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Melancholie – zwischen Attitüde
und Diskurs

Konzepte in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit

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Andrea Sieber / Antje Wittstock

Einleitung

»Melancholie« unterliegt einem permanenten Imagewandel und ist längst in der Postmoderne angekommen. Als vermeintlich anthropologische Konstante durchlebt das Phänomen in seinen wissenschaftlichen Kategorisierungen und ästhetischen oder populärkulturellen Konzeptualisierungen immer neue ungeahnte Konjunkturen. Das Spektrum reicht von melancholischen Ego-Dokumenten in Blogs der »digitalen Bohème« über das resignativ-trotzige Lebensgefühl in Zeiten der aktuellen Finanz- und Wirtschaftskrise bis hin zum *self-fashioning* der Sängerin Soap&Skin als »Sirene der Melancholie«.

Ausführlich hat die in Paris und Berlin 2005/2006 realisierte Ausstellung »Melancholie. Genie und Wahnsinn in der Kunst« zu Ehren Raymond KLIBANSKYS (1905-2005) der Aktualität und Überkomplexität von Melancholie gehuldigt und dabei nicht nur das ungebrochene Faszinationspotenzial von Melancholie dokumentiert, sondern durch den weiten Fokus der Ausstellung auch einen neuralgischen Punkt in der Auseinandersetzung mit Melancholie von der Antike bis zur Postmoderne getroffen: Ob Gemütslage, Sternenkongstellation, Temperament oder Krankheit; Göttin oder Teufel; Wahnsinn oder Genie; Antriebshemmung oder Katalysator schöpferischer Potenz – wie kaum ein anderes Konzept basiert Melancholie geradezu programmatisch auf dem Nebeneinander von Disparatem und der Dialektik des Gegensätzlichen. Melancholie ändert dabei »ihr Gesicht«, verfügt über oszillierende Semantiken und zeichnet sich durch eine konstitutive Ambivalenz aus, die durch wissenschaftliche Rationalisierungen immer wieder eingeebnnet wurde, während im Resultat postmoderner Allgegenwärtigkeit gleichzeitig alles »zum Melancholischen« zu gerinnen droht.

Während Zeitgeist und Medienpräsenz suggerieren, dass wir im 21. Jahrhundert am Ende einer langen historischen Entwicklung möglicher Weise in einer »Black Box« melancholischen Bewusstseins »gefangen« sind, fühlen wir uns dazu herausgefordert, in dem vorliegenden Band nochmals den Blick zurück zu wagen: zurück auf historische Diskursformationen und Ästhetisierungen, zurück auf »Masternarrative« der Melancholie und zurück auf einschlägige Theoriebildungen.

Zentral bei der Historisierung von Melancholie erscheint ihre diffuse Begriffsgeschichte, die seit jeher durch die Heterogenität der prägenden Diskursfelder hervorgebracht wurde und sich in den disziplinären Kontexten von Medizin, Philosophie, Astrologie und Moralthologie, aber auch in den un-

Christiane Ackermann
Written Woundings
The Significance of Melancholy in the German prose
»Lancelot«

Das große Thema des »Prosa-Lancelot« ist die unmögliche Liebe zwischen Ginover und Lancelot, die quälende Leidenschaft des Protagonisten, seine emotionale Versehrung. Doch nicht nur die Distanz zwischen den Liebenden ist ein zentrales Motiv, Trennung und Trennungsschmerz erscheinen als wesentliche Modalitäten von Sinn und Identität im Werk. Sie wirken als Movers des Protagonisten, determinieren die Figuren und die Handlung. Trennung und Trennungsschmerz sind gerade deshalb zentral, weil sie offensichtlich an der Basis der Sinnbildung des Romans liegen. Elementar ist die spezifische Wiederholungsstruktur des Leidens Lancelots, welches sich dadurch als Melancholie charakterisieren lässt. Ausgangspunkt der näheren Bestimmung von Melancholie sind im vorliegenden Beitrag die Überlegungen der Kulturtheoretikerin und Semiotikerin Julia KRISTEVA, die dazu anleiten, Melancholie im Zusammenhang von Sinnbildungsprozessen zu begreifen. Es ist so möglich, die Funktion und Funktionsweise von Melancholie, insbesondere im Rahmen der narrativen Strukturen, im »Prosa-Lancelot« zu erklären.

I. Lancelot's indispensable pain: self-induced separation as an indication of melancholy

It is common knowledge that the main topic of the prose »Lancelot« is the unfulfilled love between Queen Ginover and the knight Lancelot and the unique passion of the protagonist, his pain and emotional wounding. Longing for his beloved, Lancelot seriously suffers; he is often restless and cannot think about anything else but Ginover:

Die history sagt uns das Lancelot sere zu ungemach ist und sere verdacht nach der frauwen die er mynnet [...]. Er enspielt oder lachtet noch enhett keyn freud in der welt anders dann das er allweg in großen gedencken was. Er enißt noch trincket noch enschleffet wedder tag noch nacht, er ist oben off dem thorn zu alleröberst und sicht alumb als ein man der sere in ungemach ist. [...] Da lag Lancelot zu alleröberst off dem torne und gedacht als er gewon was zu thun. (STEINHOFF I, 1202,29-1204,35)¹

¹ »The story tells us that Lancelot was very unhappy and restless and could not help thinking about the woman he loved [...]. He is joyless and does not laugh and has

Lancelot's symptoms that result from his being completely absorbed in love, his loss of self and occasional disorientation have sometimes been compared to medieval concepts of *melancholia* and *amor hereos*, that is, love-sickness.² Kurt RUH, who was one of the first to see Lancelot as the image of

no other pleasure in the world than being deeply lost in thought. He does not eat or drink and sleeps neither day nor night; he [...] looks around like a man who is completely restless« (henceforth all translations of the quoted passages from the prose »Lancelot« will be provided in the footnotes. The translation is the author's own). – The following abbreviations (provided in the brackets below) will be used for quotations taken from the STEINHOFF-edition: Lancelot und Ginover, Vol. I (Prosa-Lancelot I). Nach der Heidelberger Handschrift Cod. Pal. germ. 147. Hg. v. KLUGE, Reinhold, ergänzt durch die Handschrift Ms. allem. 8017-8020 der Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal Paris. Transl., annot. and ed. STEINHOFF, Hans-Hugo. Frankfurt a. M. 1995 (Bibliothek deutscher Klassiker 123; Bibliothek des Mittelalters 14) [short-title = STEINHOFF I]; Lancelot und der Gral, Vol. II (Prosa-Lancelot IV). Nach der Heidelberger Handschrift Cod. Pal. germ. 147. Hg. v. KLUGE, Reinhold, ergänzt durch die Handschrift Ms. allem. 8017-8020 der Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal Paris. Transl., annot. and ed. STEINHOFF, Hans-Hugo. Frankfurt a. M. 2003 (Bibliothek deutscher Klassiker 183; Bibliothek des Mittelalters 17) [short-title = STEINHOFF IV].

- 2 On the topic of melancholy in the prose »Lancelot« cf. besides the studies mentioned below OHLY, Friedrich: Bemerkungen eines Philologen zur Memoria. Münstersche Abschiedsvorlesung vom 10. Februar 1982. München n.d. [ca. 1985], pp. 59-64; WALTENBERGER, Michael: Das große Herz der Erzählung. Studien zur Narration und Interdiskursivität im »Prosa-Lancelot«. Frankfurt a. M. et al. 1999 (Mikrokosmos. Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft und Bedeutungsforschung 51), pp. 59-64. For the medieval understanding of *amor hereos* cf. MATEJOVSKI, Dirk: Das Motiv des Wahnsinns in der mittelalterlichen Dichtung. Frankfurt a. M. 1996 (stw 1213), pp. 48-52; HAAGE, Bernhard Dietrich: Melancholie und Liebe in der Antike und im Mittelalter. In: Melancholie. Sinnaspekte einer Depression. Ed. by Jaspert, Bernd. Hofgeismar 1994 (Hofgeismarer Protokolle. Tagungsbeiträge aus der Arbeit der Evangelischen Akademie Hofgeismar 307), pp. 6-38, here pp. 9-15; HAAGE, Bernhard Dietrich: *Amor hereos* als medizinischer Terminus technicus in der Antike und im Mittelalter. In: Liebe als Krankheit. Vorträge eines interdisziplinären Kolloquiums. 3. Kolloquium der Forschungsstelle für europäische Lyrik des Mittelalters. Ed. by Stemmler, Theo. Mannheim 1990, pp. 31-73; WACK, Mary Frances: Lovesickness in the Middle Ages. The Viaticum and its Commentaries. Philadelphia 1990. – Arnaldus de Villanova explains the pathological type of melancholy as a possible intensified form (among others) of *amor heroicus*, cf. his Tractatus de amore heroico. Edidit et praefatione et commentariis anglicis instruxit Michael R. McVAUGH. In: Opera medica omnia. Vol. 3. Barcelona 1985. On Arnaldus's view on *amor heroicus* cf. M. R. McVAUGH's introduction to the »Tractatus«, pp. 11-39, esp. p. 29 and KLINGER, Judith: Der mißratene Ritter. Konzeptionen von Identität im Prosa-Lancelot. München 1996 (Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur 26), pp. 249, 254.

the great melancholic, states that although the love between Ginover and Lancelot spurs him onto heroic action, it does not, however, purify, invigorate or illuminate the soul; instead, love throws shadows of grief upon the soul. »And these shadows are reflected by Lancelot's countenance: the head is cast down, thoughts are running restlessly through it, while it seems difficult to communicate them.«³ RUH's diagnosis is based on Lancelot's re-occurring mental condition throughout the romance, his being lost in thought. RUH also calls attention to Lancelot's *swaeren muot*, his sad, depressed and dark state of mind. Another symptom of Lancelot's melancholic mood is his *gedencken*, his absent-mindedness, which befalls him repeatedly after he first catches sight of Ginover:

Er sah wiedder off sie, wann das nymant geprüfen mocht, und wundert yn sere wie die frauw so schön mocht gesyn. [...] Die konigin nam yn mit der hant und fraget yn wannen er were. Da er ir hant enczüb, er erschrack als ob er von eim traume erwacht were; er gedacht so sere nach yre das er nit enwüßt was sie gesprochen hett. Sie sah zuhant wol das im nicht recht was, und fraget es yn anderwert. »Sagent mir«, sprach sie, »wannen sint ir?« Er sah off sie sere einfeltlichen und sprach suffcende: »Frauwe, ich bin ein knappe und hatt mich ein jungfrauw bißherre gezogen.« »Wie heißent ir dan?« sprach sie. »Des weiß ich nicht«, sprach er. Die frauw sah zuhant wol das er sinselbs nit geweltig was mit den großen gedencken die er hette. Sie getorst nit volliclichen gedencken das es durch yren willen were [...] und fraget yn mit me, umb das sie yn in mere affenheit nit wolt bringen. [...] Sie ducht wol das er in sym synne nit enwas [...]. (STEINHOFF I, 366,8-37)⁴

Walter BLANK rejects those who would describe the protagonist as a melancholic and regards Lancelot's depressive mood as an expression of his *Minnekrankheit*, that is, his suffering from love; only to a certain extent does Lancelot's »pathology« correspond to the usual symptoms present in a melan-

3 RUH, Kurt: Lancelot. In: DVjs 33 (1959), pp. 268-282; see also the revised version of the study. In: Der Arthursche Roman. Ed. by Wais, Kurt. Darmstadt 1970 (WdF 157), pp. 237-255, here p. 247 (translation: C.A.).

4 He looked at her again when nobody could observe it and he was stunned by her beauty. [...] The queen took his hand and asked him where he came from. When he felt her hand, he was frightened, as if he had woken from a dream. He was lost in thought, only thinking about her so that he did not know what she had said to him. She immediately realized that he was confused and asked him once more: »Tell me, where are you from?« He looked at her foolishly and sighed: »My lady, I am a squire and a noble woman has raised me.« »And what is your name?«, she asked. »I don't know,« he said. She noticed that he was deeply absorbed in thought and not in control of himself. She did not dare to believe that this really was because of her [...] and did not ask any further so that she would not embarrass him even more. [...] It seemed to her that he was out of his mind.

cholic person.⁵ Nevertheless, there are certain characteristics of Lancelot that everyone seems to agree on: First, Lancelot suffers from his unfulfilled love for Ginover and from his being separated from her; secondly, his suffering is very intense; thirdly, his anguish even shows pathological characteristics of a somatic and mental nature; and fourthly, Lancelot's mental symptoms are those of or at least close to the symptoms of depression and melancholy. The special character of Lancelot's sadness and its relation to the structure of the romance reveal, however, that his suffering is much more than a mere convention; it is not mere love-sickness, there is a further dimension to it. Judith KLINGER points out that the hero's physical, emotional and mental wounding and suffering is an integral part of his character and a clear sign of his identity.⁶ While taking this into consideration, I would like to emphasize that it is necessary to read this essence of identity in relation to the following two central characteristics of the romance:

1. Lancelot himself revives separation and, thus, suffering; he holds on to his mental wounding.
2. Separation is crucial for the narration itself because it provides its structural basis. In order to understand the importance of separation for the signifying process presented in the prose »Lancelot«, this basic structure must be taken into account.

The preservation and self-induced repetition of separation as well as mental wounding typifies Lancelot's sad state of mind. These aspects are crucial, since they mark the protagonist's mourning as being melancholic. Cultural theorist, semiotician and psychoanalyst Julia KRISTEVA describes the self-repetitive structure of suffering as part of the basic logic of melancholy.⁷ According to her, melancholy is not only mourning for something lost, but

5 BLANK, Walter: Der Melancholiker als Romanheld. Zum deutschen »Prosa-Lancelot«, Hartmanns »Iwein« und Wolframs »Parzival«. In: *Ist mir getroumet min leben? Vom Träumen und vom Anderssein*. FS Karl-Ernst Geith. Ed. by Schnyder, André. Göttingen 1998 (GAG 632), pp. 1-18, here pp. 5, 8.

6 KLINGER [note 2], p. 248.

7 Of course it is necessary to differentiate between medieval concepts and a modern understanding of melancholy. Since I focus on structural phenomena of the text and its inscribed poetics in correspondence with the protagonist's constitution and action my argumentation is based on a semiotic understanding of melancholy in analogy to KRISTEVA's conception. This does not imply a rejection of investigations interested in extrapolating the medieval idea or occurrences of melancholy. Doing so calls for, as KLINGER points out, »separating melancholy as a medical term and melancholy as a literary topological field that overlaps with the multifaceted pathology of the melancholic [...]«. KLINGER [note 2], p. 241 (translation: C.A.).

also a result of mental wounding that is closely related to language or man's existence in language. KRISTEVA's understanding of melancholy within a semiotic context and her emphasis on the connection between melancholy and the »process of signification«⁸ can be of some help in grasping how the logic of melancholy functions within the framework of the narrative structure of the prose »Lancelot«.

II. Melancholy according to Julia KRISTEVA

KRISTEVA's concept of melancholy is based on FREUD's explanation, but she adds a semiotic dimension to it.⁹ According to Freud, the melancholic, unlike the mourner, holds on to loss. The lost object usually consists in an imaginary, abstract quality; it is hardly possible to say what has actually been lost.¹⁰ The attitude towards the lost object is ambivalent; it is destructive and libidinous at the same time, characterized by the urge to destroy the object and simultaneously to maintain the relation to it.¹¹ KRISTEVA agrees with FREUD only partly since she argues that there is no actual hostility toward what is lost and that »the melancholic feels wounded rather than hostile«¹². This understanding is based on the idea that melancholy does not originate from the loss of an object, but rather from loss itself. The cause of melancholy is closely related to the most basic human condition, that is, to exist in language and also to experience separation out of necessity. According to KRISTEVA, different experiences of separation are central to the constitution of the individual's psychic life: »[...] birth, weaning, separation, frustration, castration. Real, imaginary or symbolic, those processes necessarily structure our individuation.«¹³ They are accompanied by a »depressive stage« that »is essential to the [...] access to the realm of symbols and linguistic signs.«¹⁴

8 The term is used following concepts in the field of literary and semiotic studies, cf. besides the works of KRISTEVA, e.g. those of Kaja SILVERMAN and Slavoj ŽIŽEK.

9 KRISTEVA analyses melancholia in the context of art, literature, philosophy, religion, culture and psychoanalysis in: *Soleil noir. Dépression et mélancolie*. Paris 1987. For the English translation which is used here cf. *Black Sun. Depression and Melancholia*. Transl. by Leon S. Roudiez. New York 1989.

10 Cf. FREUD, Sigmund: Trauer und Melancholie. In: Sigmund FREUD: *Psychologie des Unbewußten*. Frankfurt a. M. 2000 (Studienausgabe Vol. 3), pp. 193-212, here p. 199. On FREUD and his study on »Mourning and Melancholia« cf. KÜCHENHOFF, Joachim: Trauer, Melancholie und das Schicksal der Objektbeziehungen. Eine Relektüre von S. Freuds »Trauer und Melancholie«. In: *Jahrbuch der Psychoanalyse* 36 (1996), pp. 90-117.

11 Vgl. KÜCHENHOFF [note 10], p. 98.

12 MCAFEE, Noëlle: *Julia Kristeva*. New York, London 2004 (Routledge Critical Thinkers), p. 61.

13 KRISTEVA [note 9], p. 132.

14 KRISTEVA [note 9], p. 133.

The subject's parting from objects, from the representation of the absent thing inevitably causes sadness. It is by language, however, that we are able to cope with the parting from objects; language »sutures«¹⁵ the cut between subject and object. Mental confusion will result if the subject rejects or repudiates separation. Dramatisation of loss »is a source of exorbitant and destructive anguish.«¹⁶ The subject's being absorbed in separation leads to melancholy.

KRISTEVA states that signification results from the need to create sense, the need for significance in life. Language is *the* instrument that helps to fulfil that need; it is the very instrument that produces sense. If loss predominates and the subject realizes loss despite the possibility of producing sense through language then melancholy might result. According to KRISTEVA, melancholy denotes »an actual or imaginary loss of meaning, an actual or imaginary despair, an actual or imaginary razing of symbolic values, including the value of life [...]«¹⁷ At the same time, the experience of melancholy may function as a fundamental stimulus for human action, it may be a kind of basic mode that results from the inevitable experience of loss.¹⁸ To be abandoned by someone is part of the human experience and, as previously stated, it is a fundamental experience of human existence in language. It is by loss that man learns to express himself. The subject, however, needs to accept, internalize and overcome the experience of loss and the melancholic mood that may accompany this experience.¹⁹

Usually the subject is able to overcome loss and melancholy, although this is obviously not the case in the prose »Lancelot«. In that work, separation, loss, and the wounding that results from it stay with the protagonist until the end and, what is more, even define the very structure of the romance. It is true that generally separation is a basic experience of the protagonist in the courtly novel. This, for example, is present in »Parzival« by Wolfram von Eschenbach; here the hero first loses his father Gahmuret and his mother Herzloyde. After having married Condwiramurs, Parzival needs to leave his

15 Regarding the term and the idea of »suture« in the field of literary studies and semiotics cf. SILVERMAN, Kaja: *The Subject of Semiotics*. New York 1983.

16 KRISTEVA [note 9], p. 132.

17 KRISTEVA [note 9], p. 128.

18 Cf. SCHMITZ, Bettina: *Arbeit an den Grenzen der Sprache*. Julia Kristeva. Königstein/Taunus 1998, pp. 133-135.

19 Paradoxically within »melancholy it is possible to experience being non-separated to an utmost degree«, since the subject »folds back« on its core, that is, he or she »folds back« on separation, cf. SCHMITZ [note 18], p. 153 (translation: C.A.). It is only by entering the symbolic, the field of language and its power of representation, that we are able to cope with and to bear separation. The melancholic him- or herself is not yet part of the symbolic. In order to enter it, the melancholic position must be overcome.

wife and does not see her again for years until they reunite at the end. It is important for the structure of the romance that they indeed reunite. Although separation is a basic experience in the courtly novel, the resulting wounds can be cured by reunification, that is, they can be »sutured« by love or the promise that love will be fulfilled. In other words, separation serves to perform the negation of separation, to establish a closed meaning regarding the individual as well as the structure of the romance. The promise of narrative closure, which is closely related to the promise that love will be fulfilled, is the great promise of the courtly novel. In the prose »Lancelot«, this promise vanishes, and the text instead illustrates that it is impossible to undo separation. It is the realisation of this impossibility to which the melancholic gesture of the romance bears witness.²⁰

20 KLINGER, too, though on the basis of some other arguments, observes a crucial structural difference between the prose »Lancelot« and the Arthurian romance: While a single crisis is central for the structure of the latter, there a series of crises evolves in the prose »Lancelot«. Moreover, Lancelot's three great crises may be followed by healing and recovery, but still they are no starting point for a changing status and the factors by which they are caused have no direct social relevance. The protagonist's occasional state of confusion, his sickness and madness appear as nothing less than the expression of the lover's frail identity, cf. KLINGER [note 2], p. 174. Regarding the structure of the prose »Lancelot« some further studies ought to be mentioned: Friedrich WOLFZETTEL discusses the structural change of the prose romance in comparison to the closed symbolic style of the verse epic of Chrétien de Troyes. He suggests to interpret the »Lancelot en prose« as a modern text in so far as »it leaves behind the mythical connotations of symbolic narration and also from the earlier demand of *senefiance* [...]« After all there is no (narrative) closure in the conventional sense anymore, cf. WOLFZETTEL, Friedrich: *Der Lancelot-Roman als Paradigma. Vom geschlossenen symbolischen Stil des Chrétienischen Versromans zur offenen Welterfassung der Prosa*. In: *Lancelot. Der mittelhochdeutsche Roman im europäischen Kontext*. Ed. by Ridder, Klaus and Huber, Christoph. Tübingen 2007, pp. 13-26, here p. 26 (translation: C.A.); Walter HAUG states that the prose »Lancelot« is on the brink to subjective fiction, it is on the threshold of something new without actually going beyond it, cf. HAUG, Walter: *Das Endspiel des arthurischen Romans im »Prosalancelot«*. In: HAUG, Walter: *Brechungen auf dem Weg zur Individualität. Kleine Schriften zur Literatur des Mittelalters*. Tübingen 1995, pp. 288-300, here p. 265. In his latest article on the prose »Lancelot« HAUG takes up the subject again; he asks if factors must not be considered by which the Arthurian tradition has been forced to a self-destructive remodeling within the literary texture itself and he shows similarities and differences in comparison to the Arthurian structure, cf. HAUG, Walter: *Das erotische und das religiöse Konzept des »Prosa-Lancelot«*. In: Ridder and Huber [this note], pp. 249-263, here p. 249; Monika UNZEITIG-HERZOG had already argued in this direction when she concludes in her study in 1990, that in comparison to the optimistic conception of the classical verse epic the prose »Lancelot« is a highly pessimistic text and its poetic statement is the rejection of the genre of the

In the following section I shall attempt to demonstrate how the logic of melancholy functions in the prose »Lancelot« not only as an emotional state of mind in the protagonist but also as a poetic principle. To this end, I will use Julia KRISTEVA's concept of melancholy (merely) as a point of departure in order to understand the structure of melancholy and its relation to language, that is, to signification. On this basis, it is possible to examine the 'texture' of melancholy in the prose »Lancelot« and comprehend its relevance for the signifying process that is present in the romance. My interpretation owes much to the insights of Judith KLINGER and Andrea SIEBER²¹ who have recently explained the role of desire and melancholy in the prose »Lancelot«. My interpretation, however, is based on a different theoretical background and my perspective stresses other aspects of melancholy. I am thus less interested in the emotional constitution of the protagonist;²² instead, I regard melancholy in the prose »Lancelot« to be a mode of poetic expression, poetic composition and reflection.

III. Written woundings:

The significance of melancholy in the German prose »Lancelot«

[T]he whole of him was one huge wound [...] (OVID, »Metamorphoses« 6,388).²³

Central to my argument are the issues of the pain of separation caused by repeatedly deferring fulfilling love, Lancelot's return to distance and his recapitulation of absence. The interplay of distance and closeness and especially the experience of separation within this interplay are the central motivating factors for both the protagonist and the plot on the whole. The separation of the lovers not only forms a central motif in the romance but separation

Arthurian adventure novel, cf. UNZEITIG-HERZOG, Monika: Jungfrauen und Einsiedler. Studien zur Organisation der Aventurewelt im *Prosalancelot*. Heidelberg 1990 (Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte), pp. 174f.

21 SIEBER, Andrea: Lancelot und Galahot – Melancholische Helden? In: *Aventiuren des Geschlechts. Modelle von Männlichkeit in der Literatur des 13. Jahrhunderts*. Ed. by Baisch, Martin et al. Göttingen 2003 (Aventiuren 1), pp. 209-232.

22 This, of course, does not mean that the works of KLINGER and SIEBER are reduced to such a viewpoint. KLINGER, for instance, investigates Lancelot's »case history« in its multifaceted appearance and shows its meaning for the constitution of the individual as a complex process: »In the prose »Lancelot the pathology is most closely connected to the conception of love. [...] Showing the lover in a pathological light seems to maintain the constitution of a subject of love being at risk and unstable and at the same time to submit it to a system of understanding which makes it possible to socially classify the lover as a »sick man.« KLINGER [note 2], pp. 241f. (translation: C.A.).

23 OVID: *Metamorphoses*. Transl. by A. D. Melville. Oxford 1998.

in a more general form defines the structure of the narrative itself, including the characters and the plot. Separation is not only significant because it refers to a sad story of unfulfilled love, around which further stories are arranged, but also because it provides orientation in a complex narrative with a vast network of subplots. And even more importantly, separation, suffering and the repetition of both are central to the romance since they form the basis of how signification and narration work in the prose »Lancelot«. On the basis of the model of melancholy I previously described, it is possible to regard the intensity of sorrow in the romance in relation to its structure and its poetic implications. The extent to which the staging of the melancholic mood, the creation of identity and the production of meaning in the text are related will be made evident in the following section.

Separation and Identity

The relation of separation to the constitution of identity and the production of meaning is expressed most strikingly in a well known scene in which Lancelot paints pictures of Ginover and himself on the walls of his prison in the palace of the sister of King Artus, Morgane. Uwe RUBERG has called this episode one of the most surprising and remarkable scenes of the romance.²⁴ It is noteworthy, however, that the episode perfectly expresses the poetic principles of the prose »Lancelot«. A short recapitulation of the scene may help to understand its significance for the whole text: By means of an act of betrayal, Morgane gains power over Lancelot. After Lancelot has been given a drink that makes him weak and tired, he is taken into a room from which he cannot escape. He stays there a full month without knowing that he is imprisoned. Only when Lancelot wants to leave, does he realize that he is a captive. Despite his inquiries, Lancelot is not given any reason for the imprisonment (STEINHOFF IV, 47,9f.). He is deeply aggrieved (*betruht*; STEINHOFF IV, 46,6) and seeks relief from his emotional distress by imagining Ginover's presence. From his room he is able to see a man who paints the Trojan War on the walls of Morgane's palace. Inspired by what he sees, Lancelot himself starts to paint pictures of his beloved on the walls of his prison:

[...] er wolt in der kamern maln, darinn er gefangen lag, von der die er so lieb hett und sere begeret zu sehen [...]. Das solt im groß lichterung

24 RUBERG, Uwe: »Lancelot malt sein Gefängnis aus«. Bildkunstwerke als kollektive und individuelle Memorialzeichen in den Aeneas-, Lancelot- und Tristan-Romanen. In: *Erkennen und Erinnern in Kunst und Literatur. Kolloquium Reisenburg, 4.-7. Januar 1996*. Ed. by Peil, Dietmar et al. Tübingen 1998, pp. 181-194, here pp. 183f.

syner beschwerniß bringen, als yn ducht, so er das gemelds wurd anse-
hen in der gefengknüß. (STEINHOFF IV, 46,16-21)²⁵

By means of his paintings Lancelot tries to bridge the distance to Ginover and cope with her absence. The scene has frequently been discussed in recent studies. They particularly emphasize the aspect of the production of presence. Klaus RIDDER, for instance, stresses Lancelot's mournful *gedencken*, his remembering,²⁶ his mournful absent-mindedness and his state of being lost in love, a state that originates from his desperate longing for Ginover.²⁷ *Gedencken* becomes the mainspring and the basis for producing art, and the work of art created in this way becomes an essential medium with which he copes with the imprisonment. As a reconstruction and representation of memory, art takes on a therapeutic function. Production of art makes it possible to cope with memories, it acts as a substitute for *minne* and *aventure* and it keeps the subject (Lancelot) distanced from a *gedencken* in which he forgets about the world; art saves the subject from delusion. Lancelot's art makes Ginover present so that the images of his memory gain an aesthetic-sensual presence.²⁸ According to RIDDER, the paintings have a stabilising function: they keep Lancelot's melancholic *gedencken* from turning into insanity.²⁹ Andrea SIEBER investigates melancholic heroes in the prose »Lancelot« and focuses on the emotional aspect of the scene with the frescoes. She explains that the paintings serve to reassure Lancelot of Ginover's existence. By means of the paintings Lancelot repeatedly overcomes the separation

25 [...] he wanted to paint in the room in which he was imprisoned, [pictures] of the one he loved so much and whom he very much desired to see [...]. He thought it would be a great relief from his distress if he could look at the painting in his prison.

26 RIDDER, Klaus: Ästhetisierte Erinnerung – erzählte Kunstwerke. Tristans Lieder, Blanschefflurs Scheingrab, Lancelots Wandgemälde. In: LiLi 27/105 (1997), pp. 62-85, here p. 74. About the function of memoria of the frescoes and the aspect of media see also WENZEL, Horst: Hören und Sehen, Schrift und Bild. Kultur und Gedächtnis im Mittelalter. München 1995, pp. 302-320.

27 The motif of *gedencken* is central to the text. Connected to the term is a wide field of meaning. Moreover, the motif of *gedencken* does not apply to Lancelot alone but also for instance to Artus, though his *gedencken* is evoked by other causes, cf. RUBERG, Uwe: Raum und Zeit im Prosa-Lancelot. München 1965 (Medium Aevum 9), pp. 173-178; WALTENBERGER [note 2], p. 63, note 164. WALTENBERGER describes *gedencken* in the prose »Lancelot« as a gap of significance produced by the narrator, which makes it hardly possible to extrapolate an unambiguous meaning of the term, cf. WALTENBERGER [note 2], pp. 63f. On the meaning and role of *gedencken* in the prose »Lancelot« cf. also MERVELDT, Nikola: Translatio und Memoria. Zur Poetik der Memoria des Prosa Lancelot. Frankfurt a. M. et al. 2004 (Mikrokosmos 72), pp. 329-340; KLINGER, [note 2], pp. 192-197.

28 RIDDER [note 27], pp. 76f.

29 RIDDER [note 27], p. 79.

between him and his beloved, while, at the same time, he creates a setting in which he can act out his emotions.³⁰ According to SIEBER, the hero is able to cope with the absence of the desired person and even recreate his identity with the help of the pictures. KLINGER, too, refers to the episode when she explains the construction of Lancelot's identity and the paradoxical form of the construction and destruction of Lancelot's identity by love.³¹ As KLINGER explains, the problem of distance and closeness is brought to full expression by the hero, although other characters are affected by that very distance as well, especially those who desire Lancelot, even though he is inaccessible.³² After all, distance is what generally characterizes Lancelot's and Ginover's *minne*-community. The principle of distance is reflected by different objects that work as substitutes for the lovers. Similar to the suffering caused by separation, the description of passion in the prose »Lancelot« shows an »ecstatic intimacy with absence that can very concisely be grasped in the episode about Lancelot's frescoes.«³³

The aforementioned studies refer to the interplay of presence and absence that is staged by the paintings. I begin my argument at exactly this point, since, as I see it, the repeated, revitalized distance is crucial for the organisation of the text. By taking a closer look at this phenomenon it is possible to explain why the interplay of presence and absence is important for Lancelot's melancholic character and why it also reveals a poetics implied by the text. First of all, however, it is necessary to describe in (more) detail how the paintings act as a substitute and why this substitution is crucial for the scene and its staging of presence and absence.

After having portrayed Ginover on the walls of his prison, Lancelot behaves in front of the images as if they were real:

[...] er ging in syn kamer und spart die thür zu, das nymands gesehe was er mechte. Da hub er zum ersten an zu maln [...]. Und des morgens, als er uff stund, spart er die fenster uff gegen dem bangarten. Er sah das bild syner frauwen an, er neygt sich vor im und gruoßt es, darnach umbfing er es und kust es vor den muont als inniglich als er eyner frauwen gethun möcht dann syner frauwen. Da hub er an zu maln *wie es im* ging da er zu Dolerosegarte yn fuor und *wie er* die burg gewann durch syn frümkeit. Er malet denselben tag *wie er* gethan hett biß an den tag des thorneys, und in welcher maßen er die gruen wapen furt an dem tag da der konig herab kam von dem sale und *brisete yn* fur alle die ritter. Und darnach von tag zu tag malet er *al hystorye von im besunder und nit von den an-*

30 SIEBER [note 22], p. 218.

31 Cf. the section »Der ferne Spiegel: Trennung, Verzicht, Distanz« in KLINGER's book »Der mißratene Ritter« [note 2], pp. 212-227.

32 KLINGER [note 2], p. 217.

33 KLINGER [note 2], p. 223.

dern. Und als die ostern vergangen waren, da hett er alles gedichtet.
(STEINHOFF IV, 46,25-27; 48,28-50,5; emphasis mine)³⁴

The portrait of Ginover serves as a substitute for direct contact.³⁵ On the morning after his first day of creative work, Lancelot hugs and kisses the image. This contact, only possible via the medium of art, stimulates the continuation of the signifying process. In the course of this process the painter and his life become more and more important: Though Lancelot starts by painting pictures of Ginover, he finally makes himself the main character of his illustrations. He ›projects‹ his whole life on the walls, including his childhood and youth: How he was brought to King Artus's court by the Lady of the Lake in order to be made a knight, how he went to Camelot and was awed by the queen's beauty when he saw her for the first time, and how he had to take leave from her when he rode to the Duchess of Noaus to help her (cf. STEINHOFF IV, 47,30-35). It is not Ginover but Lancelot and his identity as a knight that become the main subject matter of the depiction. Moreover, the text emphasizes Lancelot as the creator of the paintings (*Da hub er an zu maln [...] von tag zu tag malet er al hystorye*; emphasis mine)³⁶ and, in this way, it accentuates the individual's participation in the process of defining identity.

It is no coincidence that Lancelot finishes his work exactly when easter, the feast that celebrates the resurrection of Christ and the conquest of death, has passed. Because the text brings Lancelot's self-projection to a close at exactly this point, it emphasizes the significance of the paintings: Analogous to the Christian myth, the paintings bring Lancelot back to life. It is quite telling that this act of self-creation results from the separation from and the desire for the absent woman. After all, it is not so much her who is made

present but the painter himself, whereas the act of painting actually *repeats the distance* between the lovers. Ginover turns out to be secondary in relation to the projection, which is, in reality, narcissistic. Ginover plays, to a certain extent, the role of a mirror used by Lancelot to project his narcissistic ideal. *In this way, the text performs separation and the anguish resulting from it as the premise of the creation of identity and as a force leading to signification.* Furthermore, the creation of identity and signification are interdependent upon one another. Lancelot's paintings result from a mental wounding and they signify this wounding. Isolated from society, the melancholic individual is thrown back on his essence, that is, separation, and, in the moment in which he is occupied by that state of consciousness, he cannot help to record and signify absence.

It is a characteristic of the text that the essential meaning of separation finds a correspondence in its narrative technique.

Separation as a principle of narration

Previously I have stated that separation motivates Lancelot to create art, images, and signs. His inspiration, however, is a man whom he can see from his prison working on murals depicting the Trojan War. This observation seems to be of no further importance for the episode. Nonetheless, this incident is crucial, because it anticipates and reflects the poetic implication that is implied by the scene involving the frescoes. The motif of the Trojan War is not chosen indiscriminately, since it refers to the tradition of describing and writing pictures in literature. The images of the Trojan War are significant in medieval literature: If paintings are mentioned in medieval texts, most often they depict the Troy theme, as Elisabeth LIENERT has shown.³⁷ In non-Trojan and non-historical literature, Troy has not an historical but instead an *ideological* relevance, since it symbolizes the origin of knighthood and courtly love. Descriptions of paintings of Troy refer especially to the escape of Aeneas from burning Troy.³⁸ Those descriptions – and this is a very important point to remember – do not actually describe real paintings, but rather perpetuate a literary tradition of fictional paintings appearing in literature.³⁹ This

34 »And when he got up in the morning he opened the windows where the garden of trees was. He looked at the painting of his lady, he bowed in front of it and greeted it, then he hugged and kissed it on the mouth in such a devoted way as he would kiss no other woman but his lady. Then he started to paint what happened to him when he rode to the Dolorose Garden and how he captured the castle by his bravery. On this day he painted what had happened to him until the day of the tournament and how he wore his green armor on the day when the king came down from the hall and praised him before all the other knights. And after that, day after day, he painted his whole story, but only his story and not that of the others. And when easter had passed his composition was complete.«

35 On this see also STURGES, who describes Lancelot's paintings as »visual texts« functioning »in the same way as oral/aural ones, referring directly to an ever-present reality«, STURGES, Robert S.: Epistemology of the Bedchamber: Textuality, Knowledge, and the Representation of Adultery in Malory and the Prose ›Lancelot‹. In: *Arthuriana* 7 (1997), 4, pp. 47-62, here p. 61.

36 Cf. STEINHOFF's commentary on 46,15 in STEINHOFF IV, p. 847; RIDDER [note 27], pp. 76f.

37 Cf. LIENERT, Elisabeth: Ritterschaft und Minne: Ursprungsmythos und Bildungszitat – Troja-Anspielungen in nicht-trojanischen Dichtungen des 12. bis 14. Jahrhunderts. In: *Die deutsche Trojaliteratur des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*. Ed. by Brunner, Horst. Wiesbaden 1990 (Wissensliteratur im Mittelalter 3), pp. 199-243.

38 LIENERT [note 37], pp. 210-213.

39 LIENERT explains that, in the middle ages, Troy has two functions: First, a real-historical, and, secondly, an ideological-historical function. The historical role of Troy is marginal in non-Trojan and non-historical poetry though this does not reduce the realistic idea of Troy, cf. LIENERT [note 37], pp. 200f. Most crucial is

tradition originates from Vergil's »Aeneid«. After his escape from Troy, Aeneas catches sight of murals in the temple of Juno in Carthage that show the battles of Greeks and Trojans as well as pictures of himself (»Aeneid« I, 450-493).⁴⁰ In this way, Aeneas is confronted with his own history and this is brought up again in the prose »Lancelot«, though it is crucial to remember that the hero himself is the painter.⁴¹ Within the framework of the literary tradition mentioned above, pictures of Troy and Aeneas exist in literature without being bound to actual models outside the text. The pictures relate not directly to actual objects but are instead images that represent certain values and ideals; within medieval literature, the images may represent important aspects of the courtly ideology such as courage and beauty. The function of these pictures is to serve as representations of the courtly ideal and to provide meaning. It is necessary to consider this tradition in order to understand that Lancelot's frescoes work analogously to the logic of those literary paintings. The romance makes reference to the tradition of literary paintings. They serve, however, not only to represent courtly values, but also to represent the individual, personal sphere. The paintings represent Lancelot's life, albeit in an idealised fashion.⁴² Moreover, the pictures create and form meaning based on absence, which itself produces a meaning of its own. The prose »Lance-

Troy's ideological significance as the origin of knighthood and *minne*. The Trojan War is understood as the origin of knighthood which is defined as the fight for a lady. The values of the present are projected onto an idealized past in order to gain dignity and legitimation of the present. Troy is the model for exemplary courtly existence and behaviour (p. 202). The literary texts referring to the topic do not give detailed information about Troy as this is assumed to be known. In any case, authors do not aim at giving detailed information about Troy; in that way, historical data becomes the subject of a literary game without guaranteeing correctness (p. 209). The Trojan War appears as literary text or image not as an incident. The most popular example is Helmbrecht's helmet in the »Meier Helmbrecht« by Wernher der Gartenaere (ca. 1250/80). Amongst other things it shows the theft of Helena, the conquest of Troy and the flight of Aeneas (p. 210). These pictures have a literary tradition only. The original image is the shield of Achilles in Homer's »Iliad«. Although this image was present in the Middle Ages the frescoes with Trojan motives, which are shown on the walls of the temple of Juno in Carthage in Vergil's »Aeneid«, were of most influence. But hardly ever do the pictures have a key role like in the prose »Lancelot« (p. 211).

40 Virgil I: Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI. With an English transl. by FAIRCLOUGH, H. Rushton. Cambridge/Massachusetts, London/England 1994 (LCL 63).

41 Cf. STEINHOFF's commentary on 46,15 in STEINHOFF IV, p. 847.

42 Cf. e.g. the description that Lancelot *hett nye keyn ritterspiel getriben groß und cleyen, er hett es darinn gemalet und gemacht, so das vgluchs syn recht maß hett* (STEINHOFF IV, 58,30-32; emphasis mine). Translation: »Lancelot did not take part in any knightly contest, major or minor, which he did not paint in it and he made the pictures in such a way that each had its perfect form.«

lot« takes up the tradition of literary paintings, a signifying chain without an actual object. The romance carries the signifying chain further by making the motif of the pictures personal; thereby Lancelot uses the pictures as an instrument to produce depictions of himself. In this way, the text draws specific attention to the central narrative framework, namely the interplay between absence and presence. When the protagonist picks up the brush, it becomes clear that the subject is responsible for the creation of signification and that signification creates the subject. Subject and signification are mutually dependent, each one is unable to exist without the other. The implication of this is that the individual who creates art is bound to art and art is bound to him or her; both the identity of art and the individual's identity strongly depend on absence.

The specific performance of this interdependency may be regarded as being self-reflection and a poetics inscribed on different layers of the text, that is, on the plot and narrative level. Absence of the object as a source of art-creation is articulated on different textual layers:

1. In the plot, because the absence of Ginover (that is, the object of deferred desire) motivates Lancelot's painting.
2. In aesthetic reflection, since the pictures that inspire Lancelot's art exist only in literature; they are marked by the absence of a direct referent. Analogously to the pictures of Troy (which have a representational function since they serve for self-definition of the courtly society), Lancelot defines himself by his paintings.

Though Lancelot visualizes Ginover, she is only present in a mediated fashion. This mediated presence does not undo separation, but instead recreates absence. This paradoxical process is essential not only to the relation of the lovers to each other but also to the creation of Lancelot's very identity, his melancholic character as well as to the plot. Separation is repeated time and time again, defining both the protagonist and the narration by loss.⁴³ Repetition of separation is what characterizes Lancelot as a melancholic and provides the analogous basis of the romance. The protagonist and the narrative structure continue along but they simultaneously preserve the notion of separation, which is the source from which meaning is created.

43 In regard to this cf. HIRSCHBERG's statement about the protagonist who, as she explains, is most present for the society »when he is absent, unable to act due to weakness, illness or imprisonment. In those moments everyone talks about him, celebrates his meaning for the community by endless questions and lamentations and search operations«, HIRSCHBERG, Dagmar: Die Ohnmacht des Helden. Zur Konzeption des Protagonisten im »Prosa-Lancelot«. In: Wolfram-Studien IX (1986), pp. 242-266, here p. 253 (translation: C.A.).

IV. Conclusion

The episode of Lancelot's painting reflects a form of the literary creation of identity. The images illustrate the motivation of signification that is caused by the separation from the signified object and the suffering connected to that separation. Presence as the aim of art is a less important concern. The episode performs the separation of the lovers and shows the power of the melancholic mood. Melancholy results from the basic condition of separation, which in the episode motivates the process of self-signification.

Julia KRISTEVA states that the experience of melancholy works as a fundamental stimulus for human action: It stimulates an act of creativity and an act of creating meaning. Because this sense is based on absence, the episode depicts the power of melancholy and mental wounding even though it is not overcome but recapitulated and recreated. The episode illustrates that melancholy cannot be surmounted by the individual, but also makes it clear that this emotion, which is of such great importance for the text, literally *makes* sense. It is apparent that melancholy is not only a mood characterizing the protagonist but itself a modality of identity. In the literary text, this modality is a basic element and a constituent of a specific literary way of narrating and signifying.

Ultimately, however, melancholy is not only an emotional condition of the protagonist but crucial for the text as a piece of art and for its aesthetic quality, especially in regard to its narrative structure. The specific structure that underlies Lancelot's temper and acting finds a correspondence in the overall idea of the romance: Separation cannot be overcome. At the end, it is impossible for the individual to find his or her place in the Arthurian community, whose decay must be confronted by its members, while the individual withdraws from the community and chooses *moniage*, that is, reclusion.⁴⁴ When everything is said and done, though, the prose »Lancelot« proposes its own vision. It presents an individual who is forced into a state of separation and reclusion, who eventually absorbs separation »into his very being, integrating it not as a condition for glory,«⁴⁵ but as an indispensable condition and essence of life. It is by acknowledging his isolation and facing absence that the subject (as presented in the romance) attains a state in which he finds himself in a disillusioned – a melancholic – but dignified position.

44 KLINGER draws a poignant conclusion from this ending: »The Arthurian society has been destroyed, the individual is still alive [...]«, KLINGER [note 2], p. 295 (translation: C.A.). On the problem of the unity of the Lancelot grail cycle and its scholarly discussion cf. UNZEITIG-HERZOG [note 21], pp. 12-18 and cf. ANDERSEN, Elizabeth A.: Brothers and Cousins in the German Prose *Lancelot*. In: Forum for Modern Language Studies 26/2 (1990), pp. 144-159 (who focuses on kinship as a structural principle).

45 KRISTEVA [note 9], p. 118.

Matthias Meyer

Parzifals Schwester – eine melancholische Textgeste?

This paper deals with Parzifal's sister, one of the, if not the most enigmatic figures of the »Prose Lancelot«. While many of her narrative functions are clear, so far no satisfying interpretation for her very spectacular and completely useless death has been proffered. I suggest to read her as a melancholic gesture of the text. The content of this melancholic gesture is the ambivalent role – and, ultimately, exclusion – of women from the history of salvation.

Begehren ist ein zentrales Element der narrativen wie der psychologischen Struktur des »Prosalancelots«: Galahot begehrt zunächst die Weltherrschaft, dann Lancelot. Lancelot begehrt Ginover von seiner ersten Begegnung mit ihr so wie er begehrt, der beste Ritter zu sein. Artus begehrt Ginover – die echte wie die falsche –, die Sachsenprinzessin und andere Frauen und natürlich die Tafelrunde, deren Existenz an die Ehe mit Ginover geknüpft wird. Schließlich begehren alle Artusritter im Einzelfall nicht nur Aventure, sondern immer wieder höfische Damen. Die wiederum sind auch nicht frei von Begehren: z. B. immer wieder nach Lancelot, wie Ginover, die Dame von Malohaut und jenes namenlose Fräulein, das Lancelot von der Vergiftung an der Quelle heilt und seine jungfräuliche Freundin werden will, und die Tochter des Gralskönig; ein weiterer berücktigter Fall ist natürlich das den Untergang des Artusreichs beschleunigende Begehren der Dame von Challot.¹ Schließlich ist nicht alles Begehren geschlechtlich, so wird oft das Begehren durch Ehre ausgelöst, warum Galahot Lancelot begehrt, ist alles andere als geklärt. In der Gralsqueste wird dieses Begehren nun meistens auf ein einziges Objekt umgelenkt: den Gral, dem sich alle anderen Objekte des Begehrens unterordnen müssen. Dies zeigt sich schon bei einem oberflächlichen Blick auf den Text, wenn nämlich jegliche Form sexuellen Begehrens in dieser Phase im wörtlichen Sinne verteufelt, als vom Teufel ausgelöst dargestellt wird und schließlich zum Versagen auf der Gralsqueste führt. Dass dieses zentrale Begehren nach dem Gral in den meisten Fällen unerfüllt bleiben muss, liegt an der Natur des Grals und der Suche nach ihm. Doch gibt es

1 Es ist dieses Begehren, das die Figuren der Kompilation immer wieder auf den Weg schickt, und das auch nach dem Tode nicht aufhört, die Körper in Bewegung zu halten; vgl. BAISCH, Martin u. MEYER, Matthias: Zirkulierende Körper. Tod und Bewegung im »Prosa-Lancelot«. In: Körperkonzepte im arthurischen Roman. Hg. v. Wolfzettel, Friedrich. Tübingen 2007, S. 383-404.