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The Shield as Prop and ›Stage‹ in the Early Modern Tournament

Props and Shields

In theater studies, thrusting weapons are a popular reference point for determining what constitutes a prop as distinct from other ›things on stage‹ or items worn on the actor's body.¹ According to Erika Fischer-Lichte in *Semiotik des Theaters* (1983), as long as a sword hangs on a belt, it is part of a costume; only once it is drawn and wielded by the actor does it become a prop.² Starting from Fischer-Lichte's basic distinction, Andrew Sofer defines the prop as »a discrete, material, inanimate object that is visibly manipulated by an actor in the course of performance.«³ The prop can thus be considered a kind of companion, supporter, even amplifier of a movement or action performed by the actor. Embedded in such physical dynamics, a prop can serve as an identity marker, its use indicating something about the character portrayed.⁴ But a sword, for example, can equally be evoked on stage by a walking stick, or a similar

1 With the phrase ›things on stage,‹ I refer to Kathi Loch who uses it as a superordinate category including props (and parts of the costume). Cf. Kathi Loch, *Dinge auf der Bühne. Entwurf und Anwendung einer Ästhetik der unbelebten Dinge im theatralen Raum*, Aachen 2009, pp. 67–70.

2 Cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Semiotik des Theaters. Eine Einführung*, vol. 1: *Das System der theatralischen Zeichen*, Tübingen 1983, p. 151.

3 Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props*, Ann Arbor, MI 2003, p. 11. For the reference to Fischer-Lichte: *ibid.*, p. 12. Jiří Veltruský, an important representative of the Prague School, already uses the sword as an example to illustrate the antinomy of ›the dynamic forces of action and the static forces of characterization.« Cf. Jiří Veltruský, *People and Things in the Theatre*, in: David Drozd, Tomáš Kačer, and Don Sparling (eds.), *Theatre Theory Reader: Prague School Writings*, Prague 2016, pp. 147–156, here pp. 151–152.

4 Cf. Sofer 2003 (note 3), p. 21.



1. Adam van Breen, Position of the targe while drawing the rapier, engraving, 1616–1618, in: *De Nassausche Wapen-Handelinge*, 's-Gravenhage 1618, pl. 4, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Research Library

object, that the actor merely handles like a stabbing weapon – thereby increasing the play's degree of fiction.⁵

But what about the shield? When it comes to this defensive weapon, it is not always possible to distinguish clearly between its passive attachment to the actor's body and its active use. If it does not hang on the upper body by means of a strap, it is – and this is far more often the case – carried on the left arm and grasped with the left hand (fig. 1), as demonstrated in Adam van Breen's prints for *De Nassausche Wapen-Handelinge van Schilt, Spies, Rappier ende Targe* (1618), a treatise on military practices in the time of Prince Maurice of Nassau but mainly relying on ancient descriptions.⁶ Passive carrying and active holding therefore overlap in the shield's handling.

⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 57. See also Loch 2009 (note 1), p. 145.

⁶ Cf. Christian Beaufort-Spontin, *Harnisch und Waffe Europas. Die militärische Ausrüstung im 17. Jahrhundert*, Munich 1982, pp. 105–108, 152–153, note 210. On the use of shields in general: Wendelin Boeheim, *Handbuch der Waffenkunde*, Leipzig 1890, p. 169; Helmut Nickel, *Ullstein Waffenbuch. Eine kulturhistorische Waffenkunde mit Markenverzeichnis*, Berlin 1974, pp. 13–15.

Sofer likewise concedes that »[...] it is difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint just when a prop ceases to be passive and becomes active.«⁷ Following this insight, the shield cannot be readily excluded from the category of the prop. On the contrary, its analysis as a stage prop allows us to direct our attention to contexts, increasingly numerous from the late fourteenth century, in which new uses for the shield were devised, namely in tournaments and in pageants preceding them. In these, shields less and less often served only to protect the body: they became targets that made the strict rules of the mock fight comprehensible to the audience and enhanced the visual spectacle through special effects. As image carriers worn on the body and as ›stages‹ for elaborate figural scenes, they also commented on the narrative and general ideals underlying the tournament or the pageant. With their overall design – incorporating unusual materials, ingenious mechanisms, and painterly decoration⁸ – shields thus equally amplified the actions performed before or during the joust and thereby can be considered props even in the narrower sense of the term. I would like to briefly explicate this in the following pages.

Spectacular Targets

By the second half of the fourteenth century at the latest, shields had in large part lost their defensive function in battle.⁹ Plate armor, which appeared at this time, ensured better protection of the body and rendered the shield superfluous.¹⁰ In the tournament, however, the shield continued to play a central role.¹¹ A new type even emerged specifically in the context of jousting: the targe.¹² With a cutout, or *bouche*, in its upper-left corner, the targe provided support for the lance, which was the central

⁷ Sofer 2003 (note 3), pp. 22–23.

⁸ In this respect, the shields to be discussed clearly differ from props on today's stages, which are designed to be perceived from a distance and are rather plain. Cf. Eleanor Margolies, *Props*, London 2016, p. 99.

⁹ Cf. Malcolm Vale, *War and Chivalry: Warfare and Aristocratic Culture in England, France and Burgundy at the End of the Middle Ages*, London 1981, p. 105; Nickel 1974 (note 6), p. 41; id., *The Tournament: A Historical Sketch*, in: Howell Chickering and Thomas H. Seiler (eds.), *The Study of Chivalry: Resources and Approaches*, Kalamazoo, MI 1988, pp. 213–262, here p. 220.

¹⁰ Cf. Helmut Nickel, *Der mittelalterliche Reiterschild des Abendlandes*, Berlin 1958, pp. 55–56.

¹¹ In contrast to today's usage, the term ›tournament‹ denotes a particular kind of *hastilude* from a historic point of view. Cf. Vale 1981 (note 9), pp. 67–68; Tobias Capwell, *Arms and Armour in the Medieval Joust*, Leeds 2018, p. 5.

¹² Cf. Ortwin Gamber, *Ritterspiel und Turnierrüstung im Spätmittelalter*, in: Josef Fleckenstein (ed.), *Das ritterliche Turnier im Mittelalter. Beiträge zu einer vergleichenden Formen- und Verhaltensgeschichte des Rittertums*, Göttingen 1985, pp. 513–531, here pp. 526–527; Dirk Breiding, *Turniere und*

offensive weapon in such duels. While this functional detail represents its most distinctive feature, the targe nevertheless varied greatly in its external form.¹³

As a protective weapon, the targe served a dual purpose in the joust. On the one hand, it closed the gap between the left arm and the torso, which would have otherwise provided a welcome attack surface for the opponent; on the other hand, it served as a kind of target.¹⁴ Its concave surface prevented lance thrusts from easily glancing off, increasing the likelihood of either breaking the lance or lifting the opponent out of the saddle with a skillful thrust, as were the respective aims of the *Gesteck* and the *Rennen*, two modes of jousting.¹⁵

Especially in the *Rennen*, the shield took on unusual shapes. Toward the end of the fifteenth century, Wilwolt von Schaumberg commented that his and his opponent's targes were fitted with small mirrors, which were meant to be hit.¹⁶ Even more sensational was the use of a cushion filled not only with feathers but also with a steel plate, which Wilwolt opted for in place of a targe at a 1477 wedding tournament. As Ludwig von Eyb transmits in his *Geschichten und Taten Wilwolts von Schaumburg* (1507), the feathers flying up into the air after a successful thrust caused great pleasure among the spectators and particularly among the ladies: »Ir harnischmeister riesen die löcher des treffens in den küssenn weyther, das der windt die außgestobenn vedern, als weitt die bann was schlug, die leüth besteübt, des ein gelechter gemacht, den frauen vnd iunckfrauen lüstig zw sehenn was.«¹⁷

Turnierausrüstung in Mitteleuropa, in: Stefan Krause and Matthias Pfaffenbichler (eds.), *Turnier. 1000 Jahre Ritterspiele*, Vienna 2017, pp. 22–39, here p. 29.

¹³ Cf. Nickel 1958 (note 10), p. 58

¹⁴ Cf. id. 1988 (note 9), pp. 216, 223. From the end of the fifteenth century, the targe was no longer worn on the forearm but fixed to the breastplate to increase its functionality within the mock battle. Cf. id. 1974 (note 6), p. 28.

¹⁵ Cf. Dirk Breiding, *Rennen, Stechen und Turnier zur Zeit Maximilians I.*, in: Cornelië Lagerwaard (ed.), »Vor Halbtausend Jahre...«: *Festschrift zur Erinnerung an den Besuch des Kaisers Maximilian I. in St. Wendel*, St. Wendel 2012, pp. 51–82, here pp. 60, 64; Natalie Margaret Anderson, *The Tournament and Its Role in the Court Culture of Emperor Maximilian I (1459–1519)*, PhD thesis, University of Leeds 2017, URL: <https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/18205/> [last accessed: 10th March 2023], pp. 153–154.

¹⁶ Ludwig von Eyb der Jüngere, *Geschichten und Taten Wilwolts von Schaumberg. Kritische Edition*, ed. by Helgard Ulmschneider, Münster / New York 2018, fol. 86v–87r / pp. 166–167. Cf. Gamber 1985 (note 12), pp. 528–529; Sven Rabeler, *Niederadelige Lebensformen im späten Mittelalter. Wilwolt von Schaumberg (um 1450–1510) und Ludwig von Eyb d. J. (1450–1521)*, Würzburg 2006, p. 134.

¹⁷ Ludwig von Eyb 2018 (note 16), fol. 87r–87v / p. 167. Cf. Rabeler 2006 (note 16), p. 134; Breiding 2012 (note 15), p. 61.

In *Freydal* (ca. 1512–1515), the tournament book of Emperor Maximilian I, which gave expression to his pronounced enthusiasm for various forms of jousting,¹⁸ targes with other special effects are described and depicted. The miniatures give information about breastplates with sophisticated mechanisms that, when triggered by a hit with the lance, flung the attached shield upward.¹⁹ The design of these shields differed according to three subcategories of the *Rennen*. While in the *Bundrennen* the entire targe was catapulted upward, in the *Geschifttartschenrennen* individual metal plates attached to the targe flew away when hit with the lance (fig. 2). In the *Geschiftscheibenrennen*, on the contrary, the targe was replaced by a round disk with similar mechanisms.²⁰

Helmut Nickel ascribes »theatrical effects« to such shields.²¹ In addition, the narrative framing of the tournament testifies to its increasingly theatrical character, likewise reflecting a departure from the former purpose of the knights' games as a method of military training.²² The beginnings of this development are considered to date back to the thirteenth century: the tournaments based on Arthurian poetry, the so-called Round Tables, are already grounded on the fusion of chivalrous games with role-playing.²³ This theatricality reached its peak in fifteenth-century Burgun-

18 On the *Freydal* in general: Stefan Krause, *Freydal – Medieval Games: The Book of Tournaments of Emperor Maximilian I*, trans. by Agnes Stillfried, Cologne 2019.

19 Cf. Richard Barber and Juliet Barker, *Tournaments: Jousts, Chivalry and Pageants in the Middle Ages*, Woodbridge 1989, pp. 7, 162; Veronika Sandbichler, Torneos y fiestas de corte de los Habsburgo en los siglos XV y XVI, in: Krista De Jonge, Bernardo J. García García, and Alicia Esteban Estríngana (eds.), *El legado de Borgoña. Fiesta y ceremonia cortesana en la Europa de los Austrias (1454–1648)*, Madrid 2010, pp. 607–624, here p. 610. On breastplates with such mechanisms: *The Last Knight: The Art, Armor, and Ambition of Maximilian I*, ed. by Pierre Terjanian, exh.-cat. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2019, pp. 108–110, cat. no. 31–33 (Pierre Terjanian).

20 Cf. Breiding 2012 (note 15), p. 63; Matthias Pfaffenbichler, Das Turnierfest zwischen Reiterkampf und Oper, in: *Feste Feiern*, ed. by Sabine Haag and Gudrun Swoboda, exh.-cat. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna 2016, pp. 42–53, here p. 45; Anderson 2017 (note 15), pp. 134–137. On a *Scheibenschild* in the Musée de l'Armée in Paris, which probably stems from such a context: exh.-cat. New York 2019 (note 19), pp. 110–111, cat. no. 34 (Pierre Terjanian).

21 Cf. Nickel 1988 (note 9), p. 226.

22 Cf. Roy Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals 1450–1650*, Woodbridge 1984, pp. 12, 50–57; Nickel 1988 (note 9), p. 213; Barber / Barker 1989 (note 19), pp. 1, 8; Martina Neumeyer, *Vom Kriegshandwerk zum ritterlichen Theater. Das Turnier im mittelalterlichen Frankreich*, Bonn 1998, pp. 21, 128, 343; Alan V. Murray and Karen Watts (eds.), *The Medieval Tournament as Spectacle: Tourneys, Jousts and ›Pas d'armes‹, 1100–1600*, Woodbridge 2020.

23 Cf. Ruth Huff Cline, The Influence of Romances on Tournaments of the Middle Ages, in: *Speculum* 20 (1945), no. 2, pp. 204–211; Roger Sherman Loomis, *Arthurian Influence on Sport and Spectacle*, in: id. (ed.), *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History*, Oxford 1959, pp. 553–559; Nickel 1988 (note 9), pp. 231–232; Barber / Barker 1989 (note 19), pp. 4, 8; Neumeyer 1998 (note 22), pp. 18, 24, 343–395.



2. Southern Germany, Geschiftartschen-Rennen, gouache with gold and silver paint on paper, 1512–1515, Frey dal, Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum, ms. KK 5073, fol. 29

dy.²⁴ Particularly popular in that region was the *pas d'armes*, in which a variety of arms were brought together and linked to the fiction of defending a certain place, usually a bridge or another such passage within a city or in the countryside.²⁵ The

²⁴ Cf. Évelyne van den Neste, *Tournois, joutes, pas d'armes dans les villes de Flandre à la fin du Moyen Âge (1300–1486)*, Paris 1996, pp. 53–54; Neumeyer 1998 (note 22), pp. 399–401; Sandbichler 2010 (note 19), p. 609. The increasing theatricalization of the tournament in the fifteenth century was already emphasized by Johan Huizinga. Cf. Johan Huizinga, *Herfsttij der middeleeuwen. Studie over levens- en gedachtenvormen der veertiende en vijftiende eeuw in Frankrijk en de Nederlanden* [1919], 5th ed., Haarlem 1941, p. 106. His critical undertones – both with regard to the theatrical framework of the jousting and its military utility – were in turn critiqued. Cf. Vale 1981 (note 9), pp. 63–67; Neumeyer 1998 (note 22), pp. 22–23, 464–465.

²⁵ Cf. Annette Lindner, *Die »pas d'armes«. Eine Form des Turniers im burgundischen Raum im 15. Jahrhundert*, PhD thesis, University of Stuttgart 1990, microfiche; Eric Bousmar, Jousting at the Court of Burgundy. The »Pas d'armes»: Shifts in Scenario, Location, and Recruitment, in: Wim Blockmans et al. (eds.), *Staging the Court of Burgundy*, Brepols 2013, pp. 75–84, here p. 75; Torsten Hiltmann, Un État de noblesse et de chevalerie sans pareilles? Tournois et hérauts d'armes à la cour des ducs de Bourgogne, in: Werner Paravicini (ed.), *La cour de Bourgogne et l'Europe. Le rayonnement et les limites d'un modèle culturel*, Ostfildern 2013, pp. 253–288, here pp. 255–276.

concomitant theatrical enrichment is generally seen as setting the *pas d'armes* apart from other dramatized forms of jousting.²⁶

Visual Commentary

Shields were an important part of the *pas d'armes*.²⁷ They symbolized with their designs the various modes of combat, and they were hung on trees, where they were touched by the jousters with the sword or the lance to show their readiness to fight and their chosen manner of combat.²⁸ The *Pas de la Bergiere* of 1449, organized by René d'Anjou, stands out in this respect, since the color of the shields was also meant to signal the state of mind of the participants.²⁹ In the case of the *Pas de la Dame sauvage*, which took place in Ghent in 1470, a shield was instead central to the theatrical setting: it bore the image of the wild lady addressed in the title and was presented as a prize to the winner of the tournament, as Olivier de la Marche recorded in his *Traicté d'un tournoy tenu à Gand par Claude de Vauldray* (1469).³⁰

A targe made between 1470 and 1490 and preserved today in the British Museum in London can be placed, due to its painterly design, in the general context of this type of joust (fig. 3). Its elaborate decoration is attributed to the Master of the Portraits of Princes, who was active in and around Brussels at the end of the fifteenth century.³¹

26 Cf. Jean-Pierre Jourdan, *Le thème du pas d'armes dans le royaume de France (Borgogne, Anjou) à la fin du Moyen Âge. Aspects d'un théâtre de chevalerie*, in: Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale (ed.), *Théâtre et spectacles hier et aujourd'hui: Moyen Âge et Renaissance*, Paris 1991, pp. 285–304, here p. 285; Armand Strubel, *Le pas d'armes: le tournoi entre le romanescque et le théâtral*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 273–284, here pp. 273, 283; Eric Bousmar, *Pasos de armas, justas y torneos en la corte de Borgoña (siglo XV y principios del XVI). Imaginario caballeresco, rituales e implicaciones socio-políticas*, in: De Jonge / García García / Esteban Estríngana 2010 (note 19), pp. 561–605, here p. 567. For a critical consideration of the aspect of theatricality as a characteristic of the *pas d'armes*: Catherine Blunk, *Between Sport and Theatre: How Spectacular Was the ›Pas d'armes‹?*, in: Murray / Watts 2020 (note 22), pp. 120–138.

27 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 125, 129.

28 Cf. Bousmar 2010 (note 26), pp. 569–570. For various examples: Neumeyer 1998 (note 22), pp. 425–426, 431–432, 438–439, 443, 452.

29 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 428–429.

30 Olivier de La Marche, *Traicté d'un tournoy tenu à Gand par Claude de Vauldray, seigneur de l'Aigle, l'an 1469 (vieux style)*, in: Bernard Prost (ed.), *Traictés du duel judiciaire. Relations de pas d'armes et tournois*, Paris 1872, pp. 55–95, here pp. 64, 95. Cf. Blunk 2020 (note 26), p. 123.

31 Hugh Hudson already noted the possible attribution to the Master of the Portraits of Princes in the object file in 2001. Cf. *L'héritage de Rogier van der Weyden. La peinture à Bruxelles 1450–1520*, ed. by Véronique Bücken, Griet Steyaert, and Brigitte De Patoul, exh.-cat. Brussels, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Tiel 2013, p. 233, cat. no. 45 (Griet Steyaert), note 1.

The shield has a height of 82.8 centimeters and was crafted from a single piece of wood, either a trunk or branch.³² When viewed from the front, it has a slightly concave curvature, and it is divided lengthwise by a raised ridge, worked directly from the wood. Both sides of the weapon were covered first with canvas, then with leather and a layer of lime.³³ On the surface thus prepared, the artist applied underdrawings, which testify to the successive construction of the three figures, followed by the red-dish primer for the gold ground.³⁴

The figures and the barren landscape in which they stand were executed with oil paints. A frame formed by black lines and hatching traces the contour of the targe and its vertical ridge. This visual device separates the figures, who are depicted standing on a uniform piece of rock. A magnificently dressed lady appears on the left side. She faces right with lowered eyes, while lifting from her belt a long chain with a pendant, perhaps a small perfume container.³⁵ The lady wears a dress with a straight neckline, a front-lacing bodice, tight-fitting sleeves, and an A-line skirt. Its precious brocade fabric and trimmings of ermine fur at the hem and cuffs are worked out in detail. For the design of the brocade, the artist used the sgraffito technique, in which the applied gold leaf was partly painted over, only to remove this color in a second step. On her head, the lady wears a hennin with a long white veil, so finely painted that the red dots that are distributed over the gold background shine through the cloth.

The knight on the right turns to the noble lady with slightly bent knees. He wears a full suit of armor resembling the Burgundian style.³⁶ Only the armet and the gauntlets have been discarded by the knight;³⁷ they lie at his feet and are supplemented there by a poleax, the thrusting point of which is aligned with the lower tip of the targe. The pole of this weapon points toward the knight and toward the figure of death who approaches

³² This and the following technical information is based on the detailed examination of the object conducted by Katy Sanders in 2009. Cf. Katy Sanders et al., 'Purely Decorative? Technical Analysis of a Fifteenth-Century Northern European Parade Shield', in: *Studies in Conservation* 57 (2012), no. 1, pp. 268–278, DOI: 10.1179/2047058412Y.0000000019 [last accessed: 9th January 2022], p. 274. The targe was first cleaned in 1938, and subsequent overpaintings were removed in this context. Cf. Thomas D. Kendrick, 'A Flemish Painted Shield', in: *The British Museum Quarterly* 13 (1939), no. 2, pp. 33–34.

³³ On the reverse, the leather pieces overlap along the edge, reinforcing this area. Cf. Sanders et al. 2012 (note 32), p. 273.

³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 270.

³⁵ Cf. *exh.-cat. Brussels 2013* (note 31), p. 233, cat. no. 45.

³⁶ Cf. Nickel 1974 (note 6), p. 32; Guy Wilson, 'The Arms and Weapons of Burgundy in the Fifteenth Century', in: *The Connoisseur* 194 (1977), no. 781, pp. 190–197, here p. 195.

³⁷ The helmet was slightly altered during a later overpainting. Cf. Kendrick 1939 (note 32), p. 33. Griet Steyaert associated the easily recognizable facial features with the portrait of a member of the Fonseca, which is now kept in the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam. Cf. *exh.-cat. Brussels 2013* (note 31), p. 233, cat. no. 45.

from behind, depicted as a sunken, darkened corpse. The crossroads thus evoked between the noble lady and Death becomes explicit in the inscription on a banderole above the knight's head, reading »Vous ou la mort« (You or death).

Nickel first interpreted the London targe as a precious prize in the context of the Round Tables.³⁸ Such a use of shields has been transmitted for certain Burgundian *pas d'armes* of the fifteenth century, including the *Pas de la Dame sauvage* of 1470 and the *Pas du Perron fée* held in Bruges as early as 1463.³⁹ Later authors, without going into further detail, considered the London targe to have been merely displayed at a tournament.⁴⁰

The depiction on the targe supports a connection to the Round Tables. In his early attempt to contextualize the object, Nickel referred to Sir Thomas Malory's late treatment of the Arthurian legend, his comprehensive work *Le Morte Darthur*. According to Nickel's reading, the central figures on the London targe are adapted from a shield



3. Master of the Portraits of Princes (?),
Parade Shield, oil on leather over canvas and
wood, ca. 1470–1490,
London, The British Museum

³⁸ Nickel 1974 (note 6), p. 41. See also Wilson 1977 (note 36), p. 195; Vesey Norman, *The Tournament*, in: *Riddarlek och tornerspel / Tournaments and the Dream of Chivalry*, ed. by Lena Rangström, exh.-cat. Stockholm, Livrustkammaren, Stockholm 1992, pp. 304–310, here p. 308.

³⁹ For the *Pas de la dame sauvage*: see above; for the *Pas du Perron fée*: Chloé Horn, Anne Rochebouet, and Michelle Szkilnik (eds.), *Le Pas du Perron fée (Édition des manuscrits Paris, BnF fr 5739 et Lille BU 104)*, Paris 2013, § 19, fol. 165r / p. 132. Cf. Neumeyer 1998 (note 22), p. 441.

⁴⁰ Cf. John Cherry, *Medieval Decorative Art*, London 1991, p. 70; James Robinson, *Masterpieces of Medieval Art*, London 2008, p. 168; Sanders et al. 2012 (note 32), p. 268; exh.-cat. Brussels 2013 (note 31), p. 233, cat. no. 45. Alan R. Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments*, London 1987, pp. 130–131, refers to the targe as a comparative example of an »impresa shield,« a type he assumes was also used in large numbers in English tournaments.

design closely linked to Lancelot.⁴¹ In fact, Malory describes two shields with unusual and complex paintings that clearly stand out from the others mentioned in the book, whose designs are closer to contemporary heraldry.⁴² Both are connected to Lancelot and to various episodes of the plot. The shield Tristan receives from Arthur's sister Morgan le Fay and then wields during a tournament at the castle of the Harde Roche hints at the ›love triangle‹ among Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot: »[...] the shyde was gouldes with a kyngge and a quene therein paynted, and a knyght stondynge aboven them with hys one foote standynge uppon the kynges hede and the othir uppon the quenys hede.«⁴³ The shield Lancelot commissions after being cured of his love-induced madness, on the other hand, shows a knight kneeling before a noble lady against a black background.⁴⁴ Nickel is obviously referring to this passage.

In view of the convincing attribution of the targe to the Master of the Portraits of Princes, who, as noted above, was active first and foremost in Brussels, it is less likely that Malory's *La Morte Darthur* itself – rather than one of Malory's French sources – served as the model for the design of the targe. A connection to the *Lancelot en prose* (*Lancelot-Grail*) has already been raised for discussion by Christiane Hessler, with reference to the description of a magic shield that Guinevere receives from the Dame del Lac.⁴⁵ This weapon shows a knight and a noble lady separated by a vertical crack; the disappearance of this crack later signals the union between the queen and Lancelot.⁴⁶

However, the kneeling posture of the knight suggests that it is not this episode that is invoked on the targe, but rather another passage taken up by Malory. Nickel thus hinted in the right direction, but his identification of the depiction on the shield calls for explanation in greater detail and with recourse to the *Lancelot-Grail*. After Lancelot has been freed from his love madness by the Grail, he remains in the care

⁴¹ Nickel 1974 (note 6), p. 32. The author does not quote the exact paragraph in the text.

⁴² On these shields: Sarah Brazil, *The Codification of Heraldry in Malory's ›Le Morte Darthur‹*, in: *The Coat of Arms* 3rd ser. 10 (2014), no. 227, pp. 1–8.

⁴³ Eugène Vinaver (ed.), *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 2nd ed., 3 vols., Oxford 1967, vol. 2, fol. 227r / p. 554. This shield description and its narrative framework are based on the *Prose Tristan*. Cf. Eilert Löseth, *Le roman en prose de Tristan / Le roman de Palamède et la compilation de Rusticien de Pise. Analyse critique d'après les manuscrits de Paris*, Geneva 1974, §§ 190, 192, pp. 136–141.

⁴⁴ Cf. Vinaver 1967 (note 43), fol. 339v / p. 827: »[...] a shyde all of sable, and a quene crowned in the myddis of sylver, and a knyght clene armed knelynge afore her.«

⁴⁵ Christiane J. Hessler, *Zum Paragone. Malerei, Skulptur und Dichtung in der Rangstreitkultur des Quattrocento*, Berlin 2014, pp. 399–401.

⁴⁶ Alexandre Micha, *Lancelot. Roman en prose du XIII^e siècle*, 9 vols., Geneva 1978–1983, vol. 8, LVIIIa, § 15, p. 206, LXXa, § 35, p. 444. Cf. Hessler 2014 (note 45), pp. 400–401, who interprets the vertical demarcation of the figures on the targe with recourse to the aforementioned gap.

of King Pelles and moves into the Tower of Giants on the Isle of Joy, with the king's daughter. There he stays under the name Chevalier Mal Fet (the Guilty Knight) in order not to be recognized by the Knights of the Round Table. Lancelot eventually challenges the knights of the area to a duel so that he can practice once again in the use of weapons, and for this occasion he asks King Pelles to have a shield made for him according to his instructions:

»Three days later a squire brought in the shield, just as he had described it. When the people of the castle saw it, they were amazed, for they had never seen the like, and without doubt it was the most extraordinary shield in the kingdom at that time. It was blacker than a mulberry, and in the middle, where the boss should have been, was painted a silver queen and a knight on his knees before her, as if he were begging for mercy.«⁴⁷

None of the castle's inhabitants understands the meaning of this representation – except Lancelot and the king's daughter.⁴⁸ Blinded by magic, Lancelot had a fling with the latter, which Guinevere discovered, whereupon she disowned him, causing his madness.⁴⁹ The design of the shield thus refers to an earlier episode of the *Lancelot-Grail* and illustrates the great remorse of the knight who, upon his recovery, continues to be in love with the queen. One day, in the midst of duel, Lancelot (alias the Guilty Knight) himself explains to Parzival the representation on his shield with reference to this event: »Know then that whoever wishes to name me correctly will call me the Guilty Knight, and because of that I bear a fitting device.«⁵⁰

Yet, the figure of death and the accompanying motto »Vous ou la mort« cannot be derived from this paragraph. Even among the coats of arms of the Knights of the Round Table, which were brought together several times in the fifteenth century, no

47 Norris J. Lacy (ed.), *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, 5 vols., Abingdon / New York 2010, vol. 3, part VI, trans. by Carleton W. Carroll, pp. 335–336. Micha 1978–1983 (note. 46), vol. 6, CVII, § 46, p. 233: »III. jorz après aporta leanz .I. vallez l'escu come il l'ot devisé. Et quant cil del chastel le virent, si s'en mervillerent moult, por ce qu'il n'avoient onques mes veu autel; et sanz faille il ert li plus divers qui a cel tens eust esté el reaume, car il estoit plus noirs que meure et ou mi leu, la ou la boucle devoit estre, avoit painte une roine d'argent et devant li un chevalier a genolz ausi come s'il criast merci.«

48 Ibid.: »Et cil de leanz qui virent l'escu et les ymages ne sorent que ce senefioit, for seulement Lancelot et la fille de roi Pellés.« See also *ibid.*, § 43, p. 231.

49 Cf. *ibid.*, CV, §§ 33–38, pp. 173–177.

50 Lacy 2010 (note 47), vol. 3, part VI, p. 337. Micha 1978–1983 (note 46), vol. 6, CVIII, § 7, p. 239: »Et bien saichiez qui droitement me volra nomer si m'apelera le Chevalier Mesfet et de ce port je bonnes enseignes.«

direct counterpart can be found – only general references to courtly love and the knights' courage even in the face of death.⁵¹ Rather than quoting word for word an impresa transmitted in the *Lancelot-Grail*, the figural scene on the shield generates a more complex narrative blending Lancelot's remorse with a general allusion to chivalric duties and ideals. The depiction on the targe may thus have served as a personal motto and guiding principle for the tournament.⁵² In light of this, the weapon should be construed as a prop within a pageant preceding the joust, instead of as a prize handed over to the winner afterward.⁵³

In 1470, 1491, and 1494, *pas d'armes* with differing themes were organized in Ghent, Mechelen, and Antwerp respectively.⁵⁴ In the end, however, it may have been a *pas d'armes* in the considerably more distant castle of Sandricourt that gave rise to the design of the targe. Part of this event, which lasted several days and was attended by nobles from all over France, consisted of ›adventures‹ in a nearby forest, which the participants undertook in the roles of the Knights of the Round Table and, at the banquet that followed, reported on to the noble ladies and judges present – as had been the custom already in the *Lancelot-Grail*.⁵⁵ The extent to which Arthurian literature continued to shape tournaments in the Burgundian Netherlands in the second half of the fifteenth century is evidenced not least by the treatise *La forme quon tenoit des tournoys et assemblees au temps du roy Uterpendragon et du roy Artur*, written around 1470 and preserved in a copy in the Houghton Library at Harvard University.⁵⁶

51 Cf. Michel Pastoureau, *Armorial des chevaliers de la table ronde*, Paris 1983; Lisa Jefferson, 'Tournaments, Heraldry and the Knights of the Round Table: A Fifteenth-Century Armorial with Two Accompanying Texts', in: *Arthurian Literature* 14 (1996), pp. 69–157. The juxtaposition of love fulfillment and death is considered by Huizinga 1941 (note 24), p. 103, to be characteristic of courtly love. For a rather cursory placement of the targe in this thematic context: Alberto Montaner Frutos, 'Emblemática caballeresca e identidad del caballero', in: Eva Belén Carro Carbajal, Laura Puerto Moro, and María Sánchez Pérez (eds.), *Libros de caballerías (de ›Amadís‹ al ›Quijote‹)*. *Poética, lectura, representación e identidad*, Salamanca 2002, pp. 267–306, fig. 9.

52 Comparable mottoes can be found on the earlier standards of the Burgundian booty. Cf. Vale 1981 (note 9), p. 98.

53 Birgit Franke, 'Ritter und Heroen der ›burgundischen Antike‹. Franko-flämische Tapisserte des 15. Jahrhunderts', in: *Städte-Jahrbuch N. F.* 16 (1997), pp. 113–139, here p. 121, already refers to the targe as a prop for a *pas d'armes* in general, without going into further detail.

54 Cf. Bousmar 2010 (note 26), p. 564.

55 The exact course of events of the *pas d'armes* of Sandricourt is documented in a manuscript kept in the Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, edited by Louis-Augustin Vayssière in 1874. Cf. Louis-Augustin Vayssière, *Le pas des armes de Sandricourt. Relation d'un tournoi donné en 1493 au château de ce nom*, Paris 1874, pp. 49–61. The *pas d'armes* is already mentioned in: Marc de Vulson de La Colombière, *Le vray théâtre d'honneur et de chevalerie, ou le Miroir héroïque de la noblesse*, Paris 1648, pp. 147–170.

56 MS Typ 131. Cf. Edouard Sandoz, 'Tournaments in the Arthurian Tradition', in: *Speculum* 19 (1944), no. 4, pp. 389–420.

Whether the targe actually served one of the jousters as a prop for the role of the Guilty Knight must remain an open question. The targe could just as easily have served as a more general prop in a *pas d'armes* with another thematic focus, perhaps to symbolize chivalric duties. Regardless of the exact performance context for which it was intended, the painterly design of the shield – transforming it into a pictorial ›stage‹ in itself and tying it to an overarching narrative or ideal – would have been central to its use as a prop.

Conclusion

When a shield serves as a prop in a play, it designates as a warrior the character in question. The many shapes the shield has assumed over the centuries, which Arthur Wise traces in his 1968 book *Weapons in the Theatre*, make it possible to distinguish on stage Greek and Roman infantrymen from one another as well as from warriors of other times and cultures.⁵⁷ As a shield type, the targe, including the examples discussed above, can be described as a typical prop of a medieval knight, one that moreover refers to the tournament.⁵⁸

Even before the tournament came to be staged in theater, it took on theatrical forms increasingly from the thirteenth century. Shields and especially targes were already used as props in these knightly duels and their preceding pageants. For this purpose, they were ›enriched‹ in various ways: targes became targets with special effects that surprised the spectators. If this effect relied on the dissolution of the entire form – the shields seeming to explode with the impact of the lance – targes could also remain intact and take on a role as bearers of images. As such, they referenced and at times even consolidated the thematic orientation of the tournament or pageant and, in a more general way, referred to the knightly code of honor, which was always displayed at these events.

⁵⁷ Arthur Wise, *Weapons in the Theatre*, London 1968, pp. 54, 56, 66–67, 80. On weapons in theater and film, see also: Dale Anthony Girard, *Actors on Guard: A Practical Guide for the Use of the Rapier and Dagger for Stage and Screen*, New York 1997; *Pop-arm fantastique! Armes et armures des mondes imaginaires*, ed. by Nicolas P. Baptiste, exh.-cat. Morges, Château de Morges, Gollion 2019.

⁵⁸ Cf. Nickel 1974 (note 6), p. 27; Raphael Beuing, Schilde. Formen, Verwendung und Terminologie, in: id. and Wolfgang Augustyn (eds.), *Schilde des Spätmittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*, Passau 2019, pp. 1–32, here pp. 14–17.

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Julia Saviello, The Shield as Prop and ›Stage‹ in the Early Modern Tournament, in: Requisiten. Die Inszenierung von Objekten auf der ›Bühne der Kunst‹, hg. von Joanna Olchawa und Julia Saviello, Merzhausen: ad picturam 2023, <https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.1186.c16882>