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Temporality in Ancient and Medieval Literatures

1 Dimensions of "Narrative Temporality"

It is a rather uncontroversial claim that narration and temporality are intricately intertwined. According to the standard definition of narration as the "representation of a sequence of events" (cf. among many Genette 1982, 127), it is the temporal succession of events (in the sense of a general "change of state" as a minimal condition of narration; Schmid [2005] 2014, 3, but see 12–19, and Hühn in this volume, on the discussion of which properties of changes of state define narrative eventfulness) that constitutes the fabric of narrative texts. In many accounts, temporality has therefore been regarded as the basic form and foundational source of all narration (see Lessing's famous dictum that "the sequence of time is the field of the poet"; [1766] 2006, 129; see also Müller [1947] 2011, 72; Ricoeur 1980, 169). Furthermore, narration and temporality have been seen as linked together under the common assumption that the represented stories are prototypically past, since telling a story presupposes that the events already happened (see Cohn 2000, 96, for an overview and critical discussion). In addition, time is also an important ordering force in the storyworld.

Temporality is thus not a clearly defined category, but a semantic domain that both constitutes and affects the structure of narration as well as the content of the story. In order to compare the dimensions of "narrative temporality" in different stages of language and different cultures, it is necessary to distinguish between two different dimensions of narrative temporality:

(1) the temporal relations between events, which roughly comprises Genette's (1972) subcategories of "order," "frequency," and "duration" of events (section 3); and
(2) the temporal relationship between the telling frame, constituted by the communicative situation between narrator and the (fictive, implied, or real) recipients, and the represented storyworld (section 4).

Apart from these structural aspects of narrative temporality, diachronic narratology is furthermore concerned with

(3) the role of time within the content of the story (section 5).

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2 Concepts of Time

Within the controversial discussion on the phenomenology of time, there are in particular two temporal conceptualizations which are discussed since antiquity: an absolute concept and a relative concept of time. The absolute concept of time is based on the assumption that time is a cosmological force that determines the succession of events in an absolute order of "before – simultaneous – after" relations. According to this view, time exists independently from its potential observer and time relations between events are permanent: within the common conceptualization of linear time, the discovery of America, for example, is always localized "before" the French Revolution. While the absolute conceptualization of time allows for the description of one event with respect to its intrinsic relation to another event, it does not allow for a description of an event as "past," "present," or "future." Terms like "past" always imply the question "'past' in reference to what?" and, as such, an observer's viewpoint from which the temporal interval can be evaluated: the French Revolution is "past" as seen from our present standpoint, but it was "future" for Columbus. According to this conceptualization, time is dependent on an observer's mind (see Störmer-Caysa 2007 and Kragl 2013 on similar conceptions of time by Aristotle and Augustine).

Narratives comprise both observer-dependent and observer-independent aspects. They prototypically invoke a succession of events in terms of "before – after," but they are, at the same time, observer-dependent since the events are also located with respect to the actual speech act and the viewpoints represented within the story. While in everyday discourse, the primary reference point for temporal localization is constituted by the actual speaker of the utterance, narrative events can (in addition to their localization with respect to the narrating act involving the speaker and the recipients) be seen as "past," "present," or "future" from both the narrator's and the protagonists' viewpoints (see Meister 2011, 198) and thus integrate a forward and backward view on the story. The question "'past' in reference to what?" is thus particularly relevant for narratives.

3 The Succession of Events

The order of events has been subject of investigation in many studies on narrative temporality (but see Werner 2018, 45, for a critique of the dominance of chronological accounts of "time" in narratology). Traditionally, the order of events has been investigated with respect to deviances between the "natural" succession of events of the story and their "artificial" representation in the discourse, but this view has

been challenged. On the one hand, the sequence of events has been seen as the result of general narrative processes like ordering and the selection of information (see Schmid [2005] 2014; Meister 2011, 190–191) and thus not as a temporal phenomenon in the first instance. On the other hand, it has also been criticized that there is no "natural" sequence of events given a priori, which is then transformed into a story. This is seen in the fact that not every narration makes it possible to reconstruct the temporal timeline of the narrative events (see also Werner 2018, 77), and not all narrative information can be brought unambiguously into a temporal plotline. Furthermore, sequentiality (in terms of "earlier – later") and temporal localization (in terms of "past," "present," and "future") are closely linked together. Achronological representations of narrative events should thus not be seen as "deviations" but rather investigated with respect to their narrative function.

3.1 Ancient Greek Epics

Narratives in Ancient Greek (AG) have been said to follow, in general, a rather chronological order of events. According to de Jong and Nünlist (2007, 505), this is even true for narratives that are structured according to the principle of ring-composition (i.e., the ordering of thematic units according to the pattern A-B-C-B-A). However, there is also wide variation both within AG and Latin narrations (Grethlein 2019, 171). The Homeric epics, in particular, are examples of narratives that do not represent a story in a chronological way. Neither the *Iliad* nor the *Odyssey* start from the beginning, but in medias res, and focus on a short period of several days, whereas the Trojan War and the journey of Ulysses stretch over a time span of multiple years. In order to present the events outside the main plot, the epics make frequent use of analepses, prolepses, and the technique of foreshadowing. In the *Odyssey*, Ulysses's adventures prior to the main plot are narrated by the protagonist himself in an extensive flashback which stretches over four books (9–12). Within the *Iliad*, the actual end of the story is not told but only anticipated by analepses and foreshadowing.

Both analepses and prolepses are important narrative strategies which are used in different functions. Analepses can refer both to events that have been described earlier within the story (internal analepsis) and to the "epic plupast", i.e., the past that preceded the main story (Grethlein 2012, 15). While internal analepses in Homer are usually infrequent and brief (de Jong 2007, 20), external analepses are frequently used to provide information about the background of characters and objects that are relevant for the actual story now. A famous example is the background story about Ulysses's bow (*Odyssey* 21.11–41) when it is presented to the suitors who are competing for Penelope. Background stories about the protagonists

prototypically occur in obituaries that praise the hero's life after his death in the storyworld. In some cases, the serialization of analepses can form a complete story, like the story about the returns of Agamemnon and Menelaus in the *Odyssey*. While this use is not frequent in the Homeric epics, the technique is extensively used in the late antique novel *Aethiopica* by Heliodorus, where analepses are essential in order to reconstruct the action that precedes the massacre at the beginning of the novel.

Analepses in the Homeric epics can be made both by the narrator and by the protagonists (as in the case of Ulysses). The same can be said about prolepses that anticipate the posterior events in the story line. Narratorial prolepses often evoke dramatic irony, since they offer information about the events to come that cannot be foreseen by the protagonists within the storyworld. Within the Homeric epics, the prolepsis is often indicated by the verb μέλλω (intend to) + inf., which within the prolepsis denotes an ineluctable fate that is contrasted with the intention of the protagonist (de Jong 2007, 25; Bakker 2005). As Dolon leaves the Trojan camp in order to spy on the Greeks (*Iliad* 10.336–337), the narrator adds that "in fact he *was never to return*" (ἄρ᾽ ἔμελλεν ἐλθὼν) from the ships and to bring his report back to Hector's (trans. de Jong 2007, 25). The dramatic irony can further be emphasized by narratorial comments on the protagonists' unawareness of their destiny (see e.g., Grethlein 2010, 320–-322, on the foreshadowing of Patroclus's death).

In contrast to the narrator's anticipations, prolepses made within the storyworld are less reliable but contribute to the foreshadowing of future events in a similar way. A famous example is the conversation in which Andromache bids Hector not to enter the battlefield (*Iliad* 6.407–465). Both Andromache's worries that her husband could die and Hector's worries about the future of his wife after the fall of Troy foreshadow the upcoming events, but Hector's speech still does not exclude the possibility of a bright future for his son. After Hector's death, however, Andromache's lament pictures the fall of Troy and foresees quite accurately the future that is destined to her son, although represented as a guess ("as I think"):

> he [. . .] who is still a child, he, *as I think, will never reach his youth* [οὐδέ μιν οἴω ἥβην ἵξεσθαι]. Because beforehand, this city *will be destroyed* [πέρσεται] completely, as you have perished, the guardian, who has kept the wives and children safe, who will quickly be held in the hollow ships, I as well among them. You my child will follow me and be put to do shameful tasks, working for some relentless master, or some Achaian *will grasp you by the arm and throw you from the tower to mournful death* [ῥίψει χειρὸς ἑλὼν ἀπὸ πύργου λυγρὸν ὄλεθρον]. (*Iliad* 24.725–745)

The figural prolepsis serves more than one goal. Next to an emphatic representation of the grief of Hector's wife, it pictures the events that follow the end of the war as is common practice in antiquity: the slavery of women and killing of small children. Furthermore, it refers to the individual fate of her son Astyanax who is, according to traditional knowledge, thrown from the walls after the fall of Troy. Since the

end of the Trojan War was commonly known to the audience, the reference to Astyanax's death will have been received as more than just a vague guess by Andromache. As such, the prolepsis contributes to a dense network of the foreshadowing of the fall of Troy (see also Grethlein 2019, 171). Furthermore, the passage emphasizes Hector's glory as the most important guardian of Troy, since it is due to his death that the ruin of Troy becomes inevitable. The example thus makes obvious that prolepses are more than temporal deviations from iconic representation of events, but constitute a narrative strategy that serves multiple goals.

3.2 Middle High German Epics

Analepses and prolepses are also common in the Middle High German (MHG) epics in different forms and functions. Next to smaller analepses which provide missing information about anterior events that are of relevance for the current story now, there are also more extensive ones which repeat prior parts of the story from a different perspective. The narrative effect of these "repetitive analepses" is apparent when comparing Virgil's *Aeneid* with the medieval representations of the story, the Old French *Roman d'Eneas* and the MHG *Eneasroman* by Heinrich von Veldeke. In the Virgilian version, the background of the main story – i.e., the events after the fall of Troy and Aeneas's flight – is narrated when Aeneas has arrived in Carthage and tells his story to Dido. Within the medieval versions, the story is narrated twice, i.e., chronologically at the beginning of the story by the narrator and a second time by Aeneas in Carthage. Yet the second analepsis is not just a repetition but elaborates subtle contrasts between narratorial and figural perspective (Fromm 1996; Zimmermann 2017, 93). Within the medieval epics, analepses can thus also be used as a narrative strategy of multiperspectivization.

Prolepses are also used frequently in the MHG epics. The *Nibelungenlied*, for example, contains about a hundred prolepses. They often do not anticipate a specific event, but predict a complication or the bad outcome of an event in rather stereotyped forms: "dâ von im *sît* vil liebe und ouch vil leide geschach" (*Later on*, as a result, much love and also much harm was happening to him; *Nibelungenlied*, 138.4). Linguistically, the prolepses are indicated by the preterit, i.e., by the same tense form that also denotes the sequence of the events in the main plotline, often combined with adverbials like *sint*/*sider* (later on). These adverbials are not explicit markers of the future, but can also be used to indicate the next step in the successive progression of events. This linguistic pattern of prolepses is also frequent in the later epics. In the courtly epics, there is further the possibility to mark the prolepsis by the construction *sollte* + inf. (literally "should," proleptic meaning "was to do"; Zeman 2018).

Next to explicit prolepses, the technique of foreshadowing also is frequently used in the heroic epics. The most famous example in the *Nibelungenlied* is Kriemhild's dream about a falcon which is torn to death. The dream interpretation is given by her mother, who supposes that the falcon represents Kriemhild's later husband and thus foreshadows his early death. Dreams and prophesies are also frequently used in later narrations in order to foreshadow future events. In the *Prosalancelot*, dreams and prophesies constitute important parts of the narrative since they not only anticipate further events but also motivate the actions of the heroes (Klinger 2012). However, whereas the truthfulness of dreams and prophesies is taken as a given in heroic epics like the *Nibelungenlied*, the validity of dreams and dream interpretation is put into question in narratives like the *Prosalancelot* (Fuchs-Jolie 2012). When Galahot dreams about two hearts, of which one turns into a leopard and springs away while the other dries up and dies (*Prosalancelot* II, 2,10), he consults a number of prophets. Their interpretation – Lancelot represents the leopard who will leave Galahot, who himself will die afterwards – is proven true within the further line of the story and can thus be seen as a reliable prophecy. Lancelot, however, questions the validity of dreams and criticizes dream interpretation as an unmanly practice: "'Dreams are often wrong', said Lancelot [to Galahot], 'and a man with such a brave heart like you should not worry about dreams. Women should believe in them and people with weak hearts" (*Prosalancelot* II, 2,11). While the proleptic narrative pattern in general is thus comparable to the use of prolepses in the heroic epics, the uncertainty about the future becomes a topic within the content of the story. Proleptic narrative strategies are thus not pure temporal phenomena but are also dependent on the epistemological precondition concerning the hero's capacity to influence his fate.

3.3 The Order of Multiple Plotlines

3.3.1 Ancient Greek Epics

Next to the sequence of events within a story, the temporal order between episodes and subplots has also been discussed for narratives in the ancient and medieval epics. For AG, the investigation of the order of multiple plotlines is closely connected to the debate on "Zielinski's Law," also known as the "continuity of time principle" and "law of succession" (Zielinski 1899–1901). It states that within a narrative, two simultaneous plotlines have to be represented in a sequential order since they cannot be perceived at one time. While this could be said about all verbal narratives in general (see also Seeck 1998 for discussion), Zielinski's argument refers to the specific way the Homeric epics deal with it: according to him, the Homeric epics

are characterized by a forward movement that prevents the narrator from going backward in order to retrace a parallel plot of events. In consequence, simultaneous events are represented successively, often without any indication that they should be thought of occurring simultaneously.

Zielinski's law has been subject to controversial discussions and continues to be debated (see e.g., Rengakos 1995; Scodel 2008; Pozdnev 2016). While earlier research focused particularly on the reconstruction of the temporal relationships between different events in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as well as on the question of whether Homer's representations might be a reflection of an "undeveloped" concept of time in general (Fränkel 1931; for detailed critiques, see Krischer 1971; Rengakos 1995), Zielinski's observations are nowadays seen not primarily as a temporal, but rather as a narrative problem linked to scene shift and story progression. The main characteristic is seen in the fact that Homer is obliged to a poetic convention that foregrounds the flow of the narration as a single strand, whereas in later novels, changes of episodes are frequently indicated by formulas like "in the meantime [. . .]" (see Fludernik 2003), which invoke a step back in narrative time (i.e., Zielinski's "zurückgreifende Methode") and thus interrupt the sequence of narrated time (Rengakos 1995, 9).

Several interpretations have been suggested for this specific treatment of episode change. Zielinski himself has argued that the representation of the narrated events corresponds to the way the poet perceived them before his virtual eyes. As such, the Homeric epics seem more inclined to a representation of a homogeneous, continuous flow of narration than explicit indications of the temporal relationship between the events. The argument of "the seeing poet" is also found in studies that consider the Homeric convention as a result of the oral predisposition in ancient Greece. According to Bakker (1997, 2011), the primary temporal reference point for the Homeric epics is not the actual story now but the "time in which a live narrative unfolds as a flow of live spoken language" (Bakker 2011, 877). Similarly, Kawashima has argued that the Homeric epics establish a storyworld that subsists wholly in memory and exists only when actualized within the singer's performance (Kawashima 2008, 115). Since time does not progress in a backgrounded subworld, it is possible to simply return to a character when the narrative requires it. Subplots in parallel narrative worlds to the main plot thus do not exist independently, but are only actualized when they come into the "vision" of the poet. A famous example is book 14 of the *Iliad*, where the narrator refocuses on Nestor, who is still drinking from his cup like he was in 11.624–643 (Scodel 2008, 111). This and similar examples have been seen as evidence that the Homeric narrator is "less concerned with temporal realism than with narrative effect and thematic continuity" (112).

Furthermore, it has been argued that Zielinski's "Law" can be reduced to a general lack of explicit marking of temporal relations (Pozdnev 2016). In contrast

to other ancient epics like Virgil's *Aeneid*, where explicit markers like conjunctions and adverbials are used even when the temporal order is clear from context, both parallel and successive events in the Homeric epics can be connected by the same particle, δέ (Pozdnev 2016, 6). Whether the represented strands follow each other or have to be thought as occurring at the same time has thus to be conjectured.

3.3.2 Medieval Epics

Similar observations have also been made for the heroic epic in MHG. In the tradition of Zielinski (1899–1901), the *Nibelungenlied* has been described as an example of a "single-stranded" story representation. Like the Homeric epics, it has been characterized by its forward movement which desists from the representation of parallel subplots, and it is rarely the case that the simultaneity of events is relevant for the main action. Instead, parallel plots are oriented to the "story now" of the main plot (Steinhoff 1964, 91–92).

Within the medieval courtly epics, metanarrative comments by the narrator ("How do I now begin my speaking that I prepare the dignified protagonist Tristan [. . .] in such a way that one would like to hear it gladly?"; Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, 4591–4595), narrator's dialogues with allegoric instances ("Oh, it is you, Lady Aventiure, how is the dear hero doing?"; Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, 9.7), and so on indicate a general reflection on the representation of the story and on its temporal order in particular (see Reichlin 2019, 182). In general, however, the courtly epics have also been classified as single-stranded. Arguments have been seen in the fact that supporting actors and side stages disappear as soon as the hero on their journey has moved away (Störmer-Caysa 2007, 79–83.; Reichlin 2019, 188). In contrast, the *Prosalancelot*, the first romance in prose in MHG, displays a more complex network of multiple strands (Ruberg 1965, 129). Changes in characters and places are often indicated by formulaic expressions, which lead to the illusion of the coexistence of parallel narrated subworlds: "Now we have to leave this talk about my lord Gawain and his companions and speak further a while about King Arthur" (*Prosalancelot*, II, 25a,10). In the courtly epics, the order of narrative information can also be oriented towards the protagonist's knowledge about the storyworld. An example is Parzival's adventure in the Castle of the Holy Grail, where the hero does not know that he has to ask a question in order to free the city from a heavy curse (Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, 5.239.11–240.9). The narrator only inserts an unspecific regret about the fact that Parzival did not ask. Apart from that, the reader remains uninformed about the background story until Parzival learns it from a conversation with Sigune.

The chronological order of events can also remain underspecified. This is particularly true for narrative medieval genres like the adventure and the picaresque novel that are characterized by an episodic structure. Though picaresque novels like *Till Eulenspiegel* depict phases of a biographical life of one main character, the temporal macrostructure remains weak as the single units could be arranged in a different order without leading to chronological or causal disruptions, or even stand for themselves (Kipf 2014, 77). The transition between the different episodes is often marked by temporal clauses that indicate a temporal progression ("After he had accomplished *x*, he continued his journey and came to place *y*"). Such expressions can be seen as rather formulaic markers of scene shift whose temporal meaning has lost its importance.

3.4 The Sequence of Events in Diachrony

In sum, both ancient and medieval narratives display a whole arsenal of narrative techniques that deviate from pure chronological storytelling. Achronological representations are not restricted to the epic texts but are also found in, for example, tragedy like Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* and historiography (see de Jong and Nünlist 2007). Analepsis and prolepsis as strategies of information selection thus seem to be a common feature of narratives per se.

Their functions, however, depend on various factors like the content of the story and the precondition with respect to the eschatological precondition of human life in time. Within the *Iliad*, prolepses and foreshadowing emphasize the discrepancy between the heroes' intentions and the outcome of fate, and as such, highlight "human fragility" (Grethlein 2012, 32). The *Odyssey*, in contrast, though it shares the same template for viewing human life in time, i.e. "notably a general feeling of insecurity and the belief that crimes provoke divine punishment" (Grethlein 2012, 32), focuses on the successful return of Ulysses and does not display the same tragic irony as the *Iliad*. Furthermore, the representation of events is dependent on narrative conventions within different genre traditions. Within the medieval tradition, there are significant differences between heroic and courtly epics. Whereas the protagonists of the heroic epic are powerless in face of *Fatum* and part of a story that implements itself, the events within the courtly epic are intricately determined by the hero whose action, though in a way predestined, is the prerequisite for the succession of events (Philipowski 2007, 55–56). The representation of the order of events is thus dependent on several factors, without adding up to a clear line of development.

What has been seen as a more general diachronic tendency is a change with respect to the representation of multiple plotlines. Both AG and medieval heroic

epics have been characterized as single-stranded narrations with a continuous focus on the respective "now" of the narrating act. The story is presented as one main plotline, and parallel subworlds do not coexist independently but only come into existence if the story "needs" them. In later narratives, the focus shifts from the "discourse now" to the "story now." Linked with that, the selection of narrative information can also be oriented toward the knowledge of the protagonist, a change of focus that might correlate with the increase of internal focalization in MHG (Hübner 2003). Furthermore, the later narratives tend to integrate multiple strands that correlate with a more complex architecture of the storyworld, as reflected within the formulaic expressions for scene shifts.

3.5 Duration and Frequency: Ekphrasis and "Slow" Narration

Two other aspects which are frequently discussed as subcategories of narrative temporality are the "duration" and "frequency" of the represented events. "Duration" refers to the velocity of the narration, measured by the density of details in order to describe an event in the story (Schmid [2005] 2014, 233–234). In this respect, both AG and medieval narrations have been described as "slow" narrations (e.g., Kragl 2013, 121), since the plotline is frequently interrupted by extensive descriptions of battles, tournaments, ceremonials, as well as depictions of objects like special clothes and weapons. Although the moments of ekphrasis seem to "pause" the succession of events, the "visual," "pictorial" style is, however, not primarily a temporal phenomenon. This is in particular obvious for the German courtly epics, where the digressions made by the narrator – such as metanarrative comments, as well as metaphorical and allegorical descriptions – add further levels of meaning that reach beyond temporal aspects (see e.g., Kragl 2013, 148, for an interpretation of the *Blutstropfenszene* in Chretien's *Perceval* and Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*).

Frequency as well is a not a primarily temporal category either but linked to different semantic effects. As seen above, repetitions can be used to present different perspectives on the same event and to increase the emotional intensity (Lock 1985), e.g., in fighting scenes. In the *Prosalancelot*, Lancelot has to fight successively against twenty individual knights in order to be able to enter the castle of "Dolorose Garde." Twenty-one fights are described in detail (five duels on the first day, which are won in vain as a rule dictates that all fights have to be fought in one single day, and sixteen fights the day that follows – after that the remaining knights take flight) over fourteen pages. The effect of the detailed representation might not only be a "visual" impact on behalf of the reader but also an enactment of experience of Lancelot's exhaustion and strength.

4 The Grammar of Temporality

4.1 The Grammar of the Past

According to a common view, narrative always requires a retrospective view since the narration of events presupposes a knowledge about events that have happened before. Although this view has been called into question by studies on multiple future narratives (Bode 2013) and present-tense novels (Fludernik 2010, 63–64; Martínez and Scheffel 2016, 73–75), it seems in particular natural for ancient and medieval narrations. First, they refer to a heroic past with no specific localization in historical time and distinct from the temporal viewpoint of the narrator. Second, the narrator's voice is omnipresent and constitutes an important temporal reference point (on the problematic distinction between "author"/"teller" and "narrator," see Tilg 2019 for antiquity and Kragl 2019 for medieval narratives).

Linguistically, the distinction between the narrator's discourse world and the narrated storyworld parallels with two discourse modes, an immediate and distanced mode (Chafe 1994), which imply a different usage of temporal deictics and tense markers. Past tenses and deictics like *then* and *there* indicate that the denoted event is seen at a distance from the moment of speech, whereas present tenses establish a reference frame including both the moment of speech and the denoted event. One example for this distinction is the contrast between the prologues of the narrator and the main plot of the story in the MHG courtly epics. The present tense and first-/second-person pronouns indicate a reference frame including the "now" of the narrating act, shared by the narrator and his audience, whereas the preterit "leit" (suffered) marks a shift into the past reference frame of the storyworld.

> I tell all this for the reason
> that you pay attention all the better
> to this poem that I want to tell,
> because I do not want to conceal
> the distress and the great effort
> that Duke Ernst *was suffering*,
> when he *was expelled* from Bavaria. (*Herzog Ernst*, 31–37)

The shift into the storyworld is enabled by two grammatical properties of the preterit, i.e., the denotation of specific events within narrative succession and the establishment of a reference frame that does not include the narrating act. In MHG, the preterit is often accompanied by using the concatenative particle *do* (then), which indicates the next step of the story ("[and] then/after that") and, at the same time, localizes the events in a world that is distant from the reference system of the speaker ("then, at that time"). In contrast, the present perfect is a non-narrative form which is excluded

from passages with time-specific adverbials and the particle *do* (then) and cannot denote a temporal sequence of events (Zeman 2018). The semantics of the preterit thus combines both temporal properties that are characteristic for epic narration: the forward movement of the temporal succession of specific events within the narrated world and the temporal localization of the events in a time interval that excludes the speaker and presupposes the narrator's external viewpoint.

4.2 The Grammar of Immediacy

While it is the prototypical case that the narrator is situated outside the narrated world, ancient and medieval storytelling has also been characterized by the fact that the story is "relived" and represented as if it was happening simultaneously to the actual "now" of the narrating act. A property which is commonly seen as characteristic for narrative epics from antiquity to the Middle Ages is thus the notion of "literary presentness" and "immediacy" (for overviews, see Philipowski 2013; Zeman 2016; Philipowski & Zeman 2022), where the narrator "adopts the stance of an eye-witness" (Bakker 2005, 63) and the past events are represented as they were present for the eyes of the audience. Such "narrative immediacy" refers to two different temporal relations (Zeman 2018): first, a (real or fictive) simultaneity relation between the production and the reception of the story ("simultaneity I"); second, the simulated simultaneity between the time of the actual performance (including both the time of the producing and perceiving act) and the time of the events within the storyworld ("simultaneity II").

4.2.1 Ancient Greek Epics

Temporal adverbials are the most explicit expressions of the language of immediacy. Within narrations, adverbials like "now" can refer to different temporal anchors, notably the "now" of the (actual or fictive) narrating act, the "now" of the actualized stage in the sequence of events, or the "now" of a character's point of view. For the Homeric epics, it has been claimed that the primary "now" is the moment of performance. A famous example is the invocation of the muses in Homer, where linguistic means of the immediate mode (i.e., the particle *νῦν*, "now"; the personal pronouns in first person, *ἡμεῖς*, "we"; and the imperative) refer to the "now" of the act of narration as shared by the poet and his audience.

> Sing *now to me* [ἔσπετε νῦν μοι], Muses, who dwell in Olympian houses –
> For you are goddesses and you are present, and have seen everything;

> But *we* [ἡμεῖς] are hearing only the rumor of it and know nothing –
> Who the leaders and lords were of the Danaans. (*Iliad* 2.484–487; trans. Bakker 2005, 81)

While the passage is a straight example for the immediate mode in referring to the frame of reference that includes the communicative situation ("simultaneity I") and is in this respect comparable to the MHG prologue (see section 4.1), the characteristics of the Homeric epics are seen in the fact that the "now" of performance stays actualized for the whole time of the story. It is not a displaced "now" in the past but the moment of the poet's recollection in the present that constitutes the primary reference point for the epic's deictic orientation (Bakker 2005, 175; Kawashima 2004, 146).

This is supported by the fact that linguistic means of the immediate mode also "intrude" into the representation of the epic past. Linguistic means that draw attention to the actual moment of narrating speech are, for instance, demonstratives like the hearer-oriented οὗτος (this; Bakker 2005, 75–84). Unlike anaphors which refer to an antecedent within the linguistic discourse, οὗτος "points" at existing objects within the "here and now" (Bühler's [1934] 1978 "deixis ad oculos et aures"). As a linguistic feature of proximity, it is usually used in the dialogic parts of character speech. Used in displaced mode, it creates the impression that the narrator can point at the narrated situation as if it were before his eyes ("simultaneity II"). Other linguistic means that have been listed as markers of proximate deixis and of the narrator's voice within the representation of the sequence of events are the augment (Bakker 2005, 127), the aorist (169), particles referring to the "here and now" like ἄρα, and several discourse markers (Bonifazi 2008). In the Homeric epics, the "language of immediacy" is thus a mode that combines linguistic markers of proximate and distant deixis, leading to a "conflation of far and near" (Bakker 2005, 80).

4.2.2 MHG Epics

As in the Homeric epics, the "now" of the narrating act is the first temporal reference point in the MHG epics, and there are similar linguistic strategies that invoke a shared communication space between the narrator and the audience. The time of narration is indicated by linguistic means of the immediate mode, i.e., first-person pronouns, deictic particles of proximate deixis (*nu*, "now"), and the present tense.

> It is told *to us* in old stories a lot about the glorious adventures
> Of famous heroes [. . .],
> [about which] *you can now* hear glorious adventures. (*Nibelungenlied*, 1.1–4)

There are, however, several differences with respect to the use of the language of immediacy when compared to the Homeric epics. Regarding the relation between the poet and the audience, it is characteristic for the courtly epic that the succession of events is occasionally interrupted by metanarrative comments which turn the narrating process itself into a subject of discussion. In the example given below, the progression of events is suspended and the narrator expresses his concerns about how to represent the following pivotal moment, namely the protagonist's knightly accolade.

> How do I *now begin* my speaking
> that I *prepare* the dignified protagonist
> Tristan in such a way for his knightly accolade
> that one would like to hear it willingly? (Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, 4591–4595)

Such comments reinforce the impression that narrating and perceiving process are taking place simultaneously. Whether this is the actual case in oral performance or not (for the oral preconditions of narratives, see my contribution on oral storytelling in this volume), the narrating act is conceptualized as a dynamic online production process in which the story evolves within the speech act. The example thus refers to a simultaneity between production and performance of oral storytelling ("simultaneity I"). At the same time, it also creates a moment of distance, since the discussion about the form of the representation emphasizes that the story is one version out of many possible versions, and that it is the representation, not the events themselves, which is happening before the recipients' ears and eyes.

In the following example, the linguistic means refer to the simultaneity between the represented events and the "perceptional" act of the audience ("simultaneity II").

> *now* let Terramer ride –
> *listen* how the first ones are fighting!
> his help *comes* for them yet to early. (Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Willehalm*, 360.29–361.1)

> *Now look*, *there* [*dô*] *approaches* distress to them. (Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, 407.10)

The deictic "nû" (now) and the imperatives of verbs of perception ("seht" [look!], "hoeret" [listen!]) imply that the narrator and his recipients are situated in a shared communicative situation and are looking at the narrated events happening simultaneously with the narrating act ("simultaneity II"). The second example shows that this feature of immediacy can also be combined with the particle "dô," which establishes a temporal reference frame of a storyworld that is distinct from the narrator's discourse. Despite effects of immediacy, the distance of the past events is thus not repealed.

Another linguistic feature of the immediate mode that evokes the impression of "simultaneity II" is often seen in the "historical present," i.e., the use of the present

tense in alternation with the preterit in order to denote past events in the story-world (see Zeman 2013). This usage, however, occurs neither within the Homeric nor in the MHG epics, but in later narratives of early modern High German:

> and as he lay in this way, there *comes* a small animal
> which is called a weasel, running down the mountain. (*Das Volksbuch vom Hl. Karl*, 94.14; fifteenth centuy, quoted in Herchenbach 1911, 125)

There are many accounts in order to explain the use of the historical present and its effect of "immediacy" (for a recent overview, see van Gils and Kroon 2020). The comparative view on the historical present suggests that there is no single explanation that could account for all its functions within the different languages and narrative traditions. It is, however, rather clear that "an explanation of the historical present on the basis of time alone is quite impossible" (Schlichter 1931, 47), since not all its functions can be reduced to the temporal meaning of the present tense. Furthermore, it has been argued that it is not so much the temporal meaning of the present tense but the whole alternation pattern (Wolfson 1982; Fludernik 1992) and the markedness of the present tense within the narrative discourse mode (Fleischman 1990) that causes the effect of "vividness." In a similar way, the "vivid" impression caused by tense alternation in general – the seemingly unmotivated alternation of different tenses, also dubbed "tense confusion" (Fleischman 1990) – cannot be deduced directly from tense semantics either.

4.2.3 The Grammar of Temporality in Diachrony

The representation of past events as present is a paradox inherent in all kinds of narratives (Müller [1947] 2011, 69) and linguistically reflected by the fact that narratives combine linguistic features of both the immediate and the displaced mode. In both traditions, the moment of the (actual of fictive) performance constitutes the primary temporal reference point and aims at the representation of simultaneity in two aspects: the cotemporality between the poet's performance and the reception in a shared communicative setting ("simultaneity I") and the cotemporality between the narrating act and the events of the storyworld ("simultaneity II"). In both the Homeric and MHG epics, the language of immediacy "intrudes" into the distanced mode and leads to a "conflation" of proximity and distance.

The specific constellation between distance and immediacy is, however, dependent on narrative conventions and subject to change. In MHG courtly epics, metanarrative comments explicate that the narrative events are the result of an artificial representation and thus create a moment of distance. Also, the continuous use of *dô* (then) as a marker of distance indicates that the frame of the sto-

ryworld is maintained throughout the poem in distance from the teller (and the audience). In later romances, the focus on the "discourse now" is increasingly weakened, and the dynamic "story now" within the progression of events becomes the more important reference point for temporal anchoring. This focus shift has been seen in connection with the oral predisposition of ancient and medieval epics, as it is supposed that the focus on the "now" of the narrating act becomes less relevant as soon as the literary tradition and the composition of the poem are no longer based on the moment of active memory and verbal reactualization but on the written word.

Although strategies of visualization are characteristic for narratives in general, the peculiar narrative conventions are thus subject for change. This becomes obvious in comparison to the modern development of the present-tense novel in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Fleischman 1990), which is characterized by a use of tenses of immediate discourse mode (present, present perfect, future tenses) throughout the entire novel. The use of the present tense does, however, not lead to the same effects of immediacy as in AG and MHG epics. Whereas modern present-tense narration evokes the impression that the distance between the storyworld and the reader's perception is erased and implies that the reference frame of narrator and implied reader includes the storyworld, the storyworld in epics is reperformed within the actual moment of memory but stays at the same time in a distant reference frame.

5 Time in the Storyworld

5.1 Conceptualization of Time in Premodern Narratives

Next to the structural aspects of temporality in narratives, historical narratology has also focused on the conceptualization of time within the content of the stories. In this respect, one of the most striking characteristics of premodern narrations has been seen in the polycentric conceptualization of time: there is no invisible clock ticking which would constitute an orientation time for all protagonists within the story (Cross 2008, 163; Störmer-Caysa 2007, 88). Rather, a single narration can include different dimensions of time, and some events of the story can also defy a localization in time altogether. In this respect, the following dimensions of time have been expounded as characteristic for premodern narratives.

5.1.1 Biographical vs. "Adventure Time"

In AG and MHG stories, time can pass without affecting the protagonist, a fact that has been described in the tradition of Baxtin (1981) as "episodic" or "adventure time." "Adventure time" is an "extratemporal hiatus" where the whole action takes place, whereas the passing of biographical time "leaves no *trace* in the life of the heroes or in their personalities" (90; emphasis in original). Consequently, the physical age and health as well as the personal development of the character and the fictional world remain resistant to temporal change. In the AG novel *Aithiopika* by Heliodorus, the protagonists meet in their youth and marry after several adventures, being as young and beautiful as at the beginning of the story (Baxtin 1981). The concept of "adventure time" is seen as a chronotopos valid not only for AG narratives but for premodern narrations in general. Baxtin (1981) himself has elaborated parallel characteristics for both the Hellenic adventure and the medieval chivalric romance (but see Störmer-Caysa 2007, 83, for differences in the conceptualization of adventure time in MHG and AG epics).

5.1.2 Historical vs. Indefinite Past

"Adventure" time is not only unaffected by biographical time, but also by the historical context. The epic past as a whole remains an indefinite past "once upon a time" without any indication of absolute localization in time. This is the case both for the mythological world of the Homeric epics as well as for the context of Germanic and Celtic legends in the MHG epics. Even if the narration alludes to historical events, it does not aim at a faithful description of the historical background. In the book about the adventures of *Herzog Ernst*, for example, the story starts in the historical context of the German Empire, but names and events of different times are mixed. After his banishment from Germany, the hero travels to exotic countries and gets involved in fabulous adventures that are taken from traditional medieval and oriental fairy tales. The dividing lines between historical and epic time thus become blurred (see also Ruberg 1965, 146, on the *Prosalancelot*). This has led to the hypothesis that epics are based on a different concept of historical time and fictionality.

5.1.3 Spaces In and Outside Time

Though epics are set in an indefinite past frame and the heroes remain unaffected by time in several respects, time is an important factor in many stories. Protago-

nists make appointments to meet each other, and there are timelines that have to be met. One famous example in MHG epics is the story of Iwein, who has to return to his wife within one year but fails to do so, with crucial consequences for the storyline. Furthermore, MHG courtly epics refer to different dimensions of measuring time such as juridical timelines, the liturgical year, the natural cycle of day and night, and the seasons of the year. There are also narrative spaces where the computation of time seems to stop. After Iwein has lost his wife and honor, he goes mad and lives secluded in a forest. Outside of courtly society, no temporal frame is established within the text, and it remains unknown to the reader how much time Iwein spends in the timeless wilderness of the forest (see Nitsche 2006). Next to such "wild places" like the forest, magical places like the *Minnegrotte* where Tristan and Isolde meet are also not represented as subjected to time.

5.1.4 Heterochronias

Both Homeric and MHG epics are characterized by the fact that there is not a timeline that is valid for the whole story. Episodes can have their own temporalities without leading to logical contradictions, and there is no temporal continuity that comprises the whole storyworld. The absence of a homogeneous computation of time should, however, not be equated with a "subjective" concept of individual time perception as it has been described for modern novels (see also Reichlin 2019, 187, for MHG; Will 1976, 53, for Homer). Unlike the protagonist in Thomas Mann's *Zauberberg* who forgets how old he is while being in the timeless world of a sanatorium, the protagonists within the medieval stories do not perceive time in an individual way but stay committed to social conventions (Weixler and Werner 2015, 3). In MHG epics, the representation of temporal relations seems rather to follow text-internal patterns and is, as such, not primarily dependent on external conceptualizations of time (Störmer-Caysa 2007, 120).

5.2 Hypotheses on Diachronic Changes of the Conceptualization of Time

To account for the characteristics of ancient and medieval epics, several hypotheses have been proposed with respect to the question of whether and how the aspects of "narrative temporality" interact with the conceptualization of time in different stages of language.

5.2.1 Hypothesis 1: Development of an "Abstract"/"Objective" Notion of Time

In a still famous article on the conceptualization of time in ancient Greece, Fränkel (1931) argued based on semantic and grammatical arguments that the Homeric epics reflect an "undeveloped" sense of time. In its strong sense, this hypothesis has been rejected (see Krischer 1971; Rengakos 1995; Zanker 2019; Reitz and Finkmann 2019, 178) by showing that the Homeric heroes have a clear conception of "the passing of time, the weight of the past, and their historical situation" and that the narrator reveals "a sophisticated sense of time in structuring his story" (Zanker 2019, 66). However, the question about whether and how ancient epics reflect a different time concept is still discussed. Influenced by Cassirer's concept of "mythological time" as opposed to both cosmic and historical "objective" time, Baxtin (1981) has argued that AG narratives were characterized by the development from an ahistorical epic past to a notion of historical time (251–252; for a critique, see Bemong and Borghart 2010, 9, with further references). Kawashima (2004) sees a crucial difference between "deictic" and "non-deictic"/"objective" time conceptualization. His hypothesis is based on the observation that the Homeric epics take the present moment of oral performance as the primary reference point, whereas the Bible as a literary tradition based on the written word tends to focus on the temporal relations between the narrated events in terms of "earlier/later than" (146). This chronological pattern is also dominant in the later historiographical literature, which has been interpreted in favor of the hypothesis that the "idea of historical time" is a fifth-century BC "invention" (Williams 1993, 69). The notion of "objective" time has also been given as an explanation for the fact that time becomes an increasing concern as a topic of the stories, whereas narrations like the Homeric epics focus on the events that occur in time, but not on the existence of time itself (Lock 1985, 46; Zanker 2019, 65).

5.2.2 Hypothesis 2: Development of a "Subjective" Notion of Time

Another general development is seen in a focus shift from the chronological sequence of events toward the representation of consciousness, also subsumed under the term "inward turn." Whereas premodern narratives such as courtly epics and chivalric romances are generally based on a pattern of "and then [. . .]" and depict the "visible" events in the storyworld, the plot within modern novel has been seen as "a matter of relations between states of consciousness" (Keunen 2010, 51). While this is a development characteristic in particular for the nineteenth century, an increase of thought and speech representation and focalization patterns has been stated already for MHG courtly epics (Hübner 2003). This shift in focus might

have been favored by the fact that the protagonists become more and more the temporal orientation points within the story in MHG epics (Störmer-Caysa 2009, 83).

5.2.3 Hypothesis 3: Oral Predisposition

The characteristics of premodern narratives like polycentric timelines and the focus on the sequence of events have also been seen in connection to their oral predisposition. In this respect, it has been argued for the following causalities, which refer to different aspects of narrative temporality (see my contribution on oral storytelling in this volume).

(1) Since the Homeric epics were performed orally, the now of the storyteller constitutes the primary temporal orientation point for narration. Consequently, the narrator's voice is omnipresent, reflected within the combination of grammatical means of immediate and distanced mode. As soon as the epics are composed in written form, the focus on the present moment of the narrating act decreases and the events within the story become more and more the primary temporal anchors of narration (Bakker 2005; Kawashima 2008).

(2) In oral performance, the flow of narration is the most important timeline, which causes the pursuit of a single-stranded plot. The connection between different subplots can be left underspecified. In contrast, stories that are composed in writing are characterized by complex constellations of different subplots.

(3) Epics composed in oral performance simulate simultaneity between the narrated events and the perception of the story and evoke the impression that the events are happening virtually before the poet's and the audience's eyes. This "language of immediacy" decreases with the increase of literacy (see Zeman 2013 for discussion). It is, however, maintained in later epics and romances as a strategy of visualization.

(4) Since the epics' stories belong to traditions shared by everyone and are familiar to the audience, less emphasis is placed on expectation and surprise and more on their elaboration as a retold story (Lock 1985, i; Grethlein 2010, 322–323). This has been seen as a predisposition for a more repetitive, paratactic, and discontinuous narrative structure. It has also been seen as the cause for the fact that narrative strategies like the frequent use of prolepses and foreshadowing in the epics "widen the gap between the recipients and heroes" (Grethlein 2010, 324), whereas the modern novel aims at an alignment of the experience between recipients and protagonists.

(5) It has been argued that oral cultures tend toward cyclic conceptions of time. The concept of time as a recurring cycle has, for example, been seen as reflected in the Homeric epics, which defy a clear distinction between past and present (Lock 1985).

(6) Since the epic past can be reactivated in each performance of the poem, it has also been described as an "eternal past" that transcends the present. Within the Homeric epics, the past does not exist outside discourse but is eternally present (Bakker 2005). In a similar way, the future in the epics is not "some kind of fixed future, a future locked up in the past," but persists within the hero's *kleos* (fame), a future moment of recognition that will become present every time the story is performed (Bakker 2005, 109; see, however, Garcia 2013, 8, for a critique of the hypothesis of "poetic immortality").

5.2.4 Hypothesis 4: Eschatological Predisposition

The conceptualization of temporality in narrative texts has also been seen in connection to eschatological preconditions. Within the Homeric epics, the heroes are represented as subjected to the course of inevitable fate. In the *Iliad*, in particular, the Homeric heroes act within a world where human life is represented as fragile, which is reflected within the frequent prolepses that emphasize dramatic irony. In the courtly romance, the fate of the protagonists is also in a way predestined. However, their adventures do not occur by chance but as moral trials assigned by God, and their fate is seen as dependent on their actions (Störmer-Caysa 2007, 83).

For medieval narratives, a distinction has been made between "human" and "divine time" (Cross 2008, 165) which is ever-present and transcends temporal change. According to Cross, it is this difference that allows for the idea of alternative temporalities and can provide the context for the heterochronias in premodern narratives.

6 Historical and Universal Aspects of Narrative Temporality

In sum, the relationship between "narrative temporality" and the conceptualization of time is not straightforward. Not all phenomena debated under the term "temporality" are temporal in the first instance. Furthermore, "narrative temporality" is closely linked to the communicative setting, the status of the narrator, the selection of information, and viewpoint organization.

With respect to the universal and historical aspects of narrative temporality, the perception and conceptualization of time seem not to be radically different in premodern narratives (see also Reichlin 2019, 181), as is also reflected in the metaphorical conceptualizations of time. In medieval epics, time is measured by the natural cycles of day and night and the seasons, as well as by social conventions. Time can "come" and "pass." It can be pressing due to time limits, and it can be spent in a useful way or left unused (see, e.g., Nitsche 2006, 47, on the example of Erec and Enite, who – against the social code of practice – stay in bed during daytime and *verligen* (lie too long inactively, causing possible bad consequences). For the Homeric epics, Zanker (2019) has shown that the concept of time is conceptualized in the metaphor "[time/ego] moving along a path," which is also common both in present-day Western languages and in Sanskrit and Hittite (Zanker 2019, 102). From the perspective of cognitive grammar, this suggests that there is a general Indo-European tendency for time conceptualization, if not a universal one.

The specific characteristics of narrative temporality in its different aspects in ancient and medieval epics are thus not direct reflections of the conceptualization of time. Rather, the differences with respect to the ordering of events, episodes, and subplots, the "grammar of immediacy" as well as the polycentric organization of temporal timelines within a narrative, can be seen as text-internal patterns and narrative strategies (Störmer-Caysa 2007, 120), still to be explored by diachronic narratology in their details.

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