2003, 138).

Haug's approach has been criticized by various medievalists, leading to a discussion in German literary theory over the years that has ultimately led to little progress (Kiening 2012). There is no doubt whatsoever that there was a "burst of fictionality" (Fiktionalisierungsschub; Wolfzettel 2002, 97) in late twelfth-century Europe, which saw the emergence of a hitherto unprecedented secular literature in the vernacular. What has been debated, however, is whether this designation is true only from an anachronistic viewpoint – as a legitimate category of retrospective literary historiography – or whether the emergence of what modern scholars would unanimously describe as "fictional" actually implies the development of a historical concept of fictionality that is comparable with that of modern literary theory. The main objection to Haug's theory was that his reasoning was guided by a modern idea of fictionality projected onto medieval texts, while neglecting both historical concepts of truth and reality and historical literary theory (Huber 1988; Heinzle 1990; Knapp 1997; responses in Haug 2003).

Subsequent research in German literary studies on a possible medieval concept of fictionality in the vernacular romance has been wide-ranging and is difficult to survey. However, three main positions can be distinguished (Schneider 2020, 81–82). The first discusses the question within the context of Latin literary theory and the theologically shaped worldview of the Middle Ages. In this view, since no other truth than that of God and his plan could have been deemed possible, the idea of an alternative fictional truth in its own right is considered inconceivable or, at best, to have remained "a very rare special case within romance production, which was otherwise dominated by pseudo-history" (Knapp 2014a, 185; cf. Knapp 2005, 2014b; Schmitt 2005, 136–157; Meincke 2007). In contrast to this, the second position identifies certain features of vernacular romance as signals, or even indicators, of either a conscious use of fictionality or, alternatively, a reflection on it, which, even though it can be more or less clear or occur within a tiered model, is considered essentially comparable to the modern concept (Meyer 1994; Grünkorn 1996; Ridder 1998, 2001, 2003; Neudeck 2003; Reuvekamp-Felber 2013; Dimpel 2013). The third, more cautious position aims at a differentiated view of the historical theory, practice, and perception of what may be termed "fictionality." It emphasizes the unsettled status of medieval vernacular literature between factuality and fictionality and concludes that most texts can only vaguely, if at all, be classified as one or the other (Müller 2004, 2014; Glauch 2005; 2009, 137–197; 2104a; 2014b; Raumann 2010; Herweg 2010; Braun 2015; Manuwald 2018; Schneider 2020).

3.2 Medieval Textual Culture

Medieval textual culture was subject to conditions that are very different from those of the literary industries of modern epochs. Since these prerequisites inevitably affect the manifestation of fictionality as an institutional conception, they will be outlined briefly here. First of all, it must be pointed out that vernacular narrative literature conceived in writing was, at the time of Chrétien and the courtly classics, a relatively young phenomenon. Quantitatively, it remained a peripheral aspect of a literary culture that was predominantly Latin and predominantly concerned with (mostly non-narrative) scholastic, religious, or historiographical writing. Medieval culture was bilingual, characterized by the dualism of Latin and the vernaculars, which, in terms of education, function, and status, belonged to clearly demarcated spheres: that of the clerics – the Latinate *litterati* – on the one hand, and that of the laymen – the aristocratic *illitterati* – on the other. The cultural techniques of writing and reading were, for the most part, restricted to the former. They were acquired by means of the Latin language and, in principle, limited to Latin texts in their use. The transfer of these techniques to the vernaculars was only secondary, the slow result of the long-term process of literarization of the vernaculars that had begun around AD 800 and was still not complete by the end of the Middle Ages, even though it gained considerable impetus from the twelfth century onward due to the establishment of aristocratic residences and the rise of a new secular court culture, which involved the need for aristocratic self-representation in art and literature. This important cultural shift saw its beginnings in France, whose new courtly ideals radiated rapidly to other European cultures. Consequently, written German literature around 1200 is, to a large extent, "reception literature," rewritten from French sources. This corresponds to the medieval concept of authorship, which differs fundamentally from the modern understanding, being based on continuity and retextualization rather than on originality or creativity.

Before the twelfth century, secular poetic literature in the vernacular had been exclusively oral; as a consequence, it is almost entirely lost today. Within the context of the new courtly culture, which included worldly scriptoria (staffed with Latinate clerics), not only did some older oral epics find their way onto parchment, still bearing traces of their former orality, but, in the second half of the twelfth century, the romance, a new type of secular verse narrative, emerged; from the start, it was conceived in writing and soon displayed sophisticated poetic designs in complex structures. Yet it was still largely based on the material of the older oral traditions, such as heroic sagas or the Arthurian myths, or else on classical Latin epics. At least for the decades around 1200, it also remained connotatively connected to the oral, illiterate sphere, even though, in this period, the authors can only have been literate clerics. Their patrons and, in general, their recipients, by contrast, were the mostly illiterate members of the

court. This led to a form of reception that was typically (but not exclusively) linked to oral communication: unlike Latin literature, vernacular literature was recited or sung in oral performances that included vocal variation, rhythm, gestures, and facial expression. Any messages or undertones, including possible signposts of fictionality, that might have been conveyed by these means must be considered blind spots for today's literary analysis. This type of secondary orality has been termed "vocality." It is to be distinguished from the genuinely oral literature that, as many indications reveal, still thrived at this time in the same circles, drawing in parallel on the same material as the written courtly literature that is the subject of today's research.

Independently of the medial disposition of a text, throughout the Middle Ages, the opposition between "vernacular" and "Latin" remained connected to the connotations of the coexisting illiterate and literate spheres, such as "oral" versus "written" or "secular" versus "spiritual," which, in turn, were associated with evaluations as "unreliable" versus "reliable" or "dubious" versus "serious" – "something that, at least from the standpoint of the literate, comes very close to our modern understanding of the difference between 'fictional' and 'factual'" (Glauch 2014a, 389). Yet, in contrast to the modern literary world, medieval vernacular literature did not possess an institutionalized genre system with clearly defined designations that could in themselves indicate fictional or factual discourse.

3.3 Historical Literary Theory

Medieval literary theory does not possess any theoretical concept of literary fictionality. Aristotle's *Poetics*, which can be considered a cornerstone of the modern discourse on fictionality, was virtually unknown before its rediscovery in the Renaissance. However, there is an elaborate discourse on *ficta* and *facta* in narrative (Ernst 2004), which mainly goes back to ancient textbooks of rhetoric, in particular to Cicero's *De inventione* (*On Invention*) and the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (*Rhetoric for Herennius*, formerly attributed to Cicero), both dating to the first century BCE. These textbooks were studied in medieval cathedral schools on a basic level, the trivium, and they were taken up in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Latin poetics. They were presumably known to most authors of courtly literature, whose Latin education is obvious in many cases. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (*Ad C. Herennium libri IV* 1964, 1.8.13) differentiates three types of narrative, distinguished by the way they represent events: *fabula*, *historia*, and *argumentum*:

> Fabula est quae neque veras neque veri similes continet res, ut eae sunt quae tragoediis traditae sunt. Historia est gesta res, sed ab aetatis nostrae memoria remota. Argumentum est ficta res quae tamen fieri potuit, velut argumenta comoediarium.

(The *fabula* comprises events neither true nor probable, like those transmitted by tragedies. The *historia* is an account of exploits actually performed, but removed in time from the recollection of our age. The *argumentum* recounts invented events, which yet could have occurred, like the plots of comedies.).

Earlier views deemed the category of the *argumentum* – the narration of invented but possible events (*ficta*) – to represent an early concept of narrative fiction (Jauß 1983). However, this connection is rejected in current research (Knapp 1997, 171–174; Glauch 2014a, 411; for a different view, see Green 2002, 1–17), both on the grounds of the total lack of reference to these rhetorical categories in the metapoetic or self-reflexive passages of courtly romances or historiographical narratives, and because of the lack of terminological or conceptual coherence in medieval Latin discourse (Mehtonen 1996). This is also true for the early medieval adaptation of the categories by Isidore of Seville in his widespread *Etymologiae* (*Etymologies*, ca. AD 630). Even though Isidore quotes the classical tripartite classification (1911, 1.44.5), his main focus is on *fabula* and *historia*. *Fabula* is reinterpreted, much in the sense of the original *argumentum*, as being characterized by representing *ficta*: “Fabulas poetae a fando nominaverunt, quia non sunt res factae, sed tantum loquendo fictae” (Poets have named the fables after *fando* – “speaking” – because they do not represent things that happened, but what is invented in words; 1.40.1).

Isidore further differentiates three types of *fabulae* (1.40.3): those that have been invented “delectandi causa” (for the sake of entertainment), those that are to be interpreted “ad naturam rerum” (with regard to the nature of things), and those that are to be read “ad mores hominum” (with regard to the morals of people). The first type is dismissed quickly as corresponding to “quas vulgo dicunt” (those that are told to the folk) or to Plautus’s and Terence’s comedies. Isidore only elaborates on the other two types (1.40.4–6): while the second type conveys what can be described as general knowledge, the third type, which is represented by the Aesopian fable, allows, by means of the invented narrative (“per narrationem fictam”), the represented events to be linked to a “true meaning” (verax significatio). Narrative invention is thus bound back to revealing religious or moral truth, which is in fact the only usage in which it is legitimate from the viewpoint of medieval theology, as stated by the Church Father Augustine: “quando id fingimus quod nihil significat, tunc est mendacium. Cum autem fictio nostra refertur ad aliquam significationem, non est mendacium sed aliqua figura ueritatis” (When we invent (feign) something that signifies nothing, then it is a lie. But when our invention (fiction) refers to a signification, then it is not a lie, but a figure of truth; 1980, II LI, 4–6).

Another concept of Latin literary theory that has been discussed as a possible medieval correspondence to narrative fictionality is that of the *integumentum*, a hermeneutic concept of twelfth-century scholastics (Knapp 1981; Huber 1986; 1994; Haug [1985] 1997, 228–240). *Integumentum* refers to texts that convey a moral or

religious truth that is hidden under the cover or "dress" of an invented narrative ("fabulosa narratio"; Bernardus Silvestris 1977, 3). It has been linked to vernacular romance mainly because of a passage in Thomasin von Zerklaere's ([1852] 1965) didactic poem *Der Welsche Gast* (*The Romance Stranger*), where it is claimed that in romances – initially described as "frivolities that are untrue" (spel diu niht wâr sint; line 1085) – "one dresses truth in lies" (daz wâr man mit lüge kleit; line 1126). However, even if one concedes that in these verses Thomasin may have had the concept of *integumentum* in mind (which is debated: Knapp 1997, 65–74), this single short passage cannot be considered sufficient to ascribe the systematic practice of using a second level of meaning to vernacular romance (Schneider 2020, 84). In any case, just as with Isidore's *fabula*, that meaning would essentially be only secondary, with reference to the truth remaining primary – an idea that differs so significantly from the modern idea of autonomous fiction that it would be difficult to speak of any conceptual equivalence.

3.4 The Other Factual: Medieval Concepts of Truth and Reality

Matters are further complicated by the fundamental alterity of medieval understandings of what is "factual" and of how "truth" and "perceivable reality" relate to each other (Glauch 2005, 45–51; 2014a, 389–393; Braun 2015; Manuwald 2018; Schneider 2020, 85–97). This can be elucidated in at least three respects.

First, the marvelous and the miraculous formed an integral part of the medieval concept of reality. *Mirabilia* were considered as scientifically true (Rothmann 2001). They typically occurred in genres like historiography, travelogues, or encyclopedic literature, while *miracula* were a fundamental part of religious genres, like hagiography, whose veracity was unimpeachable. But they could equally occur in secular vernacular verse epics that, from a modern point of view, are clearly fictional. Additionally, creatures like unicorns or dragons are accounted for in medieval bestiaries or appear in saints' legends. From this perspective, they are no more unreal than, for instance, a lion or an elephant, which were not part of visible reality either. This not only means that seemingly fantastic and unrealistic elements or events cannot be considered signposts of fictionality in medieval literature; it is also a first important factor in recognizing that people's relationship with perceivable reality in the Middle Ages was different from what might be assumed from a modern perspective.

Second, there is a common cultural practice in medieval writing that has been described as making "corrections to reality" (Realitätskorrekturen; Herweg 2010, 196). Its basic idea is to facilitate access to reality by shaping more clearly or adding to what is perceived as real – by means of what, from a modern viewpoint, could

only be described as fictional, if not as fake, but from a historical perspective is more adequately characterized as a practice of "lazy hypotheses" that treat what helps solving a problem as true (Althoff 2014). In this sense, the practice is clearly factual. Obvious examples are etiological narratives, founding narratives, fictitious genealogies, or episodes that marvelously connect the past to the present, all very much part of aristocratic self-representation and, consequently, of courtly literature. They are all intended to convey what is considered to be true by freely visualizing what may be hidden – legitimately so, because in medieval thought, truth exceeds the visible. In some views, this practice applies equally to classical rhetorical technique: according to one – albeit controversial – interpretation of a passage in Cicero's *De oratore* (*On the Orator*), in historiography only the *fundamenta*, the historical essence, was required to be literally true, while, at the same time, it could be expanded by a superstructure, the *exaedificatio*, that only required verisimilitude (Cicero 2007, 2.15.62–63; cf. Knapp 2014a, 181–182; Schorn 2019).

Third, along similar lines, from the religious viewpoint of the Middle Ages, the perceivable substantiveness of the world is only the expression of a higher transcendental truth: the message of God, which is considered to be present in all creation and, in principle, discernible for everybody who endeavors to read it. In this view, veracity is determined not by reference to reality but by reference to truth, which, in turn, arises precisely not from representing but from transcending reality. It remains debatable whether this hermeneutic perspective can be transferred from the Latin scholastic sphere to that of the *illitterati* of the courtly world, and even more so, whether the participants in courtly discourse would apply the corresponding biblical exegetical practice to the reception of secular narrative literature. Still, it must be concluded that medieval recipients of what we would call fictional narratives may not have perceived the difference between reference to reality and reference to a possible world particularly clearly (Schneider 2020, 87).

4 Possible Conceptual Adjustments

4.1 Reference and Mode

4.1.1 Differentiating Facticity and Factuality

Overall, it is apparent that medieval literature could deviate in many ways from representing (empirical) reality, without necessarily falling into the (modern) category of fiction. The claim to truth and reference to reality can quite naturally drift

apart. The modern premise of a supposedly objective "factual," as a kind of default from which the "fictional" is set apart, turns out to be the expression of an empiricism (or the claim to it) that postdates the Middle Ages by quite some way. Consequently, if the difference between factuality and fictionality is to be maintained, it becomes necessary to distinguish between *facticity* as the quality of what is represented and *factuality* as the mode of representation, analogously to the differentiation between *fictivity* and *fictionality* that has been emphasized in German literary theory since the early 1990s (Rajewski 2020, 34–38). Factuality does not depend on facticity. With regard to medieval writing, it should not be asked whether something is true in point of fact, but whether it is presented in a factual mode or not (Müller 2004, 2014; Manuwald 2018, 78–82).

Yet how exactly factuality (and, as a relative quality, fictionality) can be determined in premodern narrative must be resolved carefully with regard to individual texts or genres; as stated above, a scalar rather than a binary model must be adopted (von Contzen 2020; cf. Glauch 2014a, 406–410). This is no easy matter in most cases, but in some instances, the methodological differentiation between facticity and factuality provides an immediate solution to otherwise complicated problems. Medieval historiography is an example. Many chronicles refer to elements or events that are, from a modern point of view, clearly fictive, such as the descriptions of the monstrous people of India that, ultimately going back to Pliny, are part of many universal chronicles. Some are also obviously feigned, but without intent to deceive, such as the "lazy hypothesis" of Mohammed being an apostate Christian who founded Islam out of affront at having been passed over in a papal election (Melville 2002, 2009). While it is difficult to determine to what extent authors or their recipients considered this content as real, there can be no doubt as to the authors' factual intention.

4.1.2 Differentiating Factuality and Fictionality

Approaching fictionality with a negative logic has also been proposed in a recent programmatic essay on the shortcomings of historically unfounded concepts of fictionality in modern literary theory (Orlemanski 2019), which has received considerable scholarly attention, triggering a special issue of *New Literary History* on "Medieval Fictionalities." Stressing not only the need for an institutional conception of fictionality but also the need for descriptive approaches that explain how and under what conditions that which is conceived as fictional stands out from other linguistic representations, Orlemanski conceives fiction

as a demarcational phenomenon, a semantic mode of unearnest reference that depends on the recognition by some interpretive community of a representation's distinction from one or another idiom of actuality – from history, philosophy, factuality, religious doctrine, a sacrament's performative efficacy, or everyday speech (147).

However well founded methodologically, this approach leaves questions open. Orlemanski proposes a provisional catalogue of motifs, genres, modalities, and performative contexts which indicate non-actuality (158–160). Many of them, however, are part of medieval discourses on "covered" truth, for instance involving allegory; or refer to a moral truth in the sense of Isidore's *fabula*; or, like marvels, are a distinct part of medieval concepts of reality. All that may be non-actual, but it is still essentially factual.

Reuvekamp-Felber (2013) suggests differentiating between factuality and fictionality on the grounds of indicators or, more cautiously, signals on the level of discourse, some of which are also listed by Orlemanski. The catalogue he proposes ranges from generic terms, formulaic phrases, or the staging of a narrator to forms of structural organization, compositional principles, techniques of focalization, and digressive passages with metanarrative reflections, even though these features can be more or less clear-cut in any given case. This approach, partly mirroring Haug's landmark contribution, may work for texts that tend toward the extreme ends of the scale, such as chronicle literature on the one hand and Arthurian romance on the other. However, as Reuvekamp-Felber points out himself (437), for many texts – in fact, it must be feared, for most of them – this approach alone does not lead to any clear classification or even allow an approximate localization on the scale from factuality to fictionality. In general, narrative techniques such as focalization, and even the narratological differentiation between author and narrator, which are often cited as text-related indicators of fictionality, can rarely be applied directly to medieval literature (Hübner 2003; Haferland 2014, 2019; Schneider 2020, 95–97).

4.2 Function and Level: Qualifying Fictionality

Considering the alterity of the medieval understanding of factuality, it has repeatedly been proposed that we should distinguish between different qualities of fictionality in order to conceptually grasp what we encounter in medieval narrative. The most influential distinction is between "functional" and "autonomous" fictionality (Burrichter 1996, 15–22). The latter corresponds to the modern concept of fictionality as a self-referential, non-utilitarian artistic practice, the occurrence of which in premodern literature is subject to debate. In contrast, what has been termed "functional" fictionality is undisputedly an ubiquitous phenomenon in medieval literature. This refers to creative embellishments of what was believed to be

true, for instance by adding descriptions, dialogues and speeches, or psychological motivations, which could all pass as merely shaping the historically veracious in order to make it more accessible. The same distinction has been made using other terms, as in "rhetorical" versus "generic" fictionality (Green 2002, 151), "suppletive" versus "substitutive" fictionality (Knapp 2002, 147), or "superficial" versus "massive" fictionality (Glauch 2009, 181–182; cf. 2014a, 393–394). Parallels can be drawn between all these differentiations and the distinction between story and discourse, and it has in effect been argued that medieval and modern forms of fictionality can be distinguished in terms of the structural level on which they were located (Schmitt 2005). A further approach is to complement the twofold distinction with a third type of fictionality, which has been termed "significative" (Knapp 2005, 10), "theoretical," "theological" (Nichols 2009, 454), or "speculative" (Glauch 2014a, 396), referring to the concepts of Latin literary theory (see 3.3 above), according to which imaginative content can be a legitimate intermediary for conveying a deeper, be it doctrinal, dogmatic, or moral, truth.

There are two main counter-arguments against approaches that rely on qualifying (rather than scaling) fictionality. First, it has justifiably been argued that there is little methodological gain from referring to "functional fictionality" as fictionality at all (Glauch 2014a, 395–396; Konrad 2020, 184–186). Second, this view seems to somewhat undervalue the innovative achievement of courtly literature. Authors of vernacular romances went far beyond rhetorically embellishing the stories they were rewriting. In fact, from the early romances onward, there is a marked tendency to make modifications on the level of the story, for instance by adding background stories or side-stories. Green (2002, 187–201) describes this phenomenon as "episodic" fictionality. He judges that it still falls under "functional" ("rhetorical") fictionality, but at the same time considers it to be a precursor to the later "autonomous" ("generic") fictionality of the Arthurian romance. This indicates that the differentiation is essentially gradational rather than categorical and can more sensibly be absorbed in a scalar model.

4.3 Modes of Reception

4.3.1 Interpassivity

Even upholding as a defining factor of fictionality the broad criterion of an "attitude of indifference toward the truth value" of what is narrated ("Vergleichgültigung"; Kablitz 2013, 167) is, in a diachronic perspective, a question of identifying a range of historical variants rather than a prototypical model. Braun (2015, 106–111) has proposed modifying the question of *whether* something was believed or not

into the question of *how* something was believed or not. He points out that Pfaller's ([2000] 2007, [2002] 2014) concept of interpassivity – the sociocultural practice of delegating one's own acts and sensations to external parties or devices, as in the case of "canned laughter" in American sitcoms – allows us to describe how medieval recipients may have assessed narratives with extraordinary content without having to make clear decisions about their truth value. Rather than replacing the concept of fictionality, as Braun suggests, this perspective actually allows us to conceptually adjust it by circumventing the precarious question of the truth value that recipients are thought to assign to a text, which, in one way or another, is part of all contemporary theories. It extends the range of possible modes of fictional reception to include receiving the narrated content while taking part in a collective imagination – "illusions without owners" (Pfaller [2002] 2014) – without being individually concerned with the veracity of the content. In an interpassive mode, the claim to truth can be suspended – albeit only as far as the participants in the ongoing literary discourse are concerned.

Once the active, subjective role of the recipient has been taken out of the equation, it becomes apparent that the presupposition of a consciously recognized irrelevance of truth in fiction – Coleridge's ([1817] 1983) "willing suspension of disbelief" – is in fact only a cultural habit restricted to the modern epoch. In conclusion, rather than as a "game of make-believe" (see 2.1 above), a possible mode of reception of fictional narrative in premodern times can be described as a practice of "delegating belief." Strictly speaking, the difference is not great: it is just a shift in the accent from, in medieval logic, not interacting with a problem that does not concern the individual (remaining "interpassive") to, in modern logic, interacting with that problem in a very special, habitually acquired manner. The result in either case is that in receiving what can be classified as fictional, the question of truth is simply not raised.

4.3.2 Experientiality and Immersion

One of the most innovative approaches in recent medieval German studies is that of Schneider (2013; 2020, 98), who proposes linking the concepts of fictionality and narrativity more closely. Based on Fludernik's (1996) notion of "experientiality," Schneider defines fictionality in terms of the immersive effect of narrative as described by Ryan (2000). In this view, fictional texts are those that call for a form of reception that includes a semantic augment: the listener or reader receives the story as if it were part of his own experiential world and as if he were emotionally involved, while at the same time knowing it to be part of a different state of the world with no relation to his own personal experience, acts, or emotions. Given

that this cognitive process is evoked by psychological effects that narratives strategically trigger in order to plunge the recipient into the story, it can be linked back to features of the text that simulate actuality, for instance shifts from preterit to present tense, or techniques of envisioning, visualization, or metalepsis. Depending on the degree to which a narrative is shaped accordingly, and also on the extent to which immersive reception is socially institutionalized, the effect can be of varying intensity, which correlates with a scalar conception of fictionality.

Even though Schneider (2013, 69) adds the qualification that the approach does not explain the problem of reference, one of its advantages seems to me that it does precisely that. Reference or the claim to truth may not be suspended in immersive reception – but they do become blurred, at least as long as the immersive dynamic is in effect. This is due to the cognitive splitting of two separate states of the world: questions of reference and veracity necessarily lose their relevance when they are deflected toward a state of the world that does not concern the recipient. The resulting effect corresponds to what has been described above as "delegated belief," a functional equivalent to the modern practice of "make-believe." In this sense, it complies with the *convention of gradational specification.*

As a whole, the concept offers a convincing explanatory framework for what has been called the "burst of fictionality" in the late twelfth century (see 3.1 above), which in effect can be described as the systematic emergence of a literature that encourages immersion – and does so with secular plots, which was entirely innovative, at least in written literature. Yet it must be noted that this definition basically applies to any narrative text – more or less so depending on its artistic design, indeed, but certainly including, for instance, legendary, mystical, or even biblical narratives. This is not necessarily inappropriate from a historical perspective, but is it methodologically satisfying? Many late medieval chronicles also build on the effect of narrative immersion. Just like religious narratives, they would need to be classified as fictional texts with what is considered factive content, falling into the borderline region of what Christian Klein and Matías Martínez (2009) have termed, from a modern perspective, "reality narratives" (Wirklichkeitserzählungen).

5 Conclusion

The new court culture of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw the most important development in fictional narrative in European history: the emergence of secular vernacular literature. Yet, even though this evolution may, in retrospect, display all the signs of fictionality and be confidently describable as a "burst of fictionality," it is much more difficult to judge whether and to what extent it can also

be designated as such analytically. This is due to the almost total lack of pertinent metapoetic statements or relevant theorizing from the time, but also to the alterity of the worldview of the Middle Ages. But the methodological dilemma in discussing premodern fictionality is not only to avoid making ahistorical projections on the one hand and overcautiously downplaying true literary innovations on the other. It is also to strike a balance between efforts to painstakingly extract early indications of a notion that was to become a cornerstone of modern literary history (and is of interest primarily for this reason) and to develop an independent concept of a premodern phenomenon (or possibly, various phenomena) that is of actual descriptive relevance for medieval studies.

Still, a balance between these two equally legitimate interests seems possible and heuristically profitable on the basis of a careful, wide definition of fictionality, which, apart from addressing basic factors as set out in section 2.3 above, allows for

– a negative derivation from factuality, which, in turn, is not defined in relation to facticity;
– a scalar conception according to which the concrete fictional or factual status of a text or genre can be more or less pronounced relative to an abstract prototypical conception;
– composite texts that include both fictional and factual parts;
– historical fluctuations even within relatively short periods of time (see my article "Fictionality in Medieval and Early Modern German Literature" in this volume); and, not least,
– varying institutional practices.

Regarding the last aspect, it is primarily the *convention of gradational specification*, corresponding to the modern technique of "make-believe," which must be addressed. Among the possible adjustments that have been discussed in this article, two that seem particularly promising cover

– immersive reception, which tends to shift concerns about veracity away from the recipient by encouraging cognitive splitting (even though this criterion is not definitive); and
– the interpassive mode of reception, which delegates concerns about veracity to an indistinct external instance.

This has an inherent logic in that both immersive and interpassive dynamics tend to be intuitive, while the technique of "make-believe" in fiction is in fact a (modern) cultural habit that is learned from an early age. In contrast, immersive or interpassive reception, even though possibly based on the particular conditions of a given genre or context, relies less on an overall, culturally established mutual understanding, which, in premodern times, simply had not yet been firmly institution-

alized. Describing functional equivalents of the modern game of "make-believe" has the double analytical advantage of promoting the historical understanding of premodern narrative and of helping to identify modern habitual patterns that are, in fact, not a defining part of fictionality as such, but need to be traced back to a more abstract foundation.

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