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The Heart in the Chest

Fig. 1: Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1534–38, oil on canvas, 119 x 165 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

A seductively posed nude with long, loose hair; an elegant domestic interior; a sleeping lapdog; freshly picked flowers; an opened chest: the visual ingredients are familiar from Titian's enigmatic *Venus of Urbino*, painted around 1534 (fig. 1). "La donna nuda," as Guidobaldo della Rovere succinctly—though unfortunately all too vaguely—described the coveted painting in a 1538 letter, has produced a long and controversial reception history.[1] It stands, among other things, at the center of a fictional polemic titled *The Woman in the Chest*, staged before the picture as a dialogue between its author Daniel Arasse and an interlocutor, easily recognizable as Charles Hope.[2] The lively exchange between the discourse-savvy French scholar—attuned to pictorial logic and viewer orientation—and his British counterpart, who represents a more iconographic and socio-historical stance, wittily raises a series of fundamental questions about interpretive models and epistemological desires that animate our discipline. At the same time, it directs more specific attention to the scholarly

habits and academic traditions we bring to depictions of the nude female body in Art. Let us take a closer look at the two scholar's exchange about Titian's *Venus of Urbino*:[3]

> A: "A pinup?" — H: "Yep. That's what she is. Pure and Simple — A: "Well, it depends on what you mean by that." — H: "It's simple: a beautiful, naked woman … or rather, an image of one. The image of a naked woman that's meant to excite the man who's looking at it; an image of woman as sexual object." — A: "You're saying that the Venus of Urbino is a pinup? Come on!"[4]

And further on, after a brief controversy on the painting's objects:

> A: "Usually, you like these attributes. An iconographer like yourself who is quoted everywhere…" — H: "Just because I am an iconographer doesn't mean I cannot see! And these attributes look suspicious to me. The chests? Of course they bring to mind those hope chests in which the young bride would place her dowry of linens to take to her husband's home; but I am convinced that the great courtesans —and she is one; just look at the place where she lives! —also had this sort of chest in their bedrooms. As for the dog, it's a well-known symbol of fidelity, but also of lust. In any case, it's asleep […]." — A: "Long live iconography!" — H: "Yes, long live iconography! These objects are not necessarily attributes and, in any case, their meaning is not clear, univocal. After all, the myrtle on the window might very well be only a myrtle, and the roses only roses…" — A: "And the woman only a pinup. I see where you're going. Taken separately, each object does not have in itself a clear, indisputable meaning. I agree. But the juxtaposition of these objects weaves a context that makes them less ambiguous, a well-knit network that is an allusion to matrimony."[5]

Arasse explicitly questions common interpretations of the painting as an erotic cabinet picture or a courtesan portrait. Yet he also takes issue with Panofsky's iconological reading of the work as a neo-Platonic allegory of the senses.[6] For him, the *Venus of Urbino* is neither a lifelike pinup (Hope) nor an intellectual symbol (Panofsky). Instead, it is "a paragon of eroticism."[7] Like Rona Goffen and David Rosand before him, he interprets the painting as a novel depiction of a sexually self-aware woman in her luxurious palace.[8] At the same time, he emphasizes the painting's titillating semantic openness that establishes an ambivalent and unstable image–viewer relation. From this perspective, adherence to iconographic models of disambiguation proves more of a stumbling block than an aid to interpretation—a distortion of vision: A: "I'm just trying to look at the painting. To forget iconography. To see how it functions." His counterpart brusquely dismisses the approach with the categorical remark: "That's not art history."[9]

Close looking, in Arasse's manner, brings to the foreground a background detail: two women bending over a large chest. One of them seems to almost disappear with her upper body into the voluminous wooden box. In fact, the scene is more than a mere detail: It establishes a narrative link. Chests of this type—*trousseaus* or *cassoni*—held the linen of young brides. Often, their exteriors were decorated with educative mythological and literary scenes (though here adorned with grotesques); some of them bore more explicitly erotic imagery on the inside, alluding to sexual harmony and its hoped-for fruits. Arasse connects such erotically charged imagery to the sexually explicit pose and hand gesture of the nude woman in the foreground, which Goffen elsewhere interprets a gesture of female masturbation—underscoring, in Renaissance terms, the explicit link between female pleasure and successful reproduction.[10] What we have, then, is an erotically charged staging of domestic sexuality and its

role in securing the family line. Accordingly, Arasse suggests that the protagonist might also be understood as a kind of embodiment of love and fertility emerging from the chest itself—an interpretation already hinted at by the dialogue's title, *Woman in the Chest*. He explains:

> A: "By placing in the foreground this naked female body, and by showing in the background the servant girls fussing about with the clothing in the chest, Titian is suggesting what the contents of the chest are meant to hide. […] I almost want to say it's as if this woman had come naked out of the chest, and that it's not by chance that the curves of the chest and the curves of her body echo each other on a formal level…" — H: "The woman a chest, the chest as woman!" — A: "That's not what I said." — H: "If you can find a single text to support your … I don't know what to call it… your hypothesis, well, I'll eat my hat."[11]

Thus, one art historian (Hope) accuses the other (Arasse) of "intellectual masturbation." Arasse, for his part, seeks to expose Hope as a pedantic fact-grinder lacking imagination.[12] Of course, both readings ultimately rely on a male gaze not only embedded in the painting's own visual address but also heavily reflected in its long art-historical reception.[13] Moreover, Arasse's methodological jab at Hope—"maybe you need to look more carefully by reading less iconographically"[14]—is hardly new. Yet in the end the dialogue productively stages fundamental questions of image interpretation, especially the tension between a painting's inner fictions and ambiguities, on the one hand, and our desire to anchor meaning in historically verifiable "realities," on the other.

There is little doubt that the *Venus of Urbino* probes, in new and subtle ways, the preoccupation with seeing and touching, veiling and unveiling both in Renaissance art and in the image theory of the time. But how exactly does the painting do this? What does the artist want us to see? A courtesan in soft-porn pose? A Platonic allegory? A married beauty, proud of her body and the pleasure it brings? A role model for a bride conditioned to deliver offspring? The Renaissance version of an ancient goddess? The answer depends largely on how much 'historical reality' we assume the image conveys, and how literally we take its components. Hope dismantles Arasse's bridal-chest argument at a crucial juncture of their dialogue with the well-placed remark: "In Venice, the chests were not painted; they were sculpted with decorative motifs." With that, the hypothesis of a marriage chest goes out the window, and Hope remarks: "Really, your entire reasoning is 'theoretical.' It's not even that. You're just talking, not producing knowledge. And art history is not just talk or theory."[15]

As Arasse—somewhat sophistically—sidesteps the force of Hope's historically grounded arguments, one cannot help but realizing that historically responsible interpretation should not sacrifice one approach to the other, and that attentive visual scrutiny and historically anchored meaning should be mutually productive rather than oppositional. This brings me, belatedly enough, to the actual subject of my essay for the anniversary issue of the open-access journal *Kunsttexte*. While my contribution does not shy away from the image—text sleuthing typical of iconography and iconology, it pays heed to Arasse's insight that only careful reflection on how an image's elements interact and work together brings us closer to understanding its "texture" and grasping its "fabric," through a process of attentive disambiguation.[16]

The work in question here is a small painting in the Museum der Bildenden Künste in Leipzig (fig. 2). Once again, we see a young nude woman with loose hair in a luxuriously appointed interior, a sleeping lapdog, flowers, and an opened chest—a distant relative, so to speak, of Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, though roughly two generations older. The painting,

Fig. 2: Rhenish Master (Master of the Bonn Diptychon?), so-called *Love Spell*, circa 1470, oil on beechwood, 23,9 x 18 cm, Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig.

commonly known as *Der Liebeszauber* (*Love Spell*), measures only 24 x 18 cm; its small formal suggests that it was probably designed for close viewing and more intimate interaction. [17] Dated around 1470 or 1480 and usually attributed to a Rhenish master, it has attracted considerable scholarly attention.[18] Its unusual subject matter of a magical love ritual performed by a woman—if that is what in fact it shows—is singular in the context of fifteenth-century panel painting.

At the center of the composition, a nude young woman with downcast eyes presents herself almost frontally to the viewer. With an elegant, dance-like stride, she appears to advance across the planked floor of a spacious interior. The brightly lit room opens to the outside landscape through three large windows; on the rear wall to the right is an open door, through which a young man wearing a cap and a sword at his hip can be seen. He pauses casually in the doorway, hands resting on the frame, his head extended just enough to suggest a quick, casual inspection. Next to the door sits a wooden cupboard whose door is ajar as well, revealing a series of polished vessels inside. On a high shelf we see jugs, a box, and a book. Beneath the cupboard and windows, a low, cushion-topped bench runs along the back half of the room. To the left of the woman in the foreground burns an imposing fireplace, while to her right—under the frontmost window—a half-height *Stollenschrank* holds on its lower shelf a metal washbasin and ewer, the water sprinkled with red petals. A half-rolled towel lies beside a beaker-like prunted glass and a gilded, cup-shaped tazza filled with white sugar sweets. A bird perches on the rim of the dish, holding one of the sweets in its left claw. On the post between the two windows of the right wall hangs a gilded convex mirror above a peacock feather leaning against the wall. In the foreground to the right, between the girl and the cupboard, a small white dog naps on a two-toned cushion; meadow flowers—some identifiable as lilies of the valley, narcissi, and red and white roses—are evenly scattered across the floor.

Our attention is initially drawn to the beautiful girl through her scarcely concealed nudity. Her erotic staging is obvious in the elegance of her stride, but also by her long, golden hair, flushed cheeks, delicate strappy sandals, and the diaphanous veil winding loosely from her right forearm over her hip to her left calf, finally folding softly onto the floor. Yet it is primarily the enigmatic nature of her actions in the chamber that captivates the viewer. Her slightly bent arms, casually directed to the left, hold several small objects (fig. 3). Only a close inspection reveals what she is doing. In her left hand is a small fire striker, while in her right, pinched between thumb and forefinger, a flint sparks. Her remaining fingers grip a small sponge, from which water drips. Sparks and drops fall evenly into a small, gilded chest, set

Fig. 3: Detail of fig. 2, Heart in the Chest.

on a tripod stool before the fireplace. Its lid is open, revealing a red, heart-shaped object carefully placed on the veil draped from the girl. Her head slightly bowed, she accompanies her actions with calm attention and a gentle smile.

The open interior space, seen frontally, is rhythmically structured by a series of blank white banners emanating from the girl, the dog, the bird, the man in the doorway, and the heart in the chest, giving the impression of a dialogue or song. Whether they were ever intended to bear inscriptions remains unclear;[19] but their presence in the small panel reinforces its invitation to 'read' the scene through close visual scanning, adding a performative or communicative dimension.[20] Equally subtle, though no less effective, is the deliberate use of a luminous crimson, which carries the color of the plump heart through the image in a painterly "trail of blood." This bright red visually links the heart with the fireplace's embers and the sparks of the flint, while also connecting to the girl's sandals, the underside of the dog's cushion, the bird's claws and beak, rose petals in the washing water, the mirror's frame, the peacock feather, the bookbinding in the background, and finally the man's red hose. Against an otherwise muted palette of greys, browns, and golds, the red functions as a clear visual leitmotif. The painter contrasts it with the whites of the girl's body, veil, dog, flowers, towel, sweets, and banners, echoing the simultaneous emergence of sparks and water—an opposition again reinforced by the positioning of the girl between fire and water.

Given the abundance of clearly displayed pictorial elements, the iconographer's heart naturally quickens: mirror, dog, veil, bird, flowers, fire, heart—all are promising for iconographic analysis. Yet here, as in Titian's *Venus of Urbino,* a definitive semiotic fabric does not easily emerge; the iconographic ambiguities of the individual elements are too great, as has been repeatedly noted in scholarship.[21] The dilemma is exemplified by the lapdog, a motif found similarly in Jan van Eyck's allusive interior of the *Arnolfini Double Portrait*. Already in the Middle Ages, and well into the sixteenth century, the allegorical interpretation of animals could work in both directions: *in bonam partem* or *in malam partem*. [22] Strong ambivalences emerge even when we focus on the specific combinations, such as a lapdog with a nude woman, popular in early print culture—although none of the images include a heart in a chest.[23] A comparison to the so-called *Girl with a Rose* from a set of playing cards of circa 1465, attributed to the *Master of the Banderoles* (fig. 4), is a case in point: nudity, long hair, flowers, and lapdog are recurring visual ingredients. The fluttering banners here warn of sexual impropriety: while the girl covers her genitals with a rose, the accompanying text of her banderole proclaims: "Set ale her czo ich disse Rose hin do" ("look all here, where I am putting this rose"). The little dog admonishes in his banderole: "Scham dich darin" ("shame yourself for it)."[24] In contrast, the dozing dog next to the reclining beauty

Fig. 4: Anonymous engraver (Master of the Banderoles), *Girl with the Rose (left) und and playing card Hirsch-Unter (right)*, circa 1465, copper engraving, 12,7 x 12,4 cm, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich.

in Titian's *Venus of Urbino* hardly sends off a moral admonition; it is typically interpreted as a symbol of marital fidelity or a positive sign of erotic charm and tactile pleasure.

Perhaps, then, the sleeping dog in *The Love Spell* simply underscores the intimate domesticity of the scene. An example from contemporary manuscript illumination supports this reading (fig. 5). In a miniature by Loyset Liédet from the *History of Charles Martel* (1470—1472), the Duke's surprise visit to his secretary and scribe David Aubert is depicted. The interior echoes the one in the Leipzig panel: supraportes with boxes and vessels, a sideboard with washbasin and towel, a convex mirror, a substantial fireplace, books, and a sleeping white dog at the scribe's feet.25] Here, the dog —one of two—is likely just a companion during focused work, underscoring the faithful work of the scribe. So maybe the dog in the center of the Leipzig *Love Spell* is just a faithful companion, keeping the girl company (a "Charles Hope-style" argument, so to speak)?

Fig. 5: *L'Histoire de Charles Martel,* vol. 3 (ms. 8, fol 7r), 1470–72, illumination on parchment, 41 x 29 cm, Bibliotheque Royale de Belgique, Brussels.

A second example of the iconographic ambiguities complicating interpretation is the bird (parrot or parakeet?) feeding on the sweets, which in turn are sometimes identified as pearls. [26] Brigitte Lymant, who has conducted the most thorough iconographic analysis to date, concludes that "the white lapdog represents the young man's fidelity, which he lays at the girl's feet," and "the bird signifies his desire."[27] She suggests that the combination of fidelity and passion reflects core concerns of medieval moral theology, which also informs notions of the good marriage—a connection that we will revisit. Or might the cheeky bird with its banderole instead be understood as an allegory of the lyrical "I" as expressed in the conventions of late medieval *Minnesang*?

Overall, the Leipzig panel subtly presents, on several levels and through multiple objects, the ambivalences and complexities of love: dog, bird, mirror, the spring flowers, sugar confections, fire, and especially the heart—the painting's actual protagonist.[28] Ambiguity of meaning is compounded by the ambiguity of action and gaze. To be sure, the idea that the painting uniquely depicts a late medieval erotic love ritual has remained compelling; the museum still exhibits it as *Der Liebeszauber*, and it adorns, for instance, the cover of a recent publication on occult practices in Shakespearean theater.[29] This strain of interpretation—as a magic ritual performed on a heart of wax—was first established in 1882 by Hermann Lücke.[30] He posited that the painter recorded a young woman secretly performing a ritual in her chamber, dipping a wax heart in water and baptizing it in her lover's name, then melting it in a shower of sparks, thus summoning her beloved in the process, who then appears in the background through the open door. Dieckhoff (1985) extends the thought and claims that the image "is a unique *document* of late-medieval erotic *practice*."[31] Lymant (1994), later on, convincingly refutes this reading, noting that the scene's springtime flowers contradict a St. Andrew's night ritual that would have taken place in November. The fact that not a single medieval ritual we know of matches the painting's alleged erotic activities should give further reason to pause.[32]

How, then, are we to 'read' this painting if not as the representation of a magical love ritual? Perhaps as an allegory of love, as numerous attributes seem to suggest? As a 'pin-up' reflecting the growing popularity of primarily erotic pictorial subjects in the fifteenth century? As a bridal or wedding image, indicated by its compositional echo of the *Arnolfini* interior? As a domesticated Renaissance Venus, whose nudity and pose recall images from the Cranach workshop? Or as a moralizing exploration of male voyeurism, akin to Bathsheba and Susanna?[33]

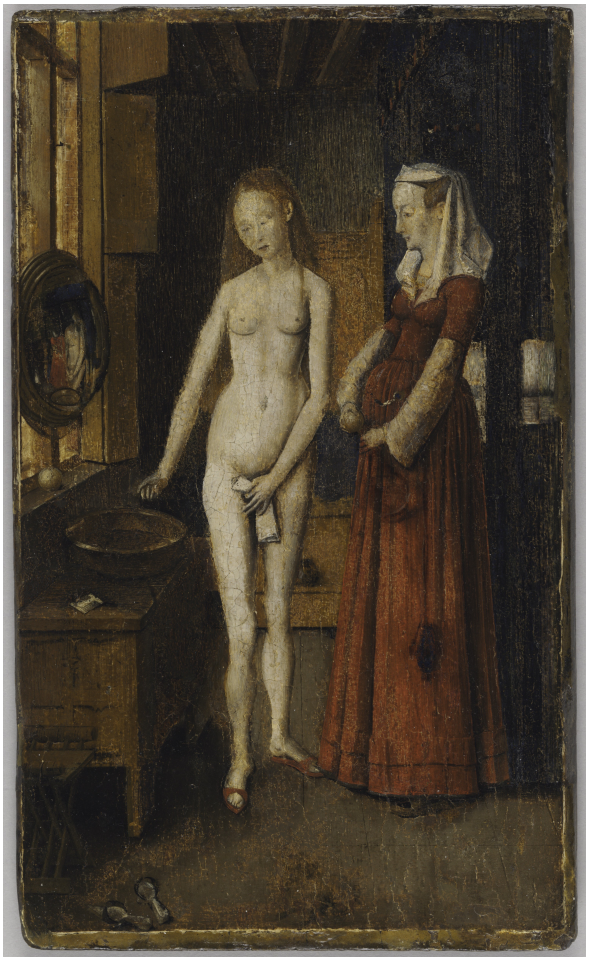

Fig. 6: Copy after Jan van Eyck, Lady (Judith?) at her Toilette, fifteenth century (?), oil on wood, 27,5 x 16,4 cm, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge MA.

Recent scholarship on the painting has foregrounded concepts of gendered space, the male gaze, and its contextualization in "wider social realities of its day."[34] The erotic staging of the female body at the center of the pictorial action has rightly been emphasized, sometimes with reference to the phallic dagger between the man's legs.[35] Yet is the painting then primarily an early erotic cabinet piece, as Paula Nuttall proposes, situating it among other openly erotic depictions of the female body in the fifteenth century? The rising popularity of bathing scenes, an image type that justified sexualized representations of the naked female body, offers another interpretative avenue. The Leipzig *Love*

Spell has been compared to a panel attributed to Jan van Eyck in the Fogg Art Museum (fig. 6), whose iconographic meaning is likewise uncertain.[36] The painting, which survives only in a fifteenth-century copy, has a similar format (27,5 x 16,4 cm vs. 23.9 x 28 cm for the Leipzig panel). It depicts a nude woman at her intimate toilette, who is accompanied by a fully dressed lady holding a filled glass vessel.[37] The original also included a small dog in the foreground, now barely recognizable.[38] Elements such as the wash vessels on the sideboard, large windows, convex mirror, sandals, sponge, and dog indeed recall the Leipzig painting. [39] Yet we are neither looking at a typical bathing scene, nor at "a nude [painted] for its own sake," as Nuttall assumes for van Eyck's image.[40]

Repeated attention has been paid to the youth in the doorway, whose cheeky look at the nude girl allegedly preformulates, within the picture's logic, the sexualized male gaze of the painting's viewers.[41] Michael Camille famously called this "the first pornographic gaze in Western Art," a claim that has loomed large.[42] Yet, close inspection shows that the young man who extends his head into the chamber does not look at all at the nude lady (fig. 7); instead, his eyes are looking well past her, toward the far left side of interior. He neither enters the room—remaining instead an ambivalent threshold figure in the doorframe—nor peeps at her nude body from behind. It is thus difficult to identify the "transfixed stare of the youth" that would define a male-gaze reading.[43] Consequently, interpreting the image solely through "heavily gendered notions of nudity, privacy and the female body" seems problematic, especially when it presumes the depiction of an actual ritual act.[44]

This is not to suggest that the Leipzig panel is not explicitly erotic, catering to the male gaze. The act of seeing is thematized repeatedly in the image: in the convex mirror (itself an ambiguous cipher implying vanity, transience, reflection, and beauty), in the eyes of the

Fig.7: Detail of fig. 2.

peacock feather below, in the bird turning to look at the lady, in the unusually large windows offering a view of the surrounding landscape, and finally in the young man at the door. Yet this is an image of unreciprocated gazes: the youth looks toward the window, the girl averts her gaze modestly, and the dog sleeps. The viewer, however, sees everything, and at the center is the erotically staged female body, capable of visualizing the act of falling in love through the contemplation of beauty.

Returning for a moment to the question that Arasse and Hope debated so controversially for Titian's *Venus of Urbino*: How do we 'read' such an image? As a depiction of an apparently unusual but nonetheless real action—a magical ritual performed on a wax effigy of a human heart to "summon" and bind the beloved? Or as an intellectually layered allegory of female powers of seduction and their hold over men? Perhaps even as "applied literature" in Johan Huizinga's sense—a painted, dramatized enactment of romantic ideals?[45]

Brigitte Lymant was the first to critically question Hermann Lücke's 1882 thesis that the image represents a late medieval magical ritual. She rightly notes that the depiction of a love spell on a panel is not only singular but would have already been anachronistic in the 1470s or 1480s.[46] The complexity of the scene and its plethora of iconographically significant objects, as well as the fact that the popular iconography of the heart in the later fifteenth century almost exclusively operates metaphorically and within

Fig. 8: Regensburg Master (Master Casper), Lady Venus and her Lover, 1479, colored woodcut, Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin.

Fig. 9: Unknown master, The Forging of the Heart, circa1400, carved relief on a Minne-chest, pearwood, 12 x 28,5 x 16 cm, Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Cologne.

literary topoi, lead her to propose that the image should be read as a literary allegory rather than an actual ritual.[47] Keith Moxey, in his study of similar subjects in contemporary printmaking, has demonstrated that supposedly quotidian scenes often carried allegorical content strongly shaped by contemporary *Minnesang*.[48] The heart is thus often not an actual 'object' but a symbol, as it appears frequently on tapestries, playing cards, and prints, sometimes in the context of female power *(Weibermacht*), or more generally, the power of love.[49]

A striking comparison is the roughly contemporary woodcut by the Regensburg Master Caspar, circa 1480 (fig. 8).[50] Here, Venus's cruel power is enacted in no fewer than nineteen variations—often with a strong element of sadism—against the male heart. The print's visual impact relies on the emphatically repeated motif of the heart in combination with a nude woman who poses at the center of the image, impaling hearts with lance and sword alike. Her eroticized attire, with veil and headgear, anticipates later Cranach workshop Venuses; her dance-like stride and prominent banderoles recall the Leipzig girl. Textual comments in the print enumerate the torments: the heart is impaled, sawed, broken, perforated, crushed, pierced, trampled, burned, and even salted. The banner reads, "MEIN HERCZ LEIDET SCHMERCZ," spoken by a kneeling youth on a rose: "O freulein hübsch un(d) fein. Erloß Mich auß der pein und schleus mich in die arm dein."[51]

Related allegorical representations of the extraordinary power of *Lady Minne*, or *Vrouw Minne*, over the male heart also appear on contemporary love caskets (*Minnekästchen*). These small gift chests were especially popular in the context of courtship from the thirteenth through the fifteenth century.[52] Often bearing inscriptions referencing injury through love and male submission to the power of *Minne*, the caskets functioned as pseudo-reliquaries in the exalted, quasi-sacred conception of love in literary *Minnesang*.[53] The violence of female love power frequently operates via the isolated heart motif, much as in the Regensburg broadsheet. The front of a pearwood *Minnekästchen* of circa 1400, for example, shows *Lady Minne* first surgically removing a youth's heart from his chest, then forging it on an anvil according to her will (fig. 9).[54]

It is not a coincidence that the Leipzig panel shows the plump red heart fitted precisely in a chest reminiscent of such *Minnekästchen*.[55] A comparison with the strikingly similar jewelry chest in a miniature from the Hours of

Fig. 10: Detail from the Book of Hours of Mary of Burgundy, Flanders circa 1475, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.

Mary of Burgundy (1470–1475), containing shell, veil, trim, and gold chain, shows this was a period-typical container for treasures (fig. 10). [56] In the Leipzig painting this is further emphasized by the heart being tenderly bedded in a veil, which connects it to the girl's body.[57] The visual reference to contemporary *Minnekästchen* also opens up, quite clearly, a literary horizon.

One of the central literary and visual topoi of late medieval love poetry is the motif of the burning heart, a metaphor for inflamed desire yearning for relief.[58] Lymant therefore rightly interprets the heart symbolically. As in the Regensburg print, the young lady functions as an allegory of *Minne*, holding the male heart in her power and thus commanding both its ignition and its extinguishment, drawing on well-established literary topoi.[59] In this view, the emotional state of the young man becomes the true subject of the image, and the iconography of dog, bird, and heart can be mapped onto *him*: the little dog symbolizes his fidelity, the bird his desire, and the heart his love.[60] *Lady Minne* embodies the idea that the young man's ardor can be quenched and his desire fulfilled through a successful promise of pleasure and fidelity. [61] In this combination of moral responsibility and erotic passion, we see a core theme of medieval moral theology, which understands these as complementary components of love. [62] Both elements are also integral to contemporary literary practices of courtly love, which makes the interpretation of the painting as a "love allegory" consistent with late medieval ideals of *Minne*. A male perspective is inherently inscribed in this scenario, and the love casket containing the heart reflects contemporary courtship practice.

In conclusion, I wish to further refine these reflections and propose a more precise reading of the painting based on a particular ideal of love from the *Minnesang* and *Meistergesang* tradition of the period. Central to this reading is the metaphorical interplay of fire and water. The girl's placement between the blazing hearth and the rose-petal water of the wash vessel is echoed in the simultaneous sprinkling of sparks and water onto the heart in the chest. The paired metaphor of the heart's burning and the extinguishing of its consuming flame is one of the central topoi of love poetry from the High Middle Ages through the sixteenth century.[63] Examples abound of the burning heart, which can only be saved from destruction by the cooling water of reciprocated affection—a notion traceable to Ovid's *Remedia Amoris*. [64] The motif appears prominently in the foreground of the aforementioned print by Master Caspar, where a heart burns on a pyre, flanked by the verse: "Solt ich sy nit billich kennen, Die mein hercz wil in ainem feiuer brenen."[65]

Even closer to our subject is a 15th-century Northern Italian *canzoniere d'amore* (fig. 11).[66] On folio 1r, the historiated initial "A" of *Amore* depicts a young nobleman presenting a collection of 49 love sonnets to his lady in kneeling submission. In the opening sonnet, the lyrical I laments—framed by an image of a heart being roasting over a fire, with water droplets

Fig. 11: Northern Italian, Frontispiece with heart on a fire and raindrops quenching it, mid-fifteenth century, book illumination, 23,2 x 16,5 cm, British Library, London (ms. King's 322, f. 1r).

falling upon it—that Love has consigned his heart to the flames, consuming it slowly and painfully, whereas a little rain would suffice to extinguish the fire, and only a small act of pious compassion would end his suffering. The gentleman appeals to his beloved's mercy, derived from her virtue, to bring their story to a happy ending and save him from infernal torment.[67] As often in these texts, love is portrayed as a consuming disease that can only be healed by the intervention and favor of the beloved.[68] The following sonnet praises of the powerful lady, abundant in superlatives: worthy of the gods in beauty and virtue, a shining light and a clear source, like a garden full of flowers, scented like a rose.[69]

The desire for the arsonist of the heart to also act as its extinguisher is expressed in the metaphor of the heart between fire and water—here the Leipzig panel and the book illumination converge. Yet the painting goes further: the scene does not merely illustrate a text but established its own narrative context. If we assume that the banderoles were originally blank, as seems likely, then the textual element is visually subordinated — to the point where it appears only in the negative, via an empty form.[70] This media shift — of an illustrative motif popular in book illumination and prints to its novel narrative treatment in an autonomous painting — can also be understood as a contribution to the emergence of the "self-aware image" (Victor Stoichiță) at the beginning of the Northern Renaissance. While clarity is lost —the written word and its faithful illustration — the painting's narrative unfolding, its ambiguity and visual autonomy constitute its primary gain.

Looking closely at the iconography, it seems to me that the image addresses not the torments of male desire but a kind of equilibrium. The focus in not on the act of being set aflame or on helplessness in the face of female cruelty. Rather, the image formulates an ideal concept of love, visually articulated through the domestic order of the scene and the charm of the young woman, who, though largely unclothed, devotes herself attentively and with modest gaze to her task. The bright room offers little opportunity for occult practices, the youth in the doorway is no conjured chimera, and despite the asymmetry of clothed male and nude female, the man shows no sign of aggression or voyeurism.[71] He remains respectfully at the threshold, without direct eye contact, embodying a *minne*-like relationship, based on male service to the lady rather than voyeuristic exploitation.

The lady herself shares little with the aggressive eroticism of Lady Venus in the Regensburg print. While both appear erotically stylized, we see neither a cruel dominatrix armed with spear and sword nor a clandestine

sorceress. Rather, the heart, carefully stored in the small chest and linked by the veil to the female body, is held in a balanced intermediate state.[72] It is both ignited and preserved. The protagonist thus emerges as a worthy curator of the heart. The male promise of fidelity and desire, encoded in the ambivalent animal iconography, is reciprocated and honored through her measured restraint. Corresponding to this are her Venus-like beauty, the cleanliness and luminosity of the chamber, and the respectful distance between the two figures. Though virtuous feminine *temperantia*, sweet love flourishes, signaled also by the scattered spring flowers on the floor.

The contemporary context of courtly *Minnesang* is evident: the young lady is an allegory of *Minne*, reciprocating the man's love and preserving it within her *Minne*-chest. Yet this is neither a depiction of female domination, or *Weibermacht*—as frequently depicted those little chests—nor of desperate pleas for mercy.[73] The painting's significance lies in the late medieval poetic ideal of love founded on virtue, as articulated in the concept of *mâze*.[74] In classical Minnesang of the late twelfth century, idealized love rests on *triuwe* (fidelity), *mâze* (moderation, restraint), and *hôher muot* (nobility of spirit, pride). In this high form of *Minne*, the lady demands both emotionality and discipline, and the frequently lament of unfulfilled love lacks the cruelty and heightened focus on the physical and sexual characteristic of the thirteenth century and later *niedere Minne*. Walther von der Vogelweide explicitly elevates *mâze* as a guiding principle of courtship, remaining so into the sixteenth century. Here, an ideal balance is sought between earthly and transcendent love, realized in the measured, or even, *ebene Minne* in which the beloved is both friend and lady, "friundin unde frouwe."[75] In Walther's poem *Aller werdekeit eine füegerinne*, the praise of *mâze* is celebrated emphatically in the figure of Lady Measure: "You are indeed the guide of all worth, Lady Measure. / Happy the man who has your teaching! / He need never be ashamed of you anywhere, / neither at court nor in the street. / Therefore, lady, I seek your counsel, / that you may teach me to woo in proper measure."[76]

During the transition from the courtly noble song in the High Middle Ages to the urban Meistersang of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the concept endured, sustained by the deep veneration of the so-called "twelve old masters" (Walther, Wolfram, Hartmann, etc.).[77] Expressions of *Minne* that extol virtue-based love continued to play a central role among the *Meistersinger*. Within this framework, the idea of quenching the fire of desire recurs, as in Heinrich von Mügelen's *Minne-bekundungen*, where the lyrical I, inflamed by love, begs his lady to extinguish the wild blaze ("des wilden Feuers Brunst") of desire with the dew of *Minne* ("der Minne Tau")—a motif far from unique.[78]

Xenia von Ertzdorff, in her study of *Minnelyrik*, cites Gottfried von Straßburg's theory of love in his *Tristan*, in which he argues that Eve, had she not been forbidden to eat the apple, would likely not have sinned. Therefore, a woman should not be strictly policed, as trust and affection, not constraint, ensure that she avoids *unmâze*, that is a loss of virtue and moderation. Only through love and fidelity, not oversight or coercion, does *mâze* arise, guaranteeing a happy relationship and marriage.[79] Mastery of moderation—*mâze*—is central to Gottfried's definition of marital and romantic felicity in his verse epic *Tristan*: "Maß allein, das hehre, / Mag hehren Leib und Ehre. / Von allen Dingen auf der Welt, / Die der Sonne Schein erhellt, / Ist keins so heilig als ein Weib, / Die ihr Leben, ihren Leib / An das goldne Maß ergiebt, / Sich selbst mit rechter Liebe liebt."[80] The man in love with such a woman —a woman who dedicates her life to the delicate balance of love and, as a result, loves herself —attains the highest level of happiness.[81]

The ethics of measured love, shaped by courtly *Minne* and based on *temperantia* and the avoidance of extremes, is allegorically realized in

the Leipzig panel. What we see is an ideal of love—not a magic spell, nor endless variations of amorous suffering. It is not a capricious lady, but the self-possessed and contented *vrouw mâze* in her chamber, enacting an allegorical drama of functional love on an intimate stage: the guardian of love balancing *cupiditas* and *caritas*, nurturing desire yet maintaining the proper virtuous measure to prevent harm. The man's presence at the threshold may even be read as a gesture of respectful distance, of allowing, in the spirit of Gottfried von Straßburg's 'liberal' love ethics. And the bird, marked by its banderole as a singer, may embody the common metaphor of the *minnesinger*.[82]

Speculation about the panel's original function and context has been plentiful but inconclusive. Within the interpretative framework proposed here, situating the image in the context of a marriage seems plausible. The small format suggests private use, as does the recognizability of the depicted domestic setting, reminiscent in some respects of Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Double Portrait*, which, if not depicting a wedding ceremony, conveys a pledge of fidelity.[83] Supporting evidence includes the peacefully sleeping fidelity dog and a number of objects interpretable as bridal accoutrements or wedding symbols: the mirror as a symbol of beauty and purity, the (bridal) veil, the peacock feather—attribute of Juno, goddess of childbirth, and a common wedding gift—, the wash vessels as part of the ritual bridal bath, the scattered flowers, the *Minne*-chest, and the three-legged stool as a metaphor of steadfast love.[84] Fire and water are emphasized as opposing yet complementary elements—traditionally male and female, respectively.[85] Air and earth are also referenced through the bird, peacock feather, large windows on the one hand and the flowers, products of the earth, on the other. In this way, the entire human experiential world of the four elements is brought into the domestic sphere, aligning the allegory of measured love with a cosmic order. The panel, in turn, grants permanence to this ideal world of love: the heart continues to beat in the chest.

Endnotes

1. For the range of different interpretations, see especially the contributions in Goffen, 1997, and Alexander Nagel's review of Goffen's book in *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 1998, pp. 71–73.
2. Arasse 2013, pp. 89–127; see also Arasse 1997, pp. 91–107.
3. For better readability of the dialogue, the speakers are marked here as 'A' and 'H'. This is not the case in Arasse's French original or in the German and English translations.
4. Cit. Arasse 2013, p. 91.
5. Cit. Arasse 2013, p. 99.
6. Panofsky 1969.
7. Cit. Arasse 2013, p. 99.
8. Goff 1997, pp. 63–90; Rosand 1997, pp. 37–62.
9. Cit. Arasse 2013, p. 100.
10. Goffe 1997, pp. 63–90.
11. Cit. Arasse 2013, p. 116.
12. Cit. ibid.
13. "Die Ignoranz gegenüber der eigenen geschlechtlichen Kodierung des Blicks gehört durchaus zu den Konventionen paternalistischer Kunstgeschichtsschreibung, der sich offenbar auch Arasse nicht ganz entziehen konnte, so sehr ihm sein brillantes diskursives Modell die Gelegenheit dazu geboten hätte. Trotz seiner blinden Flecken auf geschlechterkonstruktivistischer Ebene im Bild und im Betrachten bleibt seine große Leistung, dass er den Betrachter/die Betrachterin als flexible Kategorie versteht und einführt." Gludovatz / Kruemmel 2005, p. 120.
14. Cit. Arasse 2013, p. 102.
15. Cit. Arasse 2013, p. 115.
16. Cit. Arasse 2013, p. 99.
17. Leipzig, Museum der Bildenden Künste, Inv.-Nr. 509, oil on beechwood. It has been in the Museum since 1878 and comes from the estate of Amalia von Ritzenberg in Nischwitz near Wurzen, see *Museen, Schlösser und Denkmäler in Deutschland* 1997, p. 10; Aikema / Brown 2000, p. 230.
18. For literature on attribution see Lymant 1994, n. 1; Dechant 2019, n. 1.
19. Winkler 1979, p. 79, suggests that the scrolls may originally have contained magical formulas explaining the depicted ritual; similarly, Nikolaisen 2011, p. 456, Schmidt 1978, p. 103, and Dieckhoff 1985, p. 358, who notes that the scrolls indicate

that the figures are speaking and suggest meaningfulness. See also König 2000 (n.p.): “Der Maler selbst spürte, dass seine Kunst nicht ganz ausreichte, das eigentlich Gemeinte und heute auch nicht präzise Gedeutete adäquat auszudrücken. Deshalb wollte er den Beteiligten einzeln das Wort geben. Er hat dafür Spruchbänder in den Raum geschwungen.” Lymant 1994, p. 118, rightly objects that such banderoles often did not contain specific texts but were intended merely as indicators of an “utterance.”

20. Nikolaisen 2011, 456, describes an invitation to “nahsichtiger, gleichsam lesender Betrachtung.” See also Landau / Parshall 1994, esp. p. 62, on empty banderoles in Renaissance prints, e.g., by the Hausbuchmeister and Israhel van Meckenem, which were often probably left blank intentionally, encouraging the viewer to fill the “blanks” with text.
21. Lymant 1994, pp. 118–121, among others. Dieckhoff 1985, p. 361, concedes that many of the iconographic elements are polysemous, which was “a general commonplace in the Middle Ages;” Dechant 2019, p. 45f.: “Here too, there is no iconographic code to break: only a patchwork of ambiguous symbols that promise meaning without revealing it. (…) And the nature of the woman within her chamber is not to be divined (is she a witch, or isn’t she?) but fantasized about”; on ambiguity see also Büttner / Gottdang 2006, p. 132, especially with regard to the unresolved iconography of the bird.
22. Mühlenfeld 2019, pp. 392–396, with reference to Wörner 2010, p. 278.
23. *Spätgotik in Köln und am Niederrhein* 1970, no. 17, p. 41; Nikolaisen 2011, pp. 256–257 has already quite rightly pointed to the influence of representational conventions from printmaking on the image, in which both the frequently blank banderoles and female nude figures with similar stance and pose are common.
24. Wurst 2005, p. 257, and n. 665.
25. *L’Histoire de Charles Martel*, vol. 3 (ms. 8, fol. 7r), 1470–1472, manuscript illumination on parchment, 410 x 290 mm, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Brussels.
26. Lymant 1994, p. 112, describes the bird as a “parakeet” and the confectionery as “pearls.” The parakeet is said to be a “woman-lover” and thus an erotic allusion to the fulfillment of male desire. The bird is more often identified as a parrot, for example by Wörner 2010, pp. 393–394. He interprets it as a symbol of unchastity, which—together with the peacock feather, symbolizing pride—illustrates the theme of female seduction, depicted in the “blutenden (sic!) Herzen” (bleeding heart). This is contradicted by Mühlenfeld 2019, p. 393f.: the parrot could also be seen as humorously inclined matchmaker and may here even utter a “Zauberspruch” (magic spell). Büttner / Gottdang 2006, p. 132, emphasize the ambivalence of parrot iconography and its symbolism of both love and *luxuria*.
27. Cit. Lymant 1994, p. 121: “[…] das weiße Hündchen als die Treue des Jünglings zu erklären, die dieser dem Mädchen zu Füßen legt,” „den Vogel als Zeichen seiner Lust.“
28. For love symbols see also Wurst 2005, p. 85.
29. Nikolaisen 2011, 455. The painting adorns the cover of Mary Floyd-Wilson’s *Occult Knowledge, Science, and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage*, Cambridge 2013.
30. Lücke 1882, pp. 379–383.
31. Cit. Dieckhoff 1985, p. 357: “[…] ein einzigartiges Dokument erotischer Praxis aus dem Spätmittelalter.” This interpretation still in Wood 2006, p. 156, n. 117, and in Dechant 2019, p. 40, who supports an interpretation of the painting as documenting “uncanny magical (or magical-seeming) practices” but notes that the image no longer appears in studies of medieval love magic, ibid., n. 4.
32. The Andreasnacht (St. Andrew’s Night) was traditionally a time of fertility and love incantations, first associated with the image by Kohlhausen 1942, pp. 145–172; adopted by Piper 1952, no. 118; *Spätgotik in Köln und am Niederrhein* 1970, p. 41; *Chefs-d’Œuvre* 1993, p. 48: “il illustre des themes liés a des rites traditionels pratiqués la veille de la Saint-André,” and elsewhere. It should be noted that this is by no means a nocturnal scene; on the contrary, the room appears unusually light-filled and open.
33. A good example of a fairly recent gendered reading of the painting, based on the scholar’s own ‘male gaze,’ is König 2002 (n.p.): “Selbstverständlich steckt Venus in allen Frauen. Deshalb kann man nicht recht sagen, ob es eine heidnische Göttin, eine Fee oder nur ein Mädchen vom Niederrhein ist, das in der rätselhaften Kaminszene des Leipziger Museums in seiner Schmuckschatulle ein erstaunlich großes Herz so beträufelt, dass man es mit einer Erdbeere verwechseln könnte.”
34. Dechant 2019, p. 40.
35. Wood 2016, n. 17, emphasizes the motifs of the phallic dagger and female power: “the woman performs a magic ritual, a charm, in the nude, in order, effectively, to reduce the man entering the door to the docile state of the dog curled at her feet;” see also Sander 1995, no. 509; similarly Nikolaisen 2011, p. 456, who notes: “In der Unterzeichnung ist zu erkennen, dass das Gesicht

des Mannes ursprünglich ein stärkeres Lächeln zeigte, was den sexuellen Aspekt verstärkte." A smile, of course, can be interpreted in all sorts of ways.

36. Nuttall 2012, p. 301: "[…] surely an early example of the erotic cabinet picture." Similarly, Wolfthal 2012, pp. 279–297, esp. p. 285, who situates the painting in the context of the eroticization of biblical bathing scenes: "One common topos is that men will spy on unclothed women as they bathe in their private chamber." This, in turn, invites the viewer to adopt the voyeur's position.
37. The painting measures 27.5 x 16.4 cm. For a comparison of both images, see Schabacker / Jones 1974–1976, pp. 56–78; Aikema / Brown 2000, p. 230; Wolfthal 2012, pp. 286–289; Dechant 2019, p. 40.
38. The original van Eyck painting is shown in Willem van Haecht's *Gallery of Cornelis van der Geest* (1628), today in the Rubenshuis, Antwerp. Regarding the eroticization of intimate female interior scenes in the 15th century, it has also been noted that Bartholomaeus Facius describes another, now lost van Eyck painting in which ladies rise from the bath, modestly covering their private parts, while the painter, through a cleverly placed mirror, allows the viewer a view of their nude backsides; see Baxandall 1964, pp. 103—104; Wolfthal 2012, p. 286.
39. Schabacker / Jones 1974–1976, p. 66.
40. Schabacker / Jones 1974–1976, p. 67, note that the Leipzig painting "may derive many of the formal elements from Judith, although iconographically they have nothing in common with it." The tentative identification of the lady in van Eyck's painting as Judith preparing to visit Holofernes (ibid., p. 62) is ultimately unconvincing; the painting's interpretation remains open.
41. Nuttall 2012, p. 307; Shalev-Eyni 2014 (n.p.), n. 69; Dechant 2019, p. 40, who builds his argument partly on the "voyeuristic glimpse into an otherwise taboo or private realm."
42. Camille 1998, p. 119.
43. Nuttall 2012, p. 301; similarly, Wolfthal 2012, p. 288.
44. As in Dechant 2019, p. 45. He argues that the painting reflects a male fascination with largely inaccessible female interiors, a curiosity that grew alongside expanding female privacy in the fifteenth century and fostered suspicions of improper secrecy. In this gendered, sociohistorical reading, the "male gaze" appears as a compensation for exclusion, linked to anxieties about female magic—and ultimately, to witch hunts. Yet the idea of secrecy, which assumes the Leipzig painting depicts a love spell, is undercut by the room's openness: it is sunlit, visible from two sides through large windows, and has a wide-open door. Furthermore, as noted above, similar spatial arrangements occur in male-associated spaces as well, such as the scribe's study in the miniature of the *History of Charles Martel* (see note 25 above) and the Arnolfini double portrait.
45. Huizinga 1975, p. 108.
46. Lymant 1994, p. 112; supported by Aikema / Brown 2000, p. 230, and Nuttall 2012, p. 301.
47. Lymant 1994, p. 115 et passim; also Aikema / Brown 2000, p. 230; Wurst 2005, p. 85; Nuttall 2012, p. 301. On the heart in medieval thought, see esp. Walzer 1969, p. 163; Schrade 1969, vol. 2, pp. 12–14; Hübl 1992, p. 349; see also *Handwörterbuch des Deutschen Aberglaubens*, vol. III, lemma: *Herz*, col. 1794; as well as Hartnell 2018, pp. 133–158.
48. Moxey 1980, pp. 125–148, and Moxey 1985, pp. 39–53, with examples of both moralizing inscriptions on banderoles in the context of "female power" and the closely related motif of the "forging" of the heart as a central scene in Minnesang depictions.
49. Lymant 1994, p. 114 observes that the allegorical treatment of an erotic theme takes place in a historically accurate interior, "wirklichkeitsgetreuen Innenraum,"—a circumstance that can be attributed to the growing interest in realistic depictions and the emerging conventions of 15th-century representation.
50. Woodcut, single-sheet print, signed lower right, Berlin, SMB, Kupferstichkabinett, Inv. No. 467—1908, there titled *Frau Venus und der Verliebte*: Möhle 1963 (reprint 2019), p. 22; see also Mielke 1994, pp. 94–95, cat. III.6 (with further literature); Lymant 1994, p. 114; Nuttall 2012, pp. 301–302, who also notes iconographic correspondences with a print by the Master E.S. depicting a nude woman with a veil, a convex mirror, and a bird on a meadow, being groped at the chest and hips by a lovesick fool (Dresden, Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Inv. No. A. 1926—271); Brückner 2013, 254; Hartnell 2018, 149.
51. Mielke 1994, pp. 94–95.
52. For this specific genre, see Kohlhausen 1929; Wurst 2005.
53. For example, the *Minnekästlein* of circa 1350 from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, with the inscriptions: "Genad Frou ich hed mich ergeban" and "Sent m-r(?) Frou Min Drtv Min Herz Ist W[u]nt." https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/471357
54. Kohlhausen 1929, p. 61; Lymant 1994, p. 114.
55. Aikema / Brown 2000, p. 230.
56. Vienna, Austrian National Library, ms. 1857, fol. 43v; see also Wurst 2005, p. 192, and fig. 123.

57. Chests, through the metaphor inherent in their locks and keys, were understood in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as a cipher for the female body and could carry explicitly sexual connotations. This is illustrated, for example, by a circa 1470 Flemish watercolor in which the key held by the man is clearly phallic, while the lady ostentatiously presents him with the lock of her chest, surrounded by double-entendre inscriptions (Wurst 2005, p. 194, fig. 125; Flemish drawing, 1470, São Paulo, private collection). In line with this, Nuttall 2012, p. 301, interprets the box as a "standard symbol of the female body, the parrot as a metaphor of the male member and also for lust"; see also Camille 1998, pp. 65–68, pp. 117—119.
58. For the relationship between literary and medical concepts of love and the influence of Ovid's *Remedia Amatoris*, see again Lymant 1994, p. 116.
59. Lymant 1994, esp. pp. 114–118.
60. Lymant 1994, p. 121; see also Dechant 2019, p. 40.
61. See also Nuttall 2012, p. 301. A more traditional reading, interpreting the scene as a mysterious magical event, is largely endorsed by Dechant 2019, especially p. 45. Like Lymant, he shifts the focus from the woman to the man—but from a different angle: emphasizing male fascination with female secrets, which arose from contemporary, gendered changes in privacy that favored women. He concludes: "The Leipzig panel depicts not a sorceress but a man trying to determine whether or not a woman is a sorceress."
62. Lymant 1994, pp. 121–122; followed by Aikema / Brown 2000, p. 230.
63. Glier 1971, pp. 127–156; Lymant 1994, p. 116 et seq., with examples from the *Minneburg*.
64. Ibid.; Funke 1990, pp. 31–73, esp. p. 50; Hoffmann 1990, p. 225.
65. Wurst 2005, p. 214.
66. Ms King's 322, British Library, London http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=3013&CollID=19&NStart=322
67. *Un canzoniere d'amore del XV secolo* 2017, X, p. 104, and fig. 3.
68. See esp. the contributions in Stemmler (ed.) 1990. Further examples of the trope of kindling and quenching love in Lymant 1994, p. 116.
69. *Un canzoniere d'amore del XV secolo* 2017, p. 106 et seq.
70. For the empty banderoles see again Landau / Parshall 1994, esp. p. 62, and Lymant 1994, p. 118.
71. Lymant 1994, pp. 116 et seq., repeatedly highlights the metaphorical content of the scene. She also emphasizes that the girl's "erotic radiance" emphasizes the moment when desire is ignited; by observing the girl attentively from behind, the young man's heart is, so to speak, set aflame. This, however, is contradicted by the observation made above that the youth is not actually looking in the girl's direction.
72. For an iconographic counterpoint to the motif of the heart kept in a chest, see the miniature by the Master of the *Chronique Scandaleuse*, in which two women attempt to catch men's hearts, flying like birds, with a net (circa 1500, in Pierre Sala's *Petit Livre d'Amour*, British Library, London).
73. See, among others, the iconography of a *Minnekästchen* from Basel, late 14th century (Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum, SMPK), where *Lady Minne*, in the role of Phyllis, rides Aristotle's back. They are flanked by two lovers, one holding a plump heart before him, the other with a moralizing banderole. Moxey 1980, p. 141 and fig. 17.
74. On the important ideal of *mâze* in high *Minne* (*hohe Minne*), see Schweikle 1963, pp. 498–528; von Ertzdorff 1981, esp. pp. 214–216; Schweikle 1994, pp. 297–336; Stackmann 2002, p. 148.
75. As in Walther's song *Hoffnung*: "Friunt und Geselle diu sint din : so si friundin unde frouwe min." Wilmanns 2015 (reprint), p. 30; see also Martini 1961, p. 82.
76. Cit. Walther von der Vogelweide, ed. Walshe 1966, 67. "Alles inneren Wertes Schöpferin / seid Ihr wahrlich, Frau Mâze. / Glücklich der Mann, den Ihr unterweist! / Er braucht sich nirgends zu schämen, weder bei Hofe noch auf der Straße. / Darum suche ich Euren Rat, Herrin, / damit Ihr mich lehrt, in rechtem Ebenmaß zu werben." In the Middel High German original: "Aller werdekeit ein füegerinne,/ daz sît ir zewâre, frowe Mâze. / er sælic man, der iuwer lêre hât! / der endarf sich iuwer niender inne / weder ze hove schamen noch an der strâze. / dur daz sô suoche ich, frouwe, iuwern rât, / daz ir mich ebene werben lêret." Cit. Walther von der Vogelweide, ed. Böhm 1944, *Frau Mâze* (46,32–47,15): https://projekt-gutenberg.org/authors/walther-von-der-vogelweide/books/die-gedichte-walthers-von-der-vogelweide/chapter/8/ The passage was well-known up to the sixteenth century; see Schweikle 1963, pp. 498–528.
77. Stackmann 2002, p. 148. Middle High German *Minnelyrik* remained popular in the 15th century, as in the Weimar Liederhandschrift, a compilation 49 strophes attributed to Walther von der Vogelweide, or the so-called Troßsche Bruchstück (Troß fragment) with songs by Wilhelm von Morungen; see also Kornrumpf 2005, pp. 111—118.

78. Stackmann 2002, pp. 216–217 (with original text). See also Huber 2005, 89–110; on the metaphor of the *Tau der Minne*, see Koebele 2003, p. 98 and note 36, with a passage from a song by Heinrich von Meißen, gennant Frauenlob.
79. Von Ertzdorff 1981, esp. p. 214.
80. Cit. Gottfried von Straßburg, ed. Simrock 1855, verses 18017 et seq. https://projekt-gutenberg.org/authors/gottfried-von-strassburg/books/tristan-und-isolde/chapter/29/; see also von Ertzdorff 1981, p. 215 (incl. original verses).
81. That the man's face in the Leipzig painting originally had a stronger smile may well be due to this circumstance; see Nikolaisen 2011, p. 456.
82. In Minnesang, the bird functions as perhaps the most common metaphor for the singer or poet, who is often compared to—or imitates—the songbird. For the significance of the songbird in Minnesang poetry, see Hochkirchen 2015.
83. Lymant 1994, p. 122, mentions the idea that it may have been a marriage present to a bride.
84. Dieckhoff 1985, p. 361; Winkler 1979, p. 79.
85. See Böhme 1996, p. 167, for the historical gendering of the four elements, and Scheer 1990, p. 197, for the perceptual and theoretical implications of fire in theories of love, from Plato onward.

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Figures

Fig. 1 : Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1534–38, oil on canvas, 119 x 165 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Fig. 2: Rhenish Master (Master of the Bonn Diptychon?), so-called *Love Spell*, circa 1470, oil on beechwood, 23,9 x 18 cm, Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig.

Fig. 3: Detail of fig. 2, Heart in the Chest.

Fig. 4: Anonymous engraver (Master of the Banderoles), Girl with the Rose (left) und and playing card *Hirsch-Unter* (right), circa 1465, copper engraving, 12,7 x 12,4 cm, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich.

Fig. 5 : L'Histoire de Charles Martel, vol. 3 (ms. 8, fol 7r), 1470–72, illumination on parchment, 41 x 29 cm, Bibliotheque Royale de Belgique, Brussels.

Fig. 6: Copy after Jan van Eyck, Lady (Judith?) at her Toilette, fifteenth century (?), oil on wood, 27,5 x 16,4 cm, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge MA.
Fig. 7: Detail of fig. 2.

Fig. 8: Regensburg Master (Master Casper), Lady Venus and her Lover, 1479, colored woodcut, Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin.

Fig. 9: Unknown master, The Forging of the Heart, circa1400, carved relief on a Minne-chest, pearwood, 12 x 28,5 x 16 cm, Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Cologne.

Fig. 10: Left: Detail from the Book of Hours of Mary of Burgundy, Flanders circa 1475, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.

Fig. 11: Northern Italian, Frontispiece with heart on a fire and raindrops quenching it, mid-fifteenth century, book illumination, 23,2 x 16,5 cm, British Library, London (ms. King's 322, f. 1r).

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Abstract

A small panel painting in Leipzig known as *The Lovespell*, attributed to a Rhenish master and dated to around 1480, has long puzzled art historians because of its enigmatic iconography and the eroticized presentation of a female nude at its center. Neither religious nor mythological in subject, the painting depicts a young woman striking sparks of fire and squeezing drops of water onto a plump red heart placed in an open chest, while a young man watches the scene through an open doorway. Most scholars have interpreted the image as the depiction of a

magical love ritual, demonstrating the erotic power of women over men. Michael Camille famously described the male observer in the painting as embodying “the first pornographic gaze in Western art.” Drawing on contemporary literary and visual sources, this article proposes a different interpretation, arguing that the painting should be understood as an allegory of ideal love, possibly in the context of a marriage, as formulated in the traditions of German *Minnesang* and *Meistersang*.

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