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Introduction

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Introduction

*Wil man och säija sin Meening och Skääl med fåå Ordh /
som offta för nöden är / att så skeep måste / [...] /
tå får thet skeep igenom Fabuler / Lijknelser /
Sententier och Ordsprååk / [...] Fabulas Aesopi /
Och andre Swenske och Tyske Ordsprååk.
Per Brahe, *Oeconomia* (1581)¹*

The author of these lines, Per Brahe the Elder (1520–1590), was one of the most important politicians and noblemen in sixteenth-century Sweden, at the time of the Reformation and King Gustav Vasa, the ‘father’ of the Swedish monarchy. Per Brahe also was the author of a ‘household book’ for young members of the Swedish nobility: *Oeconomia, eller Huuszholdz-Book* (“*Oeconomia*, or Household Book”) was written in 1581, but not printed until 1677. This quotation from *Oeconomia* shows that Brahe was aware that fables along with other entertaining stories, which he mentions some pages later in the *Oeconomia*, are very much a part of the study and educational programme for young people. We can also see from this statement that *Aesopus* was very well known before its first printed edition in Swedish in 1603.²

From the beginning of printing in Europe, translations and adaptations of fictional narratives from various sources as well as belonging to different literary traditions were put on the book market. These early printed narratives were built on older narrative models and traditions in bookmaking of the manuscript age, but as the study of their printing history will show, over time the textual, paratextual, and material presentation of these stories from very different backgrounds were moulded into a recognisable format that laid the basis for modern narrative fiction. This book offers for the first time a detailed analysis of the printed dissemination

1 Per Brahe den äldre, *Gamble Grefwe Peer Brahes / Fordom Sweriges Rijkets Drotzet / Oeconomia, Eller Huuszholdz-Book / För ungt Adels-folck. Skrifwin Anno 1581*. Visingsborg: Johann Kankel, 1677, 15. Digital copy at: <https://litteraturbanken.se/författare/BrahePäldre/titlar/OeconomiaEllerHuuszholdz/sida/1/faksimil> (16 May 2023). “If you want to express your Opinion and explain your Reasons in just a few Words, which often is necessary to be done like this [...], then it should be done by Fables, Parables, Sayings, and Proverbs, [...] the Fables of Aesop, And other Swedish and German Proverbs.” (translation by the editors of this volume). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the authors of the respective chapters. The capitalization of the English translations (including titles) in this book essentially follows the capitalization used in the original quotation.

2 On the dissemination of *Aesopus*, see the chapter by Julia Boffey in this volume.

and longevity of the Top Ten fictional narratives in several European vernaculars between the south and the north and between the east and the west from the beginning of printing until the end of the eighteenth century. Each of these texts was not only popular in one or two vernaculars, but the ten narratives circulated all over Europe throughout several centuries. In this way, our volume, which combines literary history and book history, also shows how these narratives helped to create a European literary identity in the early modern times.

1 Criteria for the Choice of the Top Ten Narratives

The first question which could be posed is: how were these Top Ten texts chosen? This book project started with the transmission data of 43 narratives, printed between the beginning of printing and 1900.³ We adopted a “transnational”⁴ perspective, which does not give priority to any language area. In subsequent years the transmission data of about 35 narratives⁵ were collected by our research team.⁶

For a narrative to be included in the Top Ten, it had to meet the following six criteria:

1. The narrative was published in a European vernacular;
2. The narrative was printed in at least six European vernaculars;
3. The printed tradition of the narrative started in the fifteenth or sixteenth century;

3 These 43 initial titles were selected according to research on a canon of early modern fictional narratives presented at the conference “Crossing Borders, Crossing Cultures” organized by members of the international research project “European Dimensions of Popular Print Culture” (EDPOP) at the Istituto Italo-Germanico of the Fondazione Bruno Kessler, 15 and 16 June 2017 (Schlusemann 2019b).

4 As there were no nations in the early modern period in the modern sense of the word, ‘transnational’ is in single quotation marks.

5 As a result of the pre-research, narratives like *Eginhard von Böhmen*, *Friedrich Barbarossa*, or *Armer Heinrich* had been excluded because the number of different language areas was too low.

6 The research was carried out by Helwi Blom, Marie-Dominique Leclerc, Anna Katharina Richter, Jordi Sánchez-Martí, Rita Schlusemann, and Krystyna Wierzbicka-Trwoga. In the course of time, we received information about the Czech tradition from Matouš Jaluška; about the German *Melusine* tradition from Ursula Rautenberg; and about the Hungarian tradition from Csilla Gábor and Ágnes Maté. Among the many library catalogues and other resources that were consulted, these were the main sources for the bibliographical survey: BC; BNE; DFB; EDIT16; ESTC; FB; GW; HPB; IB; IIS; ISTD; KPS; LN; MRFH; NK; OPAC SBN; RMK; RMNy; SF; SFS; STC; USTC; VD16; VD17; VD18; Estreicher et al. (1870–2000); Doutrepoint (1939); Rudnicka (1964); Schenda (1971); Debaene (1977); Gotzkowsky (1991 and 1994); Horstbøll (1999); Richter (2009); Blom (2012); Colombo Timelli et al. (2014); Cuijpers (2014); Schlusemann (2019a).

4. The printed tradition of the narrative lasted at least until the eighteenth century;
5. The narrative had continuously been printed during at least three centuries in at least three different language areas;
6. At least one edition (or fragments) must have been preserved in each of at least six vernaculars (material evidence).

The first criterion focuses on the publication of a text in a ‘European vernacular’. Although the word ‘European’ is generally used in the meaning of ‘relating to or coming from Europe’, its meaning is not clear-cut with respect to the early modern period, especially regarding the eastern border. In the south, west, and north, the borders are more distinct because of the adjacent seas bordering the different regions.⁷ In the east, however, the border is more complicated. When we assume that the borders chosen in physical geography can also be regarded as border characteristics for our project, the Ural River and the Caspian and Black Seas can be regarded as natural ‘borders’ separating Europe from Asia to a certain extent. The term ‘vernacular’ implies that, even where editions in Latin and/or Greek (e.g. *Apollonius*) did exist, ancient languages were not taken into account.

The second criterion guarantees that a narrative spread in at least six different speaking areas and that the dissemination was not limited to certain parts of Europe.

The third and fourth criteria were chosen to produce a corpus with a long-lasting tradition. The third criterion stipulates that a narrative must already have been printed in the fifteenth or sixteenth century. This means that bestsellers like *Robinson Crusoe*, the first edition of which was put on the market in 1719, were excluded. Narratives with a strong tradition only in the early period of the chosen time frame were also excluded (fourth criterion); for example, *Paris et Vienne*, as its translations and adaptations, except in French, were published in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries only. We chose 1800 as the end date of our research due to changes in the production of books and more generally the functioning of the book market at the time.

The fifth criterion guarantees that a narrative was not only printed in one or two speaking areas for a long period. It also requires that a work must have been printed in at least three vernaculars.

Finally, many editions published in the incunabula period and in the early modern period have been lost. Even if there is evidence that they existed, e.g. in

⁷ Great Britain, Ireland, and Iceland are included.

catalogues of booksellers and publishers, they were not taken into consideration when counting the number of language areas.⁸

Based on these criteria, the following Top Ten narratives have been selected: *Aesopus*, *Amadis*, *Apollonius*, *Fortunatus*, *Griseldis*, *Historia septem sapientum Romae* (SSR), *Melusine*, *Pierre de Provence et la belle Maguelonne* (*Pierre et Maguelonne*), *Reynaert*, and *Ulenspiegel*. We use these titles for general reference throughout the volume, as they represent the title of the particular narrative in the language in which it was first printed as a standalone text.

2 The Top Ten

The volume starts with narratives of ancient origin. Printed in at least 440 editions, collections of Aesopian animal fables have been European bestsellers for many centuries. These editions comprised a variety of versions with different numbers of fables, incorporating moralisations, or even adapted as political satire. *Apollonius of Tyre*, probably going back to an ancient Greek novel and one of the best-known stories of the European Middle Ages, appeared in at least 100 editions with a widespread transmission in European language areas.

The *Historia septem sapientum Romae* (“History of Seven Sages of Rome”, version H), including fifteen told stories, demonstrates the lifesaving power of storytelling. With nearly 200 known editions in many European language areas before the end of the eighteenth century, it belongs to one of the most successful narratives of world literature (Hoffmann 2021).

The novella *Griseldis*, first written by Giovanni Boccaccio in his *Il Decamerone* (1349–1353), was not only published in this collection of stories or as a standalone text, but also together with other texts in composites or in multiple-text units (see the chapter on *Griseldis*). It appeared at least 550 times in more than thirteen vernaculars in the early modern period (among which Dutch, English, French, German, Hungarian, Polish), and was also adapted as a historical song and as a drama.

⁸ *Valentin et Orson*, for example, was published in six language areas but only if lost editions without material evidence are also included. *Floire et Blancheflor* was not taken into consideration because the number of editions in different language areas was much lower than for the other narratives. *Les quatre fils Aymon* was, of course, a very popular narrative in French, but in comparison with the other narratives, it was much less distributed in other European language areas. The dissemination of *Amadis* was also restricted but it was distributed more equally among different European speaking areas.

Some Aesopian fables were also told by animals in medieval epics about a trial at the court of the lion king Nobel. After shorter versions had been told in different branches of the French *Roman de Renart*, the Dutch epic called *Van den vos Reynaerde* (1275–1375) formed the foundation of the rich tradition of the animal epic even until today. From the beginning until 1800 the narrative about the fox *Reynaert* was published in six vernaculars in about 200 editions.

Three narratives originating in the medieval romance tradition became widespread in Europe. Two of them are French chivalric romances. In *Melusine*, the motif of the “gestörte Mahrtenehe” (“disturbed marriage with a supernatural partner”) forms the basis of the narrative. It was especially popular in French and German, but also published in Czech, Polish, Russian, and Scandinavian language areas. The story of *Pierre et Maguelonne*, telling the adventures of the famous love couple, was immortalised by the printing press in about 235 editions in no less than fifteen different languages. *Amadís de Gaula*, the third romance, was printed in four books in Spanish for the first time in 1508. It immediately sparked enthusiasm for the main hero’s chivalric adventures on the European book market with translations, continuations, and adaptations in up to 24 books in Italian, English, French, Dutch, and German.

The volume closes with two narratives first printed in the early sixteenth century. *Fortunatus*, which recounts the adventures of a young man from Cyprus using a magical purse and hat, was an instant success when it was published 1509 in Augsburg. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century translations into Czech, Polish, Danish, Dutch, English, French, Swedish, Hungarian, Italian, and Yiddish as well as at least 160 editions printed before 1800 prove that it was a favourite of the reading public. The collection of facetious stories with the title *Ein kurtzweilig lesen von Dyl Ulenspiegel*, also first printed in German, was translated and adapted into Dutch, English, French, Polish, Czech, Danish, Swedish, Russian, and Yiddish, and published in at least 230 editions. Its protagonist fascinated European readers as an early modern trickster figure, whose name enriched the vocabulary of many vernaculars.

Each chapter of the book provides a survey of the dissemination of one narrative in time and space. The approach in each chapter does not only show similarities and differences between the editions in the course of time, but also similarities and differences between the editions in various language areas. Every chapter mainly focuses on four different aspects of the long and widespread transmission of the narratives: 1. the spatio-temporal transmission of the editions in different language areas (chronology, places of publication, printers),

combined with research on the peaks of the narrative's popularity in Europe and on the role of the printer-publishers; 2. the materiality of the editions (typography, format, number of pages); 3. paratextual elements (title pages, prologues, and illustrations); 4. a contextualisation of the findings with regard to other printed media, other genres, and new audiences. Although each author remains responsible for her/his own chapter, the results presented in each chapter are the result of collectively conducted research and have benefitted from the advice and expertise of other contributors to the volume according to their respective specialisms.⁹

3 Survey of First Editions of the Top Ten

Regarding the time when the narratives were first put on the market, we can see that the production already started in about 1470 with the edition of *Griseldis* in *Il Decamerone* in Italian. In the 1470s already, five narratives were printed in German (*Aesopus*, *Historia septem sapientum Romae*, *Apollonius*, *Griseldis*, and *Melusine*), three in Italian (*Griseldis*, *Apollonius*, and *Aesopus*), two in French (*Pierre et Maguelonne* and *Melusine*), two in Dutch (*Reynaert* and *SSR*), and one in English (*Griseldis*) (Tab. 1).¹⁰ Obviously their potential as a successful story, which would sell well, was recognized early on by the publishers in different parts of Europe.

⁹ Each chapter mentions the first extant edition in the different language areas, either in an appendix or in the chapter itself. As a supplement to three chapters (*Apollonius*, *Historia septem sapientum Romae*, and *Fortunatus*) the authors have compiled a bibliography of editions in different languages. Bibliographical listings already exist in various contexts for most of the Top Ten narratives discussed here. It would take a separate book to cover all editions of all texts in complete detail.

¹⁰ Dates in bold indicate the first known printed edition of the narrative. The order of the language areas from left to right is based on the year of the first printed edition in that language area for the Top Ten texts. Editions marked with an asterisk are lost. For the dates of the editions, see the different chapters. Several of them also comment on the printed tradition in other languages like Russian, Greek, and Yiddish.

Tab. 1: Survey of first editions of the Top Ten narratives in different European vernaculars.

	Italian	High / Low German	French	English / Scottish	Dutch	Iberian	Czech	Polish	Danish	Hungarian	Sweedish
<i>Griseldis</i>	[1470]	1471 [1482]	1477	[1487]	1496	1560	*[before 1571]	*1528	1539	1622	
<i>Apollonius</i>	1475	1471 [1480]	1510	1493	1488 [1510–1511]		*[before 1591]		1591	1633	
<i>Historia septem sapientum Romae</i>	1552	1473	1493	1479	[1510]	[1501–1508]	[before 1540]	[1571–1575]	[1570–1574]	1642	
<i>Melusine</i>	–	[1473/1474]	1478	1510	1491	1489	*1555	*1569	1613	–	1736
<i>Pierre et Maguelonne</i>	[1726–1765]	1535 [ca. 1475]	–	[1517]	1519	*1565	*[1565–1587]	*1583	1676	–	
<i>Aesopus</i>	[1478]	1476	1480	1484	1485	1482	[ca. 1488]	*[ca. 1522]	1646	1566	1603
<i>Reynaert</i>	–	1498	1566	1481	1479	–	–	–	1555	–	1621
<i>Amadis</i>	1546	1561	1577	[1590]	1546	1508	–	–	–	–	–
<i>Fortunatus</i>	1676	1509	1626	*[1615?]	*[1552–1557]	–	*1561	[1565–1573]	1575	1651	1651
<i>Ulenspiegel</i>	–	[1510–1511]	1532	[1519]	[1526–1532]	–	[1566]	[1530–1540]	[before 1571]	–	1661

4 Research on Early Modern Narratives

Research on the Top Ten narratives, most of which originated in the period before the arrival of the printing press, has been carried out since the nineteenth century. But, because of the paradigm of originality and the linking of originality and quality, later editions of these narratives were often regarded as not being worth studying and were neglected for a long time in twentieth-century research. As Anja Hill-Zenk pointed out with regard to the English *Howleglas* (*Ulenspiegel*), it is hardly possible to discuss this work within a framework of English fictional prose literature, because the reference parameters have not been defined due to a lack of research and genre theory (Hill-Zenk 2011, 566). This kind of literature has received little attention in English studies since the first quarter of the twentieth century. Early modern fictional prose is usually analysed as a forerunner of the novel (and assessed negatively); on the other hand, English research mainly focuses on a few canonical authors (Hill-Zenk 2011, 566).

In the last few decades, early modern fictional narratives have received more attention but research has usually been limited to a specific period and/or language: *Le Roman français dans les premiers imprimés* (Schoysman and Colombo Timelli 2016), or *Dimensionen narrativer Sinnstiftung im frühneuhochdeutschen Prosaroman* (Speth 2017) are restricted to one language area only.¹¹ The volume *Early Printed Narrative Literature in Western Europe* (Besamusca et al. 2019) takes an international approach to the early period of printing and deals with the shift from handwritten to printed narratives until 1600, the modifications of these texts when published in print, and the publication strategies of printer-publishers; however, nearly every contribution focuses on one language area. In the volume *Crossing Borders, Crossing Cultures. Popular Print in Europe (1450–1900)* (Rospocher et al. 2019) popular print is studied from a European perspective, treating many various subjects (media, markets, translations, and genres), but the contributions often concentrate on one or two language areas. In contrast, each chapter in our book provides an overview of the dissemination of a fictional narrative in at least six language areas over several centuries.

The theoretical frames of reference for our approach in this volume are the broadly defined transfer studies, with the main focus on cultural objects and their interrelations (Espagne 1999; Middell 2000). The perspective of cultural transfer has been already employed in studies on the pre-modern period (Schmale 2003; North 2009; Deneire 2014); in translation studies it was applied to the Enlightenment period (Pufelska and D'Aprile 2009; Stockhorst 2010), but also to the early modern

¹¹ Other examples are Bertelsmeier-Kierst (2014a and 2014b), and Colombo Timelli et al. (2014).

times (Hermans 2002; Burke and Po-chia Hsia 2007; Naaijkens 2010; Toepfer et al. 2021). In this volume we study the material remainders of the communication involved in the transfer of the chosen Top Ten narratives: paratexts, title pages, and illustrations. As the best way to tackle the interplay of language and medium, we adopt “the recent methodology of multimodality – a branch of stylistics which aims for the systematic analysis of types of text which, in addition to wording, employ other semiotic modes such as typography, layout, visual images and colour for their meaning-making” (Deneire 2014, 311).

5 Terminology

The term ‘narrative’ requires an explanation. Relying on different national traditions, literary historians have used a variety of expressions to indicate the type of popular stories we find in our Top Ten: “romance” in English, “mise en prose” or “roman de chevalerie” in French, “Prosaroman” (and, earlier, “Volksbuch”) in German, “romanzo cavalleresco” in Italian, “libros de caballerías” in Spanish, “romans” in Polish, “knížky lidového čtení” in Czech, “folkebøger” and “folkböcker” in Danish and Swedish, “prozaroman” or “volksboek” in Dutch, to name only a few. In this volume we prefer the neutral term ‘narrative’ for those works, which all present a fictional narrator’s story of events that take place in an imaginary world; they were appreciated for their entertaining and educational value.

In German literary history, the term “Volksbuch” has been used for a long time to describe narrative literature in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. However, this expression has been called into question since Hans Joachim Kreutzer’s *Der Mythos vom Volksbuch* (1977). He showed that the use of the term, introduced by Joseph Görres (1807), contributed to a manifestation of a romantic view that these texts were primarily written and read by common people – a notion which is historically inadequate. Nowadays the term “Prosaroman” (“prose novel”) is preferred for a heterogeneous group of texts and their early phases of publication. They are defined as entertaining literature in prose for a broader group of readers (Müller 1985; Müller 2003a, 174).

In Dutch and French research, genre and corpus definitions of early printed narratives have been less extensively discussed. In a first survey about the Dutch-speaking area van den Bergh (1837) chose the term “volksroman” (“novel for the common people”). Kruyskamp characterized these narratives as “sunken cultural” products (1942). Starting in the 1970s Pleij in particular promoted research about the functions and intentions of early printed Dutch prose narratives in society (Pleij 1970–1971; Pleij 1974; Resoort 1988; Pleij 2007). Cuijpers presented a canon of

23 Dutch “volksboeken” (“books for the common people”) which were continuously printed until 1900, and calls them “narrating books” (2014, 18). In French studies, often used categorizations for texts belonging to our corpus are the “mise en prose” and “roman de chevalerie”, the latter a mixed category combining prose adaptations of medieval “chansons de geste” with late medieval “romans d’aventures”.¹² In Scandinavian studies, the works of Rasmus Nyerup (1816) show an approach oriented towards the reading practices of his time; he used “morskabslæsning” (“reading for entertaining”) for a compilation of the most disseminated narratives in Denmark. In recent times, the term “små historier” (“small histories”) was introduced by Henrik Horstbøll (1999), but “folkebøger” remains much more popular (similar to Swedish research, e.g. Wingård 2011).

In Spanish literary studies a distinction is made between narratives with a strong chivalric component, “libros de caballerías”, and narrative texts focusing on love and emotions, even if they refer to some chivalric action, which are labelled “novela sentimental” (Thomas 1920; Whinnom 1983). Therefore, the term “libros de caballerías” is not exactly the same as the French “roman de chevalerie”, where chivalric adventures, love stories between a knight and his lady, and the “merveilleux” are predominating ingredients. Further confusion arises when comparing these terms with the Italian “romanzo cavalleresco”, which is a text in verse, while (at least since the sixteenth century) the French “roman” is in prose. The term ‘chivalric’ thus denotes different things in different language areas, even if they have a similar meaning (Schlusemann and Wierzbicka-Trwoga 2021, 169–170).

The matter becomes even more complicated with the usage of the English term “romance”. Its definition as “all narratives dealing with aristocratic ‘personae’ and involving combat and/or love [...] if written after 1100” (Finlayson 1995, 429) comprises the corpus of medieval English texts, in both verse and prose. This seems to overcome the contradictions between the French, Spanish, German, and Italian traditions, but the English term “romance” also covers its relation to the novel. According to the prevalent view in English literary history, the new form of “the novel” has replaced the older form of “the romance”, which has been known since antiquity and existed until the eighteenth century (Watt 1956). This perspective has also been adopted in Polish literary studies, supported by the existence of equivalent terms: “romans” (romance), and “powieść” (novel). Today there is no consensus on such a vision of the history of the novel, because since the publication of Watt’s

¹² For a French overview discussing the definitions of “mise en prose” and “romans de chevalerie”, see Doutrepoint (1939); Vieliard (2007); Blom (2012, 13–17); Cappello (2011, 55–71). On other types of fictional narratives, see Mounier and Thomine (2016, 515–545).

book many antique novels have been discovered, which call into question the idea of romances being superseded by novels. Moreover, this distinction is not recognised in German, Dutch, and French studies, since these languages rely essentially on a single term to describe both “romance” and “novel” (respectively “Roman”, “roman”, and “roman”).¹³

This is why we turned to the contemporary terms used in European vernaculars: for the stories told by Aesop, for example, the term “fable” (French) or “fables” (English) was preferred, but for most of the other narratives the printer-publishers settled in general for “history” (English), “histoire” (French), “historie” (Dutch, German, Danish), “historia” (Polish, Swedish, Spanish). “History”, derived from the Latin *historia*, had a double meaning in the early modern period: on the one hand, it alluded to the account of *res factae* and was related to events someone had experienced or seen, the product of experience, of “verifiable perception”. On the other hand, “history” was also used in a narratological sense, meaning the “narration of events” (Knappe 1984; Müller 1985). Therefore, we chose to translate this term consistently as “history”. From this early modern use of the term “history” it followed that the most adequate genre description of the texts in our book is “narrative fiction”, defined by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan as “the narration of a succession of fictional events” (1993, 2). It covers both prose and verse, which is important inasmuch as some of the titles in our corpus, like *Reynaert* in German, were still printed in verse, even in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For the individual narratives the term “fictional narrative” seems appropriate.

In the early modern editions of various narratives, the noun “history” is usually accompanied by specific epithets, like “pleasant”, “charming”, “joyous”, or “entertaining”, and often in combination with “useful” – to express the narratives’ claim to *prodesse et delectare* and as such to defend the reading of fictional texts. The German expression “nutz und kurtzweyl” (“usefulness and entertainment”) – the latter meaning literally that the reading of the book will while away your time – serves in many early modern editions to announce the didactic and entertaining value of the narratives. One could say it became a standard formulation in paratexts such as title pages and/or prologues as early as the sixteenth century.¹⁴ The combined focus on pleasure and usefulness can be found not only in translations that derive directly from the German, like most of the Scandinavian versions, but also independently of translation. An overview of our Top Ten shows that these epithets on the title pages

¹³ For a discussion of the ambiguous meanings of the term “romance”, see Schlusemann and Wierzbicka-Trwoga (2021). Interestingly, Margaret Spufford (1989) used the title *Small Books and Pleasant Histories* for her study on early modern popular fiction in England – taking aspects of format, readership, questions of genre, and self-denomination of the narratives into account.

¹⁴ On the use of “nutz und kurtzweyl”, see e.g. Müller (1985).

were almost identical in various European languages. We can find them, for example, in the bilingual *Reynaert* edition: *REYNAERT DE VOS. Een seer ghenouchlicke ende vermakelicke historie: in Franchoyse ende neder Duytsch. REYNIER LE RENARD. Histoire tresioyeuse [sic] & recreatiue, en François & bas Alleman* (“Reynaert the Fox. A very pleasant and entertaining history: in French and Dutch. Reynier Le Renard. Very pleasant and entertaining history, in French and Dutch”, Antwerpen: Christoffel Plantijn, 1566),¹⁵ or in the first vernacular *Historia septem sapientum Romae* (in German, printed in Augsburg in 1473): *Ein gar schöne Cronick vnd hystorie Auß den geschichten der Römern In welicher hystori vnd Cronick man vindet gar vil schöne vnd nützlicher exempel die gar lustlich vnd kurzweylyg ze hörnn seind* (“A very charming Chronicle and history From the stories of the Romans in which [history and Chronicle] you will find many charming and useful examples which are very enjoyable and entertaining to hear”). A corresponding title is to be found in the Polish *Melusine* (1671): *Historia wdzięczna o szlachetnej a pięknej Meluzynie* (“A pleasant History of the noble and beautiful Meluzyna”) or in the Hungarian *Apollonius* (1591): *Szép chronica, miképpen az Apollonius nevő királyfi* (“A beautiful chronicle about prince Apollonius”). These examples of narratives using “chronicle” in their titles refer to the “truth of history” and the close relation between the narrative and *res factae*.

Another important aspect, in line with the question of authority and ‘history’, is that the paratexts often draw the attention to presenting a translated text. Tracing the origin of the text, listing the language(s) of the source text and its recent versions – the *translatio* of the story throughout the European linguistic landscape – were means to confirm the long tradition of the narrative, as in Thuring von Ringoltingen’s prologue of his *Melusina*, where it is stated that “ich / Thuring von Ringoltingen [...] ein zû mol seltcene und gar wunderliche fremde hystorie funden in franczôsischer sprache und welscher zungen [...] zû tûtscher zungen gemacht und translatiert” (*Melusina* 1473–1474, A1r–A1v; “I, Thuring von Ringoltingen [...] made and translated into the German tongue an especially rare and marvellous unknown history found in the French language and Romance tongue”). The fact that the story first appeared in French (and afterwards in German to be from there translated, more or less directly, into the respective mother tongue) is also mentioned in the 1489 Castilian edition, the sales prospectus made for the first Dutch edition (1491), the early modern Czech version as well as the 1736 Swedish edition.¹⁶ The importance of making the fictional narratives available in the mother

¹⁵ In bibliographical descriptions and references to holding institutions, place names are given in the domestic language; otherwise the English spelling is used.

¹⁶ See the chapter on *Melusine* in this book.

tongue, often announced as an advertisement appealing to the curiosity of the audience, like “now recently translated”, is another aspect: the narratives often show an obsession with advertising themselves as “new”, “revised” etc. In combination with the *prodesse et delectare* principle, this is an important commercial argument for the promotion of the stories. Moreover, the emphasis on the tradition in other European languages can be regarded as a marker for a widespread narrative that attracted attention in many other regions. All this raises questions about the linguistic landscape, marketing fictional literature, and the importance of individual vernaculars as literary languages in early modern Europe, but this is something we can only briefly touch on in this introduction.

6 Multilingual Europe

The linguistic landscapes in early modern Europe were characterized by many different language areas, both written and spoken. Multilingualism is a phenomenon which has become an object of study for medieval and early modern literary studies in recent years (e.g. Classen 2016; Clarke and Ní Mhaonaigh 2022).

Each of the fictional narratives presented in this book was marketed in numerous European language areas and circulated during several centuries. Combining literary studies and book history, this work offers for the first time a ‘transnational’ perspective on a selected text corpus of this genre. It explores the spatio-temporal transmission of the texts in different language areas and the materiality of the editions: the narratives were produced, read, translated, adapted, bought, and sold across European borders, from Seville to Stockholm and from Dublin to Lviv. The time span chosen for this study is a very wide one – from the beginning of printing until 1800 – and the history of early modern Europe in this long period is complex and multifaceted. It is also important to remember that geographical borders were (and still are) not necessarily fixed demarcations, neither for rulers or peoples, and certainly not for the exchange of ideas and literature.

In this book we strive to use the correct designations for the countries or language regions of the time, considering the early modern geographical and political conditions. High and Low German, for example, were of course spoken and read not only in the Holy Roman Empire and in the Habsburg Empire, in large parts of today’s Switzerland, but also in Scandinavia and in the Baltic Sea Region, in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, in cities like Zwolle, Antwerp, Copenhagen, and Novgorod (von Polenz 2000; Glück 2002). The importance of Middle Low German (and, after the end of the *Hanse*, High German) for trade relations in northern, north-

eastern, and western Europe has been studied in detail (Meier 2016, 317–318). But German was also learned as a foreign language by, e.g., French, Spanish, or Italian merchants, which is documented by grammar and language books from different southern European regions (Meier 2016, 319–320).

As a rule, the expressions ‘German editions’, ‘Iberian editions’, etc. in this study refer to the dissemination of a specific text in our corpus in different *language regions* (respectively the German-speaking area, the Iberian-speaking area, etc.) – beyond the complicated (and often shifting) geographical and political borders of kingdoms or countries in the early modern era. Besides, one should keep in mind that over a long period of time the readership of the texts presented here has been an educated and a multilingual one. A nobleman or an educated citizen in Kraków, for example, was able to read the history of *Melusine* not only in Polish, but also in German or in French, and he may also have known Latin. The private library of Hogenskild Bielke (1538–1605), a Swedish nobleman and politician, documents his widespread interest in historical, religious, as well as fictional reading – in different languages (Undorf 1995). Jan Hamers van Hantwerpen (Antwerp) wrote in a copy of the Ripuarian *Aesopus* edition printed in Cologne by Johann Koelhoff (1489, copy: London, Guildhall, INC 40, q2v) the following philosophical advice in Dutch: “[...] datmen in allen saechen kenne een getempert man sober gestadich / ende sterck tegen tegenspoet getemperheyt is den toom die de wellusten des lichaems bedwinght” (“that in all things a temperate man is known to be simple, steadfast, and resistant to misfortune. Temperance is the rein that subdues the lust of the body”). And there are many more examples. Systematic research on book ownership and the dissemination of narratives across different language areas is a promising field of studies. The situation and the impact of the early modern European book market has been studied in recent years, e.g. by Matthew McLean and Sara Barker in *International Exchange in the Early Modern Book World* (2016) and by Shanti Graheli in *Buying and Selling. The Business of Books in Early Modern Europe* (2019).

The movement and dissemination of the narratives presented in this volume are to be considered literary as well as economically successful phenomena in early modern Europe: not only were the texts themselves printed, disseminated, and read over large parts of Europe, the networks of printers and the circulation of woodcuts and illustrations were ‘international’ as well. The main European printing centres Venice, Antwerp, Lyon, Strasbourg, and Frankfurt am Main, but also smaller places like Lübeck printed books in different languages.

7 The Top Ten: Success Factors, Media, and Materiality

With our research group, we noticed many parallels between the Top Ten narratives and their respective trajectories in early modern Europe. One of the striking aspects is that all the narratives, except *Fortunatus* and *Ulenspiegel*, were already part of a substantial manuscript tradition in different language areas before appearing in print.¹⁷ In that sense, the contents and the narrative models they were based on – stories of love, marvels, and adventures; Arthurian romance; the Byzantine novel; fables – were already firmly rooted in a cultural memory that transcended geographical and linguistic boundaries. As such the Top Ten seem to belong to the core of an early modern European publishing genre that was as widespread, popular, and eloquently promoted by publishers as it was harshly condemned by certain humanist writers, clerics, and numerous scholars. We would like to present here some thoughts about possible reasons for the popularity of these particular ten narratives for several centuries and in such a vast spatial dimension.

Several reasons for their success are given throughout the volume; together, they form an intricate mix of narrative-specific features and more general generic as well as book historical aspects. In narrative fiction the figure of the main protagonist evidently plays a crucial role: while in some cases their archetypal quality is highlighted – e.g. Aesop, Reynaert, and *Ulenspiegel* as rebels and trickster-figures, Griseldis as a symbol of *oboedientia* and *constantia* – in other instances, such as *Melusine*, a woman-serpent, and *Fortunatus*, a modern adventurer, the appeal could have resided partly in the more individual specificities of the main character and her or his development. In the two latter narratives, the supernatural elements as such no doubt added to the attraction, as it also did, for example, in *Amadis*.

More generally, we can identify certain formal and thematic properties shared by several of the narratives discussed in this volume. Firstly, *Aesopus* and *Ulenspiegel* consist in fact of a variety of stories more or less loosely grouped around a central figure or intrigue, and in the *Historia septem sapientum Romae* and *Reynaert* many *exempla* or other shorter stories told by the fictional characters are part of the narrative as a whole. Did this specific format, which facilitated discontinuous reading and memorization, have a specific appeal to the audience? The stories told in *Aesopus* and *Reynaert* furthermore share a focus on animal characters who walk and talk like humans: “anthropomorphism has its own appeal” (Julia Boffey).

¹⁷ The case of *Amadis* is different, see the chapter on *Amadis* in this volume.

The at times scabrous humour that dominates in these stories must also have played an important role. The power of words and language on the whole is foregrounded in the oral contracts in *Melusine* and *Griseldis*, and the jokes, tricks, and powerful stories in *Ulenspiegel*, *Reynaert*, and *Historia septem sapientum Romae*.

Another important theme present in several of the narratives is that of the twists and turns of fate and their bearings on family and love relations, like in *Apollonius*, a deeply human topic, which is as timeless as the fascination with the supernatural or the importance of humour. Two of the narratives present a strong female protagonist, *Griseldis* and *Melusine*. Curiously enough, love and romance play a rather modest role in our Top Ten; only *Pierre et Maguelonne* and *Amadis* really develop this theme by giving the reader an insight into the sentiments of attraction, love, and despair that rumble in the hearts of the love couples they present.

Based on the information given in the different contributions, one could hypothesize that apart from the unfailing attraction of entertaining stories filled with adventures, magic, and humour, the ability of most of our narratives to serve as a vehicle to convey moral lessons has contributed enormously to their dissemination and longevity. Didactics are, of course, a constituent ingredient of fables. Judging by their first known written versions, narratives like *Apollonius*, *Griseldis*, and *Pierre et Maguelonne* originally served little or no specific didactic goal. Nevertheless, at some point, they were presented as *exempla* in early modern editions: sometimes in strikingly similar wordings, as was the case in two Danish editions of *Pierre et Maguelonne* (1583) and *Apollonius* (1594). In the dedication of his *Maguelonne*, the Danish printer, Lorentz Benedicht, used the same example from the Bible accompanied by a comment on the instability of secular happiness as the anonymous author of the *Apollonius* preface does. *Aesopus*, *Pierre et Maguelonne*, and *Reynaert* moreover were used for language education, probably because of their entertaining and didactic nature but also as they were already widely known.

Despite their different origins and generic features, all our narratives offer a broad variety of themes and characters, thus allowing for a range of varying interpretations and reframings. For instance, *Melusine* not only contains the marvellous story of a hybrid creature betrayed by her husband, but also that of a noble family firmly rooted in the Poitou region, while the Amadisian cycle with its chivalrous adventures and many protagonists builds on a long tradition of Arthurian romance, and until this day readers offer diametrically opposed interpretations of *Fortunatus*. The seventeenth-century Swedish *Apollonius* editions were enriched by an appendix on the Seven Wonders of the World, whereas the Dutch *Griseldis* was often published together with two other narratives about virtuous women in the multitext-volume called *Der Vrouwenpeerle*. This openness and adaptability could be regarded as one of the defining features of the Top Ten in general.

The question remains, however, why specifically these narratives? There are similar medieval and early modern narratives about suffering women (*La belle Héléne de Constantinople*), monstrous protagonists (*Valentin et Orson*), tribulations of love couples (*Floire et Blancheflor*) and mortals who engage with the supernatural (*Faust*). Why did they not last as long? Why were they not as widespread as the Top Ten? One could argue that the literary quality of the ten narratives was exceptional, that these creations had this *je ne sais quoi* that made them extraordinarily appealing for readers of all sorts, and of all times and places, but we should probably also turn to more prosaic elements here: business decisions made by printers and publishers, based on their materials, their contacts, and the opportunities they saw. Printing houses produced books in various languages: the Leeu printing house in Gouda, for example, published the *Historia septem sapientum Romae* in Dutch and Low German, and publishers in Lübeck or Rostock in the sixteenth century printed in Low German, High German, and Danish. Publishing was of course a business, and printers and publishers were always on the lookout for titles that had already proved successful in other linguistic and geographical contexts. They also were creative in finding ways to exploit and continue this success, as can be seen, for example, in the continuations of the first *Amadis* books or the different versions of the English *Fortunatus*.

The medial and material aspects of the printed editions also have to be taken into account, especially the illustrations. There are notable differences between individual narratives and between linguistic and spatio-temporal contexts, but woodcuts form a constituent part of many of the early modern Top Ten editions, as can also be seen on title pages advertising their presence. The series of woodblocks designed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries – some of them by famous engravers – often served for centuries. For example, Virgil Solis' series of woodblocks for Feyerabend's edition of *Reineke Fuchs* (1564) were reused and copied in other German *Reynaert* editions until the second half of the seventeenth century. The woodcuts engraved by Hans Brosamer for Hermann Gülfferichs's editions of Top Ten and other popular narratives are another case in point; woodblocks created for one narrative were reused or copied in editions of other popular narratives. Copies of these German woodcuts also turned up in, for example, Danish and Castilian editions of the same narratives, which clearly shows the transcultural and multimodal dimension of designing books in the early modern period. By reinforcing the coherence of the corpus on a medial, material, and visual level, these practices contributed to the emergence of a successful 'transnational' 'genre'.

Finally, as Lydia Zeldenrust states in the end of her chapter on *Melusine* in this book: "Luck must have been a factor at times too. [...] sometimes it seems to have been a case of the right publisher at the right time, and if one person picked up the text others might follow." For example, the mere fact that a printer could

easily acquire or borrow a set of woodblocks intended for illustrating a particular narrative might have been the determining factor in his decision to print that narrative. The same holds true for printers who migrated and took their catalogue or their stock of materials with them such as William Caxton, who moved from Bruges to Westminster and imported several narratives to the British language area, among which *Aesopus* and *Reynaert*. Without Antonio Bulifon, who moved from Lyon to Naples, *Fortunatus* would probably not have been translated into Italian in the seventeenth century. Printers in Kraków were often of German origin, like Florian Ungler or Hieronim Wietor, and they published narratives which had already been successful in German, e.g. *Aesopus* and the *Historia septem sapientum Romae*. And would *Amadis* have been as successful commercially if the French translation had not been signed by Nicolas d'Herberay and if he had not managed to engage the Parisian printer-publishers Denis Janot, Jean Longis, and Vincent Sertenas?

Thematic and aesthetic appeal, economic considerations, clever marketing, and the presence of the right person at the right time at the right place thus seem to have gone hand in hand to make the success of these Top Ten happen. Our hope is that this book may invite further scholarly discussion on the Top Ten and other narratives that were for such a long time part of a shared European publishing and reading culture.

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