

Albrecht Classen
(University of Arizona, Tucson)

Naked Men in Medieval German Literature and Art Anthropological, Cultural-Historical, and Mental-Historical Investigations¹

At issue in this paper, which picks up a specific thread in the Introduction, is the question what constitutes civilization, culture, progress, and how the experience of the human body in its nudity fits into this discourse, which carries, of course, strong allusions to sexuality, though not all the time. I choose this topic because it strongly profiles many of the issues and aspects that will be discussed in this volume insofar as the naked body carries enormous cultural-historical meanings and can serve many different functions. Cultural historians such as Norbert Elias and Hans Peter Duerr, above all, have struggled hard over the last decades to gain insight into one of the most intriguing questions concerning the historical development from the Middle Ages to the modern world, focusing, above all, on the experience of shame associated with the exhibition of the naked body within society, but the issue has never been fully laid to rest and might not even be completely manageable because the premises in this heated debate could have been wrong or misdirected.

For both scholars the most burning concern addresses such issues as: Can we easily and clearly demarcate past cultures, from which we certainly evolved, from our own, and if so, how? Would we still be justified in talking about 'dark ages,' if we even knew what that term might fully denote, apart from some generic, rather irrelevant aspects, such as oral versus literate, rural versus urban, heroic versus courtly? As Elizabeth A. R. Brown now emphasizes, "The division between 'the Middle Ages' and 'the Renaissance', like the names assigned to the two time-spans, has had unfortunate results. For those like [Lord] Acton, who study the

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Marilyn Sandidge, Westfield State College, MA, for her critical reading of this paper. An early version was presented at the *Sixty-First Annual Convention of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association*, Calgary, Alberta, October 2007

later centuries, all that precedes 1500 is on the wane, in decline, and degenerate, whereas what follows is new, fresh, and full of promise, distinct and different from what came before”² Nevertheless, progress happened, whatever we might mean by that term, and medieval culture changed, whether we think of clothing, building, the political system, weaponry, artistic styles, scientific approaches, and so forth.

But did people really change? Did their approaches to matters of love, sexuality, fear, anger, sickness, death, time, and the foreign differ remarkably from earlier or later ones? A first and forceful answer would be: absolutely, otherwise we would not be what we are today. And yet traditions continued, fundamental ideas and values resurfaced or never went away completely, religious needs stayed the same, despite numerous changes in the format of how people worshipped and what texts they used to learn about God—all this the basic stuff relevant for the history of mentality, which is also deeply informed by attitudes about sexuality and nakedness.³

One of the criteria used to determine the transition from one stage in the cultural process to the next has been the historically changing approaches to the human body and the feeling about nakedness. As Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin rightly emphasize, “The body both produces knowledge and is shaped by it, both is determined by it and colludes with it The body is after all *the* tool of desire, the *tool* of desire. The self is ultimately an imaginary construction within the world, invested in the body that a person becomes after the primary link to the mother has been lost.”⁴ Norbert Elias had once proposed that the medieval world cared surprisingly little about exposing one’s body to others, and only in the course of time did a new shame culture set in. For him, the process of civilization was determined by an ever growing interaction of people and society, creating ever more intensive interdependence, which had far-reaching consequences for the experience of nakedness, hence of shame. In other words, rationality increasingly replaced instinct-driven behavior, leading to fully-fledged forms of shame, which Elias defines as a type of fear of the superior other. Nakedness hence became a dreaded condition that everyone tried to avoid, and this more and more since the sixteenth century. But there are also, as he emphasizes, noteworthy differences in

² Elizabeth A. R. Brown, “On 1500,” *The Medieval World*, ed. Peter Linehan and Janet L. Nelson (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 691–710; here 693.

³ Peter Dinzelbacher, “Zu Theorie und Praxis der Mentalitätsgeschichte,” *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte: Hauptthemen in Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. id. Kröners Taschenausgabe, 469 (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1993), XV–XXXVII; see also his ruminations on the same topic in “Wie ‘fremd’ ist uns das Mittelalter?” id., *Das fremde Mittelalter: Gottesurteil und Tierprozess* (Essen: Magnus Verlag, 2006), 11–21.

⁴ Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, “Introduction,” *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. eadem (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 6.

the perception of the naked body by members of the aristocracy versus members of the burgher class who relied much more heavily on mutual control and discipline by way of injecting a sense of shame.⁵

One key feature of the civilizing transformation from the Middle Ages to the modern age proves to be, according to Elias, the growing control mechanisms concerning all human affects and instincts, ultimately being dominated by a super-ego (430). We might even summarize Elias's observations with a reference to the emerging bourgeois world where shame exerted one of its greatest impacts on the individual, subjugating it under broad social norms of behavior, performance, and social and moral norms and rules. Fear and shame are the result of social processes, and they grow in intensity the more society experiences an ever closer cohabitation in a limited space (448).

As to nakedness, Elias underscores that in the Middle Ages people did not have the same attitude or sensitivity regarding nakedness as today because it was common to sleep together in one bed, in one room, to sleep naked (unless in a monastery where the opposite practice was pursued), to take baths together, not separating the genders, and those who covered themselves up seemed to have to hide something, being ashamed of a bodily shortcoming or illness. Only by the sixteenth, and much more noticeably since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, did this innocence concerning the nude body disappear and make room for shame. For Elias, this open attitude toward the naked body was a sign of a certain infantility, actually characteristic of the entire period of the Middle Ages, which finds its parallel in Johan Huizinga's seminal observations about late-medieval Burgundian and Flemish culture insofar as children never display any self-consciousness and care little, or not all, about being naked.⁶

Night clothing was not invented and generally introduced until the same time when the fork and the handkerchief—both specific markers of the radical transformation in the long-term civilization process—became standard features of early modern society.⁷ For the sociologist Elias, this indicates that people at least

⁵ Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation: Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*. Vol. 2: *Wandlungen der Gesellschaft: Entwurf zu einer Theorie der Zivilisation* (1939; Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1980), 429. For an English transl., see Edmund Jephcott, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization* (1978; Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994).

⁶ J(ohan) Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (1919; Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954), 9: "To the world when it was half a thousand years younger, the outlines of all things seemed more clearly marked than to us."

⁷ Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation: Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*. Vol. 1: *Wandlungen des Verhaltens in den weltlichen Oberschichten des Abendlandes* (1939; Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1980), 222–27.

until the late Middle Ages harbored much fewer inhibitions regarding their bodies and embraced nakedness as a normal thing in human interactions.

Elias's thesis has productively challenged modern sociology, anthropology, ethnology, and cultural history at large, offering new perspectives regarding changing attitudes toward the body, but he has also met sharp criticism, especially by Hans Peter Duerr who has claimed in a series of books that sentiments such as shame are timeless and transcultural features of human life, and that the whole notion of a civilization process, which somehow implies 'progress,' amounts to a myth. He cites a number of cases from medieval German and French literature, and also refers to various images from that time to support his counter-argument that medieval people were fully aware of the shameful of the naked body and specifically refrained from exposing themselves in public. Only prostitutes did not demonstrate any inhibition to show themselves entirely naked to other people, especially men.⁸ Most importantly, Duerr argued that medieval people had a clear sense of voyeurism as a form of dramatic transgression and regarded the situation in which a woman or a man was secretly observed from the outside as shameful. Many of the scenes in medieval art work depicting naked men and women together in a bathhouse would have to be interpreted as images from brothels, hence would not have any bearing on the idea of shame, changes in civilization, and in the attitude toward the naked body as interpreted by Elias.⁹

⁸ Hans Peter Duerr, *Nacktheit und Scham*. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, 1 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1988); see also the second volume, *Intimität*. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, 2 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990); subsequently Duerr dealt with related topics: *Obszönität und Gewalt*. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, 3 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1993); *Der erotische Leib*. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, 4 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1997); *Die Tatsachen des Lebens*. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, 5 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2002). Some of these volumes have already been translated into various languages (vol. 1, Italian 1991; Swedish 1994; French 1998; Japanese 1990; Turkish 1990; Portuguese 2002; vol. 3, Swedish, 1998; but so far not into English).

⁹ Undoubtedly, Duerr, *Nacktheit und Scham*, 38–58, has assembled an impressive array of sources and documents that would confirm his arguments at first sight. But a more careful analysis will force us to discriminate much further, questioning both Elias's and Duerr's basic theses with respect to their relevance for our understanding of the civilization process. Most problematic proves to be, as scholarship has clearly demonstrated, Duerr's free-floating collection of evidence regarding the shame culture from all over the world and from all time periods, as if cultural phenomena among some Polynesian peoples today could be simply equated with those prevalent in the European Middle Ages. For further criticism, see Michael Hinz, *Der Zivilisationsprozess: Mythos oder Realität: Wissenschaftssoziologische Untersuchungen zur Elias-Duerr-Kontroverse*. *Figurationen*, 4 (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2002), 81–90. The dilemma of the entire debate consists in the clash between the large theoretical concepts that mostly disregard empirical data, and factual purism that limits itself to concretely observable aspects in human life. The latter faces the danger of blinding itself to larger, more complex issues, whereas the former disregards contradictory elements and exposes itself to criticism of the most basic kind (Hinz 88–89).

Scholarship has explored these two theoretical positions with great interest, especially because they concern the entire cultural-historical development from the Middle Ages to the present and involve virtually every aspect of human life. Moreover, the discussion has been deeply intensified ever since Elias's seminal study began to experience its wide-spread reception at least since the 1970s and 80s, and since Duerr's publication of his powerful counter arguments in 1988 and beyond. After all, as we have realized, sexuality in its myriad manifestations determines all other aspects of our existence, including religion, music, philosophy, economics, and sciences. There is no doubt that also medieval art, for instance, teems with open references to sexual objects, and yet we are faced with huge questions as to their proper interpretation regarding function and purpose, as several contributors to this volume confirm on the basis of their investigations.¹⁰ The problem with all these broad theses rests in the common and probably also necessary strategy to generalize, to paint with rough brush strokes, to focus on evidence that confirms the argument and to ignore others. A careful examination of specific texts and images from the early thirteenth through the sixteenth century, which are neither addressed in the Introduction to this volume nor by the other contributors, will illustrate the complexity of the issue and also its relevance for anthropological, cultural-historical, and mental-historical approaches to the critical examination of the emergence of the early modern world.¹¹

To do justice to the large, and most significant debate involving such global issues as the history of civilization, history of sexuality, gender relationships in the past, etc., would require a book-length study. In the Introduction I have tried to outline some of the most relevant aspects in this broad discourse both in the premodern world and today within scholarship. Famously, Michel Foucault approached the topic from the perspective of discourse, identifying sexuality as a historical construct to support specific power structures, ultimately specifically gender, relationships,¹² but then he mostly turned to seventeenth- through

¹⁰ Malcolm Jones, "Sex and Sexuality in Late Medieval and Early Modern Art," *Privatisierung der Triebe?: Sexualität in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Daniela Erlach, Markus Reisenleitner, and Karl Vocelka. *Frühneuzeit-Studien*, 1 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 1994), 187–304. For an early assessment of the significance of sexuality, see Vern L. Bullough, "Sex in History: A Virgin Field," *The Journal of Sex Research* 1 (1972): 101–16; Sander L. Gilman, *Sexuality: An Illustrated History. Representing the Sexual in Medicine and Culture from the Middle Ages to the Age of AIDS* (New York: Wiley, 1989).

¹¹ A good example for a sensitive treatment of relevant evidence from a social-historical perspective is provided by George Huppert, *After the Black Death: A Social History of Early Modern Europe*. Sec. ed. *Interdisciplinary Studies in History* (1986; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998); for the history of mentality, see *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte: Hauptthemen in Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. Peter Dinzelbacher (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1993); for anthropological approaches, see the contribution to *Daily Life in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Britnell (Thrupp, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1998).

¹² Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. I: *An Introduction*, transl. from the French Robert

nineteenth-century French literature. In contrast, choosing a narrowly defined topic, here I would like to examine a selection of Middle High German texts where we come across naked men who mostly feel entirely out of place and express embarrassment.

The intention then is to investigate what these few examples might tell us regarding the attitude toward the human body when exposed to public viewing and what narrative function the phenomenon of nakedness might have within the context of each narrative. I will also consider some art work both from the Middle Ages and the early modern period to support my critical approaches to the Elias-Duerr debate as a springboard for the further discussion of sexuality, the body, shame, and the relationship between the individual and society in the area of intimacy.¹³

Such an investigation promises to yield many insightful results regarding ethical, moral, and ideological perspectives underlying medieval and early modern cultures because it forces us to approach the relevant literary texts from an anthropological and sociological perspective, something which has not been fully realized in Anglophone scholarship where the entire debate concerning Elias and Duerr does not yet seem to have been fully recognized despite numerous translations at least of Elias's work.¹⁴ Moreover, building on some findings in the Introduction, this short study will further sensitize us to the dialectics in the attitude toward sexuality in the Middle Ages and beyond, regularly vacillating between total rejection and condemnation by the Church and other authorities, and full acceptance and realization by numerous individuals in practical terms and in the form of artistic and literary representation.¹⁵

Hurley (1976; New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

¹³ Hinz, *Der Zivilisationsprozess*, 356–86, traces the international reception process of Elias's hypotheses, including the harsh responses by Duerr.

¹⁴ For some global comments, mostly limited to Elias as a sociologist at large, see Stephen Mannell, *Norbert Elias: Civilization, and the Human Self-Image* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1989); Dennis Smith, *Norbert Elias: A Critical Assessment* (London: Sage, 2000); see also Roger Salerno, *Beyond Enlightenment: Lives and Thoughts of Social Theorists* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004); *The Sociology of Norbert Elias*, ed. Steven Loyal and Stephen Quilley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Mary Fulbrook, *Un-Civilizing Processes?: Excess and Transgression in German Society and Culture: Perspectives Debating with Norbert Elias*. *German Monitor*, 66 (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2007). The studies by Hans-Peter Duerr have not yet been translated into English.

¹⁵ Peter Dinzelsbacher, "Mittelalterliche Sexualität – die Quellen," *Privatisierung der Triebe? Sexualität in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Daniela Erlach, Markus Reisenleitner, and Karl Vocelka. *Frühneuzeit-Studien*, 1 (Frankfurt and New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 47–110. See also Ernst Englisch, "Die Ambivalenz in der Beurteilung sexueller Verhaltensweisen im Mittelalter," *id.*, 167–86. See also the contributions to *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times*, ed. Philippe Ariès and André Béjin. Transl. Anthony Forster. *Family, Sexuality and Social Relations in Past Times* (1982; Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985).

Art historians such as Michael Camille have already forged ahead in this regard, discussing the often rather disturbing world of medieval marginal drawings with countless grotesque figures, confusing scenes, and many naked bodies, perhaps mocking the pious reader and spectator, perhaps simply adding humor to a most serious matter.¹⁶ In the margin of a copy of the poem *Les Voeux du Paon* by Jaques de Longuyon from ca. 1350, for instance, we see a naked man who, looking back to the center piece where Fesona and Baudrain are playing a game of chess, points with his finger into his anus, a clearly scatological gesture, specifically contrasting the sophisticated courtly world with the grotesque sphere of the crude, perhaps uncivilized, body with its natural functions.¹⁷

When young Parzival in Wolfram von Eschenbach's eponymous romance (ca. 1205), on his way to King Arthur, in an effort to free himself from his mother and to grow up to an adult knight, encounters Jeschute in her tent, he does not pay attention to the fact that she is lying practically naked on her bed, although the narrator delights in the description of her limbs, turning even to her private parts, deliberately playing with sexual innuendo.¹⁸ The young man does not even seem to be sexually awake since he only follows his mother's recommendations verbatim, robbing the lady's ring and brooch; then he demands food and finally a kiss from her, though not because he would feel attracted to her erotically. Indeed, young Parzival does not even notice the erotically highly charged situation and simply devours the food and takes whatever he can grab from her according to Herzeloyde's advice. Once he has left her, he only reflects back upon his conquest and delights in his "roub[]" (132, 25; robbery) without even considering that he had met this lovely lady in a highly compromising situation not wearing any clothes under the blanket.¹⁹ Nakedness, deftly alluded to by the narrator, has no significant meaning in this situation, obviously because Parzival has not yet developed in sexuality insofar as he is still in a pre-puberty stage, hence he is not

¹⁶ Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*. Essays in Art and Culture (London: Reaktion Books, 1992). See also Christina Weising's contribution to this volume.

¹⁷ Today in the Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. G. 24, fol. 25v, see *Medieval Mastery: Book Illumination from Charlemagne to Charles the Bold: 800–1475*, ed. Lee Preedy and William Noel (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2002), 174.

¹⁸ See the contribution to this volume by Siegfried Christoph.

¹⁹ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*. Studienausgabe. Mittelhochdeutscher Text nach der sechsten Ausgabe von Karl Lachmann. Übersetzung von Peter Knecht. Einführung zum Text von Bernd Schirok (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1998), chapter 130, verse 1 to chapter 132, verse 30 (or 130,1–132,30).

yet interested in other bodies,²⁰ though the narrator certainly includes sexual allusions in his description of Jeschute's condition.

Wolfram takes the young protagonist on a quick development tour, growing up faster than it would seem possible, but the narrative requirement justifies this strategy. When Parzival spends time at Count Gurnemanz's court, he has to learn all the basic educational principles necessary for a member of highly cultured and sophisticated aristocracy, and he is well taken care of by his host. This, however, leads to an embarrassing situation because after dinner Gurnemanz leads his guest to the bedroom and requests from him to undress in preparation for nighttime: "der wirt in sich ûz sloufen bat: / ungernez tet, doch musez sîn" (166, 12–13; the host begged him to take off his clothes: he did not like it, but it had to be). Once naked and placed in the bed, he is covered by a fine blanket out of ermine coat, and the narrator cannot help it but to comment: "sô werde frucht gebar nie wîp" (166, 16; never before has a woman delivered such noble fruit), underscoring the character quality hidden within a beautiful, and certainly eroticized body the entire court is most curious about.

Once Parzival has woken up the next morning, the servants prepare a bath for him, and he steps right into it. As soon as he sits in the tub, delightful young ladies appear who massage his body, helping him to get rid of painful spots, though he does not respond to any of their comments: "sus dolter freude und eise" (167, 10; thus he experienced joy and bliss). However, when the time has come to get out of the tub, Parzival displays shyness and embarrassment, not daring to accept the bath towel and to wrap it around his body (167, 21–24). In fact, he is filled with shame in this situation: "vor in wolt erz niht umbe nemn" (167, 24), although they would have liked to examine whether his private parts have suffered any damage, or whether he is well, which provokes the narrator to comment, in his typically facetious fashion: "si kan friwendes kumber riuwen" (167, 30; womanhood demonstrates loyalty, she can take away a friend's suffering). Of course, here, as so many times throughout Wolfram's work, we have to consider his deliberate use of satire and irony, and the subsequent comment seems to confirm this perspective: "wîpheit vert mit triuwen" (167, 29; women operate with loyalty).²¹

Duerr had warned us not to read some of the highly erotic imagery from the medieval period too literally, advising us of their allegorical, moral, and religious functions. Referring to a famous illustration in the *Manessische Liederhandschrift*

²⁰ James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 40–44, argues that the gender markers in medieval courtly literature do not assume the same erotic function as in modern discourse; instead the writers focus their attention on the aphrodisiac body at large, whether male or female.

²¹ See Karl Bertau, "Versuch über tote Witze bei Wolfram von Eschenbach," *Acta Germanica* 10 (1977): 87–137; also published in his *Wolfram von Eschenbach: Neun Versuche über Subjektivität und Ursprünglichkeit in der Geschichte* (Munich: Beck, 1983), 60–109; here 87.

(Codex Manesse), the most impressive collection of German courtly love poetry accompanied by full-page images of the individual poets (imaginary) from the early fourteenth century,²² he insists on the significant difference between erotic and explicitly sexual allusions. For him, it would have been most unlikely that medieval women served men in the bathtub and actually shared, somehow, living space together. But the pictorial evidence included in his own study seems to point to the opposite direction, whether the images reflect marital scenes, sexual encounters between people of the lower classes, genre images of brothels, hospitals, bath houses, etc.²³

The illustration in the *Codex Manesse* deserves closer attention, and certainly a different interpretation than the one offered by Duerr. The artist offers an illustration of the poet Jakob von Warte (1269–1331), a composer of courtly love songs situated in the Canton Thurgau, Switzerland. We see a naked man sitting in a big wooden bathtub, surrounded by four women, two of whom handing him a wreath of flowers and a chalice, whereas one maid, who kneels next to the tub, massages his right arm, and a fourth woman, apparently a servant considering her size, uses a hand-held bellow to feed a fire under a huge kettle for the warm water. A tall linden tree rises up in the background, and birds are sitting on the leaves, signaling the time of Spring. The man's body is covered, as far as we can see it, with rose leaves, but he seems to be of old age considering his grey hair—apparently a reference to a verse in one of his songs: “Owê, si lât mich in den sorgen alten” (Oh dear, [her refusal] makes me turn old because of worrying).²⁴ According to Duerr, the entire scene has to be read only allegorically, but even allegories rely on practical experiences and familiarity with basic aspects of contemporary culture; hence the depiction of this man in the bathtub does not evoke any sense of shame, not even in the presence of women.

The depiction of a naked man taking a bath in the illustration contained in the *Manesse Codex* should not surprise us at all, considering all the other evidence. The Duerr-Elias debate has been highly influential particularly for Early Modern Studies insofar as Elias had fundamentally influenced our perspectives on the remarkable paradigm shift from the Middle Ages to the modern world with respect to civilization. Duerr seriously questioned his arguments and observations,

²² Duerr, *Nacktheit und Scham*, 28; *Codex Manesse: Die Miniaturen der Großen Heidelberger Liederhandschrift*. Ed. and explained by Ingo F. Walther, with Gisela Siebert (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1988), 40.

²³ For a parallel study, involving a significant bathhouse scene in the Old English *Apollonius of Tyre* and also new archeological evidence, see David Townsend, “The Naked Truth of the King’s Affection in the Old English *Apollonius of Tyre*,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34 (2004): 173–95.

²⁴ *Die Schweizer Minnesänger*. Nach der Ausgabe von Karl Bartsch neu bearbeitet und herausgegeben von Max Schiendorfer. Vol. 1: *Texte* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1990), 23, No. 5, 27.

suggesting that shame belongs to one of the anthropological constants, thereby implying that the civilization process actually did not happen.

This brings us back to Wolfram's portrait of highly self-conscious young Parzival whose foolish youthfulness might be an explanation for his excessive shame. The narrator certainly mocks him and comments that the courtly ladies, who were asked to leave the room and to grant him privacy, would have liked to know whether he had been wounded at his genital as well:

die juncfrouwen muosen gên:
sine torsten dâ niht langer stên.
ich wæn si gerne heten gesehn,
ob im dort unde iht wære geschehn. (167, 25–28)

[The young ladies had to leave:
they did not dare to linger there.
I believe that they would have liked to see
whether anything had happened to his body at the lower part.]

The humor of the entire scene is predicated on the tension between the young protagonist's lack of experience with womanhood and the courtly ladies' curiosity and teasing of their guest whom they identify with the standard image of a sexualized man constantly bent on conquering women for his personal pleasure.²⁵ This does not imply at all that Wolfram intended to reflect upon a fundamental concern about shamefulness and embarrassment because of the young man's exposure of his naked body. On the contrary, the explicit satire indicates how little Parzival has learned about courtly culture and still operates like a child among adults, not knowing how to handle his own body in public.²⁶

²⁵ Bertau, "Versuch" (cited from his *Wolfram von Eschenbach*), 87, emphasizes the cliché of the notoriously erotic activity of all men, especially of all knights. Within the field of Masculinity Studies, this topic has found much interest, though Wolfram's text has not yet met any significant interest in this regard, see *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D. M. Hadley. Women and Men in History (London and New York: Longman, 1999). Surprisingly, when Masculinist scholars turn to Wolfram, they tend to ignore this powerful scene, see, for instance, Susanne Hafner, *Maskulinität in der höfischen Erzählliteratur*. Hamburger Beiträge zur Germanistik, 40 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2004). See my review in *Mediaevistik* 19 (2006): 399–401.

²⁶ It seems questionable that he simply gets out of the bathtub, forcing the women, because of his nakedness, to leave the room, as if he did not feel shame, as David N. Yeandle argues in his monograph, *'shame' im Alt- und Mittelhochdeutschen bis um 1210: Eine sprach- und literaturgeschichtliche Untersuchung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Herausbildung einer ethischen Bedeutung*. Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2001), 153–55. For a rather surprising parallel case in *Tristan de Nanteuil*, though with a strongly religious undertone and motif, see the contribution to this volume by Paula Leverage. In that case, the exposure of the body, even in its specific sexual meaning, is done deliberately to demonstrate the divinely inspired gender transformation of the protagonist. There is no sense of

However, physically the guest appears like a young adult, and his presentation at court, after having been splendidly dressed by his host Gurnemanz, evokes great admiration and erotic interest (168, 24–30), which in part confirms James Schultz's recent hypothesis regarding the phenomenon of aristophilia, that is, "radiant nobility," or "nobility of the body."²⁷ In part, however, Schultz thereby denies the clearly erotic dimension of the female gaze upon the male body.²⁸ Not surprisingly, when Parzival and Cundwiramurs have married, and spend their first night together, nothing serious happens, and she remains a virgin because he does not dare, or does not want to, touch her. Only on the third night do they overcome the physical distance and discover each other: "man und wîp wærn al ein. / si vlâhten arm unde bein. / ob ichz iu sagen müeze, / er vant daz nâhe süeze: / der alte und der niwe site / wonte aldâ in beiden mite. / in was wol und niht ze wê" (203, 5–11; man and woman were just one. They embraced each other with arms and legs. If I am supposed to tell you, he found sweet closeness: the old and the new custom was realized by both. They felt happy and did not experience woe). We do not need to analyze this passage further because it is clear enough what is happening, and it is a standard description of the joys of a wedding night, or any other first sexual encounters in medieval literature without going into graphic details. Certainly, the poet does not address in explicit terms the fact that husband and wife are lying in bed together naked and are enjoying each other, but he does so implicitly. We are not told anything about their naked bodies because our imagination can do the same job much better based on the simple allusions.

Nakedness is part of the game, yet it is not necessarily associated with embarrassment or shame; rather it entirely depends on the context and the conditions, which significantly contradicts both Elias's and Duerr's theses. It would be erroneous to assume that medieval people cared little about covering their bodies and openly displayed their nakedness even in an inappropriate context, that is, in public. At the same time clothing was highly important, both for social status and for the protection of the naked, shame-associated body, assuming an important ritual value.²⁹ Depending on the context, women were not excluded

shame in the scene discussed by Leverage.

²⁷ Schultz, *Courtly Love*, 79–83, et passim.

²⁸ Normally, only Christ's naked body was exhibited in public and available for general viewing, whether this evoked erotic intrigue or not. There are, however, numerous examples in literary texts, such as Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneas*, or in Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan* where women eagerly look at men's naked physique out of sheer erotic interest. See Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 34–39. For post-medieval perspectives, see *Männlichkeit im Blick: Visuelle Inszenierungen in der Kunst seit der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Mechthild Fend and Marianne Koos. Literatur – Kultur – Geschlecht. Große Reihe, 30 (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2004).

²⁹ Elke Brügggen, *Kleidung und Mode in der höfischen Epik des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts*. Beihefte zum Euphorion, 23 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1989); Gabriele Raudszus, *Die*

from treating wounded male bodies, such as in the case of Gawan after his hard battle on Castle Schastel Marveile. Although seemingly dead, there is life left in his body, and he is carefully disarmed and unclothed so as to allow the women to treat him medically. But the servant women are enjoined to pay respect to him, guarding his honor by not making him ashamed for his nakedness (578, 15–17). His grandmother orders them to use a piece of cloth to cover his genitals, if we can read this into the modest formulation: “einen pfelle sult ir umbe iuch nemen, / unde entwâpentn in dem schate” (578, 18–19; put up a blanket in front of you and take off his armor behind this cover).³⁰

Hartmann von Aue illustrated his own approach to this fundamental issue most powerfully in his *Iwein* (ca. 1190), explicitly suggesting that nakedness carried social functions and was not simply and exclusively the site of women’s endangerment within a male society. Once Lunete has announced in public that Iwein has utterly failed in keeping his promise to his wife Laudine to return to her after one year of knightly enterprises, and that she has hence rejected him from her life, the young protagonist falls into a terrible fright, and actually loses his mind. He leaves the court of King Arthur, tears off his clothing, and wanders off into the forest stark naked. The narrator explicitly identifies this action as a radical transgression of all courtly norms of behavior: “er brach sîne site und sîne zuht” (he broke with all good customs and his courtly education).³¹

To be naked means for Iwein to sink down to the level of an animal insofar as he eats only raw meat and roams the forest without any direction. Worse even, as the narrator underscores, Iwein’s comportment indicates that he has lost his mind, which finds additional confirmation in the fact that he is hunting and eating wild animals without cooking them or preparing them with salt or any spices. In other words, his nakedness finds its parallel in his lack of human culture, that is, his inability to treat his raw food. Once Iwein has made contact with an hermit, the latter is not actually shocked by his nakedness, only by his seemingly ferocious behavior, which he can, however, quickly control by means of a simple training process. Offering him bread, he keeps the wild man at bay, who is slowly adapting to the life of a beast: “Sus twelte der unwîse / ze walde mit der spîse, / unz daz der edele tôre / wart gelîch einem môre / an allen sînem lîbe” (3345–49; so the crazy

Zeichensprache der Kleidung: Untersuchungen zur Symbolik des Gewandes in der deutschen Epik des Mittelalters. Ordo. Studien zur Literatur und Gesellschaft des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, 1 (Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York: Georg Olms, 1985), 217–19.

³⁰ Yeandle, ‘schame’, 159.

³¹ Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein*. 4th rev. ed. Text of the seventh ed. by G. F. Benecke, K. Lachmann, and L. Wolff. Trans. and epilogue by Thomas Cramer (1968; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2001), 3234.

man stayed in the forest with this kind of food until he, as a noble fool, turned into a black man in all of his bodily appearance).

Remarkably, Iwein's nakedness has only secondary significance; it only reflects on his loss of his mind and loss of culture at large. There is no sense of shame, and no reflection upon sexual embarrassment, particularly because Iwein's nakedness simply equates him with an animal, which removes this case entirely out of the larger debate concerning the process of civilization because nakedness in isolation, far away from human society, has no bearing on the issue itself. Not surprisingly, Duerr has not even considered this scene, obviously because it would have dangerously undermined his larger argument.

The situation is considerably different when Iwein has fallen asleep at a later moment and is discovered by a group of women. However, even here the protagonist is identified as animal-like, bereft of reason and clothing (3359–60), which justifies that one of the women can examine him closely in order to identify him, not expressing any sense of shame or embarrassment (3369–71). Nevertheless, she breaks out in tears because Iwein is so miserably exposed and dishonored in his nakedness. But she does not cry because possibly her female sense of shame has been hurt, looking at a naked man. On the contrary, her heart is filled with pity and sympathy for Iwein in his fallen state: "daz einem alsô vrumen man / diu swacheit solde geschehen / daz er in den schanden wart gesehen" (3392–94; that a virtuous man would have to experience the dishonor of being seen in such a shameful state).

One of three women recognizes Iwein and also the cause of his loss of mind due to painful experiences in love (3404–05). Appealing to her mistress that only a healthy Iwein recovered from his insanity would be able to help them in their political and legal conflict, she can convince her to share some of the magical salve that she had received from the fairy Feimorgân.³² But the lady seriously enjoins her to use the salve only very sparingly, threatening her even with the death penalty if she does not obey her (3439). The salve would have to serve exclusively for those small areas where the seat of Iwein's sickness is located, his head, and the rest she would want to use for many other people suffering from similar medical-mental problems. Nevertheless, the maid ignores this order as soon as she has returned to the sleeping hero, entirely enthralled by his masculine beauty. The text does not reveal too many details of the erotic experience, as we are only told that the maid spreads the salve over his entire body, using it up completely: "mit ter vil edelen salben / bestreich si in allenthalben / über houbet und über vüezen" (3475–77; she

³² Peter Meister, *The Healing Female in the German Courtly Romance*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 523 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1990), 49–70. See now Carolyne Larrington, *King Arthur's Enchantresses: Morgan and Her Sisters in Arthurian Literature* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006), especially 11–12.

spread the most valuable salve everywhere from the head to the feet). The operative words are: from head to toes, obviously not leaving out any part of Iwein's body. The narrator underscores: "ir wille was sô sūeze / daz sî daz alsô lange treip / unz in der bûhsen niht beleip" (3478–80; her mind was so sweet that she did it for such a long time [applying the salve] until nothing was left in the box).

The narrator tries hard to hide the fact that she has thoroughly treated his entire body, and offers the seemingly innocent explanation that she was ardently bent on healing him from his insanity: "und wær ir sehstunt mê gewesen: / sô gerne sach sî in genesen" (3485–86; and if there had been six times as much [of the salve], she was so desirous to see him healed). Knowing, however, that for Iwein it would be highly shameful if he knew that she had seen him naked, not to speak of her thorough massage of all his body parts, she then withdraws and hides, making sure that she can observe him clearly, whereas he would not know of her presence (3488–501). We are told in unmistakable terms that Iwein would be ashamed if he knew that she had seen him naked (3497). At the same time she observes him carefully, making sure that the salve indeed shows its effect and that Iwein puts on the clothes that she had placed next to him. Moreover, once he is dressed and no longer exposed in his nakedness, she pretends to come riding along without noticing him at first, thus assuring that Iwein believes in her acting, responding to his calling out to her only the second time (3614).³³

After the protagonist has woken up from his sleep and deep dream, he debates with himself for a long time about his identity and what he would like to be, and what he actually is, a knight, though he has lost all memory of his previous existence. It is a most remarkable passage about an analytic examination concerning the meaning of identity and self-realization, hardly ever matched in medieval literature, perhaps with the exception of Petrarch's reflections while on Mont Ventoux (1336), and of Thomas Hoccleve's (ca. 1367–1426) ruminations about himself while looking into a mirror, knowing full well that people will remember that he had suffered from insanity.³⁴

For our purpose, however, the crucial aspect proves to be the voyeuristic situation although we do not hear about the maid's feelings and specific concerns

³³ Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Garments of Shame," *The History of Religions* 5, 2 (1966): 217–38, discusses the religious significance of taking off clothes for the religious ritual of baptism in the history of early Christianity, which could have a significant impact on our discussion of Iwein's nudity and subsequent reversal to sanity once he has been 'anointed' and then taken on clothes again. I thank Siegfried Christoph for alerting me to this valuable study.

³⁴ Albrecht Classen, *Autobiographische Lyrik des europäischen Spätmittelalters. Studien zu Hugo von Montfort, Oswald von Wolkenstein, Antonio Pucci, Charles d'Orléans, Thomas Hoccleve, Michel Beheim, Hans Rosenplüt und Alfonso Alvarez de Villasandino*. Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur, 91 (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Editions Rodopi, 1991), 57–69; 223–38.

during her observations while Iwein is waking up and slowly recovering his senses. The narrator refers to her again only once the knight is fully dressed: "Nu ersach diu juncvrouwe daz / daz er unlasterlîchen saz" (3597–98; now the maid saw that he was sitting there without causing any embarrassment). At the risk of an anachronistic reading of the text, I would claim that the erotic dimension of this entire scene is undeniable, though there is no specific mention of the woman's feelings, probably because she belongs to a lower social class.

To be sure, female voyeurism permeates the situation, with the maid gazing at the man carefully and intently, whose body she has touched all over while he was asleep. Of course, there would have been embarrassment for him if she had stayed around and made him know her presence, but this has little, or no, bearing on Duerr's or Elias's hypotheses regarding shame culture and its role within the process of civilization. On the contrary, the maid demonstrates, at least indirectly, her fascination with the male body, probably her erotic interest, and yet also her sensitivity in keeping a secure distance to avoid his feeling ashamed because of his nakedness.³⁵ There is also a social difference between them, which would have increased Iwein's shame, whereas an erotic encounter between a man and a woman from the same class, as we hear about it countless times in medieval literature, is normally entirely free of shame³⁶

We would have to agree with Duerr that Hartmann provided us here with an example of a man potentially being ashamed because of being exposed to a woman's erotic gazing of his body.³⁷ But by the same token, we cannot use this passage as evidence that courtly knights felt the same degree of shame as all people in every culture and in every historical period. First, Iwein would have felt deeply embarrassed because he would have been discovered in a shameful social position; next his nakedness is intensified through his dirty appearance, making him look like a black man (3505). Most important, however, the maid is not ashamed at all to massage Iwein's naked body, and she does not mind watching him secretly from the distance, which provides a double voyeuristic perspective, that is, her own and that of the audience. Ultimately, Hartmann has simply projected a most sophisticated and complex scene where the exposed body speaks

³⁵ For a broader discussion of voyeurism, though not with regard to this scene, either in Chrétien's *Yvain* or in Hartmann's *Iwein*, see A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 75–96.

³⁶ See, for example, the charming scene of Mai's and Beaflo's wedding night in the eponymous courtly-sentimental romance from ca. 1270. At first both spend a long time praying, until he finally carries her over to the bed, but then they are both embarrassed. Only when Mai's sexual instinct sets in do they both overcome their shame and join in love making. *Mai und Beaflo*. Herausgegeben, übersetzt, kommentiert und mit einer Einleitung von Albrecht Classen. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 6 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2006), 3607–702. The narrator explicitly discusses both their feelings of shame in that crucial moment, 3676–81.

³⁷ Duerr, *Nacktheit und Scham*, 31.

its own language as to the significance of cultural development. Iwein's nakedness does not indicate that medieval people felt less shame than people in the modern period, as Elias would have argued; and it does not indicate that people always and everywhere have felt the same degree of shame because it would be an anthropological constant. The key components rather prove to be that Iwein's lack of clothing and lack of reason reflect his being outside of courtly culture and his great need for help to recover his former status and position.³⁸

Similarly, Parzival was ashamed because he was not yet familiar with courtly culture and did not know how to operate properly even among and with the ladies. At the same time, both the ladies at Gurnemanz's court and the maid in Hartmann's romance are specifically characterized as erotically charged and most curious about the male naked body. This would not mean that we would have to discount countless other interpretations regarding this one scene as the cathartic moment of Iwein's transformation from an ostracized knight without care for his social context to a fully-fledged and responsible member of courtly society. However, this short episode demonstrates how we can use a literary text from the late twelfth century as evidence for fundamental anthropological and social-historical perspectives regarding people's interaction and the basic value system.

Irrespective of religious or ethical aspects influencing the women's curiosity in Wolfram's and Hartmann's text, whether they are simply concerned about the man's well-being or worried about his recovery from insanity, both narratives also suggest a strong erotic interest on the part of those gazing upon the male body. Their voyeurism, however, is also predicated on the sense of shame both on the part of the observed and the observer; otherwise the women's gazes would be meaningless.³⁹ Considering, then, these ambiguous positions with regard to the naked male body, neither Elias's global hypothesis about the increasing shame

³⁸ Surprisingly, Yeandle, 'schame', does not even consider this extreme case of a shameful situation. Other scholars have examined the religious dimension, political issues, and structural elements revealed in this episode, but the fact of Iwein's nakedness has actually not been of any significant concern for literary historians, see Will Hasty, *Adventures in Interpretation: The Works of Hartmann von Aue and Their Critical Reception*. *Literary Criticism in Perspective* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996), 89–90. Amazingly, Susan L. Clark, *Hartmann von Aue: Landscapes of Mind* (Houston: Rice University Press, 1989), 187–88, though acknowledging Iwein's nakedness while spending time in the forest, entirely disregards the critical moment when he is discovered by the three ladies, shamefully exposed in his nakedness.

³⁹ There is mostly research on men's scopical interests in women, particularly during the Middle Ages, see, for instance, Madeline H. Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopial Economy*. *The Middle Ages Series* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). Women's interest in men, strangely, has not been the topic of any serious research, as far as I can tell. But see Raymond Cormier, "Woman's Ways of Feeling: Lavinia's Innovative Discourse of/on/about Love in the *Roman d'Eneas*," *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: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, forthcoming), 111–27.

level since the end of the Middle Ages as a marker of an intensified cultural sensitivity and new level in the history of civilization, nor Duerr's anthropological claims concerning the timeless experience of shame among all peoples at all times hold water completely.

But let us take a look at two further examples, one of which Duerr had also examined, surprisingly not knowing anything about the actual author and the literary-historical context.⁴⁰ The thirteenth-century Middle High German didactic poet The Stricker composed two verse narratives that are predicated on the appearance of a naked men among courtly society.⁴¹ The Stricker was predominantly concerned with the well-being of people within their society, within marriage, with foolishness, proper behavior, ignorance, violence against women, lack of self-control, hypocrisy, and other virtues and vices.⁴² In "Der nackte Bote," contained in Codex 2885, today housed in the *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek*, Vienna, among five other manuscripts,⁴³ a lord orders his servant, or squire, to ride ahead and to announce his arrival at one of his estates. It is early evening in Fall, and the temperatures are already dropping, but the landlord of the estate has the habit of not heating his living quarters until the arrival of winter. However, at least the bathroom is heated, so all the women withdraw there to do their work ("werkghadem," 63), instead of using it for its original purpose. But the servant does not know about this arrangement, and when he learns from an imbecile child outside that the landlord would be found in the bathroom, he naively assumes that the latter is taking a bath and is being shorn by a barber. That is not the case at all, but the servant has not inquired further because he is not a very smart person ("ouch was er tumbes muotes," 20) and lacks in circumspection. Looking forward to a pleasant treatment in the heated

⁴⁰ Duerr, *Nacktheit und Scham*, 31–32; 355, note 24, with a wrong attribution to Hartmann von Aue. In general, any close examination of Duerr's sources and references would indicate considerable ignorance and naive reliance on secondary sources, which altogether led him to commit a number of mistakes, forcing us to conclude that since the basis of his arguments is so poorly built, the larger conclusions do not necessarily hold either. This is not to deny that his theoretical position has been deeply influential and fruitful, forcing us to reconsider Elias's position much more carefully.

⁴¹ Peter Strohschneider, "The Dual Economy of Medieval Life," *A New History of German Literature*, ed. David E. Wellbery and Judith Ryan (Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 112–16.

⁴² See my study "Love and Marriage and the Battle of Genders in the Stricker's *maeren*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* XCII, 1 (1991): 105–22.

⁴³ Der Stricker, *Verserzählungen*. Vol. I, ed. Hanns Fischer. 2nd, newly rev. ed. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 53 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967), 110–24. For recent studies on The Stricker, though without any direct bearing on our issue, see *Die Kleinepik des Strickers: Texte, Gattungstraditionen und Interpretationsprobleme*, ed. Emilio González und Victor Millet. *Philologische Studien und Quellen*, 199 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2006).

room, the servant quickly undresses and moves toward the bathroom, entirely naked, believing that he would meet the lord of the house there all by himself (65). At that moment he is attacked by a vicious dog, which he fends off with one of the bath fans that he had found lying outside.

These are important objects for the further understanding of the narrative development because they confirm his opinion that he is indeed about to enter the bath where everyone has taken off his/her clothing (67–68). Because of the dog, the servant has to turn the other way, fighting him off, and so he enters the bathroom backwards, quickly slamming the door shut, not aware of the actual situation that the entire family has refunctionalized this space to do their work in a comfortable temperature

The shocked women are deeply embarrassed being confronted by this naked man and cover their eyes (84–85). The landlord alone gazes at the servant, deeply troubled and irate, yelling at him, asking who he is and what his intention might be. The servant realizes only now his great transgression, being the sole person who is naked in the company of all the women and the head of the household, and so he feels deeply embarrassed. But he does not waste a second and immediately leaves the room, grabs his clothing, jumps on the horse and races off, back to his master. But the furious host follows him, ready to kill him so as to avenge the assumed humiliation that he had to suffer by the naked servant. Once the lord has learned about the fiasco, he follows the servant, gets hold of him and is about to strike him with his sword and to blind him (178–79), when he is finally told what had actually happened.

Only now does the truth come out, and both the servant's master and the landlord stand corrected in their rash reactions. The latter had believed that the servant had intended to rob him of his honor by exhibiting himself naked to the entire family as a deliberate affront (136–37). The lord, on the other hand, had believed the insulted man's words without questioning him about the circumstances, and only when the servant begs him for mercy and to allow him to tell his side of the story does he finally understand what had happened. Interestingly, the humiliated landlord comes to his assistance, encouraging the nobleman to let his servant speak first because he does not comprehend the latter's motivation to insult him and all the female members of his family (172–75).

After the servant has related all the details, especially referring to the dangerous dog and the foolish child, the lord is greatly relieved that he did not follow through with his first reaction because he would have become guilty of murder (198–201). Like the other man, who had been the victim of the alleged insult, he had reached the conclusion too quickly that the servant had performed that way because he wanted to belittle the entire family. The landlord who had felt so insulted at least had encouraged the nobleman to give his servant a chance to speak up (170–75). Remarkably, the narrator's final criticism, contained in his

epimythion, addresses this issue only, that is, the danger of jumping to quick conclusions without having verified or falsified any of the claims. The true conflict rests in the perception that the lord has of his servant's behavior, based on the superficial account by the other man. Afraid of having been dishonored by his own servant, he is more than willing to strike quickly and to blind him, obviously unjustly, as he later admits himself once he has learned the truth, full of relief not having committed a crime (203–04). The narrator concludes with general remarks about the danger of rash decisions and trusting first and mostly deceptive impressions ("wân," 213) that could take away one's honor (218–19).

Does this mean that The Stricker implied nakedness to be shameful? Although the narrative does not explicitly address this issue, which demonstrates how inappropriately Duerr interpreted the text for an entirely different purpose, almost alien to the story itself, it still allows us to raise the question why the servant's nakedness caused such an uproar. The problem is much more complex than the anthropologist's reading insinuates. If the lord and his family had taken a bath, that is, if they all had been naked for the purpose of cleansing themselves, nothing particular would have happened, and there would have certainly not been the kind of reaction as the one described in the narrative. Communal bathing, hence, if we can trust the relevance of this literary account, was a normal practice in the Middle Ages, and offering a guest a bath at the moment of his/her arrival was rather common, though this would not necessarily take away the erotic dimension of the exposed body under special circumstances.⁴⁴ But the exhibition of the naked body in public represented, as to be expected, a considerable degree of embarrassment for both sides, unless there were other circumstances, such as differences in social status.

At any rate, The Stricker presents a rather complex situation in his narrative because the servant would have been fully within the limits of cultural expectations if the host also would have used the bathroom for its original purpose, instead of spending time there with the entire family because it is the only heated space. But the servant enters the room walking backwards because he needs to defend himself against the dog, which makes the entire setting even worse for him, understandably forcing the landlord to believe that the young man's behavior was supposed to achieve an insult to his honor. But later the nobleman understands that his servant had not intended anything like that and had only been a victim of unfortunate circumstances. Nakedness as such, for the purpose of taking a bath, would not have been embarrassing because, as the narrative context indicates, all other bathers would have been naked as well. However,

⁴⁴ Danielle Régnier-Bohler, "Imagining the Self," *Revelations of the Medieval World*, ed. Georges Duby. *A History of Private Life*, II (1985; Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988), 313–94; here 365–66.

nakedness of only one person within the company of people all clothed and not ready for this encounter constitutes an insult, a breach of honor, indeed. Nevertheless, the poet does not really demonstrate any concern with the issue of the exposed body. The key issue, by contrast, proves to be his warning not to reach a conclusion too quickly and first to learn everything necessary about it before making any decision. The nobleman would have committed a grave sin if he had blinded the servant only on the basis of the words by the irate host. Of course, the narrative is predicated on the shameful experience of nakedness on the part of the servant, but the criticism and real concern are only directed at those people who judge without the full knowledge of all aspects leading to the crisis.

Another fascinating example of the clash between a naked man and the rest of society can be found in The Stricker's "Der nackte Ritter," in which the key person is involuntarily disrobed.⁴⁵ The reason is very simple, since the entire family is sitting in a heated room, together with their guest, a highly esteemed knight, who strangely enough does not want to take off his coat although he is visibly perspiring. The host has already made himself comfortable, and he cannot understand why the knight adamantly refuses to follow his example. To understand the context, we also need to keep in mind that the host's wife and his beautiful three daughters are present as well. They all harbor great liking for the guest and would love to honor him in any possible way. Although the host seriously admonishes the knight to relax and to take off his coat, the guest insists on keeping his coat on at all costs because it would be an "unzuht" (49; lack of education, or good manners) if he did so. The problem develops because of a critical misunderstanding between them, both highly concerned about courtly manners. The host emphasizes, "ich weiz wol, daz ir hövisch sît" (54; I know well that you are courtly), not comprehending at all what the knight's concern might be. So he secretly orders his servants to approach the knight from behind and to pull off the coat by surprise (63). This happens, but to the utter dismay of all present this exposes the knight in his nakedness because he does not wear anything underneath the coat, whether out of poverty or for any other reason. Everyone is deeply shocked, if not horrified about the embarrassing situation. It

⁴⁵ Der Stricker, *Verserzählungen*, 126–31; see also Christopher Young, "At the End of the Tale: Didacticism, Ideology and the Medieval German Märe," *Mittelalterliche Novellistik im europäischen Kontext: Kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektive*, ed. Mark Chinca, Timo Reuvekamp-Felber, and Christopher Young (Berlin: Schmidt; 2006), 24–47; here 39, emphasizes that the narrator ultimately intended to demonstrate how to maintain courtliness "by keeping the covers on." See also the radical social-critical interpretation offered by Otfried Ehrismann in his commentary to Der Stricker, *Erzählungen, Fabeln, Reden. Mittelhochdeutsche / Neuhochdeutsch*. Herausgeben, übersetzt und kommentiert (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1992), 258. He believes that the poet intended to reveal the false illusion of traditional aristocracy since the naked man is nothing but a "Scheinritter," whose exhibition also deconstructs the traditional class system that had supported him.

is embarrassing both for the host and his family and for the knight (71–79), but there is no solution, except hasty retreat, which the knight does, but the damage is done, and his formerly friendly relationship with the host is severely undermined: “und schiet sô zornlîche dan, / daz er dem wirte niemer mê / sô holt wart, als er was ê” (88–90; he left so filled with wrath that he was never again as friendly inclined to the host as before).

Again, does *The Stricker* truly examine the nature and meaning of nakedness, shame, and the erotic gaze? No one likes to see the knight naked, and they are perhaps even more embarrassed than him because they had been accustomed to regard the guest as a highly honorable person who could demand great respect (75–76). But it is not nakedness as such that creates this uproar. And there is no sense of eroticism here. On the contrary, it is embarrassing to discover that this worthy knight is obviously so poor that he cannot even afford pants and a shirt. Although the host had tried his best to make the guest feel comfortable and at home, he had involuntarily exposed him so badly that their relationship is destroyed henceforth.

In his epimythion, the narrator underscores that all hosts should be more sensitive to their guests' explicit wishes and not force anything upon them (91–94). All good service and gifts would be a waste if they are forced upon a person. According to *The Stricker*, the person who imposes his service upon another would cause more damage than do good. Of course, the knight's naked appearance leads to a deep sense of shame on all sides, but this would not have a direct bearing on the general discussion whether medieval culture was equally sensitive to shame as the modern world (Duerr), or whether it was less inhibited than we are today (Elias), which in itself seems to be a highly questionable notion.⁴⁶

The really important issue that matters here more than anything else is the proper courtly behavior, the need to achieve a good communication, to pay respect to another person's wishes, and to be tolerant of unexpected behavior. In fact, the host seems to have more reason to feel ashamed than the knight because he imposed himself improperly on him and exposed the knight's naked body to the gaze of his entire family. Nakedness as such is not the topic of this narrative. However, to appear naked suddenly and without one's own free will in an embarrassing context constitutes the core issue of *The Stricker's* interest. As Danielle Régnier-Bohler observes, “The male nude was always seen as an exile from a world of authority and order, or as a destroyer or opponent of order,

⁴⁶ Hinz, *Der Zivilisationsprozess*, 282–95. He also points out that despite increasing public exposure of the body, new unwritten rules come into play today, 288: “Entsprechend dem stillschweigenden Verhaltenscode am Strand dürfen Männer barbusige Frauen nicht zu direkt, zu lange, zu intensiv oder gar lüstern anschauen.”

nudity signifies anarchy Nudity is a transitional stage . . . male regress toward savagery, abandoning the group's cultural signs."⁴⁷

A lot depends on the context, on the specific situation, the social status of the naked man, and also the generic context in which this naked person appears. This can be nicely illustrated, finally, with several examples from the poetic work of the South-Tyrolean poet Oswald von Wolkenstein (1376/1377–1445) who included a number of songs that would either have to be interpreted as pornographic, or as marital songs simply for private entertainment.⁴⁸ Probably because of his utter disregard for public opinions about his songs, Oswald was in a unique position to compose his songs as it pleased him. In "Ain tunckle farb" (Kl. 33), for instance, he laments about his absent wife, Gret, which makes him extremely uncomfortable at night. Whenever he wakes up and realizes that she is not with him in bed, he experiences a great shock insofar as a large rat frightens him: "Kom, höchster schatz! mich schreckt ain ratz mit grossem tratz" (30; Come, greatest treasure! I am frightened by a rat with a large claw), which refers to nothing but his own genital. Imagining, in contrast, her presence, he describes how the bed would creak from all the movement in their intense love making (34–36). Of course, the poet presents himself alone in bed in the middle of the night, but the open discussion of his sexual desires in a song that would ultimately be presented in public, even if only within the small circle of friends and relatives, indicates an uncomplicated attitude toward the naked body and hence sexuality.

In "Wol auff, wol an" (Kl. 75), we encounter the poet taking a bath together with his wife, surrounded by a Spring-like environment where every creature and plant exudes joy and happiness. The poet openly talks about his wife and himself playing with each other's body, rubbing, touching, and playing together freely and without any constraints, especially free of all sense of shame. The song leaves nothing unspoken and presents in dramatic fashion a highly erotic scene which deftly contradicts the claims by the anthropologist, Duerr, without necessarily supporting the assumptions by the sociologist, Elias, that here we still find a testimony of medieval culture, whereas such songs would be impossible in the Renaissance: "lass uns kuttren: / 'wascha, maidli, / mir das schaidli!' / 'reib mich, knäblin, / umb das näblin! / hilfst du mir, / leicht vachir dir das rätzli'" (33–39; let us flirt: 'wash, young woman, my head!' Rub me, young man, around my belly

⁴⁷ Régnier-Bohler, "Imagining the Self," 368.

⁴⁸ For a literary-historical introduction, see Alan Robertshaw, *Oswald von Wolkenstein: The Myth and the Man*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 178 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1977); for a historical-critical edition, see *Die Lieder Oswalds von Wolkenstein*, ed. Karl Kurt Klein. Musikanhang von Walter Salmen, 3rd ed., neu bearbeitete und erweiterte Auflage von Hans Moser, Norbert Richard Wolf und Notburga Wolf. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 55 (1962; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1987). For a critical, unfortunately rather biased and selective review of Oswald research, see Johannes Spicker, *Oswald von Wolkenstein: Die Lieder*. Klassiker-Lektüren, 10 (Berlin: Schmidt, 2007).

button! If you help me, I might perhaps grab your little rat [penis]). And in “Ain graserin” (Kl. 76), directly based on the traditional genre of the pastourelle, we come across a young man who offers his help to a grass-cutting woman. In preparation for the labor he has whetted his little ax to make it stand up, which leaves nothing to guess, as their short exchange signals: “zuck nicht, mein schatz! ‘simm nain ich, lieber Jense!” (18; ‘do not jerk, my treasure! ‘Oh no, my dear Jack, I for sure will not’).⁴⁹ The humor of this song is predicated on the direct gaze on the nude body, which would find numerous parallels particularly in the rich narrative literature composed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵⁰

In a famous *Medieval Housebook* from ca. 1480, recently edited by Christoph Graf zu Waldburg Wolfegg, we find many illustrations that confirm our findings, in specific contradiction to the claims made by Elias and Duerr both regarding the fundamental paradigm shift (Elias) and the allegedly fundamental, unchanging conditions in man’s attitude toward nakedness and sexuality. The artists present a wide arrange of everyday scenes characteristic of an aristocratic lifestyle, and so also a bathhouse in which men and women spend time together in the tub, debating, for instance, or listening to music. Their naked bodies are clearly visible, but there is no clear sense of shamefulness or moral impropriety. Of course, here we are dealing, as in all other cases, with an artistic projection, but as such it obviously culled from rather common concepts, even if only in a dream-like setting. At any rate, it would likewise not confirm Elias’s theory regarding unabashed acceptance of nudity during the Middle Ages in contrast to later periods with much stricter, shame controlled rules determining normal, real life. Despite the seemingly open display of nudity, that assumption is not quite correct.⁵¹ Certainly, we can gaze into the bathroom, and the public seems to be

⁴⁹ See also the contribution to this volume by Rasma Lazda-Cavers who examines important allusions to oral sex in Oswald’s poetry, shedding interesting light on how much a careful and thorough analysis of specific poetic images can reveal about double-entendres, innuendoes, and private experiences obliquely expressed in poems and songs for public performance.

⁵⁰ See my discussion of this phenomenon in the Introduction to this volume, pertaining, for instance, to Martin Montanus, Wolfgang Lindener, or Giovanni Straparola. See also my article, “Didactic Laughter through the Literary Discourse: Martin Montanus as Entertainers and Social Critics. Chaos Theory or Epistemological Enlightenment Through Laughter?,” to appear in: *The Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*.

⁵¹ Elias, *Über den Prozeß*, Vol. 1, 287–301, commenting, for instance, on the picture for Mars, erroneously believes that “Hier wird einfach erzählt, wie der Ritter die Welt sieht und fühlt” (293; the narrator simply tells how a knight sees the world and how he feels about it). This applies, for him at least, to the other images as well. Duerr, *Nacktheit*, 37, with respect to the picture for Venus, argues that the space with the bath is not a geometric one, but a space with meaning (“Bedeutungsraum”) (see Elias, 294). But this does not imply that the interest in sexuality and nudity was less prevalent and displayed publicly. Nevertheless, we would be equally wrong to conclude that hence the attitudes toward nakedness and shame in the Middle Ages were

present as well, as documented by various entertainers, such as a musician, perhaps also a singer. Nevertheless, it is an exclusive space, separated from the hard life outside, hence a dreamlike setting, almost comparable to a utopian scene for an aristocratic audience.

By the same token there is no necessity or any convincing reason to accept Duerr's claim, indirectly reiterated by Waldburg Wolfegg in 1998, that the artist here presented a brothel for the high class.⁵² Despite their somewhat fictional character, the illustrations of the various planets, certainly allegorical-astrological in some sense, repeatedly show scenes of nude couples, such as in the plate for Venus, where we have a setting almost identical to the one described by Oswald von Wolkenstein. Whereas many noble people are ambulating around, some are dancing, and others are playing music, in the lower left corner a naked woman steps into a tub where a naked man is welcoming her lovingly, while a go-between is waiting outside with food and drink for their refreshment.⁵³ The art work contained in this *Housebook* seems rather unusual at first sight, but it can be easily situated in long-standing and long-lasting traditions of medieval manuscript illustrations for erotic love poetry, such as the *Codex Manesse*.

In fact, examining late-medieval and early-modern German and European literature, and also the arts, we would actually discover, perhaps not so surprisingly, an ever growing corpus of highly erotic texts and explicitly sexual, and at times even "pornographic" images, whether we think of Heinrich Wittenwiler, Poggio Bracciolini, the chronicler Froben Christof von Zimmern, Gianfrancesco Straparola, Martin Montanus, and many others, and so also complimentary drawings, paintings, and even sculpture.⁵⁴ Neither nudity nor open sexuality was far away from people's minds, and they deliberately, perhaps frivolously, focused on countless scenes involving nakedness, sexuality, and many other forms of cultural transgression, if we would really be justified in labeling the phenomenon as such.

If we continued with our investigation into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we would quickly discover a continuous stream of rather outlandish, grotesque, or plainly sexual, at times even pornographic art, numerous times involving naked men as well, or naked couples caught in the act itself, as best

considerably different than in the modern world. See the illustration in Gertrud Blaschitz's contribution to this volume.

⁵² Christoph Graf Zu Waldburg Wolfegg, *Venus and Mars: The World of the Medieval Housebook* (Munich and New York: Prestel, 1998), 45. The illustration is on 46–47. See also a copy as Fig. 10 in Gertrud Blaschitz's contribution to this volume.

⁵³ *Venus and Mars*, 36–37. See Duerr's interpretation, 34–37, which exhausts itself in rejecting Elias's theory, without reaching any new perspective on its own.

⁵⁴ Some of them even played with the mythical idea of the chastity belt, see Albrecht Classen, *The Medieval Chastity Belt: A Myth-Making Process. The New Middle Ages* (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave and MacMillan, 2007).

illustrated by the notorious *L'Academie des Dames, ou les sept entretiens galants d'Aloisia*—allegedly a discussion between the courtly lady Aloisia Sigea, or Luisa Sigea (b. ca. 1530), and the lawyer for the Parliament of Grenoble, Nicolas Chorier (1622–1692), first translated by the Dutch scholar Joannes Meursius (1613–1653) from Spanish into Latin.⁵⁵ It cannot be the place here to list the vast corpus of corresponding erotic texts and art work from the entire early modern period, and it would actually not be required to revisit this vast area of interest in the sexual, hence the human body as a scopophilic, erotic object to confirm how much shame as a moral force cannot be simply used for anthropological arguments of the kind proposed by Duerr.

At closer examination, we can also observe that the claims held by Elias with regard to the cultural development do not stand up to careful scholarly criticism because educational efforts, cultural constraints and demands on the individual, highly advanced features of a civilizing process that foreshadowed early modern culture by several hundred years can already be discovered as early as in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.⁵⁶ Moreover, turning to the early Middle Ages, we discover countless examples of apotropaic figures at church buildings all over Europe, many of them male, with fully exposed bodies, often with a specific focus on the genitals.⁵⁷ Of course, these had a rather different function than high and late-medieval references to naked people taking a bath together. Nevertheless, the common denominator proves to be the generally more relaxed attitude toward the naked body which was treated as an important signifier for a range of purposes free of shame.

Nevertheless, the open and unabashed interest in the sexual, the naked body, hence in the erotic in its full physicality was never completely suppressed, if this term might even capture the true sense of the efforts by the authorities to control public mores since, roughly speaking, the sixteenth century. On the contrary, as Count Froben Christoph von Zimmern (1519–1566) mirrored in the plentiful tales contained in his voluminous chronicle, and as Judith J. Hurwich now observes, “Although the authors of these tales sometimes suggest that a cuckolded husband might take revenge on his rival by seducing the latter’s own wife, they rarely invoke the motif of the husband killing the lover Not only premarital sex but extramarital sex is treated in the tales as essentially comic; it may cause social conflict, but it does not lead to fatal consequences.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Classen, *The Medieval Chastity Belt*, 142–44.

⁵⁶ See the contributions to *Zivilisationsprozesse: Zu Erziehungsschriften in der Vormoderne*, ed. Rüdiger Schnell (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2004).

⁵⁷ Anthony Weir and James Jerman, *Images of Lust: Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches* (London and New York: Routledge, 1986), 80–99. See also the contribution to this volume by Christina Weising.

⁵⁸ Judith J. Hurwich, *Noble Strategies: Marriage and Sexuality in the Zimmern Chronicle*. Sixteenth

We could also add that for him, like for many, if not most, of his contemporaries, and also the subsequent generations, the naked body was not necessarily the object of shame and embarrassment. The interest in sexuality itself has continued, and actually seems to have increased, to be a matter of great interest that is publicly debated and dealt with in often rather shocking openness—especially today. Basically, it seems time to dismiss some of the grandiose theories espoused first by Elias, then by Duerr, and to return to the evidence in plain view and to examine it in a sober, objective fashion. Sure, there are basic facts common to all people, and sure, there is a constant historical process going on, since we all evolve, though not necessarily to the better.⁵⁹

However, ‘civilization’ is a rather pompous, if not problematic, word, and to idealize the present in contrast to the past along those lines suddenly reveals itself as a rather superficial approach to cultural history.⁶⁰ After all, scopophilia, voyeurism, crude sexuality, pornography, and the simple interest in the naked body have continued to intrigue audiences and spectators throughout time.⁶¹ Certainly, external pressures to suppress sexuality, whether through legal measures or religious and ethical forces, by way of the police or public criticism intensified throughout the centuries, but the discourse concerning this conflict can be found already in the early Middle Ages and was not necessarily a marker of modernity.⁶²

By the same token, Duerr was also right in arguing that shame and embarrassment are fundamental experiences in human life at all times and in all cultures. However, as soon as we investigate specific texts, images, and social aspects and trace their context, development or historical continuity, we face serious problems both with the sociological approach and with the anthropological analysis. Nakedness was a significant problem also in the Middle Ages, and

Century Essays & Studies, 75 (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2006), 180.

⁵⁹ Hans Peter Duerr, in his follow-up volume, *Intimität. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß*, 2 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990), defends himself energetically against the charges by the Elias partisans by pointing out, for instance, the increased control of public mores by the guilds and the urban authorities (20–24). However, here he simply turns to the penal system and does not consider that its existence, in the first place, confirms the prevalence of transgressive acts and the continued open discourse and practice of sexuality at various social levels.

⁶⁰ See also the excellent review of the key issues involved in the entire debate about the history of sexuality by Franz X. Eder, “‘Sexualunterdrückung’ oder ‘Sexualisierung’? Zu den theoretischen Ansätzen der ‘Sexualitätsgeschichte’,” *Privatisierung der Triebe?: Sexualität in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Daniela Erlach, Markus Reisenleitner, and Karl Vocelka. *Frühneuzeit-Studien*, 1 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 1994), 7–29.

⁶¹ Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur*, chapters 13 and 14, 249–82.

⁶² See the contribution to this volume by Peter Dinzelbacher. For the case from the tenth century, see *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. with an introd. and notes by Paolo Squatriti. *Medieval Texts in Translations* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 11–14.

because of its complex functions in public and private, in the religious and the literary realm, it cannot serve well as a benchmark to determine the difference between one cultural-historical period and another. In some cases we observe clear expressions of shame, in others the situation is quite different. Both poets and artists delighted in playing with allusions to the naked body because it added intriguing new perspectives regarding the individual's personal development, his or her status within society, and the public attitude toward the mighty and powerful, on the one hand, and the poor and marginalized members on the other.