HYBRIDITY AND LIMINALITY IN HERZOG ERNST B

Summary

The Grippia episode in Herzog Ernst B marks the central position in the epic through the failure of the action of Herzog Ernst. Following an excursus on curiositas, it is argued that the city landscape acts as an active agent in seducing Herzog Ernst who gives in to curiositas when following his desire to return to the unprotected city. Herzog Ernst has to face the failure of his action in an act of mirroring by watching the symbolic rape of the Indian princess by the crane beaks once they return to the city. His escape and subsequent journey on the underground river via the magnet mountain represents a low point, not just geographically. When finding the Karfunkel, Herzog Ernst finally enters a liminal space between his own world and that of the Other.

The Grippia episode in Herzog Ernst B marks a central position in the epic, placed between the rîche and the orient.1 Worlds collide in Grippia when Ernst and his men encounter the Foreign. As will become apparent in the following analysis, the failure of Ernst in Grippia is essential on his journey in order for him to enter a third liminal space between his own world and that of the foreign Other, one which is informed by both curiositas and the gendering of the city as a woman. At the center of the pivotal Grippia episode is the disturbingly violent death of the Indian princess, which until now has received only marginal treatment and will be examined in a close reading of the events preceding her murder.

Previous research on Herzog Ernst has focused mainly on the Reichsgeschichte within the story, while the Orientreise, Ernst’s journey to the East, has been seen as an entertaining interlude designed to raise the interest of the audience. In 1979, however, Jürgen Kühnel pointed to the structure underlying the narrative of Herzog Ernst and its closeness to Arthurian romance: rise, fall,

redemption, and new rise of the hero. The journeys of Ernst are thus more than just “attractive sugarcoating.” Francis G. Gentry bases his interpretation on Kühnel’s study and explored the work’s tripartite structure as “evidence of the ‘transitional’ nature of Herzog Ernst (A-Text: ca. 1160/70) as a work standing between the outgoing era of religious-didactic literature and the approaching courtly age with its stress on the development of the hero.” Gentry sees the purpose of the journeys as parallel to that of the places of passage which the chivalric heroes must overcome and which serve as loci of learning “far removed from the familiar.” Alexandra Stein’s in-depth study from 1997 focuses on the monstra in Herzog Ernst as embodiment of Ernst’s previous failure of communication, while placing the narrative in a larger context on the threshold of a culture between performance and the written word. While these and other scholars have confirmed the importance of transitional spaces in Herzog Ernst, the present interpretation aims to further their approaches by examining the Grippia episode within the framework of a third liminal space in between and in negotiation with the hero’s own world and the Foreign.

5 Gentry, see note 4, p. 118.
7 Stock, see note 3, who follows Stein and Gentry argues for the travels to the orient as a place of revision and reversion of the crisis at home and as such as a place to reflect (pp. 227 f). He rejects any notion of a possible Arthurian model for Herzog Ernst B and instead argues for a ‘before and after’ model. For further discussion on Herzog Ernst B following the structure of the