

## Globalism in Medieval Literature? Pre-Modern Perspectives in Poetic Projections: Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, Konrad Fleck's *Flore und Blancheflor*, and Reinfried von Braunschweig

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*This paper examines globalism in the pre-modern world as reflected in literary texts. In contrast to globalization, globalism indicates an opening of perspectives toward distant parts of the world and embracing to some extent the foreign people and their cultures as, relatively speaking, equals, more or less approaching the concept of transculturality. Whereas the European Middle Ages have commonly been identified as xenophobic, determined by fear, and parochial, many literary documents reflect a rather open-minded perspective and undermine such stereotypical judgments. Undoubtedly, of course, the paradigm of Christianity ruled strongly, but within the field of literary imagination, we can discover numerous examples of European protagonists openly, fairly, respectfully, and even lovingly interacting with people in the East and elsewhere. We might face here nothing but fictional projections, but those were obviously widely enjoyed by the contemporary audiences and so must have had a considerable impact on the readers/listeners. The examples chosen for this analysis are Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, Konrad Fleck's *Flore und Blanscheflor*, and the anonymous *Reinfried von Braunschweig*.*

### Globalism avant la letter

If anything might convince us to approach human history and culture from a global perspective, then the current global crisis with the COVID-19 virus and its enormous impact on people across the globe (2020). Previous epidemics and pandemics have also wreaked havoc on humanity, not to speak of huge events in natural history, with tsunamis, volcanoes, earthquakes, heat waves, and climate changes which have also deeply affected everyone on the entire globe.<sup>1</sup> For instance, recent scholars have increasingly pointed to epidemics as much more relevant causes for the devastating decline and eventual fall of the Western Roman Empire than the incursions of the various Germanic peoples or political

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1. R. S. Bray, *Armies of Pestilence: The Effects of Pandemics on History* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1996); Mark D. Hardt, *History of Infectious Disease Pandemics in Urban Societies* (Lanham, MD, Boulder, CO, New York, and London: Lexington Books, 2016); *The Routledge History of Disease*, ed. Mark Jackson. The Routledge Histories (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2017).

and military conflicts in the interior.<sup>2</sup> The black death in the middle of the fourteenth century came from Tibet, made its way across the Himalayas, down to India, from there it marched, literally, westward, reaching the Black Sea, and was then transported to Genoa and Venice, whereupon all of Europe was affected.<sup>3</sup> In fact, throughout history, global natural events (medical or physical) have exerted a huge influence, even if the individual often could not comprehend the events beyond the parochial limits. In light of these past and present developments, we are certainly called upon as cultural historians to pursue much more global perspectives than ever before, as difficult as this often proves to be out of many different limitations due to our narrow disciplinary *foci*, lack of linguistic competence, and our common concentration on smaller geographic regions.<sup>4</sup>

Global history, however, as challenging and difficult as it certainly proves to be, deserves much more of our attention so that we can recognize the much larger perspectives developed by poets, artists, philosophers, merchants, and others long before the modern age.<sup>5</sup> In fact, we are today the avatars of developments that had set in already in antiquity and the Middle Ages, which means that the exploration of this topic can help us understand much better not only the past, but the true meaning of the way how human society has been operating throughout the ages and what we might expect in the future. This paper thus intends to develop early inroads into the world of high and late medieval (German) literature created in Europe which had already developed some types of globalism. At least, some poets demonstrated a certain knowledge about distant lands and even entire continents that allow us to argue that they were

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2. *Plague and the End of Antiquity: The Pandemic of 541–750*, ed. Lester K. Little (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). See also J. N. Hays, *The Burdens of Disease: Epidemics and Human Response in Western History* (2009; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009); *L'impatto della "peste antonina": quinto degli Incontri capresi di Storia dell'Economia Antica*, ed. Elio Lo Cascio (Bari: Edipuglia, 2012); Kyle Harper, *The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of an Empire*. The Princeton History of the Ancient World (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017); Kay Peter Jankrift, *Im Angesicht der "Pestilenz": Seuchen in westfälischen und rheinischen Städten (1349–1600)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2020).

3. *Pandemic Disease in the Medieval World: Rethinking the Black Death*, ed. Monica Green (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2015); *Epidemien und Pandemien in historischer Perspektive*, ed. Jörg Vögele, Stefanie Knöll, and Thorsten Noack. Neuere Medizin- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016).

4. *The Oxford Handbook of Global Studies*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer, Saskia Sassen, and Manfred B. Steger; managing ed. Victor Faessel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

5. Many recent efforts in that regard have not been very convincing, such as *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Global Medieval Life and Culture*, ed. Joyce E. Salisbury. 3 vols (Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 2009), because they simply include non-European continents and create a rather disjointed narrative fabric with many threads that do not intertwine. Granted, this leads to a deconstruction of Euro-centrism, but it does not construct a really meaningful concept for future historians.

early participants in a global discourse, accepting the foreign cultures and peoples as more or less equal partners within their own medieval frame of mind, whether in realistic or just imaginary terms.

We know, of course, already of many medieval and early modern travelers who covered enormous distances particularly far into the Middle and the Far East, particularly China (Marco Polo, Odorico da Pordenone, John of Pian de Carpine, etc.). Reversely, Arab travelers such as Ibn Fadlan and Ibn Battuta explored many non-Muslim countries both in eastern Europe and in Asia. In the late Middle Ages, the number of Christian pilgrims grew exponentially, and many of them explored also other regions beyond the Holy Land.<sup>6</sup> To what extent did they establish the foundation for a global perspective, if at all? Was there any intellectual, political, or commercial exchange? After all, how much does any traveler really perceive, and what types of communication develop during his/her journey? These are questions of great relevance for us today as well because global tourism, for instance, does not create globalism, whereas the organization “Doctors without Borders” certainly does.<sup>7</sup>

Late medieval translators such as Antonius von Pforr demonstrated that they were surprisingly aware about foreign cultures, literature, and philosophy and can today be identified as precursors of what we might call ‘transculturality’ today.<sup>8</sup> Hence, there is no doubt that we can and must explore the meaning of

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6. See the contributions to *Encyclopedia of Medieval Pilgrimage*, ed. Larissa J. Taylor, Leigh Ann Craig, et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010); for larger issues, see the contributions to *East Meets West in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Transcultural Experiences in the Premodern World*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 14 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2013); and to *Travel, Time, and Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Time: Explorations of Worldly Perceptions and Processes of Identity Formation*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 22 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2018). See also *Europe: A Literary History, 1348–1418*, ed. David Wallace. 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); to *L’expérience des frontières et les littératures de l’Europe Médiévale*, ed. Sofia Lodén and Vanessa Obry. *Colloques congrès conférence moyen âge*, 26 (Paris: Éditions Honoré Champion, 2019). Cf. also Joyce E. Salisbury, “Europe,” *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Global Medieval Life and Culture* (Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 2009), 1–178, with a focus on “Global Ties” (69–77); Michael Borgolte, “Kommunikation – Handel, Kunst und Wissenstausch,” *Weltdeutungen und Weltreligionen 600 bis 1500*, ed. Johannes Fried and Ernst-Dieter Hehl. *WBG Welt-Geschichte*, III (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2010), 17–144. See also the informative study by Pedro Martínez García, *El cara a cara con el otro: la visión de lo ajeno a fines de la Edad Media y comienzos de la Edad Moderna a través del viaje* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2015).

7. <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/> (last accessed on March 26, 2020). Fortunately, there are many other global organizations that work hard to improve the lives of people across the globe.

8. Albrecht Classen, “India, Persia, and Arabia in the Mind of a Late Fifteenth-Century German Author: Transcultural Experiences through the Literary Discourse. Antonius von

globalism as it emerged already in the pre-modern age in order to comprehend more appropriately how people in the Middle Ages viewed the foreign world beyond the common dimensions set up primarily by the Christian Church and were prepared, at least mentally, to acknowledge other cultures, peoples, religions, and languages.<sup>9</sup> To be sure, they were not at all as myopic or narrow-minded as many modern studies seem to indicate, and there are numerous indications that medieval poets were actually more prepared to explore exotic countries and cultures especially to the East, than we might have assumed previously. Studying their fictional projections regarding the global dimension of the realm where their protagonists operated sheds not only better light on their texts and messages, it also lays the foundation for a more complex, historically and literarily grounded analysis of globalism in past and present.

Following Sebastian Conrad, we can postulate that “Global history can shift our attention to the hierarchies of power and the geopolitical structures that conditioned the way in which the world became integrated with important effects on individuals, groups, and whole societies.”<sup>10</sup> However, most scholars working on the history of globalism take as their starting point the sixteenth century, and ignore that many medieval writers had already demonstrated a strong interest in opening their perspectives toward the world beyond western Europe, Christianity, and the *latinitas*.<sup>11</sup> Conrad grants that “no society can be fully understood in isolation” (101), and he highlights, above all, the economic networks that existed in many parts of the world throughout time (103–04), and also alerts us to the complexity of global structures (108). He is certainly willing to incorporate the Middle Ages into the discourse on globalism (111), but the actual task of figuring out what that really entails still remains to be done.

There are at least three possible avenues to explore the issue at stake here. Recent scholars have returned to the topic of world literature and have endeavored to study the most diverse texts from all over the world composed at

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Pffor and his *Buch der Beispiele der Alten Weisen*,” *Philological Quarterly* 99, no. 2 (2020): 119–45.

9. *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

10. Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 214.

11. For early corrective approaches, see Geraldine Heng and Lynne Ramey, “Early Globalities, Global Literatures: Introducing a Special Issue on the Global Middle Ages,” *Literature Compass* (2014): 1–6; online at: 10.1111/lic3.12156 (last accessed on March 26, 2020); Geraldine Heng, “Reinventing Race, Colonization, and Globalisms across Deep Time: Lessons from the Longue Durée,” in *PMLA* 130.2 (2015), 358–66; eadem, “Early Globalities, and Its Questions, Objectives, and Methods: An Inquiry into the State of Theory and Critique,” in *Exemplaria* 26.2–3 (2014), 232–51; Naomi Standen and Monica White, “Structural Mobilities in the Global Middle Ages,” in *Past & Present* 238, suppl. 13 (2018), 158–89.

more or less the same time, whether influencing each other or not. Parallel to this, historians have tried to develop global history, equally a murky concept. This approach, however, leads to a very loose narrative fabric with many threads that do not really intertwine or interact with each other.<sup>12</sup> Another approach would be to examine the vast world of pilgrimage and other travelogues that certainly confirm how much late medieval Europe was on the road and explored many neighboring countries.<sup>13</sup> The third avenue, which I want to pursue here in light of three representative cases, relies on the theoretical model of the history of mentality and takes into account literary and art-historical works as mirrors of fundamental attitudes, ideas, sentiments, and feelings.<sup>14</sup> Even though these sources are not as reliable and concrete as medieval maps, letters, journals, and other ego-documents, they provide a deep and meaningful insight into the mental structure prevalent at a certain time insofar as they reflect what poets and their audiences imagined as possible and feasible.

All this does not mean that actual conversations across linguistic and cultural divides took place, though those might certainly have been possible considering the freedom and flexibility of most poets who commonly commanded a high linguistic level. Most importantly for us, the main fictional discourse provided more often than we might have thought possible an imaginary roadmap for intercultural exchanges, early attempts to conceive of interreligious dialogue, and for intellectual engagements with foreign lands and people.<sup>15</sup>

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12. *A Companion to World Literature*. Vol. 2: 601 CE to 1450. Gen. ed.: Ken Seigneurie, vol. ed.: Christine Chism (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2020).

13. *Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. John Block Friedman and Kristen Mossler Figg (New York and London: Garland, 2000); Philippe Beaujard, *From the Seventh Century to the Fifteenth Century CE*, trans. ed. Tamara Loring, Frances Meadows, and Andromeda Tait. *Mondes de l'océan Indien*, 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); *The Practice of Global History: European Perspectives*, ed. Matthias Middell (London, New York, et al.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019); Roland Wenzlhuemer, *Doing Global History: An Introduction in Six Concepts* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

14. *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte: Hauptthemen in Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. Peter Dinzelbacher. 2nd revised and expanded ed. (1993; Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2008). See here especially the section "Das Fremde und das Eigene" (459–518).

15. *La Raison du merveilleux à la fin du Moyen Âge et dans la première modernité: Textes et images*, ed. Dominique de Courcelles. *Rencontres*, 399 (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019)); Albrecht Classen, *Religious Toleration in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: An Anthology of Literary, Theological, and Philosophical Texts* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020). See now the contributions to *Imagination and Fantasy in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Time: Projections, Dreams, Monsters, and Illusions*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 24 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, forthcoming [2020]).

### Literary Examples of Medieval Globalism

For my analysis, here I have chosen three texts from the history of medieval German literature where the experience of the distant East plays a major role and underscores explicitly how much the poets and hence their audiences were aware of and interested in the foreign world far beyond even the Mediterranean: Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (ca. 1205); Konrad Fleck's *Flore und Blanscheflur* (ca. 1220), and the anonymous *Reinfried von Braunschweig* (after 1291). All three texts reflect a broader European interest in the Asian cultures and present a variety of innovative perspectives that lend themselves surprisingly well for the exploration of globalism already in the Middle Ages. Each time, we observe that the protagonist travels far beyond the traditional European limits in geographical terms and enjoys surprisingly good experiences that we might characterize today as 'transcultural.' Wolfram's work was in part based on Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval*, and Fleck's romance was one of countless other versions of the same literary material highly popular throughout medieval Europe. Only *Reinfried* appears to have exerted very little success, having survived only anonymously and in one manuscript (Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek der Universität Erfurt, Cod. Memb. II 42). Nevertheless, here we come across yet another fascinating example of personal encounters of two individuals representing East and West who deliberately dismiss previous stereotypes and prejudices and join hands in their touristic interests and simple curiosity.

We need to keep in mind that medieval Europe was deeply determined by the paradigm of the Christian religion. Everything else was anathema. However, the Church could not dominate or control secular literature, or every piece of the art works produced for private patrons. The nobility pursued quite different interests than the ecclesiastics preferred, and the same applied to the urban audiences and writers. Drawing from just three medieval texts might not provide us with a solid base to address the larger framework, which was certainly Eurocentric. I would submit, however, that these three works can be regarded as representative of larger mental-historical conditions, especially in the case of Fleck's romance.

*Reinfried von Braunschweig* was composed at a time when many other poets also reflected on the changing fortunes of the Crusades and integrated rather open-minded perspectives toward other cultures and religions.<sup>16</sup> Wolfram's *Parzival* experienced a tremendous popularity as documented by the large number of extant manuscripts containing the text, and so it seems natural that

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16. Albrecht Classen, "Tolerance in the Middle Ages? The Good Heathens as Fellow Beings in the World of *Reinfried von Braunschweig*, Konrad von Würzburg's *Partonopier und Meliur*, and *Die Heideninne*," in *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 61 (2006), 183–223.

some of his arguments must have rattled common assumptions and religious concepts.<sup>17</sup> Thematically and generically, these three texts differ considerably from each other, Wolfram's being a grail romance, Fleck's being a sentimental romance, and *Reinfried* being a crusading romance, but they all share to a considerable extent a certain level of curiosity about and interest in distant lands, without repeating the traditional absolutist position held by most of their contemporaries vis-à-vis non-Christians and non-Europeans. The three authors project, as I will outline below, a certain sense of open-mindedness and explicitly entertained the notion that their protagonists could be welcome in the East and operate there successfully, if not vice versa as well. To what extent we can talk here actually about 'transculturality,' or rather 'interculturality,' or even about 'globalism,' will have to be examined at the end through a comparative analysis.

Granted, all three poets addressed primarily a German-speaking audience and did not even imagine that they might create an actual conversation with Asian or non-Christian contemporaries. However, as we will observe, in each case just this situation is presented in rather dramatic terms, inviting us to recognize that the thirteenth century might have witnessed a considerable paradigm shift that allowed global perspectives to enter the picture.<sup>18</sup> In each case, historical conditions do not really concern us, and there are not even reflections of the imminent fall of Acre in 1291 to the Muslims, which dramatically changed the entire European and Middle Eastern relationship (with a slight exception in *Reinfried*). Nevertheless, here we face a remarkable ensemble of literary works in which the European Christian protagonists long before the coming of the modern age establish meaningful relationships with individuals in the East, as undefined as that geographic term might be.

Both Wolfram's *Parzival* and Fleck's *Flore und Blanscheflur* have already been discussed from many different perspectives; the situation is quite different with *Reinfried*, but by focusing on the issue of globalism, I hope to unearth significant parallels among all three texts and to connect them meaningfully with the current discourse on globalism as it concerns us today.<sup>19</sup> The reason why all this matters so much is grounded in the literary character of those works making it possible to imagine novel worlds.

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17. <http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/437>; here are listed 88 manuscripts, and one incunabulum from 1477 is also mentioned. See also Bernd Schirok, "Die Handschriften und die Entwicklung des Texts," *Wolfram von Eschenbach: Ein Handbuch*, ed. Joachim Heinzle. Vol. I: *Autor, Werk, Wirkung* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 308–34.

18. Laura J. Whatley, "Shifting Paradigms of Place and Ritual on Crusader Seals Before and After the Fall of Acre in 1291," in *Paradigm Shifts during the Global Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, 44 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 43–63.

19. Granted, in the *Companion of World Literature*, Wolfram is represented through one contribution (2, 967–76), but neither Fleck nor *Reinfried* were considered here at all.

Undoubtedly, that places them within the realm of fictionality, but these poets projected, with their narratives, highly intriguing scenarios in which Christian Europeans encountered and interacted with people in western Asia and even elsewhere on a refreshingly personal level. Those scenarios were thus presented to many different audiences, which in turn were thus accustomed to new, that is, virtually global concepts connecting their own little communities with countries and people far beyond their actual and concrete reach.

As Shayne Aaron Legassie has recently pointed out, "In contrast to Grosseteste, many other late medieval voices lauded their age as one marked by unprecedented advances in geographical knowledge," which he then backs up convincingly with references to numerous authors from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>20</sup> Considering the booming trade during the late Middle Ages and the early modern age closely connecting Europe with the neighboring and further distant countries,<sup>21</sup> it does not come as a surprise that contemporary poets were well positioned either as harbinger or as mirrors of this opening up of the mind, such as in the case of Rudolf von Ems's *Der Guote Gerhard* (ca. 1220).<sup>22</sup> Marco Polo and then John Mandeville several decades later both excited their audiences about the Oriental world they had toured or at least dreamed about as in the case of the latter, and provided thereby the additional layer of narrative preparedness to accept the world in its more global dimensions.<sup>23</sup>

### Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*

Wolfram von Eschenbach would not need to be introduced here once

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20. Shayne Aaron Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 61, and *passim*.

21. Arturo Giraldez, *The Age of Trade: The Manila Galleons and the Dawn of the Global Economy*. Exploring World History (Lanham, MD, Boulder, CO, et al.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); he focuses, however, mostly on the time past 1500.

22. Albrecht Classen, *An English Translation of Rudolf von Ems's Der guote Gêrhart* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2016); *id.*, "The Transnational and the Transcultural in Medieval German Literature: Spatial Identity and Pre-Modern Concepts of Nationhood in the Works of Wolfram von Eschenbach, Gottfried von Straßburg, Rudolf von Ems, and Konrad von Würzburg," in *Mediaevistik* 29 (2016), 175–94; *id.*, "Medieval Transculturality in the Mediterranean from a Literary-Historical Perspective: The Case of Rudolf von Ems's *Der guote Gêrhart* (ca. 1220–ca. 1250)," in *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 5.1 (2018), 133–60.

23. Often, recent studies use similar terms but do not engage with the real issue at stake; see, for instance, Rolf Darge, "Wahre Welt: Die Welt als offenes Beziehungsfeld des menschlichen Geistes im mittelalterlichen Denken," in *Welterfahrung und Welterschließung in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Anna Kathrin Bleuler. Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zu Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit, 5 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016), 25–45.

again.<sup>24</sup> Suffices it to summarize that he created one of the most important grail romances in the Middle Ages, his *Parzival*, in part based on Chrétien's model, his *Perceval*. He also composed a major crusading epic, *Willehalm*, the fragmentary *Titurel*, and some dawn songs. In *Parzival*, the author made serious efforts to develop a more global perspective by presenting to us first Gahmuret's adventures in the distant East, and later, the life of his son Parzival, who will later confront his half-brother, Feirefiz.<sup>25</sup> The fictional framework allowed Wolfram to play with various concepts that must have been quite radical at his time, critically undermining the Christian and the European paradigm and giving credit to the world to the East as well, and this just at a time when the Fourth Crusade in 1204 ended with the conquest of Constantinople and its horrible plunder by the Christian armies. It would be hard to imagine how the Europeans must have reacted to the news of the badly redirected Crusade, which had exposed much of the hypocrisy of the entire crusading mentality.<sup>26</sup> Yet, Wolfram did not voice any comments critical of the entire business with crusading. However, in his *Parzival* he suggested surprisingly innovative concepts about how people from East and West could interact with each other.

As Wolfram scholars have often pointed out, the life of Gahmuret takes on a rather unusual tangential, even for a fictional medieval knight, because he soon finds himself in the service of the lord of Babylon, and performs military wonders for him, earning him greatest respect among friends and foe in that distant country. There is not one bit of curiosity about the foreign culture and different religion. Chivalric values predominate there as well, and Gahmuret is never concerned with maintaining his own standing and status in the Islamic world because he enjoys greatest esteem as a knight there and feels completely at home in the East.

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24. Most recently, Evelyn Meyer, "Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*: A Complex Reshaping and Expansion of a Source," in Seigneurie, Ken et al. (ed.), *A Companion to World Literature*, vol. 2, 967–77. For the most authoritative critical study, though, see Joachim Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*. Sammlung Metzler, 36. 8th, completely rev. ed. (1964; Stuttgart: Metzler, 2004).

25. Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*. Studienausgabe. 2nd ed. Mittelhochdeutscher Text nach der sechsten Ausgabe von Karl Lachmann. Übersetzung von Peter Knecht (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998); for a convenient introduction, see Heiko Hartmann, *Einführung in das Werk Wolframs von Eschenbach*. Einführung Germanistik (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2015). There are many good English translations of Wolfram's *Parzival*, but here I offer my own. See also Heiko Hartmann, *Einführung in das Werk Wolframs von Eschenbach*. Einführung Germanistik (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2015).

26. See, for instance, David M. Perry, *Sacred Plunder: Venice and the Aftermath of the Fourth Crusade* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015); George E. Demacopoulos, *Colonizing Christianity: Greek and Latin Religious Identity in the Era of the Fourth Crusade* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

First, this young man hears rumors of the mighty ruler Baruch who controls two thirds of the entire earth. This empire of Balduc thus constitutes a much wider and more impressive national entity than anyone could imagine in medieval Europe. The poet does not define in detail what regions belonged to Baruch, or what languages were spoken there, although he makes clear that Balduc was not Christian and hence outside of the influence sphere of Christianity within Europe. In order to help his readers/listeners understand the full extent of this empire, and the degree to which Baruch commands complete control over his people, the narrator underscores that many crowned kings served under him and that the ruler himself enjoyed the parallel authority as the pope does in the western world (8). We also hear of Baruch's two brothers, Pompey and Ipomidon from whom he had taken away Nineveh, an ancient Assyrian city of Upper Mesopotamia, today near Mosul in Iraq. We do not need to probe further how much Wolfram really understood the historical and cultural connotations since it suffices for us that he simply projected a huge world far to the East where unexpected and quite different power structures dominate.<sup>27</sup> However, in strong contrast to all other real western travelers getting into that mostly unknown world, Gahmuret is happily welcomed and immediately recognized as a major fighter of great use for Baruch because no other man can withstand his force (9).

But Gahmuret does not stay there for long, instead he moves soon to the kingdom of Zazamanc, inhabited by a black-skinned people. Their queen Belacane is besieged by two armies, and she has no defender left, when this stranger appears and soon volunteers as her champion, defeating all of her opponents. Although he at first feels repulsed by Belacane's blackness, he then actually falls in love with her and joins with her in a kind of marriage, from which results a son, Feirefiz, whom Gahmuret never meets in person because he abandons his wife before the delivery of the baby, and he later dies in battle.

Two major aspects characterize the entire episode; on the one hand, Gahmuret is swept away by his erotic desires for the queen and entirely disregards the differences in their skin colors. Even though he later claims in a letter to her that he had to leave her because she was not a Christian, this proves to be nothing but a lie. He would have happily stayed there in marriage with Belacane if he only had had more opportunities for knightly combat and glory. On the other, the knights fighting outside of the castle represent a motley of aristocrats from all over Europe and the Eastern world,

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27. Alfred Raucheisen, *Orient und Abendland: ethisch-moralische Aspekte in Wolframs Epen "Parzival" und "Willehalm"*. Bremer Beiträge zur Literatur- und Ideengeschichte, 17 (Frankfurt a. M. and New York: Peter Lang, 1997); Debra N. Prager, *Orienting the Self: The German Literary Encounter with the Eastern Other*. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2014).

so Gahmuret's own turning to Baruch was regarded as nothing exceptional, except for the extraordinary fame which this Oriental ruler enjoyed. For Wolfram, knighthood and courtly love were globally shared values, and he entrusted the neighbors to the east of Europe as being on the same social, ethical, and knightly level as they were. As to the love relationship, we only need to listen to the following passage to be convinced that our poet harbored no particular concerns about racial differences: "The black Mooress, that country's queen, caused him to swoon again and again. He twisted and turned, time and again, like a bundle of willow twigs, his joints cracking. Battle and love were his desire" (16–17).<sup>28</sup>

Of course, just as in his subsequent epic poem, *Willehalm* (ca. 1219), the Christian hero defeats even the best heathen warriors, but those are certainly portrayed as most worthy and noble character, such as the prince Razalic. "Not for a single day did he desist, that mightiest man of Azagouc – his heritage did not betray him, his lineage was of kingly fruit – but he always headed off to joust before the city" (19). For Gahmuret, any noble opponent in front of him proves to be a worthy goal, and he is exceedingly happy with his successes in the Oriental lands, though he later returns to Europe because peace has been achieved due to Gahmuret's own victories. He later claims to Belacane that the difference in their religion drove him away from her, but the letter which he leaves behind for her, easily reveals to be deceptive because this knight simply searches for ever new manly adventures and accepts them as they come his way, whether he is in the West or in the East (25).

Gahmuret turns west from there and eventually becomes Queen Herzeloide's husband, but he does not stay long with her and leaves her, as in the previous case, before she can deliver their son, Parzival. As scholars have often observed, Gahmuret proves to be a highly unstable character who knows no limits in this world and roams the earth constantly on the search for knighthood.<sup>29</sup> He is open to love and welcomes women's invitations, but his heart is really only set on manly deeds, and this wherever he can find them. He does not harbor any religious dogmas and only looks for equals among the class of high-ranking knights, wherever he can find them anywhere in the world.

Not surprisingly, when he takes his leave from Herzeloide, he returns directly to the service for Baruch, as if he cannot stay away from the East. And

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28. Andreas Mielke, *Nigra sum et formosa: Afrikanerinnen in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters; Texte und Kontexte zum Bild des Afrikaners in der literarischen Imagologie*. Helfant-Texte, 11 (Stuttgart: Helfant Ed., 1992).

29. David F. Tinsley, "Mapping the Muslims: Images of Islam in Middle High German Literature of the Thirteenth Century," in *Contextualizing the Muslim Other in Medieval Christian Discourse*, ed. Jerold C. Frakes. The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 65–101; here 81–89.

correspondingly, “He was welcomed with joy” (44). However, tragedy then strikes because an evil-minded person, in this case a heathen, pours blood of a he-goat on Gahmuret’s diamond helmet which softens it entirely, and this then later means his death in battle. Yet, the poet does not use this as an opportunity to return to the traditional xenophobic attitudes of his contemporaries; instead, he describes in great detail how much the Baruch and his court grieve the death of this noble man and endeavor to provide a worthy burial for him. Not only is his corpse embalmed, as was expected for a noble dead, but the noble warrior receives a most precious burial site, a setting which speaks volume regarding the mutual respect which those men had felt for each other. They go even so far as to place a cross on his grave “for his solace, to shelter his soul” (46). The narrator makes sure, of course, to alert his audience about the vast superiority of a Christian burial and the Christian faith, but he does not fail to point out a rather surprising epitaph in which they honor both him in his knightly accomplishments and also his own religion: “He bore baptism and Christian faith. His death grieved Saracens— that is no lie, but the truth” (47), and: “He had won the victory over falsity. Now wish salvation to him who lies here” (47).

We have to acknowledge that Wolfram could not or did not want to undermine the dominant paradigm of the Christian faith being the only true one, but within his fictional setting he certainly went so far as to project the court of Baruch as a place of highest ethical esteem attractive even for the best European knights. That ruler receives the narrator’s great praise and respect, although there is no attempt at all to preach, to missionize, to convert, or to baptize. In fact, as Joachim Bumke had already pointed out, Wolfram projected here a surprisingly realistic scenery where Gahmuret is extremely effective as a champion for the Baruch in his struggle against the Egyptian Babylon, and this in clear contrast to the situation in works such as *Herzog Ernst* or Priest Lambrecht’s *Alexander*.<sup>30</sup>

Gahmuret simply accepts that the Middle East is one of the best battle grounds for him where he can also experience deep love. Surprisingly, in that context we have to consider that both women, the black Queen Belacane, and the white Queen Herzeloide suffer the same destiny, falling in love with this unreliable man, conceiving a son with him, and being abandoned by him afterwards. Knightly virtues and honor do not know any national, racial, ethnic, or even religious limits. For Wolfram, moreover, those ethical values are not limited to Europe; and instead he argues explicitly that humanity consists of a large family, globally.<sup>31</sup>

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30. Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach* (see note 24), 46.

31. Sylvia Stevens, *Family in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s Willehalm*, *miner mâtge triwe ist mir wol kuont. Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature*, 18 (New York: Peter Lang, 1997).

At the end of *Parzival*, this finds additional confirmation when the eponymous protagonist encounters his half-brother Feirefiz and fights with him at first because he does not recognize him. Only when Parzival's sword breaks, the stranger also puts his weapon away; both take a break and soon recognize each other as half-brothers, and thus they overcome any possible military conflict between each other. The situation soon becomes a little ironic because Feirefiz is allowed to accompany Parzival to the Grail where the latter has to ask his uncle Anfortas the decisive question (333), reflecting his empathy for the suffering king, which then solves all problems and returns happiness to the world, especially at the court of Munsalvæsche. Feirefiz does not understand much what is going on because he is a heathen, hence not baptized, but he quickly accepts the Christian faith for pragmatic reasons, jumps in the baptism font, and is then allowed, as a new Christian, to marry one of the Grail maids, Repansche de Schoye. His carelessness and irreverence toward the religious ceremonies make the members of the Grail court laugh in happiness; they are actually relaxed and do not care much about the stringencies of the Christian religion. As long as he would denounce his old gods and his beloved in the distant land, Secundille, Feirefiz would be perfectly qualified to join the Grail community and be allowed to join hands with Repansche (341).

Subsequently, the newly-wed couple departs and returns to the world which we localize Iraq or Iran, if not India, where Feirefiz establishes Christianity and where Repanse delivers a son, the future Prester John, the well-known mythical figure often talked about throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>32</sup> The narrator obviously felt obliged to round off his romance with the universal triumph of Christianity, but the global perspective appears to be the strongest feature here: "We call that land India here; there it is called Tribaliboz" (345). For Anfortas, it is a joy to learn that Secundille, a potential competition for Repanse, had passed away, meaning that "his sister was undisputed lady over many such broad lands" (345). There is a deep sense emerging here that there are no more limits to the Arthurian or the Grail world because fundamental values, ideals, interests, and concepts are shared even with people in very distant lands. In order to heighten the audience's awareness about the huge dimensions of Feirefiz's empire, we are told early on that in his army, he had twenty-five companies from different countries, "none of which understood the others' speech" (308), and: "In his army, assembled from far afield, was many a wondrous armament" (308). Of course, we are not given any specifics, and this outline is almost in the vein of pre-Orientalism, and yet, there is no doubt at all that Feirefiz, being Parzival's half-brother, represents a

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32. Wilhelm Baum, *Die Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes: Rom, Byzanz und die Christen des Orients im Mittelalter*. Tangenten (Klagenfurt: Verlag Kitab, 1999); Keagan Brewer, *Prester John: The Legend and Its Sources* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015).

high level of courtly culture, this one, however, located in very remote countries. This finds its most dramatic expression in the heathen's decision immediately to finish the fight when Parzival's sword has broken: "The heathen was magnanimous. He spoke courteously then" (311).

Both men communicate in French with each other, which indicates, of course, how the differences among the many people across the world can be overcome at least in linguistic terms. In the case of Rudolf von Ems's *Der Guote Gerhard* (see above), the protagonist communicates with the Moroccan castellan in Italian, and in the eastern Mediterranean, where European Christians and Arabs meet each other, they draw from the same language to build bridges among each other.<sup>33</sup> Feirefiz and Parzival then exchange news about each other, and they realize that they are not only the long-lost half-brothers, but they also enjoy the same supreme fame and share the same chivalric values. Feirefiz himself reveals that he is "so mighty . . . that many a land serves my hand with tribute" (312). Parzival has obviously heard about him before, and hence also about his great esteem that he enjoys: "who has won by knightly strength such love and fame that he may lay rightful claims to both" (312). And Feirefiz pronounces, almost in a parallel to the fundamental Christian teaching about the Holy Trinity, "both my father, and you also, and I – we were all one entirely, although it was made manifest in three parts" (314).<sup>34</sup>

In short, Wolfram signals that it was indeed possible for a Christian knight to have family in the vast distances of the Middle East, and especially an individual who is his equal in courtesy, honor, fighting skills, power, and rank as a mighty ruler. Feirefiz fully acknowledges his half-brother and pays great respect to him, and at the same time he honors his own gods, Jupiter and Juno, which is not criticized by Parzival or the narrator. Those gods had helped him to reach with his armada of ships the coast of this land where he could encounter his long-lost family member. Both men then share what they know about their father, Gahmuret, and both lament the unjust death of their father, a tragedy both would like to avenge.

As imaginary as Wolfram's projection here proves to be, we are granted a remarkable insight into his thinking about the deep family connections between the western and the eastern world. Insofar as both half-brothers are granted the opportunity to re-unify, the traditional limits between both parts of the world are lifted and the representatives of both discover their personal bonds and their shared cultural values.<sup>35</sup> The situation in Wolfram's *Willehalm* carries a number of

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33. *Multilingualism in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: Communication and Miscommunication in the Premodern World*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 17 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016).

34. Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach* (see note 24), 116.

35. Isabelle Vodoz, "Petit récit du temps où l'Allemagne-l'Europe accueillait avec émerveillement le frère noir de Parzival," in *Identité(s) multiple(s)*, ed. Kerstin Hausbei and Alain Lattard (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2008), 231–37; Elke Brüggem, 28

similarities, but those have already been discussed by numerous other scholars, and they are more complex than the case in *Parzival*.

### **Konrad Fleck's *Flore und Blanscheflur***

Instead, let us turn to the pan-European romance *Flore und Blanscheflur*, the title spelt in many different ways depending on the language used. For our purpose, I mostly draw from the German version by Konrad Fleck, composed around 1220, which is considerably more detailed than its French source, for instance, but the differences to other versions are minimal and do not impact our interest to comprehend to what extent this text mirrors early forms of globalism. Again, here we must ignore major sections of the narrative and focus, instead, on the young man's efforts at the end to recover his beloved, the slave girl Blanscheflur, as the one with whom he wants to live, otherwise he would die.<sup>36</sup>

His parents had been very unhappy about this strong emotional relationship between their son and this Christian slave girl, so when they send Flore away for some time to gain more education, they secretly sell Blanscheflur into slavery. They had considered murdering her, but this sale seems to be more efficient and would not leave blood on their hands, as Flore's mother explains to her husband (1510–20). Merchants have arrived from Babylon, and they would be interested in the girl, which proves to be true. And those then manage to sell her later to the Admiral, all of them regarding the poor Blanscheflur as nothing but chattel, a not so uncommon victim of the global

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"Belacâne, Feirefiz und die anderen: Zur Narrativierung von Kulturkontakten im *Parzival* Wolframs von Eschenbach," in *Figuren des Globalen: Weltbezug und Welterzeugung in Literatur, Kunst und Medien*, ed. Christiane Moser and Linda Simonis. *Global Poetics: Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaftliche Studien zur Globalisierung*, 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 673–92.

36. Christine Putzo, *Konrad Fleck: <Flore und Blanscheflur>. Text und Untersuchungen*. *Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*, 143 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015). The edition reproduces the text in manuscript B in the left column, Berlin, SBPK, Ms. germ. fol. 18 (ca. 1466/68), and manuscript H in the right column, Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Pal. germ. 362 (ca. 1442/44). For a good English translation, though that one of the Old French version from ca. 1155, see *The Romance of Floire and Blanchefleur: A French Idyllic Poem of the Twelfth Century*, trans. into English verse by Merton Jerome Hubert. *University of North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures*, 63 (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1966).

slave trade which flourished also in the high and late Middle Ages.<sup>37</sup>

To the Admiral's credit, the narrator emphasizes that he immediately recognized the girl's noble origin who would be a worthy partner in marriage for him (1682–86). In fact, he goes so far as to treat her royally, assigning twenty female maids to her and offering her his empathy when he realizes that she is pining away for a lover somewhere in the distance. She would never have a chance to return to him, and she would end her life with the Admiral as his wife. But he does not force her into this marriage immediately; instead, he grants her a year's time to accept her new situation and to get used to the idea of marrying this mighty ruler who would, actually, make her to his queen and thus to the female ruler over the vast empire (1725–27).

Remarkably, Blanscheflur never abandons her love for Flore, and she also dismisses the religious differences between them, with her being a Christian, him being a Muslim (1784–85). For her, in fact, Flore's heathen religion has no relevance for her; she only wants to be with him (1808). In the meantime, many events evolve back home, with Flore at first being told about Blanscheflur's alleged death, him then trying to commit suicide out of grief, until his parents reveal the truth to him. This then sets him on a long and adventurous course to Babylon under the pretense of being a merchant, facing many hurdles and challenges, but at the end he succeeds and can make his way to the distant land, finds his beloved in the tower, and manages to get up to her, where the lovers, having become careless following their exceeding joy about being together again, are eventually discovered by the Admiral. The latter, of course, is immediately bent on executing both out of enormous wrath, but then things change radically. Insofar as the two young people demonstrate extraordinary dedication and love for each other, both being ready to die for each other or to preserve the other's life by means of a magical ring which Flore's mother had given to him before his departure (6713–29), the unintentionally exert a deep impact on the entire court society there.

The couple is then led to the open courtyard for their execution, but although they are surrounded by strangers, their noble demeanor and clear demonstration of love for each other move the entire crowd (6805–06), except for the Admiral, who can only think of getting them both burned at the stake because he feels deeply hurt and insulted: "dô was der amiral versteinet" (6978; the Admiral had a heart of stone). They even struggle against each other over who should be the one to be decapitated first by the wrathful ruler. However, when the latter witnesses how both try to save the other and beg him to take his/her life instead of the other, and this out of their love for the other person, and when he hears the laments of his own people begging him

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37. Hannah Barker, *The Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260–1500*. The Middle Ages (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019). She does not, of course, consider literary sources as a backdrop to her study.

to spare their lives, his heart begins to melt, and he finally changes his mind and feels deep sympathy and respect for them (7225–35).

Everyone agrees that this show of love would never find a parallel again, and this then concludes the execution scene without anyone having died. Flore then relates all of his adventures to an enraptured audience (7409–441) that eventually breaks out in laughter filled with delight about this good outcome.<sup>38</sup> Love in its youthful manifestation emerges thus as a unifying force across the world, insofar as it convinces both Flore's father, the Spanish king, and the Babylonian Admiral to acknowledge and respect the love between those two fifteenth-year old youths. Flore's account makes the Admiral both smile and ashamed of his own behavior (7450–53). He is deeply moved and grants their wish to get married, although before he had always demonstrated a most wrathful behavior and had been feared by everyone (7478–499).

Very similar to Wolfram's *Parzival*, Fleck's romance operates on the assumption that love can overcome all conflicts (*amor vincit omnia*), and that it has the power to transform even a brutal tyrant such as the Admiral into a member of courtly society sharing the same values and respecting the ideals of love as demonstrated by Flore and Blanscheflur. Moreover, in order to facilitate the marriage, he confers knighthood upon Flore (7504), thus operating like any worthy king in the West.

What Fleck, and with him many other European poets projected here, constitutes a literary effort to imagine that the ideals of love carry across the world and that even the cruelest ruler in Persia or somewhere nearby would yield to its force. Insofar as the Admiral then takes Blanscheflur's maid Claris as his own wife, great festivities set in that prove to be entirely in uniformity with those celebrated in common courtly settings anywhere in the world, especially because everyone participates in the joyful events: "daz nieman niht wan vröide pflac" (7564; everyone was filled with great joy).<sup>39</sup>

The narrator makes every effort to portray the social setting there in Babylon as completely identical with those anyone would expect at a traditional court (King Arthur). All foreignness falls away, and the values of courtly love

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38. In medieval literature, we hear often about laughter, happy and joyful, and it commonly characterizes the fundamental value system of courtly society. This is the case here as well, which casts the world of Babylon, despite the tyrannical rule by the Admiral, suddenly as equal to that of the Spanish king and of Christian rulers elsewhere. See the contributions to *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Epistemology of a Fundamental Human Behavior, Its Meaning, and Consequences*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 5 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010).

39. Siegfried Christoph, "The Language and Culture of Joy," *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 347 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 319–33.

and then also marriage find full realization. When Flore then learns that his father has died and that Spain needs him to return home to take over the orphaned throne, both the Admiral and the entire court at first beg him to stay, demonstrating now the intense friendship and emotional companionship among them all, but eventually the new couple departs out of necessity, leaving behind a sorrowful court (7725), deeply grieved, crying, and lamenting their journey home. This is, after all, truly a sentimental romance: “hundert tûsent ougen wurden naz, / dô sie scheiden wolten dannen” (7762–63; hundred thousand eyes shed tears when they wanted to depart), but the outcome also demonstrates that for European audience the fierce and hostile world in the East could easily be transformed and then participate in the global practice of courtliness. We do not hear anything else about the Admiral and his marriage with Claris, and there are no words about their religion, whereas Floris converts to Christianity upon his return home, and requests from his people to do the same (7825–30).

If Blanche-flur would not have been sold into slavery by Flore’s parents, the entire drama would not have set in the way it does. And it might have been highly questionable whether these two young people would have been allowed to marry back home if this had not happened. They succeed in finding to each other only in the distant world of western Asia, and there their profound love has also a transformative influence on the Admiral and his people. Fleck, like many of his contemporaries and late medieval successors, deliberately utilized the notion of the distant world in order to create a setting where the drama for the two lovers reaches its peak. They almost would have been executed, but their public display of their emotions safeguards them, and also creates a new bond of friendship with the Admiral and his people.

### Reinfried von Braunschweig

Our third example, the anonymous *Reinfried von Braunschweig* (ca. 1280), is similarly determined by strong sentimentality, but we are given the most insights into the conditions of the Oriental world in comparison with the two previous examples. The poet drew heavily from previous romances and epic poems, especially from Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival* and *Willehalm*, and then also from Konrad von Würzburg’s *Engelhard*, and combined in many different ways the two genres of the courtly romance with the crusade epic.<sup>40</sup> All we can say for

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40. Albrecht Classen, “The Crusader as Lover and Tourist: Utopian Elements in Late Medieval German Literature: From *Herzog Ernst* to *Reinfried von Braunschweig* and *Fortunatus*,” in *Current Topics in Medieval German Literature: Texts and Analyses (Kalamazoo Papers 2000–2006)*, ed. Sibylle Jefferis. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 748 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 2008), 83–102.

sure is that this huge narrative was composed after 1291 because in verse 17980 we hear that the heathens (Mameluks) had conquered again the Christian fortress of Acre. The linguistic features indicate that the poet originated from Switzerland, but he likely served at the court of Duke Henry the Lion in Brunswick. This anonymous opus falls into the same category as the anonymous *Friedrich von Schwaben* and Johann von Würzburg's *Wilhelm von Österreich*, all dealing with the various issues of courtly love, marriage, adventures, heroism, and crusades, aiming at broader entertainment and yet also reflecting deeper concerns with ethical and social aspects as represented by the protagonist.<sup>41</sup>

To what extent might the crusading theme in the second part of this epic poem mirror traces of globalism? Hostile crusader mentality would certainly not belong to that category, and the crusade actually plays a major role here for two thirds of the romance. However, after much back and forth on the battlefield pitting Christians against Muslims, finally the protagonist encounters the supreme fighter on the other side, the Persian prince. While we do not learn much about his personal circumstances, the poet takes great pain to introduce him as a most outstanding character who enjoys great respect among his contemporaries in the Middle East and who quickly proves to be, at least within this narrative framework, a highly worthy, noble, and dignified individual, irrespective of his non-Christian religion.<sup>42</sup> In some ways, he appears to be modeled after the example of the shining warrior Arofels in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Willehalm*, Gyburg's uncle, whom the narrator also mentions by name, and who appears to be a perfect match for the protagonist in courtly and knightly terms, but he represents the Muslim world and thus becomes a victim of Willehalm's bitter fighting fury following the complete defeat of his army.<sup>43</sup> The situation in *Reinfried* takes a most interesting turn and opens a significant window toward

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41. Johannes Janota, *Vom späten Mittelalter zum Beginn der Neuzeit*. Part I: *Orientierung durch volkssprachige Schriftlichkeit (1280/9–1380/90)*. *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn der Neuzeit*, III (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2004), 198–202; see also Wolfgang Achnitz, *Babylon und Jerusalem: Sinnkonstituierung im "Reinfried von Braunschweig" und im "Apollonius von Tyrland" Heinrichs von Neustadt*. *Hermaea. Germanistische Forschungen, Neue Folge*, 98). See also Herfried Vögel, *Naturkundliches im 'Reinfried von Braunschweig'*. *Mikrokosmos. Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft und Bedeutungsforschung*, 24 (Frankfurt a. M., Bern, et al.: Peter Lang, 1990).

42. *Reinfried von Braunschweig*. *Mittelhochdeutscher Text nach Karl Bartsch. Übersetzt und mit einem Stellenkommentar versehen von Elisabeth Martschini*. 3 vols (Kiel: Solivagus-Verlag, 2017–2019); cf. my review forthcoming in *Mediaevistik* 33.

43. Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Willehalm*. Trans. by Marion E. Gibbs and Sidney M. Johnson (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1984), Book II, pp. 61–53; see, for instance, James A. Rushing, Jr., "Arofel's Death and the Question of Willehalm's Guilt," in *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 94.4 (1995), 469–82; Florian Nieser, "Das getilgte Ding: Arofels Schild im 'Willehalm' Wolframs von Eschenbach," in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 139.3 (2017), 329–44.

globalism already at the end of the thirteenth century.

He is said to be brave and bold (16751), generous in words and deeds (16752), and highly esteemed far and wide, a true leader of his people (16814). The narrator uses a whole stream of superlatives to characterize him as the best-educated person, as highly virtuous, loyal, and also physically strong. Moreover, he has already demonstrated to be a fair ruler (16830), treating both the poor and the rich fairly and justly (16832–33). His service for ladies proves to be impeccable, and so his constant striving for virtues (16850–51). According to the narrator, he shines in his intellectual abilities and the purity of his heart, and this in strong contrast to the moral and ethical failures of the people living in the Christian world (16897–933).

This Persian prince, the flower of his country and people, the shining star of the entire heathen army, is then selected to fight against Reinfried, and the outcome of their combat would then decide the result of the entire war campaign, the Crusade. The stakes are hence extremely high, but both sides accept them happily and enjoy the spectacle of these two outstanding warriors facing each other off. Curiously, this duel is then not identified as a struggle over which religion is the right one, but a fight on behalf of courtly love and courtly ladies (17013–14), although for Reinfried the religious purpose remains of central importance (16999). The narrator includes subtle but certain clues into the description of both men's armor that indicate already here that Reinfried will gain the victory. While the Persian prince exclusively emphasizes love in the design of his armor, the protagonist dedicates himself to the Virgin Mary (17175–77) and identifies himself with his own dynasty, Braunschweig. Nevertheless, the mortal joust demonstrates quickly that they both are of equal strength and power (17366–67) and have truly found a match in the other (17494–99).

Nevertheless, Reinfried overcomes the Persian, but his friends and family members plead for his life and eventually agree to cede the Holy Land to the Christians. The ruler of Babylon promises, "swaz ich hab ald ie gewan / ald iemer mē gewinnen kan / mac daz sîn sterben wenden" (17619–21; everything that I own, or have won, and will gain in the future will be yours if it can help to prevent his death). The narrator emphasizes that most other people would have accepted a monetary award instead of demanding such a prize for Christianity, and thus underscores Reinfried's virtues and religiosity, whereas most of his contemporaries would be characterized by their personal greed (17687). This crusader, by contrast, had not undertaken his arduous military campaign for personal profit, and thus deserves, as we are told repeatedly, to be praised as an exceptional role model for his society.

What really matters for us, however, is the question regarding the way of how the relationship between the Persian and Reinfried develops. At first, after the fight has ended, both embrace each other and demonstrate their mutual respect (17820–21), then the former invites the latter to accompany him on a touristic visit of his empire, and this in order to honor all courtly ladies

(17823–27). Most important, however, the Persian pleads with him not to force him to accept the Christian faith because it would dishonor him among his own people, while the formal conversion would not change his mind at any rate. Indeed, Reinfried realizes that no one can be forced to convert sincerely, so he quickly abandons this plan and acknowledges his new ‘friend’ as what he is, a heathen, without pushing him any further in this religious matter: “ob ich in einen kristen tuo / und er doch wil ein heiden sîn, / der missetæte schuld ist mîn” (17892–94; when I force him to become a Christian, although he wants to be a heathen, then the guilt will be mine). Christianity would not even profit from this fake conversion (17902–05), so Reinfried abstains from any further efforts, takes over the Holy Land, repairs all the holy sites, and then accepts, above all, the Persian as an equal whose invitation to tour his vast empire he then accepts happily.

This section proves to be heavily influenced by much traditional monster lore and accounts about the wonders of the so-called exotic East, such as the anonymous *Herzog Ernst* (ms. B, ca. 1220) or, in greater distance, the Old English *Wonders of the East* (ca. 1000).<sup>44</sup> Much of medieval imagination and fantasy were occupied with those miraculous phenomena located somewhere in the Orient, sometimes viewed with considerable skepticism, but mostly embraced with awe and intrigue.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, the narrator also quotes some people who have voiced considerable criticism and doubt about the various monsters (19667ff.), which he then rejects himself (19683ff.), but what matters for us here is that the Persian and Reinfried experience those wonders together and tour a fantasy world of extraordinary proportions and features. When they face military challenges, they fight together (19980–85), sharing everything in their lives. In these two people, East and West have come together and cooperate as equal partners. Many times, the conflicts are no longer those between the heathen and the Christian, but between these two heroes on the one hand and monstrous beings on the other. All previous criteria characteristic of the Eurocentric worldview here have been replaced by the struggle against hostile non-human or half-human forces.

What matters in the last section of *Reinfried von Braunschweig* concerns only the marvelous and the protagonist’s knightly accomplishments, whereas cultural and religious differences are no longer of relevance. The Persian and his friend experience the wonders of the East together, fight together, travel together, and enjoy the marvels as they encounter them in a seemingly endless stream of

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44. See, for instance, A. J. Ford, *Marvel and Artefact: The ‘Wonders of the East’ in Its Manuscript Context*. Library of the Written Word, 45 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015).

45. Albrecht Classen, “Imagination, Fantasy, Otherness, and Monstrosity in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern World. New Approaches to Cultural-Historical and Anthropological Epistemology: Also an ‘Introduction’,” in *Imagination and Fantasy* (see note 15).

occurrences. Whereas in *Herzog Ernst* (explicit reference: 20056–66) the protagonist never abandons his sense of superiority over the various monster peoples, although he serves the king of one of them in his fight against external threats, in *Reinfried*, there is no longer any barrier between the two men, which altogether represents a literary projection of ‘transculturality’ in the literal sense of the word.

They are equally frightened by a strange sculpture, and equally laugh about it once they have realized its true nature (21238–45). They marvel together about odd phenomena (212556–59), and they investigate them as a team (21276–77), such as by way of reading together a mysterious inscription on an epitaph (21300–05). They also help each other out as well to protect themselves against the danger of the siren: “er hiez mit listeclicher art/den Persân sînen lieben/knechten schôn verschieben/diu ôren umb und umbe” (22346–49; he also instructed them in a clever manner to close up entirely the ears of the Persian, his good friend [servant]). After the adventure with the siren, Reinfried suffers badly and longs dearly for her, but his friend the Persian consoles him and strongly urges him to remember his manly virtues and his true love for his wife Yrkâne back home: “phî, tuont hin den bæsen muot,/ob iuch ie liebe wart bekant” (22700–01; eew, dismiss this foul sense if you have ever experienced true love). In fact, Reinfried had actually forgotten her, and only because the Persian alerts him to this danger of losing his true mindset, does the protagonist return to his original self and ideals.

One more example for this astounding partnership, unheard of otherwise in medieval and early modern literature, may suffice to understand how much the anonymous poet developed a new sense of personal relationships that serves to invite the audience to open their minds toward foreign lands and people and embrace them as worthy equals and perhaps also as friends. Both heroes encounter a boy who laments the alleged death of Reinfried and the Persian, and characterizes them as “hergesellen” (22886; companions in war) who enjoy the highest respect across the world (22888–91). As soon as both have then reached the court of King Aschalon, they are welcomed with greatest joy: “ich wæne sô friuntliche/man ie geste enphienge” (2304–41; I believe that never before guests were welcomed in such a cheerful manner).

The relationship between both men never changes again, and the narrator also continues to call him “der werde Persân” (27106; the worthy Persian). Since the text has survived only as a fragment, we do not need to pursue the narrative further, especially because one marvelous adventure replaces another, while the two protagonists cooperate and assist each other without fail to come to terms with it. To what extent could we thus identify them as early members of a global community? Does globalism hence find sustainable support in this verse narrative, and this in comparison with the previous two texts?

## Conclusion

Many medieval travelers – merchants, diplomats, pilgrims, artists, scholars, masons, architects, rulers, friars, etc. – roamed the roads crisscrossing Europe, and many found their way even into the distant East. Traveling and merchandising, for instance, established bridges, but they do not create necessarily globalism. If we understand with this term the notion that two or more different worlds come together in a kind of harmonious, mutually respectful manner, we find powerful illustrations in literary examples, such as *Parzival*, *Flore und Blanscheflur*, and *Reinfried von Braunschweig*, where the individual breaks through the barriers to foreign worlds and experiences, often in a rather surprising manner, that she/he can establish friendship or find love.

As different as these three examples prove to be in terms of their generic features, they all indicate that Europeans could or even should reach out to their contemporaries who then would respond in kind and welcome them in a peaceful and respectful manner. Undoubtedly, wherever we look, we always realize that Christianity was supposed to dominate, which we would not recognize today as true globalism. Instead, this overarching attempt to spread the Christian religion, as described also in these three literary texts, constitutes a form of imperialism. However, below the surface, at least in all our examples, we recognize significant attempts to reach out to other cultures, to embrace the foreigners as fellow human-beings endowed with great virtues and values. Friendship and love are thus possible across all cultural and religious divides, as the three authors indicate. The issue here does not necessarily address toleration and tolerance,<sup>46</sup> but it is closely related and could lead over to this intellectual mind-set of openness and mutual acceptance.

Globalism also entails that an individual, for instance, leaves his home country and voluntarily pursues efforts to get to know foreign countries and people, and this in a respectful manner. Despite the crusading motif in *Reinfried von Braunschweig*, here we recognize the greatest effort to take the protagonist far outside of the familiar framework and situate him, in close companionship with the Persian prince, in the world of wonders which both explore with great curiosity. In *Flore und Blanscheflur*, the male protagonist pursues his beloved, enslaved to the Babylonian Admiral, and succeeds not only to gain her freedom and thus to marry her, but he also transforms the Admiral's heart and reminds him of the global value of courtliness and virtues. In *Parzival*, the protagonist's father Gahmuret operates most successfully in the Middle East until he is tragically killed when his diamond helmet is made soft as butter by means of he-

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46. Albrecht Classen, *Toleration and Tolerance in Medieval and Early Modern European Literature*. Routledge Studies in Medieval Literature and Culture, 8 (New York and London: Routledge, 2018). I have addressed all three texts under discussion here and many more, but not in terms of globalism.

goat blood. The reactions of the ruler and his people demonstrate their great grief, and they then make every effort to honor the deceased. At the end, the two half-brothers meet, and they indirectly join hands to save the Grail kingdom (Parzival) and then to bring Christianity to India (Feirefiz).

The stage of operation is changing in all three texts, which brings the protagonists into close contact with representatives from the East. While some scholars have radically dismissed all those new literary strategies as deceptive, if not even hypocritical, that is, as a thin veil covering deeply-rooted imperialism and Eurocentrism,<sup>47</sup> we need to be more sensitive and accept the actual changes in the orientation presented here. Since the thirteenth century, we might say, the world opened up for Europeans, and even if they continued to see the new countries and peoples through a narrow lens, they endeavored quite successfully to present an increasingly global perspective, at least in fictional terms. Virtues, ideals, and emotions were recognized as universally shared, which constitutes, until today, a basis for globalism.

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47. Jerold C. Frakes, *Vernacular and Latin Literary Discourses of the Muslim Other in Medieval Germany*. The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); see my review in *Mediaevistik* 25 (2012/2013), 194–96; or Katja Altpeter-Jones's, in *Seminar* 49.1 (2013), 91–93.

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