

One tenth of *Tandareis*: on characters and programmatic reduction of Arthurian literature

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ABSTRACT

Ein Zehntel *Tandareis*: Zu Figuren und programmatischer Kürzung in arthurischer Literatur

Der Beitrag stellt die altschechische Bearbeitung von Pleiers mittelhochdeutschem Artusroman *Tandareis* ins Zentrum. Dabei sticht der tschechische *Tandariáš* im Vergleich zum deutschen Text nicht zuletzt durch seine Kürze hervor. Auf ein Zehntel des ursprünglichen Umfangs reduziert, überspringt der Erzähler die meisten Kommentare und Reflexionen, um sich auf die Darstellung von höfischen (Liebes-)Szenen sowie eine deutlich einflussreichere und redegewandtere Frauenfigur zu konzentrieren. Zudem bildet der *Tandariáš* eine spezifische Form von Realismus ab und zeigt mit der Nivellierung sozialer Hierarchien narrative Strategien der Liberalisierung auf. In diesem Zusammenhang stehen etwa Verhandlungen zwischen höfischen und nicht-höfischen Figuren über ökonomische Vergütung. Der Beitrag stellt Fragen zum Einfluss dieser handlungsbasierten Beobachtungen auf die Ebene des *discours* und die Art und Weise des Erzählens.

SCHLÜSSELWÖRTER

Tandareis; *Tandariáš*; Liberalisierung; Erzählweise.

ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the Old Czech adaption of Pleier's Middle High German Arthurian romance *Tandareis*. The most outstanding feature of the Czech *Tandariáš* is its significant reduction in length. Cut down to a tenth, the narrator skips over most of the comments and reflections in order to concentrate on courtly (love) scenes and a remarkably stronger, more powerful and talkative female character compared to the German source. In addition, the Czech text features a specific form of realism and displays narrative strategies of liberalism. In this respect, *Tandariáš* moderately equals social hierarchies, when i.e. both courtly and uncourtly characters negotiate economic rewards. The article asks questions about the impact of such plot-related observations on the level of *discourse* as well as the way the story is told.

KEY WORDS

Tandareis; *Tandariáš*; liberalism; way of narration.

INTRODUCTION

After the heyday of Arthurian literature, 13th century poets as the Pleier composed ‘original’ Arthurian romances without French sources. Still, they were largely drawing on established characters, motifs and plot structures. *Garel*, *Tandareis* and *Meleranz*, which are attributed to the above-mentioned Austrian poet the Pleier, show well-known narrative elements as well as narrative techniques. The success of these texts is inter alia mirrored in stunning reception histories. Pleier’s *Garel*, which is considered to be his first romance, is at least a thoughtful reflection of Stricker’s *Daniel* and eliminates the often cunning qualities of its hero. In the South Tyrolian Runkelstein Castle, a cycle of frescoes depicting scenes of Pleier’s *Garel* attracted the attention not only of literary scholars but also of art historians. Those frescoes date from the late 14th to the early 15th century. A rather exceptional testimony of reception can be related to *Meleranz* or precisely to the heroine’s belt. An inscription engraved on a belt – a beautiful verse about love and desire – finds itself on a cup that belonged to Austrian countess Margarete Maultasch of Tyrol. After a failed marriage with John Henry, Margrave of Moravia, Margarete married Louis V., Duke of Bavaria, in 1342 who gave her the engraved cup as a bridal gift.¹ Yet, Pleier’s *Tandareis* probably shows the most astonishing form of reception. Roughly a century after the assumed emergence of Pleier’s text the *Tandareis* was brought into Czech; Ulrich Bamborschke dates the Old Czech *Tandariáš* in the middle of the 14th century (Bamborschke 1984: 179).² In the following, I will present a comparative analysis of the Middle High German *Tandareis* and the Old Czech *Tandariáš*, focusing mainly on characters and a programmatic reduction of length.³

Compared to the Middle High German *Tandareis* the most outstanding characteristic of the Czech *Tandariáš* is its drastic reduction in length. While Pleier’s text counts nearly 18000 lines, the anonymous adaption is reduced to a tenth. Three manuscripts in Prague, Warsaw and Brno transmit the story of *Tandariáš* and his beloved Floribella, all three manuscripts date to the middle of the 15th century (Achnitz 2012: 299; Thomas 1998: 119). Scholars as Ulrich Bamborschke or Alfred Thomas relate the narrative tendencies of the Czech text to contemporary social and political changes happening in 14th century Bohemia. Written at the beginning of Charles’ reign *Tandariáš* dates into a time where the aftermath and consequences of Charles’ predecessor and father were still perceptible, but new impulses concerning everyday social life already detectible (Bamborschke 1984: 184). A closer look at the reduction itself will be worthwhile before turning to possible cultural-historical dimensions of the adaption. Before that, the following summary of Pleier’s *Tandareis* might be helpful.

After an extensive prologue the Middle High German text tells the story of 12-year-old *Tandareis*, who is sent to King Arthur’s court. When young Indian princess Flordibel arrives at the Arthurian court, she asks Arthur to protect her reputation.

¹ The cup is now owned by the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria; URL: <<https://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/86251/>> [16. 01. 2020].

² For recent research see Hon (2014), Hartung/Hon/Kragl/Timmermann (2016).

³ The following thoughts result from a talk given at the conference “Central European Arthurian Texts in a Changing World” from November 1st until November 2nd 2018 in Prague.

In accordance with the well-established motif *rash boon*, the king promises to kill everybody, who comes (too) close to Flordibel. However, Tandareis and Flordibel fall in love and have to flee from the Arthurian court. Arthur and his men soon find and besiege the lovers but Tandareis is able to win every fight against Arthurian knights. When Gawein finally intercedes, some misunderstandings (as the fact that there has been no physical love between the young lovers) can be cleared up in a trial. Arthur decides that Tandareis is sent on adventures in order to vindicate himself while Flordibel has to stay with his wife Ginover. In the following episodes, the hero experiences a number of partly related adventures. First, he fights against twelve robbers, gets severely injured and has to stay at a merchants house to recover. Then, he helps the son of an earl fighting against another 25 robbers, wins against four gigantic watchers, is therefore able to release hundreds of knights and ladies out of a dungeon and finally becomes sovereign in Malmontan and Mermin. When the freed knights and ladies arrive at the Arthurian court, Arthur forgives Tandareis and sends a messenger to deliver the news. The messenger does not find Tandareis at Malmontan because he went off to other adventures. Hereafter, he protects a queen against her opponent; he releases a damsels, prevents an attempted rape and gets captured in a tower because of his last adventure. Since Arthur has set the sentence against Tandareis aside, the king decides to organize a tournament hoping that Tandareis will participate. With some help of a damsels, Tandareis is actually able to join the tournament anonymously and in disguise. However, Flordibel recognizes her beloved and Arthur and Tandareis finally reconcile. In the end, every maiden Tandareis saved during his adventures is getting married with an honorable man whereas Tandareis chooses to marry Flordibel.⁴

Only a quick look at the Czech text reveals that the narrator skips longish parts of the hero's adventures as well as most of the comments and reflections.⁵ What remains is a vivid love story between two courtly protagonists and an astonishing concentration on plot rather than reflection. Research also shows that *Tandariáš* depicts a different composition of the main characters in comparison to its source (Brušák 1970: 47). Yet, the characters' participation in the process of narrating and their involvement on the narrative level of *discourse* is still a question unasked. Therefore, I intend to set a focus on a comparative analysis of the characters' ability to define the narrative level of *discourse*. Content-related changes resulting of this generous reduction are both interesting and apparent, while changes or tendencies concerning the act of narrating probably are more subtle. Questions that arise are for instance: To what extent are the characters' actions and speeches involved in structuring the narration? When and why do thematic shifts in the composition of characters affect the way the story is told and – as an outlook – can we trace down narrative elements that link the composition of characters to the shortening of the text?

⁴ Edition: Khull (1885). For a more detailed summary of Pleier's *Tandareis*, see Achtnitz (2012: 293–295).

⁵ On the narrative reductions in more detail, see Bamborschke (1984: 180f.). Hon (2014: 29f.) describes the loss of the author's presence in the text as a process of anonymization.

To answer the questions I will take a closer look at the depiction of Floribella compared to her source Flordibel and related thereto narrative means of structuring the text at first. Second, I will outline a narrative tendency of economic liberalism that might be connected to extraliterary mechanisms as well as a realistic mode of narration.

FLORIBELLA

The young woman is introduced in line 25 of the Czech adaption (Edition: Bamborschke 1982). A nameless young protagonist announces her arrival as well as her beauty at the Arthurian court in four short lines (vv. 25–28) before the narrator praises Floribella's horse. Nobody had ever seen a more beautiful woman, the narrator states, before he explains the background of her journey: she seeks a protector because her parents died. What follows is one of the most popular Arthurian motifs: the *rash boon*, the king's unconditional promise to fulfill whatever his guest is asking for. Almost every Arthurian text depicts this motif, some characters and/or narrators show openly critical reactions to the king's behavior, others affirm his generous promises. In Pleier's *Tandareis*, the knight Keie emphatically tries to warn Arthur of his own promises. This warning is embedded in a tense and narratologically interesting scene where Keie says to Arthur that he should be careful because otherwise bad things would happen to him as they have happened before when a maiden brought a magic coat to the Arthurian court (*Tandareis*, vv. 367–377).

Keie of course recounts the very well-known scene from Ulrich von Zatzikhoven's *Lanzelet*. Thus, the character not only acts critically towards his own king, he also proves that he is aware of a situation that had already happened in the Arthurian world. As a result, the narrated worlds of at least Pleier's text and Ulrich's *Lanzelet* merge into one big storyworld. The narrative potential of this motif is enormous, since Arthur's guests usually request unrealizable demands and a chain of action to establish the original condition of the Arthurian court is the effect of Arthur's extremely generous, if not naïve promises. A quite generic plot structure of the *rash boon*-motif would include the following narrative elements: a knight asks the king to fulfill his wish, the king agrees, the knight wishes for the queen, the king has to stick to his promise, the court tries to fight the queen back in order to establish the original condition.⁶ When the German text highlights the critical potential of the motif, the Czech adaption sets the focus on a very specific depiction of the main female character.

The Czech Floribella as well as the German Flordibel obviously doesn't ask for the queen but she asks Arthur to kill every man who forces her to be dishonorable. Tandariáš is chosen to be the princesses' protector; he serves with great perfection until he cuts his own hand while preparing food. He is out of his senses because he fell in love with his protégée. Floribella realizes that her companion acts suspiciously and forces him to be honest. Both confess their love to each other and decide to flee from the Arthurian court. Regarding the Czech adaption, the narrator lays the foundation for a courtly female character that is able and allowed to speak up for herself,

⁶ For more information on Queen Ginover as well as the mentioned motif, see Schulz (2010), Webster (1973).

which is – with respect to the German *Tandareis* – not a matter of course. Floribella is the leading force behind their escape; she organizes the following events, prepares Tandariáš for his fights against the Arthurian knights, and takes the future defeated knights in custody. The repeating structure in Floribella's actions is striking and strange.⁷ Not less than four days in a row Floribella equips Tandariáš for his upcoming fights and takes the defeated in custody afterwards (vv. 259–330). However, Floribella's actions and speeches do have an effect not only on the story that is told but also on the way, this story is told. While Pleier's *Tandareis* tells us about the many adventures of young knight Tandareis that are a result of his forbidden love to Flordibel and the characters motivation is to prove his unconditional faithfulness, the Czech adaption sets a slightly different focus. Here, the story about a loving couple is told and not the story of a loving knight and his object of desire.

Floribella also acts as a counselor; a role, which is traditionally inherited by Arthurian knights, that are close to the king, such as Gawein. As Arthur is willing to bring the case of Tandariáš and Floribella to court, Tandariáš wishes to consult with Floribella before he even agrees to a trial. Floribella of course approves the idea of a court decision and when Arthur files the suit, she speaks for both of them. Tandariáš on the other hand has no speech act at all; he remains silent from the point he consulted with Floribella and only speaks again when the sentence is passed and he is sent away from the court (vv. 351–442). In the German text, Gawein acts as a mediator and conciliates between Tandareis and Arthur. Flordibel on the contrary doesn't speak but chooses Gawein as her advocate (*Tandareis*, vv. 3582–35598). In comparison to Pleier's character the Czech Floribella is depicted as a stronger, more powerful, and talkative character.⁸ The repeating structure is inherent, especially regarding Floribella's relationship with Tandariáš. Floribella pleads for Tandariáš' return several times in the course of events, while he is away on adventure and sends any defeated opponent to his beloved at the Arthurian court. In these scenes (e.g. vv. 620–624, 671–674, 695–697, 711–714, 801–804) the different roles and functions of the female character are prominently displayed. She acts as a loyal and faithful partner to Tandariáš, she raises her voice against the king in advising him to ask Tandariáš back and – regarding the narrative level of *discourse* – her speeches structure not only Tandariáš' adventures but also the narration itself and highlight the episodic character.

Following the observation that Floribella has more agency compared to Flordibel and the Czech character is more independent in her speeches and confident in her actions, the effect of this emancipation of the character is that both agency as well as integrity of other characters suffer.⁹ Tandariáš – as the court scene shows – seems to be a paler and more dependent character, which proves right regarding the following actions. Tandariáš acts when he is supposed to do so. He relies on a townsman who nurses him (vv. 483–525), he relies on god whom he makes responsible for upcoming fights and victories (vv. 526–530), and he relies on a princess who's brother holds him captive (vv. 1248–1264). While Floribella takes actions and therefore functions as a motor for the narration, Tandariáš always seems to be one step behind. He stumbles

⁷ On repetition in Tandariáš see Matthias Meyer's paper in this volume.

⁸ Thomas (1985: 102f.) also underlines the more active role of Floribella, the unchivalrous behaviour of Tandariáš as well as the narrative's emphasis on the lovers.

⁹ On a characterization of Floribella, Tandariáš and Arthur also see Brušák (1970: 48f.).

from one adventure to the other; episodes arise from each other without the character's active participation. Arthur in turn is depicted as an angry king, relentless and furious, almost uncourtly. He reacts drastically on the lovers' escape (vv. 225f.), he refuses Floribella's pleads many times (vv. 625ff., 675ff., 698, 715f.); rage and anger seem adequate to describe his character. After Tandariáš' and Floribella's escape from the court Kain, Gvan and Gavin send an urgent appeal for justice to the king but Arthur rejects their request (vv. 327–334). Gavin then gathers other noble men who insist on a fair trial for the loving couple. The noblemen question Arthur's integrity and morality by reminding him that he had never ruled illegitimately before. Still raging Arthur finally gives his consent for a fair trial (vv. 335–358). On the level of discourse, Arthur's angry behavior emphasizes the love between Tandariáš and Floribella, his uncourtly manners contradict Floribella's courtliness and diplomatic skills. When the composition of Floribella has an impact on other characters as shown above, this holds true vice versa. One characters' actions and speeches do influence the recipients' perception of other characters as well as their perception of the narration itself.

ECONOMIC LIBERALISM

Especially in comparison to Pleier's *Tandareis* the Czech adaption displays a specific form of realism which I propose to summarize as a narrative display of economic liberalism. I will trace down some textual references to economic liberalism before opening the discussion to any possible relations to extra-literary mechanisms and socio-cultural tendencies. In verse 483–525 Tandariáš is wounded and alone in the woods after fighting against a couple of robbers. He comes to a town only to realize that the local people are not willing to help until he randomly meets a townsman. Tandariáš complains about his inability to find shelter on which the townsman responds with a question: 'Would somebody perform a great service who accommodates you in his house?' (vv. 498f.) Subtle but still clearly the townsman asks for any future benefits for the helper. Tandariáš affirms the townsman's assumption and promises reward as soon as he feels better. In the corresponding scene in Pleier's text (*Tandareis*, vv. 4406–4890), the sign of realism refers to the very detailed description of the merchant's house and family. In the Czech adaption, the realistic mode of narration refers to the townsman's motivation, which is a clear shift from describing a specific setting to explaining a specific behavior. The townsman is willing to help the helpless as long as he gets his rewards. The text portrays a form of systematic giving and taking, maybe an early form of trading in health care but definitely a form of economic exchange. As the already mentioned liberal aspect I consider the fact that the townsman is not interested in being merciful, he is not interested in helping for free, and most importantly he seems to not even be aware of the obvious social differences between him and the knight. The townsman is demanding compensation for his help in advance, otherwise he won't help. However, it is not yet mentioned in detail what kind of compensation the townsman is asking for. Only at the end of the story King Arthur, who asks the townsman to choose a town or a castle and rule over his chosen area, actually rewards him with economic welfare (vv. 1795–1802). The merchant in Pleier's text on the contrary is very conscious about the social hierarchy between the wounded Tandareis and himself. The knight's appearance and clothing result in

the merchant's correct assumption that Tandareis is of noble descent (*Tandareis*, vv. 4512–4523). When Tandareis acts gracious and promises God's reward for saving him, the merchant and his wife decline any reward and are gracious themselves for having such a worthy noble man in their house (*Tandareis*, vv. 4632–4635). As in the Czech adaption, he calls for a doctor to cure Tandareis' injuries but the German narrator additionally recounts that the merchant pays the doctor immediately (*Tandareis*, vv. 4559f.). Instead of economic exchange between the helper and the wounded knight (or his proxy, King Arthur), Pleier's text displays the wealth of the merchant, who finds his personal reward in sacrificially helping a wounded and helpless knight. Instead of negotiating social status, Pleier's text also strongly confirms the social differences or hierarchies between knight and merchant, which seem to be independent from economic wealth.

Long after Tandariáš' departure from the Arthurian court, Arthur regrets his decision to send the young knight abroad but instead of a mere personal desire, he also expects positive effects for his court through Tandariáš' presence (vv. 1267f.). In order to get him back Arthur organizes a tournament and promises a generous reward for any information about Tandariáš. No matter what social standing, the king announces, anybody will receive a land and crown, who knows anything about Tandariáš (vv. 1655–1664). Again, there is a hint of this superficial equality of all people, again there is the promise of economic wealth and there is the systematic giving-and-taking. Although the German text tells more or less the same events on story-level, it still highlights a very different motivation of its characters. Arthur wishes Tandareis to be back at his court because he is worried about the knight and his presence at the Arthurian court would be a delight instead of an honor, which actually is a much more external and visible quality than delight or pleasure (*Tandareis*, vv. 11781ff.). Arthur also promises a duchy as a reward for bringing Tandareis back but instead of emphasizing that anybody regardless the actual social standing will be rewarded generously the German text only lists noble characters in this scene. A discussion of social status wouldn't be applicable due to the absence of any social heterogeneity of the characters. Arthur is talking to kings and noble knights in this scene instead of opening the tender to anybody (*Tandareis*, vv. 14494–14505). After the king proposed his offer in the Czech adaption the scene changes to an evil knight who supposedly killed Tandariáš earlier. When Tandariáš was defeated by the evil knight (vv. 1234–1242), he was held captive in a tower, where his conqueror wanted him to starve to death (vv. 1243–1247). Rather than letting him die the evil knight's sister has taken care of Tandariáš and saved him with the help of her uncle (vv. 1248–1264). When their uncle hears about Arthur's reward for any information about Tandariáš he reproaches his nephew because he allegedly let him die and therefore missed a chance to earn a fortune (vv. 1666–1670). There is no corresponding scene in Pleier's *Tandareis* regarding the missed chance to be better off economically. In the German text, characters are portrayed less as underprivileged but more as aware of social hierarchies, whereas the Czech adaption offers its characters opportunities to economic wealth and therefore portrays a more heterogenic set of characters but still tries to level social hierarchies. Any comparative analysis of *Tandareis* and *Tandariáš* concerning socio-economic status of characters provides a rather complex as well as ambivalent picture. Further questions could ask either about 14th century socio-economic conditions or the effect of this narrative

tendency on the level of *discourse*. For comparison only, no equivalent mentality of economic profit can be found in the German source. Pleier's *Tandareis*, which is dated in the middle of the 13th century, does of course display a form of giving-and-taking but concentrates rather on inner qualities and virtues of the courtly society than on commodities or realms. However, as soon as these courtly values lose their impact in society the result is an empowerment of civil values and last but not least a slow replacement of the absolute feudal society with a bourgeois society, which is amongst other indicators based on economics and trading. It probably isn't save to say that the Czech text depicts this fundamental change in society in the 14th century but it emphasizes horizontal relations between equals (Thomas 2001: 121) – even if it is only on the surface. Featuring equal or superficially equal characters on *story*-level also shows an impact on the level of *discourse*, especially regarding the interaction between characters. Realistic modes of narration as well as narrative strategies of popularization¹⁰ are characteristic elements on the level of *discourse* of this 14th century adaption of an Arthurian romance. The abbreviation of the text paves the way for depicting the substantial aims of the narration: a headstrong female character that primarily enables the typical structure of this text; a raging king that lays the foundation for emphatically highlighting this woman's powers; the processing of possible extra-literary tendencies of a changing society into narrative strategies; and last but not least a confident reduction of plotlines with the objective of telling a story of courtly love in a more and more civil society.

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¹⁰ Thomas (2001: 120f.) assumes that the intended audience consisted of the Czech speaking influential merchant class.

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