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Dario Capelli

"Wer alden weiben wolgetraut": Ageing and Ageism in Oswald von Wolkenstein

The representation of ageing and of a closely related phenomenon, ageism, characterizes many of Oswald von Wolkenstein's *Lieder*. This study investigates how Oswald represents his old age in his literary corpus as a terrible life-phase, while the later *Lebenszeugnisse* (the life witnesses) present the *Wolkensteiner* at the peak of his career and as an appreciated statesman. As for ageism in Oswald's corpus, it is addressed exclusively towards elderly women, accused by the poet of several serious crimes, such as witchcraft, corruption, and pandering.

[Oswald von Wolkenstein; ageing; ageism; misogyny; sorcery]

1. Introduction

Among the most famous and influential authors of the German late Middle Ages, Oswald von Wolkenstein has been linked to the god Janus[1], as the poet looks back to the medieval German tradition from the formal point of view, while he looks forward to the modern age when it comes to content and language. Oswald also stands out for having expertly reinterpreted the medieval canon with personal authorial features, and two of the fields in which his poetry excels are the *Alterslied* and his self-representation in both his youth and old age. There are two main studies of Oswald's relationship with ageing: one by Wailes (1975), the second by Hartmann (1980). Both studies focus in depth on the comparison between the 'canonical' *Alterslied* and its reinvention by Oswald[2]; however, the theme of ageing constitutes the *fil rouge* of many other texts of the poet. The aim of this article is, on the one hand, to reconstruct the effects of ageing on Oswald's social and marital life through a comparison between his corpus and the *Lebenszeugnisse*[3] known today. On the other hand, it aims to in-

[1] Hartmann 2005: 369.
[2] Oswald's reinvention of and relationship with the *Alterslied* tradition also constitutes a complementary *topos* in other studies, such as Müller 1978.
[3] Also referred to as LZ, these documents were collected and edited in 5 volumes between 1999 and 2013 by a team guided by Anton Schwob.

vestigate the topic of ageism, closely linked to ageing and characterizing two of Oswald's most heated *Lieder*[4].

2. Studies of Oswald's *Alterslieder*

In 1975, Stephen L. Wailes published a study in which he investigates whether some of Oswald's works may (still) be considered *Alterslieder*, or whether they ought to be included in a different genre. Wailes first opts for an introductive focus on Walther von der Vogelweide's corpus, since, as he remarks, "the term *Alterslied* is most familiar with reference to [Walther's] poetry" (Wailes 1975: 6). As a cultured medieval man, Walther was strongly influenced by St Augustine's division of human love between *cupiditas*, focused on – and therefore slave to – worldly goods and ambitions, and *caritas*, its purest form, longing for God and eternal life[5]. This dichotomy is exhibited in four poems by Walther, *Ir reiniu wîp, ir werden man* (no. 43), *Frô Welt, ir sult dem wirte sagen* (no. 70), *Ein meister las* (no. 96), and *Owê, war sint verswunden alliu mîniu jâr!* (no. 97)[6]. Here the poet does not restrict his lamentation to mishaps related to his own *persona*, but also considers relevant social events of his time, such as the Crusades.

As remarked by Wailes, the main goal of both Augustine and Walther was to free the heart's love from earthly concerns and turn it to God (Wailes 1975: 6). Walther pushes his readers and listeners toward this inner change through the presentation of several unsettling visions and deeply introspective considerations: *Owê, war sint verswunden alliu mîniu jâr!*, for example, is a poetically magnificent reflection on the flowing of time, in which Walther wonders whether he has ever lived, or was simply dreaming. Wailes also highlights that, despite the German etymology, an *Alterslied* is not necessarily linked to old age, since the parting from the world and its goods may also happen at a young age, even though signs of ageing may be linked to the maturity needed in order to definitively turn to God (*ibidem*: 7)[7]. Starting from these relevant precedents, Wailes turns his focus onto three of Oswald's works, *Es fuegt sich, do ich was von zehen jaren alt* (Kl. 18), *Es ist ain alt gesprochen rat* (Kl. 19), and *Ain anefangk* (Kl. 1).

[4] Oswald's *Lieder* are usually classified according to Klein's critical edition. The first edition was published in 1962, the fourth and latest, edited by Wachinger, in 2015. A complete translation into English of Oswald's corpus was published in 2008 by Classen.
[5] Cf. Pagliacci 2003; Tantardini 2006; Cipriani 2009.
[6] Titles and number according to Bein's edition (2013[15]).
[7] Müller also highlights "daß ein mittelalterliches Alterslied wenig oder nichts mit der sog. Altersdichtung der Neuzeit, etwa Goethes 'Marienbader Elegie', zu tun hat" (Müller 1978: 138).

In the first poem, Oswald narrates his first time travelling, when he was only ten: he wanted to see what the world looked like, but he ended up suffering poverty, violence, hunger, and misery. He only got a horse when he was twenty-four, at his father's death, but meanwhile he somehow managed to survive thanks to his many works and his knowledge of many languages. Oswald later remembers his experiences with queens and kings, as well as the two years he spent as a Beghard, and the misadventures he ran into due to a toxic relationship with a presumptuous lady. Only in the final section of the *Lied* does Oswald refer to his age; he first recapitulates the section on his former love with these words:

> Ir knaben, maid, bedenkt das laid, die minne pflegen (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 51, v. 93)
>
> Young men and women, you who are in love, keep this kind of suffering in mind. (Classen 2008: 73)

Then he opens the seventh and final stanza in which he regrets his unreasonable behaviour during his life:

> Ich han gelebt wol vierzig jar leicht minner zwai
>
> mit toben, wüeten, tichten, singen mangerlai (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 51, vv. 97-98)
>
> I have spent forty years minus two so far [in my life]
>
> with exuberance, wild behavior, creating poetry, and singing all kinds of songs. (Classen 2008: 73)

This passage may be read as a reference to and an adaptation of Walther's farewell to the *reiniu wîp* and to the *werden man* in the homonymous *Lied*:

> wol vierzic jâr hân ich gesungen unde mê
> von minnen und alse iemen sol (Bein 2013[15]: 278, vv. 7-8)
>
> At least forty years, and even more, I have sung
> about *Minne* and how one should live. [my translation]

Oswald removes two years from his count, perhaps referring to the already mentioned period in which, wandering like a Beghard, he tried – and failed – to move away from worldliness. Still, the link to Walther's archetype is evident, and one could rightly doubt whether this passage in Oswald's stanza should be considered an objective statement about his age and his former life, since Kl. 18 is considered as one of the best examples of Oswald's ability to combine his own personal life and experiences with German literary tradition[8]. Summarizing the contents of the

[8] Cf. Mayr 1961: 31-34; Müller 1968: 10-54 and 1978: 142-143, 145.

last stanza, Wailes (1975: 12-14) remarks on a relevant difference from the 'classical' *Alterslied*, which is the absence of any movement of spirit, of any request for a prayer, and of any form of repentance: Oswald restricts himself to recognizing his failures, and he fails in making a further step toward God and his mercy.

An identical pattern may also be found in the subsequent *Lied*, Kl. 19, articulated in twenty-eight stanzas. Here Oswald combines some features of the *Spruchdichtung* tradition, such as the appeal to proverbs and a gnomic purpose, with a narration of his journey to Perpignan and Paris with Emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg between late 1415 and the first months of 1416 in order to convince the supporters of the antipope Benedict XIII to join the conciliar cause. What is read by Wailes (1975: 15) as "an original formulation of the traditional Christian metaphor of man as wayfarer or pilgrim" does not actually end with a form of heartfelt repentance. Oswald reports a saying about Judgment Day and hopes that his song will inspire his listeners to worry about their souls, but there is no personal demonstration of acknowledgment of his errors. The only reference to old age in the whole *Lied* is a very short passage in the twenty-fourth stanza, in which Oswald writes that he learned how to walk on his knees in his old age, as he was received by Queen Isabeau of France:

> Auf baiden knien so lernt ich gan
> in meinen alten tagen,
> zu füessen torst ich nicht gestan,
> wolt ich ir nahen pagen (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 60, vv. 185-188)
>
> In my old age I even learned
> walking on my knees,
> I did not dare to stand on my legs,
> when I had to introduce myself to her. (Classen 2008: 78)

Nor are there references to old age in Kl. 1, the last *Lied* analyzed by Wailes and the only one among the three case studies considered by the scholar to be a real *Alterslied*. Here Oswald effectively moves from *amor mundi* to *amor Dei*, once again because of a critical experience that is due to his love for a beautiful woman. Because of her and as result of a divine punishment, Oswald is imprisoned, and here he ponders the essence of a sinful life and the difference between human love and God's love. In the seventh and final stanza, Oswald begs for the Virgin Mary's intercession and solace, but he also admits that he intends no evil for the woman and begs God "not to punish her because of [him]"[9] (Classen 2008: 46).

[9] Lit. "so bitt ich got, das si mein nicht engelt" (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 5, v. 126).

In his analysis, Wailes (1975: 16) points out that the imprisonment Oswald writes about should be identified with the one the *Wolkensteiner* was effectively subjected to in 1421. The cause of the relevant misdeed was a quarrel for the possession of Hauenstein castle, not far from Seis at the foot of the Schlern. Oswald owned a third of the castle as part of his paternal inheritance, while the Jäger family owned the remaining two thirds. Because of some robberies perpetuated to his detriment, Martin Jäger decided to capture Oswald, who was first imprisoned at Castle Forst, near Algund, and then in Innsbruck, in the prisons of his archenemy, Count Frederick IV of Tyrol[10]. Fundamental to the success of the plan against Oswald was the intervention of Anna Hausmann, whom Oswald had once fallen in love with and who is recalled in Kl. 26[11].

In none of the three *Lieder* analyzed by Wailes do old age or its physical or psychological manifestations play a relevant role. On the contrary, they result particularly relevant in *Ich sich und hör* (Kl. 5). This poem is part of a selection of seven *Lieder* (Kl. 1-7) considered by Sieglinde Hartmann (1980) in her study on the *Altersdichtung* and self-representation in Oswald's work. Aware of the numerous problems concerning the classification of medieval poetry, Hartmann examinates in depth – also referring to Wailes (1975) – the links between a selection of Oswald's texts and canonical *Altersdichtung*. The mixture of traditional *topoi* and Oswald's authorial innovations leads Hartmann to maintain the terms *Alterslied* and *Altersdichtung*, though with some reservations:

> zwar nicht als Gattungsbezeichnungen, sondern als Arbeitsbegriffe, mit deren Hilfe sich diese sieben Lieder aufgrund ihrer zusammenhängenden Thematik und Überlieferung, ihrer homogenen Form und Erlebnissphäre zu einer Einheit innerhalb der Lyrik Oswalds von Wolkenstein zusammenschliessen lassen. (Hartmann 1980: 15)

Hartmann admits that Kl. 8-11 should be added to this set, since these *Lieder* reveal some 'traditional' aspects of the *Altersdichtung* too. However, they are not treated in her analysis since they do not contain any form of Oswald's self-representation (*ibidem*: 16). Even in the restricted group of the *Selbstdarstellungslieder*, however, Kl. 5 is the only text in which Oswald shows and reflects on his old age, and the consequences that it has brought to his life.

[10] Cf. LZ 106 and 107.

[11] "so müessen si ire hendlin dorumb winden, | das ich den namen ie erkannt | von dieser Hausmaninnen" (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 91, vv. 118-120), "they will wring their hands over the fact | that I ever got to know | the name of the woman Hausmann" (Classen 2008: 99).

In the *incipit*, the worldly concern for the loss of one's property is counterposed to the unavoidable disappearance of one's youth. Oswald laments as a first consequence of incoming old age "the disappearance of [his] carefree attitude | and of what [he] used to do at that time | without any consciousness"[12] (Classen 2008: 51). Immediately after this statement, he discusses the first signs of old age on his body:

> Mit kranker stör
> houbt, rugk und bain, hend, füess das alder meldet (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 13, vv. 7-8)
>
> Now, being hampered by bodily failure,
> my head, back, legs, hands and feet alert me to the approaching old age (Classen 2008: 52)

In a sort of rewriting of the theme of the dialogue between soul and body, which finds one of its most famous realizations in the *Dialogus inter corpus et animam* (or *Visio Philiberti*), Oswald addresses his own body, which is showing visible signs of ageing, such as wrinkles, fatigue, and a fading voice. The second stanza continues the presentation of other unpleasant consequences of ageing, from repugnance:

> mein rotter mund wil werden plau,
> darumb was ich der lieben widerzäm (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 14, vv. 23-24)
>
> my red lips are turning blue,
> which makes me look disgusting to the beloved (Classen 2008: 52)

to difficulties with eating and moving:

> Plöd ungevar
> sind mir die zend und slaunt mir nicht ze keuen (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 14, vv. 25-26)
>
> My teeth have become
> loose and ugly and do no longer serve for chewing. (Classen 2008: 52)

Overcome with despair, Oswald does not hide his belief that it is better to die than to live such a life:

> und gieng mir not des küelen erd,
> seid ich bin worden swach und schier unwerd (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 14, vv. 35-36)
>
> The cold earth would be the best for me
> because I have lost my strength and am not worth much. (Classen 2008: 52)

[12] Lit. "verderben freies muetes, | wes ich vor zeiten darinn pflag, | und klain empfand" (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 13, vv. 4-6).

In the third and last stanza, Oswald exhorts an unnamed young man not to rely on his own young body or on his own strength; instead, his interlocutor should direct his thoughts and deeds toward God and to His message. Similar to the famous passage of the *Book of Sirach* (38, 23) "mihi heri, et tibi hodie", also attested in the different variants of the motif of the three living and the three dead, Oswald shows himself to his listener as living proof of the passing of time, adding this warning: "wer du jetzund bist, der was ich vor"[13] (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 14, v. 41). That Oswald's repentance comes too late and that his good deeds are not particularly effective in remedying his past dissolute life are also evidenced by the social consequences of old age: Oswald has been abandoned, he is now isolated from the rest of the world, while children and young women mock him.

As remarked by Hartmann (1980: 157), Oswald's lamentation should not be considered entirely autobiographical: it is highly probable that Kl. 5 was actually written in 1425, when Oswald was more or less forty-eight years old and "alles andere als ein verbrauchter Greis" (*ibidem*). Oswald's description is linked by Hartmann to the one in the *Jeu de la Feuillée* – written in 1262 by the *trobador* Adam de la Halle – as well as to Hugo von Trimberg's *bîspel* named *Von dem tôde* in his gnomic poem *Der Renner*[14]. Unlike this latter work, however, the signs of old age described by Oswald are not read by Hartmann as premonitory allegories of death: Oswald is in a way forced to rewrite traditional *topoi* because he does not consider death to be distant and allegorical, but a real threat (*ibidem*: 160).

3. Ageing and marriage in Oswald von Wolkenstein

3.1 Oswald's literary works

The previously discussed case studies represent an important starting point for an investigation into the representation of old age in Oswald's corpus. However, they are not the only *Lieder* from which considerations may be drawn. A comparison among four texts, Kl. 68 and 69 on the one hand, and Kl. 44 and 104 on the other, allows us to focus on a peculiar point in Oswald's works, namely the evolution of his marriage to his wife Margarethe von Schwangau, whom he married ca. 1417[15].

As pointed out by Hartmann[16], the *Liebeslyrik* represents about a third of Oswald's corpus and it would be incorrect to enclose it in the traditional *Minnesang* system: on the one hand, *minne* and *lieb* are *de facto* synonyms and "bezeichnen in

[13] "As you are now, I have been before" (Classen 2008: 52).
[14] Hartmann 1980: 158-159. On the *Renner*, cf. Weigand 2000.
[15] Cf. Schwob 2014.
[16] Hartmann 2004: 258.

Oswalds dichterischem Werk sowohl die weltliche Geschlechterliebe als auch die geistliche Gottesliebe"[17], on the other hand, Oswald articulates a new conception of love, whose impact is clearly detectable in both terminology and textual typologies. For example, Hartmann points out a clear propensity by Oswald for *Tagelieder* (a *Liedtyp* which was quite marginal in 'classical' *Minnesang*) to the point that thirteen variations may be found in the poet's corpus, making him the most relevant composer of *Tagelieder* in medieval German literature[18]. In Kl. 77, a *Liebesduett*, the voices of Oswald and Margarethe give shape to a very intimate scene between husband and wife with a wide use of diminutives, as in the case of the illocutions "Gredlin, Gret, mein Gredelein"[19] and "Öselein"[20]. The couple exchange promises of loyalty and expressions of affection, and in the third stanza Oswald sings

> Ach frou, das ist mein zuckernar
> und süesst mir alle mein gelid,
> seid du mir haltst günstlichen frid (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 199, vv. 34-36)

> Oh lady, it is a sugar-sweet delight for me
> and sweetly permeates all my limbs
> that you always demonstrate your favor. (Classen 2008: 160)

It is relevant to highlight that *zuckernar* is an 'authorial' *hapax legomenon*, which can also be found in Kl. 16,52 and in Kl. 46,14, both concerning love. If Nolte reads this mention in Kl. 77 as a sort of sexually connotated exclamation[21], it is also possible to interpret it – also in the light of the comparison with the other two *Lieder* – as a symbolic concretization of the importance of the loved one: until the 16th century, sugar was rare and as expensive as (often even more expensive than) an oriental spice.

Oswald's celebration of his wife may also be observed in the first pair of the here analyzed case studies: in the second stanza of Kl. 68, the poet spells the name *Gret* and celebrates his love for her letter by letter:

> Mit eren, o ausserweltes G,
> so freust du mich glich inn der sele grund;
> Darnach ein edel R und E
> mich trösten sol so wol durch rotten mund,

[17] *Ibidem*: 257.
[18] *Ibidem*: 258.
[19] Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 198, v. 1.
[20] *Ibidem*, vv. 4 and 12. On Kl. 77, cf. Hartmann 2004: 260-261 and 2018. On diminutives in Oswald's *Lieder*, cf. Wolf 1997.
[21] Nolte 1996-1997: 135 n. 40.

frölich zu aller stund.
An end der wort zwai T beslossen han die treu
von dir zu mir in ewikait (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 180, vv. 11-17)

Most honorably, oh, my G., the only one in this world,
you provide me with great happiness down to the bottom of my heart;
subsequently the noble R and an E grant me pleasant consolation
with red lips,
happy all the time.
At the end two Ts have sealed
the honest relationship between us two forever. (Classen 2008: 151)

In particular, the letters R and E are coupled, poetically symbolizing Margarethe's red lips, and the two final Ts are matched with *treu*, the foundation of their relationship.

In the third and last stanza, Oswald celebrates his beloved's honor, while putting himself at her disposal – in a renewal of the *Minnesang* lover tradition – and asks for her forgiveness for those deeds of his which may have angered her.

A similar pattern represents the core of the following *Lied*, Kl. 69, which is also relevant in Oswald's corpus because of its plurilingual setting[22]. Oswald has been taken prisoner, and he asks Margarethe to free him, while renewing his love for her in seven languages: German, Ladin, French, Hungarian, Slovenian, Flemish, and Latin, as attested in the *repetitio*:

Teutsch, welchisch mach!
franzoisch wach!
ungrischen lach!
brot windisch bach!
flemming so krach!
latein die sibend sprach. (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 182, vv. 13-18)

Mutate German into Ladin!
Wake it up in French!
Laugh in Hungarian!
Bake bread in Slovenian!
Sing with strength in Flemish!
Latin is the seventh language. [my translation][23]

[22] On plurilingualism in Kl. 69, see Bendheim 2019 and Capelli 2021. Further suggested studies on individual languages used by Oswald are: Kuen 1979 and Videsott 2020: 275-276 on Ladin; Motz 1913 and 1915 on Hungarian; Bonazza 1988; Habjan 1988 and 1994, and Mikhailov 1997 on Slovenian; Quak 2014 on Flemish.

[23] I have not opted for Classen's translation (2008: 151-152) since he does not consider Kuen 1979 and translates *welchisch* with "Italian".

This elaborated *divertissement* may be interpreted not only as a display of Oswald's linguistic abilities, but also as a solution to the impossibility of expressing his immense love for his wife within the limits of a single language. For example, the second stanza, in which Oswald renews his vows towards his wife, closes with a direct mention of God Himself as guarantor of his promises: "got wett wol, twyu | eck de amar"[24] (*ibidem*: 183, vv. 29-30).

A similarity with the previous text may be found in the third and last stanza, as Margarethe is here named twice, the first time as *Margaritha* and later as *Griet*. However, in the last stanza of the *expositio* – in which Oswald translates the whole *Lied* into German in order to allow his readers to reach a better understanding of the text – the woman is named *Griet* in both cases, maybe in order to evidence a strong intimacy between the two spouses in the readers' and performers' eyes. Although it is impossible to overlook an additional theme in Kl. 69, namely Oswald's desire to be liberated, the celebration of his wife recalls and renews the oath of fidelity to the woman, typical of the European lyrical love tradition, translating it into a conjugal relationship that appears all in all firm and intense.

A completely different marital situation emerges from the second pair of texts, Kl. 44 and 104. The first, *Durch Barbarei, Arabia*, is one of Oswald's most famous *Lieder* and is opened by a *Geographieteil*, in which Oswald recalls the countries he visited during his life: he jumps from Barbary to Arabia and Persia, and then to Scandinavia, England, the Iberian Peninsula, Finisterre, and Southern France. This section, described by Müller (1968: 80) as a *Lebensreise* traced by Oswald on an imaginary map with his finger, ends in (Bad) Ratzes ("in Races vor Saleren", Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 139, v. 18), a synecdoche for Hauenstein. The castle and its nearby area are presented as a real *locus terribilis* and as a prison to which Oswald was sentenced by his marriage:

> Auff einem runden kofel smal,
> mit dickem wald umbfangen,
> vil hoher berg und tieffe tal,
> stain, stauden, stöck, sneestangen
> der sich ich teglich ane zal (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 139, vv. 22-26)

> caught on a round, small hill,
> encircled by thick forest.
> Every day I see countless
> tall mountains and deep valleys,
> rocks, brushes, tree stumps, and snow sticks (Classen 2008: 126)

[24] "God knows exactly | how much I am in love with you" (Classen 2008: 152).

The poet's lament is spread over three stanzas, and in the second one Oswald compares his past honors and joys with his current state of misery: the decorations are now ash, and the red lips that were often a consolation for him have been replaced by rude and frightening people. As a consequence of this trying and horrible situation, Oswald does not hide that he violently and frequently beats his children; his wife's reaction is not long in coming:

> So kompt ir muetter zue gebraust,
> zwar die beginnt zu schelten;
> gäb si mir aines mit der fausst,
> des müesst ich ser engelten.
> si spricht: 'wie hastu nu erzausst
> die kind zu ainem zelten!'
> ab irem zoren mir da graust,
> doch mangel ich sein selten
> scharpf mit spelten (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4:] 140-141, vv. 52-60)

> Then their mother comes rushing toward me
> and begins to scream at me badly.
> If she were to hit me with her fist
> I would have to pay dearly!
> She yells: "Now you have roughly torn apart
> the children like flat bread!"
> I am horrified at her wrath,
> yet I have often to cope with it,
> it is sharp like splinters! (Classen 2008: 127)

The once angelic, virtuous, and good-natured Margarethe is now depicted as a strong and choleric monster. Oswald ceases his violence only because he is aware that his wife's revenge will be much more gigantic and devastating, and the lexicon he uses in this passage resembles that of his descriptions of his captivity. The term *zelten* in Margarethe's emotive invective deserves exploration because of its peculiar signification: Classen's (2008: 128) translation as "flat bread" is not incorrect, but it is the outcome of a translational compromise, as demonstrated by a previous translation into English (2005)[25] and by Hofmeister's (2011)[26] and Buschinger and Hartmann's (2019)[27] translations, respectively into Modern German and French. Lexer (1878: col. 1055) defines a *zelten* as a "flaches backwerk,

[25] "Pancake" (Classen 2005: 30).
[26] Hofmeister (2011: 143) refers to the in-text periphrasis "Jetzt hast du | die Kinder ruppig flachgeschlagen", with *Fladenbrot* as a literal in-note translation.
[27] "Galettes" (Buschinger/Hartmann 2019: 54).

kuchen, fladen", demonstrating that a univocal correspondence was and still is hard to find even in Modern German, and both the 'modern' Tyrolese *Zelten* and the *Schüttelbrot* may be considered a form of *zelten*.

In any case, the point of Oswald's use of *zelten* must certainly be identified with the metaphorical similarity between the brutality of the beatings inflicted on the children and the vigor needed to flatten the dough. Siller (2006) has considered this passage and other violent episodes in Oswald's corpus as manifestations of post-traumatic stress disorder, whose causes are identified in Oswald's youth, spent in a military (or in any case violent and mortifying) context. Although the second stanza of Kl. 44 is by no means to be understood as purely autobiographical, the manifestations described here can be traced back to a situation of continuous discouragement and impotence, as well to Oswald's cohabitation with Margarethe, with whom a once strong and tender relationship has visibly vanished.

The atmosphere in Kl. 104 is no jollier: Oswald is forced inside Hauenstein during winter and laments his awful relationships with a farmer named Winderklaub[28] and with a second unnamed man. The latter is identifiable with the Bishop of Brixen, Ulrich Putsch, with whom the poet had a feud between 1427 and 1429, culminating with a punch given by Oswald directly to the prelate (LZ 199)[29]. Some years later, after the laments on his weary body in Kl. 5, Oswald returns to this topic in his fifties[30], as he writes this passage with reference to the bishop:

> ob ich den bauch noch recken möcht,
> leicht hulf ich ainen biegen,
> der mir den staffel geren zuckt,
> tieff in des meres grufft (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 249, vv. 57-60)
>
> if I only could stretch out my stomach once again,
> then it would immediately be my turn to press someone else down,
> who would love to rip away from me the stairs
> deep on the bottom of the sea. (Classen 2008: 185)

Oswald is well aware of the fact that both his strength and his will are fading, and that he would not be able to replicate the bishop's vexations as he once did. Nevertheless, some verses before this lamentation, Oswald demonstrates that he is still able to taunt his rival, even from afar: taking up Jesus' admonition of Mary

[28] On the name, cf. Schürr 2008.
[29] On the historical background, cf. Marold/Robertshaw 1995: 249.
[30] Robertshaw (2002: 130) writes that the dating proposed for the composition of Kl. 104 runs from December 1427 to the winter of 1432-1433; his own hypothesis is winter 1431-1432.

Magdalene in John 20:17, he writes to the bishop: "Noli me tangere. | laich mich nicht, perzli Üeli!"[31] (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 249, vv. 49-50). Not only does Oswald repeat *verbatim* the words of God, who is betrayed by Ulrich Putsch with his misdeeds: he also insinuates a certain ironic superiority towards the prelate.

In the following and final stanza, Oswald resumes his nostalgic recollection of memories linked to certain cities he visited when he was younger, such as Constance, Paris, and Cologne. Once again, Oswald does not trace his forced stay in Hauenstein back to old age or to the raging winter, but to his wife and his children, to whom he certainly does not offer words of affection:

> das macht ain weib under ainem dach
> von Swangou, der ich bin,
> Und darzu manig kind,
> die mir den schimpf zerrütten. (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 250, vv. 67-70)
>
> The reason for this is a woman
> from Schwangau in my house, whose husband I am,
> and many children,
> who drive away all joys. (Classen 2008: 185)

Oswald rejects Margarethe on the one hand by resorting to the cold epithet "ain weib" in order to refer to her, and, on the other hand, by mentioning her maiden name, von Schwangau, as if she had lost all right to be a part of the Wolkenstein family. This passage represents a real reversal of Kl. 110, in which Oswald praises "ain stolze Swäbin", her behavior and her personality. Even though Oswald does not mention Margarethe, it is clear that he is referring to his wife, but if in Kl. 110 she is "Inbild und Musterbeispiel vollkommensten Adels"[32], in Kl. 104 she is a cumbersome presence in *his* house.

It should be highlighted that this is also the second passage of Kl. 104 in which Oswald denounces the misdeeds of an unspecified figure, whose name seems to have become a taboo and which he is therefore hesitant to pronounce: the once praised and virtuous Margarethe is now depicted by the poet as if she were his enemy, like Bishop Putsch was. Unlike the latter, who resides far away in Brixen, and with whom Oswald can therefore avoid any contact, Margarethe is a constant presence in Hauenstein, along with the children they had together. Oswald considers them a repellent to any joy, but he is required to think about

[31] "Noli me tanger [do not touch me]! | Do not bother me, Perzli, little Uli" (Classen 2008: 185). On the nickname used by Oswald to refer to the bishop, cf. van der Jagt 1973 and Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 249.
[32] Hartmann 2018: 19.

their livelihood. The poet surveys the situation in which he is living with a gnomic statement, "Ain müe die ander vindt, | wers alles wil besorgen"[33] (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 250, vv. 75-76), after which he points a final accusing finger at Frederick IV of Tyrol, to whom he had to submit before being released from a second imprisonment in 1427[34], but who seems to have never actually cared about his vassal.

3.2 The Lebenszeugnisse

In contrast to the disheartening routine described in Kl. 5, 44, and 104, the numerous *Lebenszeugnisse* at our disposal report that Oswald had a prolific and successful career in his old age, which was also characterized by many travels around Europe and in Tyrol.

The third decade of the 15th century saw Oswald's return to Sigismund's service (31 July 1430, LZ 212): the *Wolkensteiner* is sent to the imperial assembly and to the diet in Nuremberg (September 1430 and spring 1431). Here he receives the Order of the Dragon from the emperor himself (cf. LZ 222); the decoration appears in Oswald's celebratory portrait at *f.* IV of ms B (Innsbruck, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Tirol, s.n.)[35], written and packaged between August 1431 (LZ 226) and 30 August 1432 (LZ 236). The "Ritter des allerdurchleutigosten Römischen künigs sigmund", as Oswald names himself at *f.* 1r of his new *Liederhandschrift*, also travelled through Italy (1431), to the Council of Basel (May 1432), and to the imperial diet in Ulm (1434) (see LZ 231, 233, 234, and 237). In the autumn of 1435, Oswald seems to have fallen seriously ill; this aspect certainly influenced his decision not to travel anymore outside Tyrol.

Frederick IV's passing on 24 June 1439 revolutionized the Tyrolean theatre, since his underage son and heir, Sigismund, was entrusted to the safeguarding of Frederick III, later Holy Roman Emperor. Because of his acknowledged experience, Oswald was often called on as a consultant to solve problems related to the succession and to the delicate Tyrolean political situation (see LZ 296 for example). In 1443, Oswald became the new head of the Wolkenstein family after the death of his elder brother Michael. On 2 August 1445, Oswald died in Meran during a diet; he was later buried in the Neustift abbey, near Brixen.

[33] "One worry finds another. | This is the problem for him who wants to take care of everything" (Classen 2008: 185-186).
[34] See Kl. 26 and LZ 168.
[35] The manuscript may be consulted online at <https://manuscripta.at/diglit/AT4000-sn/0001>.

The *Lebenszeugnisse* also report that Oswald's real-life relationship with his wife was actually solid even in his old age, and that Margarethe was not simply the extraneous woman from Schwangau depicted in Kl. 104. Instead, Margarethe actively contributed to and supported her husband's social ascent thanks, on the one hand, to her belonging to one of the most relevant imperial families[36] and, on the other hand, to her remarkable mediation and diplomatic skills, as reported in LZ 386, in which she strives for Oswald's and the family Wolkenstein's interests.

The letters written in the last months of Oswald's life reveal a very strong emotional and confident bond between the *Wolkensteiner* and his wife, with the latter often worrying about her husband's health (LZ 501, dated 9 March 1445, and 506, dated 28 March 1445), and keeping him informed about the developments in the Tyrolean political arena while he is away from Hauenstein (LZ 506). Schwob (2013: 286) highlights that no document written by, to, or about Oswald after 9 July 1445 has thus far been discovered. Schwob does not rule out that Oswald demanded his wife to leave Hauenstein to assist him during his last days, and that in the meantime he had arranged his testament and his last will concerning his funeral. LZ 514 states that Margarethe was in Meran on 2 August 1445, since on the same day she returned two keys that Oswald had in custody to the provincial governor Ulrich von Matsch and to the Meran jury council. The following LZ, no. 515, dated 3 September 1445, is just a simple piece of paper in which Margarethe sends one of her servants from Neustift to Hauenstein in order to prepare for her return home. Schwob (2013: 291) writes that the widow and her sons may have remained in the abbey for a "30tägig[e] Seelenmesse" in honor of Oswald's soul.

Even after her return to the castle, Margarethe continued to administer her husband's goods and, most important, she kept his surname, as emerges from the latest known LZ, no. 524, dating to the first months of 1447, in which the widow and her son Michael hand over Hauenstein and all its goods to the *Wolkensteiner*'s homonymous son. Here Margarethe names herself "Ich margret vo(n) wolck(e)nstain gepor(e)n vo(n) swanga hern Oswalts salig(e)n wittib" (Schwob/Schwob 2013: 311).

4. Ageism in Oswald von Wolkenstein's *Lieder*

The complicated relationship between Oswald and old age in the poet's corpus is not only outlined through the harsh descriptions of his own weak body or

[36] Cf. Hartmann 2018.

through the social and relational consequences of ageing, but it also finds a realization – overlooked by scholarship – in assertions related to ageism.

Two of Oswald's *Lieder*, Kl. 25 and 102, together with a short passage in Kl. 19, represent the starting point for a study of the ways in which Oswald denigrates and launches heavy invectives against *alde weiber*, as he calls aged women at verse 131 of Kl. 25. At the same time, it must be immediately remarked that Oswald does not give a similar treatment to old men: in his literary attacks on his many rivals, age plays a secondary role, or it is given no relevance; Oswald tends to point out the injustices he has suffered and witnessed, or to emphasize their flaws.

However short it is, the already mentioned passage in Kl. 19 is a notable image of the spread of the phenomenon of ageism in medieval times even among the wealthiest and most educated classes. In the sixth stanza of the *Lied*, Oswald narrates that, once the imperial delegation reaches Perpignan, Sigismund is welcomed with kisses by some kings and by two queens:

> Von küngen, künigin junk und alt
> ward er gegrüesst mit küssen,
> doch nach den jungen, sach ich halt,
> tet er sich nimmer wünschen (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 54, vv. 41-44)

> He was welcomed with kisses
> from kings and also from a young and an old queen,
> but only when he was kissed by the young,
> he did not, as I could observe, wipe his face. (Classen 2008: 75)

Probably in order to raise a laugh in his audience, Oswald highlights that Sigismund promptly cleans his cheek from the kisses he has received from the older queen, while he seems to like those he is given by the younger one. Despite being quite marginal within the narrative of Kl. 19, and although the pragmatic comic aims are evident, these four verses reveal how a certain contempt, or at least disdain, towards older women probably concerned the crowned heads, too: not only is the emperor's ageist and sexist behavior against a queen not condemned by anyone, but probably Oswald initially enjoyed the scene in Perpignan, later legitimizing it in his *Lied*.

In Kl. 25 and 102, Oswald turns his irony into real invectives against older women. The narrative framework of the first *Lied* is formed by a dispute between a *burger* and a *hofman* about their abilities to please young women, with an old maid as arbitrator. As reported by Wellmann (1974: 333-334), the *streit* (or *disputatio*) was a successful *topos* in courtly literature, which evolved in the late

Middle Ages in intellectual disputes on love. The winner was usually part of a high social class, but Love itself (*Frau Minne* in German) could also grant victory to a *laborator*. Oswald does not abide by the expectations of his audience, since not only is the female arbitrator a concrete figure, she is also a lower-class woman with a dubious reputation, since she will turn out to be the owner of a brothel. In addition to this, the object of the dispute is one of the prostitutes working there, another mocking element from Oswald, who, as part of the landed gentry, had an evident interest in discrediting the court nobility and the bourgeoisie.

The dispute immediately goes in favor of the bourgeois, who convinces the old madam of the greater value of money over traditional knightly and courtly skills, such as knowing how to compose poems, riding, and jousting. After the first exchange of words, the woman says:

> ich sprich bei meiner treue,
> der burger hat wol recht.
> ich hab mein zeit verkuppelt
> zu Brixsen in dem krais[37],
> vil parell aus gesuggelt,
> das ich den louff wol waiss (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 82-83, vv. 27-32)
>
> I have to admit this honestly,
> the burgher is certainly right.
> I have done much matchmaking
> in the area of Brixen
> and have suckled emptied so many a barrel [of wine],
> so I know very well how the world operates. (Classen 2008: 94)

With these words, Oswald wants to make sure that the woman is immediately seen as easily corruptible, greedy, and in search of worldly pleasures.

In the second stanza, the link between the bourgeois and the elderly arbitrator gets stronger, and the young courtier cannot prove that love and good manners are still part of the late medieval value system. In contrast, he is mocked by the woman, who confesses to him that she has never made any profit from falling in love: "Des muess ich aber lachen […] | was sol man daraus machen? | die buelschaft hat nicht inn"[38] (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 83-84, vv. 57, 59-60).

In the following stanza comes the definitive defeat of the younger contender, since it is proved that the bourgeois' rich wallet can even outclass outstanding

[37] On this verse and the previous one, see also the following discussion on Kl. 102.
[38] "I must laugh about that […] | What can anyone do with that? | Such a love affair does not yeld any profit" (Classen 2008: 94).

skill in tournaments. The arbitrator, increasingly corrupted by the ostentation of the bourgeois' wealth, grants the latter the triumph, while definitively abandoning her supposed neutrality with heavy derision towards the courtier:

> Gar war […]
> so werdt mir nimmer hold.
> kain besser lieb nicht walte
> wann silber oder gold.
> darum bliess ich mich nützen
> auf den gerackten tod,
> e ich mich wolt bekützen
> mit kaines hofmans not (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 85, vv. 57, 89-96)

> That's right, […]
> you [knight] will never be to my liking!
> There is no better love
> than the love for silver or gold.
> I would rather give in
> to the stiff-bodied death
> than to allow a courtier's misery
> to swallow me up! (Classen 2008: 95)

In response, the courtier admits that his defeat is unfair and attacks the old woman, knocking out eleven of her teeth. His last words in the *Lied* are a curse on the former arbitrator: "der tiefel müess dich schenden, | das gib ich dir zu lon"[39] (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 85, vv. 103-104). There follows a flattering exchange of words between the bourgeois and the madam: he repays the woman for the wrong suffered with promises, but soon focuses his attention on the young prostitute, the 'prize' of his victory.

Oswald concludes the *Lied* with his own commentary on the *disputatio*:

> Der streit hat sich verbrauset,
> redt all darzue das best.
> wer alde weiber hauset,
> der hat ouch geren gest;
> wann alte weib und änten
> gehören in ainen see:
> was sol man dran verquenten?
> kain vich das schnattrot me (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 86, vv. 129-136)

> Thus the strife has come to an end,
> I hope you will praise me for that.

[39] "May the devil devour you, | this is my reward for you!" (*ibidem*: 95).

He who welcomes old hags,
must like to have guests.
After all: old women and ducks
belong in a lake.
Why should I keep this a secret?
No other animal chatters more! (Classen 2008: 96)

After inviting the audience to decide who should be the winner, Oswald states that those who house older women also like to surround themselves with guests, probably referring to pandering or to other suspect and unspecified business. According to the narrator, elderly women should stay in a pond with ducks, their companions in honking. Implicit reference is made to the fact that these women should end up drowned, as will also be seen in Kl. 102. Oswald's conclusive comment is without a doubt misogynous, ageist, and violent by modern standards, but it probably had to meet the favor of the public of his time, as much as the just concluded social satire.

The debasement of elderly women also represents a *leitmotiv* connecting the six stanzas of Kl. 102, a first-person narrative under the name of Hanns Maler, as it is expressed at v. 26; this work is therefore also known as *Han(n)s Maler-Lied*[40]. The first three verses are a brief but indicative introduction to the erotic-amorous theme addressed in the text: the narrator reveals that he has been impatiently awaiting the arrival of May for a whole year, as many other people do. In medieval German poetry, May is the symbol *par excellence* of the return of spring, and the ideal setting for the triumph of both love and eros. Examples may be found in Ulrich von Gutenburg's *Leich Ze dienest ir, von der ich hân*[41], in Walther von der Vogelweide's *Sô die bluomen ûz deme grase dringent* and *Muget ir schowen, waz dem meien*[42], in Gottfried von Neifen's *Sælic, sælic sî diu wunne*[43], but most important in Neidhart's *Ine gesach die heide*, *Ir froeit iuch, junge und alte!* and *Der meie der ist riche*[44].

Similar to Neidhart, Oswald's literary corpus is marked by numerous references, sometimes extremely explicit[45], to the sexual sphere, which is also an important driving force of the events in Kl. 102.

[40] Cf. Robertshaw 1994.
[41] Schweikle 1993: 284-298.
[42] Bein 2013[15]: 157-169 and 190-192.
[43] von Kraus 1978[2]: 94-95.
[44] Müller/Bennewitz/Spechtler 2022[2]: 114-119, 473-474, and 503-504.
[45] Cf. the sexual metaphors *muessli* "little mouse" in Kl. 73, 10 and *rätzli* "little rat" in Kl. 75, 39 (my translations).

The narrator invites his audience to pay attention to him, as he anticipates that he is going to present his misadventures with an old woman named Unruewin – whom he immediately curses – and how he miraculously managed to escape from her. A first parallel with Kl. 25 may be found in the last two verses of the first stanza, in which Hanns Maler denounces how the old woman turned out to be a bad host: "erst rau mich ser, das mich ain weib | gar alt so dick empfie". The enjambment contributes to highlighting Unruwein's advanced age, while her description as "ain weib" at the end of the first verse may be read as a second realization of the taboo-motif linked to naming a woman's name, after the first case seen with Margarethe in Kl. 104.

In the second stanza, the audience realizes that the 'evil woman' is actually another maitresse, but also that the narrator seems to be a regular customer of hers. As he reaches her house, she is already waiting for him and reveals that a girl, named Törel, is quite impatient to stay with him. Hanns' response does not differ much in style and pragmatics from that of the bourgeois in Kl. 25: the poor girl is seen just a mere instrument to re-assert the narrator's ego:

> wer dem also?
> erst kant ich, wer ich wäre,
> seid ich den freulin noch geviel (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 241, vv. 31-33)
>
> If that is correct,
> then I would truly learn who I am,
> because I always make a good impression on girls. (Classen 2008: 181)

Hanns Maler does not comment on his own statement, perhaps not considering it necessary; instead, he reports that he did not realize how the madam's integrity was hollow until he got in serious trouble.

The third stanza opens with a flashback, in which the audience discovers that Hanns is actually married, and that his affair in St. Lorenzen[46] had already cost him a fight with his wife before his departure. As might be expected, the narrator believes that this altercation was senseless and that he was not to blame at all. Once in the old woman's house, Hanns is tricked into a room, where he believes he will 'make a bishop' with the young woman; *ain bischof machen* is a quite poetical manner in which to indicate a sexual intercourse with a prostitute,

[46] *San Lorenzo di Sebato* (in Italian) is a municipality bordering Bruneck, in the South Tyrolean Puster Valley. The town is famous for the Roman *statio* named *Sebatum*, while in the Middle Ages it was the bastion of the counts of Tyrol against Bruneck, founded by Bruno von Kirchberg († 1288), Bishop of Brixen, and long administered on behalf of the diocese.

and Classen (1994: 96) does not rule out a cynical reference to the undignified behavior of some high prelates.

While Hanns was already foretasting a happy ending, the "alde hund" (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 242, v. 62)[47], that is to say the madam, locks the door of the room, and four sturdy Hungarians come out of the closet. With an evident ironic connotation, the narrator reports that he has picked up their greeting in Hungarian, "Viegga waniadat"[48] at v. 65, but does not understand their German. Oswald certainly knew some Hungarian due to his many travels in Sigismund's kingdom, and many words of the Hungarian lexicon have their first written attestation in Oswald's texts[49]: the most well-known *Lied* in question is certainly Kl. 69, while in Kl. 23, 86 Oswald writes that he learned *maierol*[50] during a journey to Hungary. In fact, the references to Hungary or Hungarians in Oswald's corpus often relate to misadventures experienced by the poet[51], and the one narrated in Kl. 102 is no exception. In the second part of the fourth stanza and in the first verses of the fifth, Hanns curses those rude men who pummeled him with strength and later robbed him of his money.

As he manages to escape the house, the narrator quickly returns home to Bruneck. His wife welcomes him with curses and reproaches, and, when Hanns begs her to keep quiet because of their neighbors, she reprimands him that this is an old story just renewing itself through the blood he has been losing.

As in Kl. 25, the last stanza represents the narrator's commentary on the misfortune he has just presented. Through the words of the unfortunate Hanns, Oswald once again points the finger at the elderly women, making explicit for the first time their relationship with the Devil: "Wer alden weiben wolgetraut, | der nimpt den teufel zu der e"[52] (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 243, vv. 101-102). If on the one hand being deceived by the flattery of such women causes misfortune and mockery, on the other hand, at least according to the narrator, it is a good and just thing, and a source of great respect, to persecute these evildoers: "Man solt si baissen in der haut | und darnach werfen in den see"[53] (*ibidem*: 244,

[47] Lit. 'old dog'; "old bitch" in Classen 2008: 182.
[48] "May the devil carry away your mother" in *ibidem*, in turn probably referring to Wustmann 1908: 131. Another possible translation may be "fuck your mother" according to Zemplényi 1998: 110.
[49] In addition to the references in the previous note, also cf. Berrár/Sándor 1984 and Capelli 2021: 153-154.
[50] Cf. Modern Hungarian *magyarul*.
[51] See as example the sufferings caused by crying children in Kl. 30 and 55.
[52] "He who has trust in old women, | accepts the devil as a marriage partner" (Classen 2008: 182).
[53] "One should bite them in their skin | and then throw them into the pond" (*ibidem*: 183).

vv. 105-106). In contrast to Kl. 25, in Kl. 102 Oswald explicitly suggests that throwing this kind of elderly woman into a body of water, and consequently letting them drown, is a legitimate capital punishment.

This statement is immediately followed by the mention of two of old women's favorite activities, "Zoubrei und kuppelspil" (*ibidem*, v. 109), "sorcery and matchmaking" (Classen 2008: 183). Both these terms are stated only twice in Oswald's corpus: *zoubrei* is also named in Kl. 39,18 as part of Oswald's confession of his sins against the Ten Commandments, while it may be remembered that in Kl. 25, 29-30, at the end of the first stanza, the old arbitrator states "ich hab mein zeit verkuppelt | zu Brixsen in dem krais"[54] (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 82-83). Oswald admittedly imputes to himself the practice of sorcery and asks forgiveness for this misdeed, but that at the same time matchmaking is attributed only to elderly women. Oswald is in fact depicting the 15th-century's gradual passage from a conception of witchcraft which was more related to sorcery and superstitious beliefs (from at least the first part of the 14th century), considered to be indiscriminately performed by both men and women, to a more clearly diabolical and sexist conception of witchery, as "accusations began to manifest a marked bias against women" (Ross 1995: 333)[55]. The increasing correlation between diabolism, witchcraft, and heresy characterizes the 15th-century debate among the educated classes: for example, the Council of Basel, announced in 1431, "the largest […] exchanging-point of ideas in all of fifteenth-century Europe" (Kors/Peters 2001[2]: 151), gathered personalities like Johannes Nider, later author of the well-known *Formicarius*, but also Oswald himself, who almost certainly came in contact with the ideas circulating there. As reported by Kors and Peters (2001[2]: 152) and by Levack (2006[3]: 36 and 39), by the middle of the 15th century witchcraft had been fully assimilated into heresy, since the magicians' idolatry of the Devil was said to also pass through the submission of their souls to Satan, an act which *de facto* denied God's exclusive position in the Catholic universe.

The solution proposed by Hanns Maler in Kl. 102 to sorcery and matchmaking reveals that Oswald was somewhat involved, or at least informed, in the ongoing debate among European intellectual elites:

> es wirt offt aine gar versert
> mit ainem haissen feuer,
> dorumb hab ich gedingen guet,
> also beschech ouch der (Klein/Wachinger 2015[4]: 244, vv. 111-114)

[54] "I have done much matchmaking | in the area of Brixen" (*ibidem*: 94).
[55] Also cf. Russel 1972: 25 and 279; Monter 1976: 24.

often one of them is badly burned
in a hot fire,
so I am rather confident
that this will happen to this [old bitch] as well. (Classen 2008: 183)

Oswald is here implicitly insinuating that the madam shall burn not so much for her lustful conduct, but rather for her recidivism, as this punishment was also intended for heretics. In addition to this, the behavior of the old woman may be symbolically and ironically related to the Devil's. Satan was believed to create illusions, and *delusions*, rather than having real power over God's creation[56]; in the same way, Unruewin first suggests to Hanns Maler that he is desired by a young woman, and once the 'poor man' is in the room, she locks it and leaves him to the four Hungarians.

In the last verses of the *Lied*, the narrator reports that these elderly women are so evil that they do not shrink from anything[57], and that his final desire is to have these witches blinded, together with all their helpers. It is legitimate to assume that Oswald does not specify the nature of these 'helpers' in order to imply their coexistent human and diabolical nature, or at least that they are also subject to the Devil's will.

5. Conclusions

In order to investigate those representations of ageing and old age in Oswald von Wolkenstein's poems which are not related to the well-known *Alterslieder*, the first section of the present analysis has considered the effects of advancing age on the *Wolkensteiner*'s marriage and social relations through a comparison of four *Lieder* on the one hand and the *Lebenszeugnisse* written during his last years on the other one.

These two sets are symmetrically contrasting in their content: in the first, Oswald's increasing social isolation in Hauenstein due to his old age is sharpened by his unhappy marriage. The poet describes his wife Margarethe as a hateful and fearful jailor, he refuses to mention her name, and he addresses her as a stranger from Schwangau; Oswald does not even praise his own children, described as a burden whose tears cause him stress. In the *Lebenszeugnisse*, on the other hand, it becomes clearer and clearer that Oswald's social ascent found in Margarethe an indispensable ally, and that this woman constantly struggled to safeguard the

[56] Levack 2006[3]: 48.
[57] Classen 2008: 183.

interests of the whole Wolkenstein family. Even during her husband's last days on Earth and in her widowhood, Margarethe proves that she is not merely the wife and widow of one of the leading political figures of late medieval Tyrol, but that she is herself a relevant protagonist in that complex scenario.

The second part of the analysis has inspected the phenomenon of ageism in Oswald's *Lieder*, often also associated with sexist, misogynist, and violent connotations. While on the one hand the strong contempt towards elderly women seems to characterize the noblest classes too, and even Sigismund (the *Rex Romanorum*) may publicly mock a queen without any consequences, the two invectives by Oswald contained in Kl. 25 and 102 also report episodes of physical and psychological violence, extremely explicit death threats directly from Oswald's mouth, and his zealous moral reprimands.

Although matchmaking and the corruptibility of women are also relevant themes in Kl. 25, it is pertinent to highlight that Kl. 102 contains explicit references to sorcery, to its increasingly feared link with the Devil, and to the first germs of the witch-hunts that would later characterize the Modern Age and which Oswald almost surely came to know during his time at the Council of Basel in 1431. The best example is certainly the stake as punishment for recidivist witches, considered by the 15th-century intelligentsia to be full-fledged heretics who had rejected their link with God in favor of the Devil.

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