Dancing with the hangman
symbol, myth, and ritual in the medieval German legend
the Schelmensage

by

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KLNMAR004

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A thesis submitted in complete fulfilment of the requirements for the award
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Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in this thesis from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signed:

Ms. Marie Bastienne Klein
Cape Town, June 2005
Abstract

Dancing with the hangman is an investigation into the medieval German legend known as the Schelmensage, which has its location in Bergen-Enkheim in Frankfurt, Germany – the town where I was born. It is a legend that concerns the manner in which a hangman became knighted by the emperor Barbarossa. I received the legend from my mother. My initial research question was to find out why the legend was being told for over a period of 900 years. The thesis investigation reveals the legend to be a German trickster myth, achieving this analysis using various theories to define it as myth. The work of Paul Ricoeur on mimesis, is cast in an arc of the prefigured world of action, the act of configuration and the ability of a person to reconfigure a situation or a life, which is applied so as to understand the structures which underlie the legend’s meaning. Regarding the word Schelm as the symbolic core of this legend the thesis analyses this symbolism through its etymology, a structural analysis of its five different versions and its ritual performance in the play, Der Schelm von Bergen. The thesis considers the impact of being personally involved with the subject matter. The analysis is woven with personal episodes and this is defended as a reflexive methodology.

A two week field trip to Bergen-Enkheim was conducted in 2001 to track the location of the legend and to attend the play Der Schelm von Bergen. The outcome was synthesised into a multimedia CD ROM, the inclusion of which is argued as a complement to the written work because it invites the reader to make their own connections with the subjectively interpreted material.

The thesis concludes that the legend is a myth and is repeated because it contains content which allows for transformation in those who receive it and thus creates the extraordinary out of the ordinary. Also, that the trickster is not a godhead, but rather the situational way in which we make meaning for ourselves. The discovery that mythology contains the gift of methodology for action implicit within it, is mirrored in the relationship of hangman to emperor, action to narrative and theory to practice. Finally, I consider this thesis as another means of telling the Schelmensage to others, and thus, passing on a transformative gift.
Dedication

Write for your dead. They are listening.
Alice Walker

To the memory of my father

Helmut Rudolf Bruno Klein
11.04.1912 - 18.08.1975

and in memory of my nanny

Mrs. Doris Sutton (born Pieters)
07.04.1932 - 01.06.2002
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If there is any merit in this work, it is because I have been sustained by all of you. For the errors I alone take responsibility.

While I have dedicated this thesis to memory of the dead, I want to pass it on to the living. For Mummie, Helmut, Gisela, Henriette and Sebastian, this is also for all of you too.

And finally, as this work is koinos Hermes, I offer it to you of the stone heap — with a grin, and my thanks.

Bastienne Klein
The imagination is the only truth.

Bertolt Brecht
1. The Schelmenburg
Preface

Myth is always a way of imagining; it is not concerned essentially with fact, except the facts can be the starting point for a mythological story. (Moore, 1992: 222)

And there’s a very special property in the trickster: He always breaks in, just as the unconscious does, to trip up the rational situation. He’s both a fool and someone who’s beyond the system. And the trickster hero represents all those possibilities of life that your mind hasn’t decided it wants to deal with. The mind structures a lifestyle, and the fool or trickster represents another whole range of possibilities. He doesn’t respect the values that you’ve set up for yours, and smashes them.

Joseph Campbell, An Open Life (Hynes and Doty, 1993: 1)

Tricksters do not arrive uninvited. Consciously or not, we create the threshold, the crossroads and set up the opportune moment of grace for them to reveal themselves. Their purpose? To trip you up and kick you in the direction your life is meant to go. Thus their arrival is always perfectly timed.

1. One fine day

In May 1997 I resigned from my job, about to buy a one-way ticket to Germany to live with my then partner. With no warning whatsoever, the partner phoned one night in June to break it all off. Within the next few days I got a call from the closest friend I have, to tell me she dreamt that I was standing watching my partner refusing to get out of a car, and then the car with the partner in it, was driven off by robbers.

While recovering from the consequences, trying to piece together what I would do next, my mother came to visit. After a lunch I made her, we sat down to talk. Invariably we got into an argument. About my brother. I put my hands up to my ears: “I don’t want to us to argue about him anymore!” I shouted in my frustration. “Can’t you just tell me a story?” I countered, desperate to get away from the topic. She agreed. I’d calmed down and was ready to listen. This is what she told me.

When I was about five years old, I asked my grandmother what kind of a house in the village which was built into a lake. It always fascinated me that there seemed to be no path to an entrance to the house. My grandmother said:
That is the place where the hangman of Bergen lived after he was knighted by
Emperor Barbarossa. I asked her if the man still lived. No, she replied, that
was a long time ago. And who lives in the house now, where is the hangman?
She replied that farmers lived in the house and that there was no longer a need
for a hangman.
What was a hangman used for then? Evildoers, bad people who used to be
hanged for their deeds, a long time ago. Where did he do this? The gallows
were next to the “Berger Warte”, which still stands today. Can we go there?
No, it is far away, outside the Filberler forest. Anyway the gallows are no
longer there.
I remember it was such a terrible thought, I didn’t ask further. I imagined that
the hanged people were eaten by wild birds which came out of the Filberler
forest and hacked the bodies to pieces. My grandmother wanted to soothe me
because she could see that I was terrified. She wanted to tell me something
nice. Then she told me the story of Hans, a poacher who was caught and
imprisoned in the Eschersheimer tower in Frankfurt. He was to be hanged.

On the day before his execution he was asked to name his favourite meal,
known as the Hangman’s meal, his last one. He refused it and said “Give me
my gun and let me shoot for one last time.” They considered where it would
be best for him to shoot. They decided that it should be high up in the
Eschenheimer tower so that he couldn’t possibly destroy anything up there.
And so they granted him his last request. The next morning, the day of his
execution, he was brought to the top tower. They handed him his fully loaded
gun, locked the door behind him and left him alone.

There was nothing up there to shoot. He looked around. Way down below lay
the town. High above him swayed the sky. There were no birds. He couldn’t
find a target anywhere. Then he saw the windsock flag flying. A very wobbly
target. The flag fluttered in the wind. At the next walkway the judges stood
and looked up at his cell. Then Hans started to shoot. The first bullet hole
went through the windsock flag. It all happened quickly from there. The flag
fluttered. The second shot went through the windsock flag, the third one
followed, creating a curve. The people below wondered what on earth he was
doing. He shot and shot and shot one hole after another until one could see the
number nine in the flag. The ninth of November was the date of his execution.
Then the shooting stopped.

The judges were so impressed with his shooting that they decided to grant him
his life. He was given clemency.

By this time I had forgotten the terrible gallows. Hans didn’t have to be
hanged. Then I insisted, I now also want to hear the story of the hangman!
Then my grandmother told me the story of the hangman of Bergen.

“One fine day, the hangman decided to attend the masked ball. Every year
Emperor Barbarossa held this ball in Frankfurt after the royal hunt in the
Dreieich forest. It was rather an exceptional thing for an outlaw like the
hangman to do: he was feared by everybody. It was believed that if you touched him you would have to die. Because of this the hangman couldn’t really be seen in public except at the court and the gallows. However, he knew that if he went to the ball he could hide himself behind a mask. So he put on a mask which nobody would recognise him in and went to the ball. As he entered the great hall he placed himself discreetly against the wall, because the glitter of the light and the music, bewildered him.

He must have been a big good looking man, because the Empress noticed him immediately. He couldn’t possibly have been an old man - otherwise he would’ve had a hunched over back and wouldn’t have been able to dance. She sent a page over to him and bad him come to her throne. The page brought the hangman to her, and he bowed before her and kept silent. The queen encouraged him to dance with her. The musicians played a particularly pretty melody and they danced together. As the dance ended the hangman wanted to return the queen to her throne, but she insisted on dancing further with him. And they danced and danced and didn’t stop dancing until it was midnight. That was the hour when all masks had to be removed. The hangman had tried a while before this to leave the queen, but she had insisted on dancing with him.

Now it was too late. He had forfeited his life. The two of them stood in the middle of the great hall, the Empress enchanted with the sight of the hangman’s face, while all the others in the hall shrieked “the hangman!” This word was enough to make all the others flee; but not the Empress.

Finally, the Emperor noticed that his wife was standing in the middle of the hall with a good looking young man, whom the people were calling the hangman, but whom she was staring at, enraptured. For the Emperor it was clear that the hangman had to die. He spoke with a powerful voice. “You hangman, you have dishonoured the Empress, now you must hang.” The Empress turned pale at his words and fell on her knees before the emperor and asked for the life of the hangman. The Emperor could not refuse the wish of the Empress and knighted the hangman saying, “I hereby knight you, and you shall be called the Rogue of Bergen. I will give you tenure of my own castle in Bergen. You will also be a welcome guest at my imperial palace in Gelnhausen. You may choose your own coat of Arms. “

The Knight, Rogue of Bergen chose two bloodied ribs on a silver background, as the coat of arms for himself and his shield.”

2. All those possibilities of life: dancing with the hangman

This story my mother passed on to me is the legend about the Schelm of Bergen, known in German as the Schelmensage. Before I heard the story I had been living quite a rational, structured life which was coming along just fine, thank you very
much. I had an honours degree in Religious Studies, a job being useful as a director in a human rights advice office. I had experience of the nature of activism by campaigning for the abolition of the death penalty. I was editing the apartheid experience of activists into an oral history text. I was about to leave for the country of my birth and a partner over there.

After the breakup I felt as if I’d been robbed of my entire world. My Greatly Structured Life now lay in greatly unstructured mess all around me. No job, an unpublished manuscript full of other people’s activism, a failed relationship. I had organised myself into such a promising future. But was it? It was as if somebody outside this rational system was laughing at how stupid I’d been to think that structure is the one truth which holds us together. I wanted to understand what had tripped me up.

In the months that followed, I unpacked the *Schelmsage*. I interrogated my mother and drew mud maps of Bergen-Enkheim. The story became the one way ticket and catapulted me back to Germany. I had to consider that maybe the legend is simply a story which is told and I could simply re-tell it myself, to others as I chose. So what? I wanted to know how this story ‘worked’. It seemed important to test whether or not the legend would stand up to academic theoretical analysis. Would submitting it to academic enquiry amount to deconstructing it, blasting it away into insignificance? An investigation by thesis would mean going back to university to study it, to find out. This was the reality I didn’t want to deal with. I was terrified of going back there. I’d left it all behind, so many years ago.

I settled for a job at the university computing department followed by an administrative one within the Religious Studies department. There, I had to finally face up to the fact that I was no administrator, but an academic. An academic writer, teacher and methodologist, in truth. I had to come to terms with the messy reality that I had, years earlier, dropped out of a masters degree. My application back then to tutor the first years - rejected. I was booted out, and pushed all hopes of becoming an academic out of my life too and acquired a set of values based on the belief that
everybody else's rights and interests should come before my own. Now those values lay in ruins around me.

But I had asked for a story and it tricked me into a new set of possibilities, booting me back onto a road I had derailed from. I was now faced with the choice of becoming my real self. Tricksters allow us to ignore their actions, as the German Till Eulenspiegel tells us:

Wer mit schalkssleuten beladen ist/Der sol den schlupff abschneide
Those who are burdened with mischevious villains/should cut the rope.
(Oppenheimer, 1972: xlv; my translation)

As Hyde has pointed out, it is better to learn how to play with the *schalkssleuten*, and to develop styles culturally, spiritually and artistically which "allow some commerce with accident"; to do otherwise, could cause even more upheaval (Hyde, 1998: 107). I listened to the opening bars of the dance, accepted the hangman’s hand and registered for a masters degree.

3. Motivation

I was born in the house that my mother and her grandmother before her, were born, on the *Riedstrasse* in the Enkheim part of Bergen-Enkheim, Frankfurt, Germany. It is a town with origins dating back to pre-medieval times.

My great-great-grandmother, Susanne Becker lived there. She married a descendant of Huguenot refugees named Phillipe Weihl and in the early 1800s they built this house near the Ried River, in the Enkheim part of Bergen-Enkheim on the remains of the wine cellar of the neighbouring medieval monastery. The house has been passed down the matriarchal line. The women in my family also passed down the gift for storytelling. My great-grandmother Katharine Krauss told stories in her kitchen, sometimes amongst women only; or to the many children who came to hear them.

I was two months old when we came back to South Africa. As we grew up my siblings and I experienced our mother continuing the gift of her matriarchal line. She keeps children spellbound with stories that she seems to pull out of nowhere. We were
brought up on Brothers Grimm fairytales and any other stories we wanted to read or tell or make up ourselves. Other than this kind of information we were cut off from the details of our origins in Germany. We were not in much contact with grandparents, cousins or in touch with the complexities of being the offspring of a post-world war generation. Growing up, I remember seeing photos of a play my mother acted in as a young woman. She made mention of the hangman legend when we were little, but I couldn’t remember the details. She played the character of the witch in the play.

4. The Schelmensage
I remember the goosebumps I got when I heard my mother tell me the Schelmensage. Partly because of my involvement in and knowledge about the South African anti-death penalty campaign. Here she was telling me a powerful story about clemency, from the place where I was born.

At the time I was reading the work of Jungian analyst Clarissa Pinkola-Estés, *Women who run with the wolves* (1992). It got me thinking about the story on a deeper level.

She observed that:

> Storytelling is bringing up, hauling up; it is not an idle practice. Although some use stories as entertainment alone, tales are, in their oldest sense, a healing art. Some are called to this healing art, and the best, to my lights, are those who have lain with the story and found all its matching parts inside themselves and at depth. In the best tellers I know, the stories grow out of their lives like roots grow a tree. The stories have grown *them*, grown them into who they are. (Estés, 1992: 463 original italicised)

Using Estés as a departure point, I found I had more questions than answers. If storytelling is a healing art then what is the wound that needs healing that makes people tell this story over and over again? A wound on a personal, local and national level? Was it all about me? Is this about the town where the story came from? Who gets to tell this story? Why is it performed every four years as a play? What does it mean to receive the story in diaspora? My relatives in Germany were amused. How on earth could any person extract enough information out of that legend to fill a thesis?
5. Symbol, myth and ritual

I was interested in what the history or its different versions suggested as in the reason for its continued telling and growing ritual, dramatic presentation. There are poems, plays, operas and at least five oral versions of the story. Their context is always a German one. I tested out my ideas on university colleagues, contextualising the story with its South African parallels (Klein, 1999). I wondered whether the English department would be a better place to take it to; but this story was primarily from an oral source and I didn’t want to confine it to a literary analysis. The story’s archetypal characters led me to think that a Jungian analysis was appropriate. But what would such a psychological analysis leave out? Looking at the legal issues around the death penalty and the right to life was another possible perspective. In Germany there is an institute devoted to work on Germany’s history of criminal justice. It would have been at home there.

None of these options completely answered the question of why this legend has been told for the past 900 years or so. In thinking through the ambiguities in the story I found myself using tools I had learnt in my degrees in Religious Studies. I remembered our studies on symbol, myth and ritual, and felt my thinking about this story resonating within these terms. It seemed the strongest framework to hold the picture forming out of the questions on the politics of transformation which such a story raises. I realised that whatever I wrote would be inextricably bound up with the fact that I was born there. Not having lived there made me feel I had some valuable distance on my side.

While considering all these issues, I had joined a theory group where we discussed chapters from Paul Ricoeur’s work *Time and Narrative* (1984). For Ricoeur, myth is “another way of talking about the mediated character of experience shaped by presuppositions and models/paradigms”, this mediation being “the way a reader understands a symbolic world, emplots it, make[s] a story from what they learn about that world, and are transformed in that process” (McGaughey, 1997: 311). His theory motivates that a bridge between existence and narrative is mediated in three different
stages. From practical experience, over emplotment toward a new kind of practical experience, this process is termed three moments of mimesis: prefiguration (mimesis\(_1\)), configuration (mimesis\(_2\)) and refiguration (mimesis\(_3\)) (1984: 54-64; 1986: 121-127).

My experience of theory was better understood and meaningful when I could apply it to empirical evidence. Using this mimetic theory to analyse the Schelmensage would surely reveal something not considered before, particularly about this legend's transformational possibilities. As I searched for ways of defining the function of the legend my definition of it moved from understanding it as simple story, a legend from history, to finally considering it as containing the mythologeme of the trickster figure. The legend had seemingly elevated itself to a very different status, which prompted investigation. I had started writing this thesis as a means to document the politics of transformation and thereby continue personally on the journey of discovery which would make my own life meaningful. But in truth, analysing the Schelmensage as a myth is another manner of repeating the legend.

6. Fieldwork

In 2001 I travelled to Bergen-Enkheim, to observe local playwright Conrad Weil’s 1952/3 dramatised version of the Schelmensage, which is performed every four years outside the Schelm of Bergen’s castle. While there, I interviewed two local historians, picked up documents at the Heimatsmuseum, lingered long in Barbarossa’s Gelnhausen castle, tracked the locations of the five oral versions and photographed my way through the forests. In order to weave this information into the thesis in a way that shifted from an illustrative function to engaging with theoretical concerns, I combined the information from interviews with my family, the photographs, music, voice-overs to produce a CD as evidence of the physical factors which would become the prefigurative stage, and thus engages with Ricoeur’s idea that the (medieval) narrative finds meaning in existence (across time).

7. Intent

This thesis wishes to make an original contribution to the scholarship on myth within the discipline of Religious Studies. It sets out to achieve this in three ways. Firstly, it
is a thesis in which I am inextricably connected with the subject material analysed and this raises dynamics of subjectivity. I present a myth which I received as a story from my mother (originating from a family oral tradition), and analyse it as a student in the discipline of Religious Studies.

Secondly, the nature of such an analysis meant that a different, fitting methodology had to be found. The academic disciplines of anthropology, sociology, literary studies, health sciences and psychology have been inclusive of reflexive method. Other than Wendy Doniger’s work, I have not managed to find many examples in the academic discipline of religious studies which have used reflexive methodologies. Writers on mythology who write reflexively on mythology are not necessarily situated squarely within religious studies even if mythology is considered part of that discipline. I am making a methodological departure from the way I have studied in this discipline in the past. The examples for interpreting and understanding are drawn from mythology, history and my own life and personal reflection on how that life is inextricable from the academic endeavour. The result is that this thesis uses reflective writing related to its theoretical arguments, and defends it using self-reflexive theories.

Thirdly, attached to this thesis is a multimedia CD of fieldwork, with voice, music, photographic images and text, which tracks a progression of the myth analysed. Its intent is not to complement the written text but to gain a deeper understanding of the theory used by allowing the viewer/reader to engage with the physical context which the theory is dependent on, and which they may not have access to. It encourages them to “read” and view the material, especially the play, and make further interpretations and draw conclusions of their own. This is in keeping with my university’s mission statement (adopted April 1996) that “Educating for life means that our educational process must provide: ...critical enquiry in the form of the search for new knowledge and better understanding” (University of Cape Town April 1996). This thesis motivates for the incorporation of this technology with the written text, arguing that it adds value to academic debate by allowing the reader to participate in the process, and by giving the reader access to the original context of the myth, the symbolic world of action to add to the experience of understanding my textual argument by experiencing how myth functions, in situ without actually being there in person.
8. Thesis overview

8.1 Introduction
The introductory chapter presents the thesis problem and the terms of the investigation that follows. It introduces the five versions of the Schelmensage using a structural view of the narratives. It casts Ricoeur’s mimetic arc which holds the facets of symbol, the myth and ritual in place. It considers arguments and presents methodological conclusions regarding reflexivity in the discipline of Religious Studies as a tool for academic writers on myth, where those writers are also personally a recipient of that myth. The inclusion of the CD ROM with a thesis text will also be defended here.

8.2 Eternal yet bearing a date: the Schelmensage as myth
This chapter opens using a reflexive example which engages the core question of the thesis and then continues by considering differing theories on myth and finally applying Ricoeur’s thesis of threefold mimesis to three different versions of the Schelmensage. The result provides an answer to the thesis question.

8.3 The sons of Woden: medieval Germany’s world of action
This chapter uses the tool of mimesis$^1$ along with a reflexive account, to understand German history, as the simultaneous experience of its structure, symbolic process and aspects of temporality. We are able to understand experience of the practical medieval world of action, because we can receive it through the Schelmensage as a story. The relationship between Germany and its emperors, Bergen-Enkheim to Frankfurt, hangmen/outlaws and the wild men in the German underworld, hand-axes and the death penalty are all considered as they appear in the various texts of the Schelmensage. This world of action prepares the moment of transformation for when a hangman becomes a trickster, the pivotal point which is to be found in the configurative stage of mimesis$^2$.

8.4 The God of the Crossroads: the figurae of configuration
This chapter considers the Schelmensage as symbolic of a German trickster myth. It analyses the word Schelm as symbolic of the configurative moment of Ricoeur’s “break for fiction” (1984: 82) in mimesis$^2$. This moment is one of development,
emplotment. A structural analysis using Babcock-Abrahams’ 16 categories of trickster, are applied to the Schelm. To amplify the analysis, myths and reflexive stories are told to identify the Schelm as divine configurer in the roles of wild man, hangman and rogue which are linked to the outcomes of the analysis of the word Schelm.

8.5 Mimesis praxeos: the refigured life
For the act of emplotment to be experienced, a reader or audience is needed. This chapter examines theories on ritualisation and performance. It uses mimesis\textsuperscript{3}, the stage of refiguration to understand the Schelmensage as a transformation on the part of the playwright who wrote Der Schelm von Bergen.

8.6 Conclusion
The conclusion takes up the point made in the chapter on the Schelmensage as myth, that the dynamic tension within it, is mirrored by the mimetic theory, showing how the Schelmensage and theory are inextricably dependent on each other. It is informed by Derrida and Hyde’s theory of the gift.

8.7 CD ROM
The CD is a compilation which uses the 2001 fieldwork for this thesis, as a way of systematically presenting the 5 versions of the Schelmensage in situ and includes my mother and aunt telling the story using the play performed in Bergen in 2001. The sections on the CD are as follows:
1. Introduction
2. The death penalty
3. The house in water
4. In the forest (version 1)
5. On the road (version 2)
6. At the castle (versions 3 and 4)
7. Dancing with the hangman (version 5)
8. Credits (examples of the Schelm’s coat of arms)
I have used the pages opposite the chapter opening pages to place pictures from the CD ROM so as to engage the CD's content with the chapter's content.

What follows this preface will introduce the tools I have used to attempt to answer the questions raised; such as, what are the structures of meaning underneath this legend that keep it in business for at least 900 years? How do we, as human beings, story myths to make meaning?
2. Forest leaves, Enkheim
Introduction

If a story is seed, then we are its soil. (Estés, 1992: 387)

A myth says something that can only be said in a story. (Doniger, 1988: 27)

1. Introducing the Schelmensage

The Schelmensage is a legend that has at its core a trickster situation when a hangman re-creates his life as a knight. This introductory section presents the thesis problem that queries the continuation of the Schelm’s legend and the terms of the investigation to follow. It introduces a structural analysis of the five orally known versions of the Schelmensage and a listing of the 33 written ones known to date. Regarding the legend as a trickster myth then, this introduction considers different views of myth that were considered for analysis. It casts Ricoeur’s mimetic arc that holds the legend’s facets of symbol, myth, and ritual in place. This introduction also informs the decision to treat the understanding of the legend in a reflexive manner. Finally, it sketches the motivation for the inclusion of a multimedia CD ROM as a counterpoint to the thesis text.

2. Problematising the Schelmensage

The thesis argument arises out of the following questions: why is the Schelmensage repeated for close on 900 years? Why is the theme of the victorious Schelm expanded into the genre of a play and performed every four years in Bergen-Enkheim? Why has Bergen-Enkheim taken the coat of arms of the Schelme von Bergen as the town’s identity? Looking through the lenses of symbol, myth, and ritual provides some of the answers that inform the structures that underlie meaning. Examining the etymology of the word Schelm as a many-layered symbol of the trickster figure, revealed the figure of hangman acting as symbolic connector, playing the pivotal role of transformer. Analysing the legend for its aspects of trickster mythology, revealed that the Schelmensage contains the elements of many trickster stories found in German (and other world) literature. Treating the performance of the play as a ritual enactment of the Schelmensage revealed a refiguration of the playwright’s life.

One of the mechanisms central in the connection between myth and people is that through the interaction, a story (seed) and the human capacity to receive (soil) allows for the re-creation, the possibility to transform life. Or as Estés defined it: “If a story is seed, then we are its soil” (Estés, 1992: 387).
3. Structuring the Schelmensage

3.1 Speaking the Schelmensage

The original tellers of the Schelmensage are not known to us. It is not possible for us to know what actual events lie behind its telling. The words Schelm, the location of Bergen-Enkheim, the genre sage or legend, the emperor Barbarossa being a key figure in the legend, all point to a historical period of at least 1192 onwards. Mythologist Wendy Doniger has an explanation for this:

Myths belong to a peculiar genre of texts that, after they come into being, seem to create their own authors. The myth must have been told originally by an individual, of course, but once it is accepted by the group it is regarded as having been created by the group, as being multi-authored. (1988: 28)

In the last century, Bergen-Enkheim’s historian Werner Henschke collected as many of the oral and written versions of the Schelmensage as he could find. His Die Schelme von Bergen in Sage, Geschichte und Dichtung (1978), traces the genealogies of the line of knights who were named the Schelme, from 1192 onwards. He lists five known oral history versions. Using a structural analysis (after Schmitt, 1983), I have ranked them in terms of their content detail and have noted which versions I received from my mother, and which I have sourced from Henschke’s text. It may be that the shortest version known, grew due to the content details which tellers and authors added after the medieval period. The categories of analysis emplot the five versions’ time and location of the action, the status of the characters before the transformative moment, the interaction before the transformative moment, the transformation, the transformed characters and the changes in location after the transformative event. I received three of the spoken versions from my mother. The order here in which the five versions of the Schelmensage are presented is repeated on the CD ROM.
Table 1. A structural analysis of the five narrative versions of the Schelmensage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative (N) and source of written version</th>
<th>Time and location of action</th>
<th>Characters before transformative moment</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Transformative moment</th>
<th>Characters after transformation</th>
<th>Location after transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N1 Oral transmission and W. Henschke, (1979: 10)</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>Emperor</td>
<td>The hangman (Schelm) of Bergen, gives the thirsty emperor a glass of water.</td>
<td>Emperor knights hangman for his service.</td>
<td>Emperor</td>
<td>Emperor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hangman</td>
<td></td>
<td>Knight</td>
<td>Knight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2 Oral transmission and W. Henschke, (1979: 10)</td>
<td>Hunt in the Dreieich Forest, near Bergen-Enkheim (BE)</td>
<td>Emperor</td>
<td>Got lost in the forest after hunt, at night. Hangman is driving his cart through forest collecting kill from hunt. Emperor asks for ride on cart. When they arrive in town the next morning, townspeople embarrass Emperor and tell him who is driving the cart.</td>
<td>On hearing this, Emperor knights hangman.</td>
<td>Emperor</td>
<td>Emperor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hangman</td>
<td></td>
<td>Knight</td>
<td>Knight</td>
<td>Townspeople</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Townspeople</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N3 W. Henschke, (1979: 10)</td>
<td>Completion of building the castle in Gelnhausen, town next to BE.</td>
<td>Emperor and his retinue</td>
<td>Before retiring at night, Emperor announces that first person to appear at court in the morning, will be made nobility.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N4 W. Henschke, (1979: 11)</td>
<td>Day at Gelnhausen castle</td>
<td>Emperor, Gelnhausner forester, hangman, assistant to hangman. Enemies in the forest.</td>
<td>Emperor stops over at his castle on way to Würzburg, and is told by three men that his enemies are in the forest plotting to kill him on his journey.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative (N) and sources</td>
<td>Time and location of action</td>
<td>Characters before transformative moment</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Transformative moment</td>
<td>Characters after transformation</td>
<td>Location after transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N4 continued Night in forest</td>
<td>Enemies and three men.</td>
<td>Emperor sends wagon with a dummy of himself, followed by three men. Enemies pounce on it. Three men circle enemies and capture them and bring them to castle.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The next morning at Gelnhausen castle</td>
<td>Emperor and entire court, three men.</td>
<td>Knights three men.</td>
<td>Two hangmen and a forester, knighted.</td>
<td>Forester named “von Forstmeister zu Gelnhausen”. Hangman of Bergen, named “Schelm of Bergen”. Assistant to hangman named “von Schleifras” - he took the hangman’s bloodied axe and rope, as symbols in his coat of arms.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2 Writing the Schelmensage

Henschke's list of 33 written versions confirms Bettelheim's view that "Myths and fairy tales alike attain a definite form only when they are committed to writing and are no longer subject to continuous change" (1978: 28). The 33 versions, written mostly in the nineteenth century, are based on the most detailed version, narrative five (N5) and so the most well known version is also the most glamorous one. These written versions are evidence for the tendency of the romantic poets of that century to imbue established legends with new life (Bäumel, 1969: 390).

Table 2. 33 Written versions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Narrative Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1811</td>
<td>Isak von Sinclair (Crisalin)</td>
<td>Der Schelm von Bergen</td>
<td>poem</td>
<td>N5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>Wilhelm Smets</td>
<td>Der Schelm von Bergen</td>
<td>poem</td>
<td>N5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>F. Gottschalk</td>
<td>Ritterburgen und Bergschloesser Deutschlands</td>
<td>(von den Schelmen)</td>
<td>Narrative version used not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833 (circa)</td>
<td>Ludwig Storch</td>
<td>Der Freiknecht</td>
<td>with the Schelm of Bergen recognisable as its theme</td>
<td>N5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer</td>
<td>Hinko</td>
<td>a drama in five acts (based on Storch's Der Freiknecht)</td>
<td>N5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>Johann Nepomuk Vogl</td>
<td>Der Schelm von Bergen</td>
<td>poem</td>
<td>N5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>Karl Joseph Simrock</td>
<td>Der Schelm von Bergen</td>
<td>poem</td>
<td>N5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>K.E. von Ebert</td>
<td>Schelm vom Berge in Frankfurter &quot;Didaskalia&quot;</td>
<td>(1849)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850 (circa)</td>
<td>F.J. Kiefer</td>
<td>Rheinsagen von Basel bis Rotterdam</td>
<td>prose summary of Simrock's poem</td>
<td>N5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>Heinrich Heine</td>
<td>Schelm von Bergen</td>
<td>poem</td>
<td>N5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td>FP Usener</td>
<td>Geschichte der Ritterburgen um Bergschloesser in der Umgegend von Frankfurt a.M.</td>
<td>historical account</td>
<td>N1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850s (circa)</td>
<td>Julius von der Traun (Alexander Schindler)</td>
<td>Der Schelm von Bergen</td>
<td>prose narrative</td>
<td>N5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>Georg Listmann</td>
<td>Der Schelm von Bergen</td>
<td>poem</td>
<td>N2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860s (circa)</td>
<td>Otto Roquette</td>
<td>Der Schelm von Bergen</td>
<td>one act comedy</td>
<td>N5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>Wilhelm Opel</td>
<td>Der Schelm von Bergen</td>
<td>poem</td>
<td>N5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>Mark Twain</td>
<td>The Knave of Bergen</td>
<td>translation of Kiefer's version</td>
<td>N5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Karl Lyncker</td>
<td>Der Schelm von Bergen</td>
<td>poem</td>
<td>N4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Roderich Fels</td>
<td>Der Schelm von Bergen</td>
<td>play in five acts</td>
<td>N5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886 (circa)</td>
<td>Johan Strauss (junior)</td>
<td>Duet aus der komischen Oper 'Der Schelm von Bergen'</td>
<td>musical duet from unfinished opera</td>
<td>N5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
20. 1890 Fritz Schleucher, *Der Schelm von Bergen*, poem (N5)
21. circa 1890s Eduard Behm, *Der Schelm von Bergen*, libretto for a comic opera - in one act
22. 1900 F.A. Muth, *Der Schelm von Bergen*, poem (N5)
23. 1900 (circa) Max Meyer-Olbersleben, *Der Schelm von Bergen*, musical arrangement for 4-part male voice choir based on F.A. Muth's text (N5)
25. 1910 (circa) Fritz Char, *Der Schelm von Bergen*, opera, based on text by Roderich Fels, (N5)
26. 1927 Wilhelm Dörfler, *Der Schelm von Bergen*, play, (N5)
27. 1933 Heinrich Heun, *Schelm von Bergen*, play, (N5)
28. 1938, Carl Zuckmayer, *Der Schelm von Bergen*, play (N5)
29. 1950 (circa) Anonymous author. Prose version of *Der Schelm von Bergen*, sold as adjunct marketing for local cigarette factory (N1+N5)
30. 1952 Conrad Weil, *Der Schelm von Bergen*, play in three acts, (N5)
33. 1968 Heinrich Schröder, *Schicksal der Schelme*, poem, (N5)

The spoken and written versions as listed here retell the legend. This thesis will use the five core narratives and a few of the poetic renditions as the basis for investigating the *Schelmensage*'s transformative potential.

4. Mythologising the *Schelmensage*

4.1 Mythologos or, storyteller

My mother passed on a story to me which may be classified as a legend, due to the inclusion of a historical figure (emperor Barbarossa). In trying to understand the nature of the *Schelmensage* I have used the words "story" and "myth" interchangeably. Wendy Doniger argues that "a myth says something that can only be said in a story" (1988: 27). Russell McCutcheon comments on the link between myth and storyteller and explains that although the root of the words *mythos* and *logos*, originally seem to have been synonyms, both signifying "word" and "story" - in the ancient world a *mythologos* was a storyteller - *mythos* eventually took on restricted meanings" *mythos* being in opposition to *logos* - reason. (2000: 191)
One such mythologos is Umberto Eco, who took on the trickster figure in his novel *Baudolino* (2002), the eponymous hero of the legend in Eco's home city - Alessandria in Italy. In another work Eco explains how he conflated the wily Gagliaudo and San Baudolino to make up the rascal Baudolino. In 1174, when along with other Italian communes, Alessandria joined forces against Barbarossa, Gagliaudo outwits the Germans. Praise for the military success of the operation was deflected, the city wishing rather to “celebrate as its hero this sly and unbloody peasant, a bit short on military talent, but guided by one radiant certitude: that everyone else was a bit more stupid than he” (1994: 237). More than any other work, *Baudolino* mirrors the essence of the *Schelmensage*.

In reviewing literature on the topic, I did not find the *Schelmensage* described as a myth in any document I researched. In Arendt’s (1974) and Meiners’ (1967) work, the origins of the word Schelm are discussed, but no reference is made to *Schelmensage*.

It is my argument that the legend’s transformative potential gives it mythic possibilities. In order to understand what kind of myth the *Schelmensage* could be defined as, various approaches to myth were considered.

### 4.2 Myth as description

One approach was Mircea Eliade’s argument that a central myth existed which described the beginnings of the world,

...that is, what happened before the world became as it is today....Now this primordial, sacred history, brought together by the totality of significant myths, is fundamental because it explains, and by the same token justifies, the existence of the world, of man and of society. This is the reason that a mythology is considered at once a true history: it relates how things came into being, providing the exemplary model and also the justifications of man’s activities. (Dundes, 1984: 140-141)

Eliade speaks of a model of an ancestral myth of origin within which ancestors are found, for example, as the culture heroes within myths (1969: 87). There are elements in these definitions that are useful in defining the *Schelmensage* legend as a myth for example, where the legend is ritualised in a play, performed every four years in its originating context. While an analysis may reveal whether it is a legend which justifies particular human activity, or provides a model for society to follow, the *Schelmensage* cannot be defined as a myth which describes the beginning of the world or a primordial time - a time before time itself was counted by humans: the *Schelmensage* functions as a transformational myth, one in which a trickster does not describe how the world is created and shaped,
but rather gives what is needed to re-shape, to re-create what has always existed into something new. As Lewis Hyde titled his reflexive work on the trickster figure, “Trickster makes this world; mischief, myth and art” (1998), the implication being that the trickster requires material to mess about with in order to be transformative.

4.3. Myth as message

This notion that the importance of myth as a message (Barthes, 1957; 1972) lies in the manner it is presented, is perhaps closer to understanding how the element of divine trickster becomes present in a legend. Bettelheim distinguishes myth as that which “presents its theme in a majestic way; ... carries spiritual force; the divine is present and is experienced in the form of superhuman heroes who make constant demands on mere mortals” (1978: 26). This understanding endows myth with a glowingly positive reputation. Messages can be manipulated, depending on the power dynamics of the messenger. Myths have been manipulated to justify inhumane power dynamics.

4.3.1 The Schelmensage as etiological explanation

Werner Henschke gives one reading of the Schelmensage as a legend explaining the origin of the unusual name in the title Schelme von Bergen. The knights took on this title for the first time in 1192, two years after Barbarossa’s death (1978: 7-9). In this method, the myth is read as symbolic explanation. As we do not really know how or why the Schelme von Bergen got this title, the Schelmensage becomes symbolic of the reasons they were named thus. The myth is emptied of power dynamics between emperors and hangmen and takes on the role of explanation. It bears a date, becomes “literal” again (Barthes, 1957; 1972: 138), as an explanation for naming medieval knights.

4.3.2 Alibis for tricksterhood

To read the Schelmensage myth as an alibi for tricksterhood, one can take its contents at their face value and then impose a concept which arises as another level of understanding it. Such a reading obscures the hangman, the emperor and the power dynamics, and distorts it into a positive alibi for tricksterhood. This distortion doesn’t hide the content elements for the reader, it informs the analysis necessary to grasp the concept of myth as an alibi. But the story then no longer bears a historical “date”, - and we see here the “eternal” trickster coming to the fore in this view of the myth. It is a reading of myth for its archetypal form rather than its meaning. According to Barthes, reading myth with such lenses is what mythologists do: they put the words at a distance and read for a form. This method moves from seeing the myth as “linguistic sign” (the word Schelm) to “mythical signifier” (trickster archetype) (1957; 1972: 139-140).
4.3.3 Compromises

Another way of reading the Schelmensage can be using both symbol and alibi - "as inextricably meaning and form" (Barthes, 1957; 1972: 139). A reader of myths in this situation "receives an ambiguous signification: I respond to the constituting mechanism of myth, to its own dynamics..." In this reading the Schelmensage is not the reason for naming of a line of knights or the alibi of "Schelmhood". The myth is read going back and forth between these two positions and it is up to the reader to decide (to "compromise") on the function of the myth. This gets the reader to consider the issues raised by the actions in the myth. Moving to the other extreme of the myth as concept, the form of the myth pushes back to distort with the power of the concept of tricksterhood. In this process "the reader lives the myth as a story at once true and unreal" (Barthes, 1957; 1972: 139). The reader vacillates between reading for facts and unmasking it as mythologist. The reader gets out of confining the myth into a historical explanation or denuding it of any sort mythical intention and asks "how do I receive this myth today?" (Barthes, 1957; 1972: 139).

For example, my mother's favourite version brings her experience as a Bergen-Enkheim local, and those power dynamics, to bear on the Schelmensage. She reads the myth as a compromise between the explainable facts (our ancestors were poor village people, in service to rich people in town) and the concept of tricksterhood (those nobles we served got tripped up). Her reading of the myth is to make the strong point that powerless officials in an emperor's retinue, such as the hangman, can be free. Her reading of the story points to the very essence of tricksterhood: its ability to risk over one's own head, and unhinge power.

Barthes encourages seeing myth as the third option - the reading of myth as compromise itself. Instead of seeing the analysis as either obliterating or unveiling its content, moving from reader to mythologist, myth survives because it hails me in the name of Schelmhood. To ask my mother whether tricksterhood as transformation exists: Of course! - look at this Schelmensage, this isn't just a concept - roguehood exists and the legend encourages me to take risks. The reader thus gets to claim the Schelmensage as the very essence of tricksterhood for themselves (Barthes, 1957; 1972: 140), and as the preface to this thesis has shown, this is how I have read the Schelmensage - according to how it has functioned within my own life. The theoretical structure which underpins the legend's persuasive potential may be understood by applying Ricoeur's theory of mimesis which allows practical action to be storied in a transformative way, and result in living within a new world.
5. Theorising the Schelmensage

Paul Ricoeur’s theory concerning the beneficial relationship between existence and narrative, provides a theoretical structure which when applied, explains the structures which underlie the meaning of the Schelmensage. His argument that life remains a “biological phenomenon as long as it is not interpreted” can be summarised by saying that life is a story in search of a narrator (1986: 127 & 121). Ricoeur argues that while life is lived and stories are told (1986: 131) this tension is bridged partly by “our capacity to appropriate in the application to ourselves the intrigues we received from our culture, and our capacity of thus experimenting with the various roles that the favorite personae assume in the stories we love best” (Ricoeur, 1986: 131) and his theory proves how this bridge between existence and narrative is mediated in three different stages. In the imitation of an action, Aristotle’s mimesis praxeos is about looking for points which can help us transform the living experience of acting and suffering (Ricoeur, 1986: 127). The bridging between life and story lies in the understanding that when a prefigured world of processes and action (mimesis1), has elements which are open to a break for fiction, an emplotment when dissimilar elements find a transformative connector, such as metaphor - a configuration is made (mimesis2), it can lead to a new, reconfigured understanding of the world (mimesis3) (1984: 54-64). Ricoeur holds that “we can become our own narrator, following these narrative voices, without becoming authors” (1986: 131) and so change our lives. Ricoeur’s hermeneutic hinge, can be seen as the mythological moment, which hinges between “the (internal) configuration of a work and the (external) re-figuration of a life” (1986: 126-7). This confirms the conclusion that particular myths and legends are elevated to the extraordinary because they contain and function as, transformational potential which is restorative to those who are open to receive it.

Virginia Woolf’s words suggest a diagrammatical representation of this: “a book is not made up of sentences laid end to end, but of sentences built, if an image helps, into arcades and domes” (Jong, 1994: preface). This image of a rounded arc helps shift the linear idea of stories which follow a line of beginning, middle and end with a “happy ever after” scenario, to the idea that the reader must lift the text from the external linear state of processes and action, to one of an arc of experiencing them in their own lives. The arc of mimesis can be displayed like this:
This mimetic process can be applied to every single one of the 33 versions listed. To unpack mimesis₁, would mean to build the prefigurative context the version supplies, understood as the outcomes of symbolic processes. Details such as the period in which the version is set, the characters which are present or have been added, the potential for transformation the details contain, will inform the possibilities of configuration in the next stage. Mimesis₂ is the stage of emplotment and the analysis of the version must reveal the nature of the change which the pivot brings, placed between the prefiguration and the refiguration process. It is the moment when all the possibilities of action become storied. This process is best described in Doniger’s words that when “[an] event is described in detail, as something that happened, we can see it happening, and so it enlarges our sense of what might be possible. Only a story can do this” (1988: 28, original italicised). Once the transformation has occurred, the process of refiguring, adjusting to the new space which mimesis₂ has opened up, leads to mimesis₃ or the stage of refiguration. It is the new interpretation of the practical world of action which has been transformed in the configurative stage.

6. Methodologising the Schelmensage

6.1 From the trickster, a techne
When you receive a story, you also receive a method for doing something. As Lewis Hyde pointed out, in the Greek tradition, the trickster “Hermes doesn’t simply acquire fire, he invents and spreads a method, a techne, for making fire.” (1998: 9). When my mother gave me the Schelmensage she was giving me the technicalities to understand what had happened to me and a way to deal with the transformation I would undertake. Ricoeur’s Time and Narrative, amplified this idea that resulted in making a connection between myself and the story or myth in that “fiction helps to make life - in the biological sense of the word - human” (1986: 121). In understanding the relation between story and life, Ricoeur applies Socrates’ maxim that “the unexamined life is not worth living” (1986: 121) and therefore,
...if it is true that fiction cannot be completed other than in life, and that life can not be understood other than through stories we tell about it, then we are led to say that a life examined, in the sense borrowed from Socrates, is a life narrated. (1986: 130; original italicised)

Different methodologies were used in this thesis to answer the question of why the Schelmensage has been repeated for the past 900 years and in following them they have answered the question on two different levels: firstly, they led to an understanding of how story holds transformative potential in life. Secondly, the fiction of the Schelmensage led me to examine my own life and narrate it differently, through writing this thesis about it.

While I have presented myself as a personal connector between the myth’s past and its future, my methodology’s departure is from the point of being unconsciously summoned to work in an intuitive way. It was the experience of being tricked into going back to university and writing a thesis about that which tricked me into being there, which has encouraged me to work with a reflexive methodology. Which is why this thesis asserts that it is possible to continue the tradition of making myth, using an academic genre. My interest in focusing on the legend as a myth for study arose out of the notion that it was a story with a transformative function.

A scan of recent postgraduate study of the trickster figures and trickster mythology, written in English between 1981 and 2003 yielded eight dissertations from the United Kingdom and North America. Various treatments of the trickster theme, included trickster rhetoric compared with subaltern rhetoric (Smith, 2003) trickster figures and trickster discourse in contemporary American English literature (McNeil, 2003); the trickster Baubo as alternative role model for women in mid-life crisis, as seen through the lens of depth Psychology (Kory, 1999); comparisons between three medieval European and one Native American trickster (Kraus, 1990); the mythological present and shamanic healing (Pickett, 1981); Mark Twain, and the tall tale imagination in America (Caron, 1983); comedians as confidence men (Kaufman, 1984); and in particular, a thesis about the work of Canadian playwright Tomson Highway, subtitled somewhat similarly to my thesis title: Dancing to the Tune of the Trickster (Preston, 1990).

From the abstracts of these works, none of the methodologies seemed to discuss the personal connection to the theme of trickster. Anne Doueihi, in her work on trickster discourse gives an explanation for the nature of these studies:
In their approaches to the trickster, Western scholars, both in anthropology and in the history of religions, have tended to impose their own terms on the trickster narratives instead of attending to the terms set by the narratives themselves. (1993: 194)

While the text of the Schelmensage may be found in books, I did not consciously seek it out. It is a story handed down to me by my mother, more importantly, a story about the town she and I were born in; this would have consequences for the way I treated what I had been given. When my German relatives amusedly asked whether or not there was enough in that little story to fill a thesis, I was reminded of my initial impulse to subject the story to academic analysis to see if it could be taken apart and stand taller when it was put back together again. In reading for a theory I was trying to find a method situated within the academic discipline of mythology within Religious Studies, which would help me answer my questions and lead me to understand the structures which underlie meaning.

I had started with Bruce Lincoln’s protocol for students of myth, which meant considering “texts, contexts, intertexts, pretexts subtexts and consequences” which comprised an analysis of seven steps that entailed categorising the issue or narrative at hand and then dealing with what arises out of that (1999: 150-1). Keeping this in mind, I then tried to track methodologies in different treatments of myths. Joseph Fontenrose’s study of Python examined the Delphic myth and its origins (1959); his methodology is an example of Lincoln’s method of myth categorised. Fontenrose found ten main themes of the combat myth between Apollo and the dragon, and traced 42 sub-headings or theme statements. The structure of his study is based on the ten themes and the international mythological traditions in which the theme is classifiable.

For an example of the treatment of a medieval legend which exposed church ideology in conflict with pagan belief, Jean-Claude Schmitt’s The Holy Greyhound Guinefort, Healer of Children since the Thirteenth Century (1983) was instructive in its method. It studies the legend by examining the socio-political background, uses the structuralist method of examining a corpus of narratives, includes a formal analysis, a content analysis, keeping the originality of the peasant version of the legend, to hand. He includes an examination of the legend’s attendant ritual, with fieldwork that extends to a discussion of the archaeological investigation at the site of the legend’s origin, and gives his insights on the unity of the narrative. There were elements here which would aid an analysis for the unity of the Schelmensage.

However, the more I tried to apply the useful rules and academic tools of these experts on legend and myth, the more I found it harder to produce any kind of meaningful analysis and my writing appeared
very stilted and cut off from the subject matter. While battling with this, as the first chapter on myth will show, the trickster dynamic revealed itself. There were times when I would be reading a theoretical text, and without really wishing it, an image or series of images would emerge, which became so vivid, so insistent that they could not be ignored or pushed aside. I would either unexpectedly bump into somebody and have a conversation with them, which would prove all my categories to be invalid and supply an experience to correct my ideas. Or, engaging with concepts such as what a Schelm is: one who works with the skins of dead animals amongst other things, I would quite helplessly have the sensory memory of being in a tannery visited on a childhood holiday; with the result that I was confronted with realities of the twelfth century Schelmanage in the twentieth century which were rather smelly and uncomfortable.

I would make an accidental lucky “find” in a special book which I wasn’t looking for and while the book was relevant to the trickster mythology, I would find that the content made me process certain difficulties in my life. The process was often so draining that I was unable to focus, read or write for a while. Hermes, they say, leads the way, or leads astray. It was as if I was being tripped up every time I tried to view the trickster from a dizzy height, a boundaried and unequivocal perspective that I was brought down to be at the end of a not untricksterlike joke, as Doueihi described it:

Thus traditional Western approaches, while trying to frame the trickster in a context of Western metaphysics and ontology, ultimately end up being the victim of a not untricksterlike joke. The joke is itself set up by the undecideable coexistence of story and discourse in every trickster narrative. Although this coexistence is ultimately true of any narrative at all, the trickster tale seems particularly designed to highlight and play upon this undecidability. Past scholarly approaches to the trickster are already victims of one of the trickster’s pranks when they take the myths, right from the start, as stories referring to unequivocal events. For what is the story but a trick played by the discourse of the trickster? (1993: 197)

Not wishing to lose the wisdom of the experts or my images and experiences, I decided that I would have to deal with the trickster situations in their own contexts and on their own terms: whatever made the trickster situation real and alive would be used. It was a reflexive methodology similar to the one which playwright Harold Pinter discovered in writing his play The Birthday Party:

The thing germinated and bred itself. It proceeded according to its own logic. What did I do? I followed the indications, I kept a sharp eye on the clues I found myself dropping. The writing arranged itself with no trouble into dramatic terms. (Hyde, 1973; 1979: 144)

In this thesis, my writing arranged itself to amplify the theory of how myth works; I use descriptions from my own life experience as evidence that myth is not an archaic story from the past, but a dynamic, transformative process in which time expands out of its chronological bounds and is
understood as part of current human experience. The descriptions function to integrate my own current context and the connections I make with my life - as supportive to a trickster dynamic.

The term reflexivity, stems from the etymological root of the word “reflexive” meaning “to bend back upon oneself” (Finlay, 2003: ix). Lawson notes that as a form of self-awareness reflexivity has been an integral part of philosophy but argues that “reflexive questions have been given their special force in consequence of the recognition of the central role played by language, theory, sign and text” (1985: 9). Doniger, who has also written reflexively, defends it as a method for myth:

The reader may wonder, from time to time, whether I have gone off on a tangent, telling stories and losing the thread of the point that I want to make. But the stories are the point I want to make; I am telling methodological stories about the stories I am telling. (Doniger, 1988: 2)

In George E. Marcus’ work on ideologies of reflexivity, he noted that within the disciplines of sociology, anthropology and feminism, lay motivations for producing messy texts. He located the researcher within their own texts:

In messy texts, there is a sense of a whole, without an evocation of totality, that emerges from the research process itself. The territory that defines the object of study is mapped by an ethnographer who is within its landscape, moving and acting within it rather than being drawn in from a transcendent, detached point. (1988: 188-9)

The word theory comes from the Greek theoria, meaning to look to observe, to reflect; it also means to be a theatre spectator (Appignanesi et al, 1995: 76). The very act of engaging with the trickster topic, turned me into a theoria, a spectator at the theatre displaying scenes in my own life and reflecting on them in relationship to the story my mother told me. The stories I tell, act as a theoretical explanation within themselves. As Doniger warned, “it is particularly evident that people who traffic in myths are caught up in them, volens nolens” (1988: 13).

It was my curiosity about how feminists in Religious Studies would tackle issues of method that led me closer to what was actually happening in my own study. In Buddhism after Patriarchy (1993), Rita M. Gross, writing about “Religious experience and the study of religion: the history of religions”, explains her methodology of being unable to separate theology from her work as a feminist working with Buddhist materials:

But precisely because I am not working with Western materials, I am again working in territory without map or model. Because I am not following already well-laid-out methodological pathways, I wish to articulate the methodological vision that drives my work. That method is perhaps best summarized as the simultaneous or inseparable practice of theology and of the history of religions....Though not usually practiced by most contemporary students of religion, this method is the only method adequate for my task. (1993: 305)
This was closer to my own experiences in writing my thesis. In 2003 South African feminist theologian Denise Ackermann theologised in the form of letters, and titled her book *After the Locusts: Letters from a Landscape of Faith*. Writing to her (deceased) mother, her granddaughters and grandson, her children, amongst others, meant being personal and thus, vulnerable. "I cannot hide behind the tricks that govern academic writing", she discovered (xvi). Which is not to say that the book isn’t academic. Ackermann refuses to apologise for using this genre and weaves this into her letters. They are an academic theologian’s methodology because “...our methods uncover our moral and religious commitment...Knowing that I am addressing someone I care for has helped me to keep my feet on the ground....As a woman theologian, I believe that the method I choose for communicating is in fact part of the kind of theology I am committed to” (xv). Her writing is reflexive in nature, and as she explained to her granddaughters: “As I tell you parts of my story, I am aware that this is also a letter to myself” (2). Like the apostle Paul’s letters to very specific Christian communities, her letters are written in such a way that we feel they are written to us too, for us to learn from. Their blood-red thread of dealing theologically with apartheid’s destruction - lament as a way of coping, speaking out for justice in a time of great oppression - mirrors ancient lament traditions and is also another form of academic argument reflected in the act of writing to another.

Out of this, I determined that the following required methodological consideration:

- A field trip to the location to personally attend and document a performance of the *Schelmensage* and to photograph the physical contexts of the oral history versions; to interview relatives who would re-tell the story and record (on disk and on paper) my mother telling the legend, herself;
- A collection and listing of the written versions of the *Schelmensage*;
- to examine similarities and differences of the transformative moment by applying a structural analysis of the five oral history versions of the *Schelmensage*;
- a structural analysis using theoretical categories to determine whether the *Schelm* was a trickster or not;
- to ascertain the symbolic content through a study of the origins of the word *Seelmo*;
- an application of Ricoeur’s thesis of mimetic theory to the *Schelmensage* to establish the structure which underlies the meaning of the *Schelmensage*, namely the transformative potential the story has. This meant applying the mimetic arc, as discussed to the world of action (through the symbolic historic context of the legend), the configurative moment (through the mythological potential) and the refigurative moment (through its ritual re-enactment).

From these considerations arose three methodologies with which I was to tackle the *Schelmensage*. The first, the fieldwork component, involved a trip to Germany, to Bergen-Enkheim, the town of my birth. Using minidisc recordings, photographs, video footage and sections of musical performance, a CD ROM listed the reasons for my taking on the *Schelmensage* as an academic study, and then
presented the five oral history versions. (The methodology for and defence of synthesising my fieldwork in a CD ROM format, follows in this introduction.)

The second, was the use of theorists such as Barthes on myth, Babcock-Abrahams and Hyde on the trickster figure and Ricoeur's mimetic arc which explains the relationship between time and narrative. These theorists, (amongst others) provided the necessary tools with which to analyse the *Schelmensage*.

The third methodological tool is that of my reflexive accounts whose purpose is to give voice to the evidence of the mythological moments in my own life and in other situations, which support the theoretical suppositions about the trickster figure in this thesis.

6.2 A place on the continuum

While there is no one method of integrating story into academic text, the stories I tell are not meant to stand in place of the argument. Doniger explains that "rather, they provide us with metaphors that make the arguments real to us" (1988: 2). This idea of stories being a metaphor for argument will be addressed by an analysis of the *Schelmensage*’s relation to theory, in the conclusion to this thesis.

Doniger locates a continuum for this reflexivity. At one end she places the “scholarly attempt” to find out what a myth means to those who created it in the first place; these attempts are judged “and criticized by the same criteria that would be applied to any academic enterprise” (Doniger, 1988: 16). At the other end of this continuum is the “nonscholarly” experience of myth which is about the personal meaning of the myth for the person who encounters it. This personal interpretation cannot be judged by “academic criteria; [it] is purely subjective, valuable only to the person who draws personal meaning from the myth” (Doniger, 1988: 16). She argues for the middle ground:

But what of the middle ground between these extremes? What of scholars who see, as well as any good scholar can, what the myth means to its parent culture, and find that interpretation also has meaning for them? (1998: 16)

As I am a scholar in this instance, and also a native of the town that grew a story, my issues take this middle ground. This thesis argues a methodology which reflects that it is possible to be caught up in the mythological, draw personal meaning from a myth, and use one’s own life experience and the analysis, to make interpretations toward an academically valid enterprise. As Doniger concludes, “Methodologies, after all, are stories too, and every storyteller is a methodologist” (1988: 2).
6.3 Without map or model

This place on the continuum is not very familiar methodologically in religious studies as a discipline. In the introduction to their thorough *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2000), Denzin and Lincoln note that “Qualitative research has separate and distinguished histories in education, social work, communications, psychology, history, organizational studies, medical science, anthropology, and sociology” (24) with the domain of religious studies, absent.

While struggling to come to terms with a work that, like Pinter’s, was proceeding according to its own logic, I found that the works I had consulted did not supply me with models for a reflexive methodology. In the preface to his book on theorising myth, Lincoln revealed the poignant personal background to his struggle to “extricate myself from a discipline, a paradigm, and a discourse [of scholarship on Aryan or Indo-European myth] that I adopted early in my academic career with insufficient critical reflection. To a certain extent, writing this book has been an attempt to undo my earlier lack of awareness and make amends for it” (1999: xii). The rest of the book is an example of the application of the seven steps which Lincoln advises in the protocol for students of myth.

Literary scholar Cary Nelson’s critique of academic writing engages with this split between preface and book content and argued that “academic writing works very hard to depersonalize its insights, to mask its fears and wishes in a language of secure authority” (Fleischman, 1988: 987). Accordingly, in scholarly books, if personal statements appear at all, they tend to be confined to the “edges: forewords (acknowledgments, prefaces, introductions) and afterwords...And, traditionally, it is only these bracketing sections that offer a window onto the relationship between scholars and their writing, their disciplines...”. (Fleischman, 1988: 987)

Gross’ account of her epistemological break, was helpful in the simple fact that she stated the methodological changes she faced. The risk of saying it seems to have been minimised by it being placed in an appendix to the book, and not within the body of the writing, because nothing is more likely to be the kiss of death for a “serious” historian of religions than the suspicion of personal interest or involvement in the religion one studies professionally. (1993: 308)

Lincoln and Denzin noted the feminist concerns with theory that arose from the slogan that the personal is the political. They argue that also “subaltern voices recognize that the epistemological is also the political” (2000: 1059) and that what we know is inextricably bound up with how we know, where we got that knowledge from and what we have experienced (2000: 1059).
In his book on Python, Fontenrose did not give any reasons for making a study of the dragon, other than an anecdotal reference in his preface which alluded to the book adding to evidence to the existence of Python mythology and so the reasons for the methodology are not clear or explained. This does not mean that a personal connection to the methodology is not present. Schmitt’s The Holy Greyhound Guinefort, Healer of Children since the Thirteenth Century, gave no personal statement of activist intent, but I found that from the title through to its conclusion, the theme is one which shows a triumph for the people who practiced pagan belief and who were violently and senselessly persecuted by the medieval inquisition. Gross explains her own conviction that

scholarship always hides and includes a normative position, a worldview, and a set of values,...These unstated and unacknowledged values and points of view deeply color and predetermine, not only many of the conclusions derived by scholars, but also what data are even included in the materials to be analyzed. (1993: 311 original italicised)

Ackermann wrote theology in a personal, vulnerable way, without stating the steps in her methodology. When starting to understand the emerging methodology in my work, reading these authors, revealed to me that they were directly and indirectly embodied in their work because, as Steedman’s work argues, knowledge cannot be separated from the knower (1991: 53). Although my work is methodologically different from those I have quoted here, they were my starting point and I have incorporated aspects which were useful for my study.

The anthropologist Clifford Geertz expressed that “We lack the language to articulate what takes place when we are in fact at work. There seems to be a genre missing” (Behar, 1996: 9). Since his comment was made, disciplines such as anthropology, medicine, science and law have incorporated reflexivity as a genre. Anthropologist Ruth Benedict concluded that myths are “a native comment on native life” (Behar and Gordon, 1995: 111). Reading in this anthropological area of “going native” suggests that the methodologies anthropologists used in the past, became harder to apply. Ruth Behar summed it up when she wrote in her book The Vulnerable Observer that

The last decade of meditation on the meaning of “native anthropology” - in which scholars claim a personal connection to the places in which they work - has opened up an important debate on what it means to be an insider in a culture. As those who used to be “the natives” have become scholars in their own right, often studying their home communities and nations, the lines between participant and observer, friend and stranger, ...are no longer so easily drawn. (1996: 28)

In the 1950s, anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston made a study of her home community using a methodology which was a unique mixture of academic criteria, intellectual reflexivity and oral history:
Hurston's *Mules and Men*,...reveals how the multiple voices of Hurston as ethnographer, writer and community member are subtly mediated by the use of a storytelling style that gives power to the spoken words of her informants over the written words of her own text. Hurston's return to her home community in Eatonville, Florida, with the "spyglass of Anthropology" obtained in Morningside Heights forced her to negotiate the relationship between ethnographic authority and personal authenticity. (Behar and Gordon, 1995: 18-19)

This passage raises some of the issues I have faced in dealing with reflexive research within religious studies. Hurston's "spyglass of Anthropology" could not guarantee what the written outcome would look like. The consciousness involved in writing as community member in one place and as ethnographer in another, highlights a methodological skill not traditionally taught at universities. She risked much by weaving it all together in a storytelling modality.

### 6.4 From anxiety to method

Kay Redfield Jamison, Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, had co-authored a standard medical text on manic-depressive illness, and then chose to write a memoir about her suffering as a manic-depressive. In *An Unquiet Mind; a memoir of moods and madness*, she "refuses to conceal her transformation of anxiety into method. She announces at the start of her book that isn't sure what the consequences will be of giving public voice to her illness" (Behar, 1996: 9-10). Redfield Jamison's refusal to conceal her illness may have methodological implications for others writing in the field of psychiatry.

### 6.5 Legal scholarship and human rights

In 1988 Patricia Williams, Professor of contract law at Columbia University, opened a contract law essay describing how her eleven year old great-great grandmother was purchased and immediately impregnated by a lawyer named Austin Miller (Fleischman, 1998: 977). The essay attracted much attention for its "unorthodox style of legal scholarship" (Fleischman, 1998: 977). As Behar pointed out, finding the deed of sale of a relative "undercuts the notion of a contract as an abstract, impersonal legal document, challenging us to think about the universality of the law and the pursuit of justice for all" (Behar, 1996: 13).

### 6.6 Stalking one's own genes

At the Howard Hughes Medical Institute a 20 year old microbiology major set out to find the flaw in his genes that causes him to have cystic fibrosis. His presence there changed the academic enterprise: "Many people in the [CF] lab had no direct contact with anyone who had the disease before. Now it's not so easy for them to see their work as just an intellectual exercise. They're much more driven by the urgency of it" (Pines, 2001: 10).
It is clear that when life experiences meet the intellectual endeavour the work calls for a different kind of methodology. For Doniger, "to deny the experiential component is not merely elitist; it is to deny the essential humanitarian component in the study of religion" (1988: 11). Stories are a useful method because they "reveal things that are not easily gleaned from the harder disciplines" (1988: 2).

6.7 Towards a sacred discourse
Lincoln and Denzin have motivated that such interpretative scholarship "celebrates the local, the sacred, the act of constructing meaning" (2000: 1052). As writing this thesis proved, trickster discourse and culture does not stem from one unequivocal myth source; my interpretative scholarship has proved that one must view the mythic culture

as a complex process of improvisation, [in seeking] to understand how people enact and construct meaning in their daily lives. It celebrates autoethnography, the personal account, "mystories" myth, and folklore. (2000: 1052)

Finlay has stated that qualitative researchers accept that the researcher is a central figure who collects, selects and interprets data in a way which includes the researcher's presence with the result that instead of presenting itself as a problem, it is seen as an opportunity (2003: 5). As reflexivity becomes less questionable, the question has become "how to do it?" (Finlay, 2003: 5 original italicised).

Postmodern experimentation allows us to work without rules in order to find out which rules one has made up - after the work is completed (Appignanesi et al, 1995: 50). How does one work without any rules? There is a French legend about the explanation for the multicoloured diamond patches of the Arlecchino from the commedia dell'arte, the harlequin (a trickster figure), which gives insight into a possible methodology:

On Mardi Gras every child, boy and girl, enjoyed being dressed up in specially fine clothes once every year. But Arlecchino's parents were very poor, and they could not afford an elegant costume for their child. Thus all his friends consulted together and agreed that each should give him a piece of the cloth from his own costume, although not one color matched another. The great day arrived and Arlecchino, to the delight of his friends, put on the multicolored suit his mother had made from all the beautiful pieces. (Niklaus, 1956: 22-23)

This trickster's suit is made up of a piece of everybody else's costume; in essence, that has been my methodology in this thesis. I used parts of theories from other works without knowing what it would all look like afterwards: Schmitt's structural analyses for content and unity of a narrative; Babcock-Abrahams' sixteen categories to parse the Schelm for the trickster role. To understand the many different facets of myth, I drew on some of Barthes' critique of mythologies. From his three volume work, I selected only Ricoeur's mimetic arc, which provides the tool for understanding the structures
which underlie meaning. I took up McCutcheon's imperative to undertake the difficult study of the mechanisms whereby societies create the extraordinary from the everyday. I used archetypal mythologies, legends and stories and CD ROM technology to amplify the analysis. I used the reflexive experiences which were triggered by engaging with trickster materials, because as the costumes which Arlecchino's friends possessed, this was what was available to me. Like Arlecchino's mother, I became a *bricoleur*. As Becker describes it in Lincoln and Denzin's *Handbook of Qualitative Research*:

> The qualitative researcher as *bricoleur* or maker of quilts uses the aesthetic and material tools of her or his craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials are at hand. (2000: 4) If new tools or techniques have to be invented, or pieced together, then the researcher will do this. [It depends on] what is available in the context, and what the researcher can do in that setting. (Lincoln and Denzin, 2000: 4)

Denzin also notes Lévi-Strauss' idea, that the *bricoleur* is a mythmaker (2000: 161). The mythologist's imagination, like the artist's, works "well in a world of 'fluctuating tatters'" (Hyde, 1998: 138). While I was considering when it was that I might have understood the link between the *bricoleur* and reflexive methodology, a little girl with some tatty knitting, appeared in my memory.

### 6.8 Rectangles for the *bricoleur*

When I was five years old, my mother taught me how to knit, in the German method. This was very different from the English method I was to learn in school, three years later. After knitting a rectangle in white wool, I somehow managed to join a piece of blue wool knitting to the section of white. Thrilled with having managed the difficult join on my own, I proudly presented it to my mother. What on earth could you do with that? She dismissed it. It was just a tatty bit of knitting.

I gave up. Left the work dangling on the needle. Years of school knitting torture were to follow. The first rectangle we were to knit at school went all wrong. It was meant to be a coathanger cover. Something easy to learn on. I wasn't interested in the L-shaped blue piece I had produced. By the time I was ten, the teacher allowed me to read to the class in the knitting sessions, while she fixed up the bedsocks in a hopeless tangle on my desk.

As a postgraduate student, I joined a women’s human rights organisation who monitored Parliament and had the tendency of knitting (when they weren’t making notes) at every meeting and in Parliament too. It encouraged me to start again, and so at long last I reconciled my earlier creative disappointments. By the time I came back to university, I had knitted a complicated aran jersey and was wearing it when a cleaner commented on how she wished she could knit. Anybody could, I said
and offered lessons. We started with a rectangle. She learned fast. Soon, a springy neat red coathanger cover emerged. We looped the centre of the rectangle over the metal hook and stretched the two ends of the knitting over the end curves of the wood. Before I could explain that she needed to sew the open edges closed over the wood, she dropped everything and clasped my hands, and thanked me over and over again. I was puzzled. Thank you for showing me how to do something useful, how to make something real, something I can use, she explained.

In teaching her, I realised something about the *bricoleur*’s method. You have to have the tatters, the little squares of colour to start with. Then you have to allow your imagination to help you construct the elegant costume that will fit your child. Knitting as a methodological skill has meaning when we stretch the springy red square over a coathanger. The learning was that meaning is usually constructed when we can apply a theory to something, to see if it fits. The other positive part of this methodology is that nothing is ever useless. In the hands of a skillful, devious *bricoleur* every scrap to hand, is a necessary part in itself; to incorporate into the costume they will dance in at the carnival. What is often seen as odd or unwieldy on its own, builds texture in a bigger picture. Like tricksters and hangmen, who know the meaning of being outsiders, only when they are incorporated into the whole, acknowledged or knighted, will they and the whole be complete.

How does one assess interpretive methodologies when the tatters keep fluctuating, shapeshifting? Denzin and Lincoln sketched the tenuous ground of such enquiry; due to the nature of the changing rules, the author will find it hard to place themselves, to set standards of evaluation and speak with their own authority (2000: 15).

6.9 Legitimation
If interpretive work involves the process of working without rules, what rules or categories should one use to “judge the experimentally unfamiliar”? (Appignanesi *et al*, 1995: 50). How does one assess reflexive methodology? My own understanding of legitimation is to ask whether or not what I have pieced together, transcends the sum of its parts. The question in assessing it must find its rigour in checking whether everything that has been used, supports the argument.

If experience is taken as the site of meaning and narrative interpretation proceeds from this, it must be remembered that the way the narrative is storied, that is, edited, or rather, manipulated may still be measured against other narrative interpretations of the same material or events (Ellis and Bochner,
2000: 746). The pre-narrative experiences, instances which have led an author to make themselves vulnerable in their reflexivity are harder to measure, but this shouldn’t mean that anything personal goes. The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise get to. It has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake....It has to persuade us of the wisdom of not leaving the writing pad blank. (Behar, 1996: 14)

Ellis and Bochner add points to this list of legitimating factors for consideration:

The narrative rises or falls on its capacity to provoke readers to broaden their horizons, reflect critically on their own experience, enter empathically into worlds of experience different from their own, and actively engage in dialogue regarding the social and moral implications of the different perspectives and standpoints encountered. Invited to take the story in and use it for themselves, readers become co-performers, examining themselves through the evocative power of the narrative text. (2000: 748)

The final test of using a reflexive methodology, is to see whether or not a reader can think with the stories that have been presented in analysis - whether it is useful to them in any way, whether or not they can apply any of it to their own lives, and in so doing perpetuate the methodology inherent in story.

My methodology has been that of bricoleur. I have stitched, edited, and cobbled slices of my reality together, a process which created and brought psychological and emotional unity to my interpretive experience of writing an academic thesis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 5).

7. Digitising the Schelmensage
Mythology is received through all the human and animal senses we possess. Gunther Kress, writing on literacy in the new media age points out that "Reading the world’ through different senses - sight, touch, hearing and even taste and smell - is always present in ‘reading’, even when we ostensibly focus on script alone" (2003: 142) as in the following example where mythologist Roberto Calasso gives us the Persephone myth and describes how she crosses the threshold to the underworld:

It was a place where dogs would lose their quarry’s trail, so violent was the scent of flowers. A stream cut deep through the grass of a meadow that rose at the edge to fall sheer in a rock ravine into the very navel of Sicily....A group of girls were playing by the river, picking flowers....[Persephone]...had been gathering flowers: roses, crocuses, violets, irises, hyacinths, narcissi. Again and again such scenes were to prove irresistible to the gods. (1994: 4 & 209)

Calasso calls on our sense of smell to understand the intoxication which enabled the mythological moment of Hades snatching her away.
Part of my reason for including a CD ROM, with this thesis, was a practical one. I wanted a physical way of recording the context of the mythological, as closely as I had experienced it. I needed something to synthesise the music, the black and white/colour images, the voice-overs and written text.

Yet I also wanted to try to convey the sense of how I had conjured up a world in my “imaginary mode” (Ricoeur, 1986: 127) of the Schelmensage's terrain and I wanted to understand this in reality through as many senses possible. The technology of CD ROM provided this possibility.

My argument is that within the 21st century, academics have more than the written mode alone to assist in defending a thesis. More than ever before, the mode with which to communicate an argument has become a matter of focus, as Kress says;

the mode in which that fixing is to happen is already settled: news appears in print, in sound, in sound and image, in sound, image and writing Ph.D. theses by and large still appear in print;...But at other times there is the possibility of choice....(Kress, 2003: 44)

and therefore also, “which materiality, is used to ‘fix’ the meanings” becomes an important choice too (Kress, 2003: 44). My mode of choice is based on the availability of technology such as print, photographs, the CD-ROM, all of which allowed me to convey the mythological moment of the Schelmensage. On the issue of inviting readers to engage with the thesis in a different way, Gergen and Gergen have written that while scientific writing is not the only form of expression for capturing reality available to academics, film and photography, have “been viewed as auxiliary modes within written traditions” (2000: 1029). They motivate that the blurring between text and performance allow an opening for considering the entire range of communicative expression in the arts and entertainment world - graphic arts, video, drama, dance, magic, multimedia...as forms of research and presentation.” (2000: 1029). Their conclusion is that in using such a method of performance, the “investigator avoids the mystifying claims of truth and...expands the range of communities in which the work can stimulate dialogue...but leaves people free to interpret as they wish” (2000:1030). In addition to the tradition writing of a thesis, I wanted literally, different voices telling the Schelmensage, in this case, my fieldwork “informants” being my mother, my aunt and the performance of the play itself in Bergen-Enkheim, which would allow the viewer to co-interpret and use the Schelmensage for themselves.

7.1 A visual sociology
To story myth is to be aware that there are many modes which bear its meaning, and which make it part of one message. Writing is one part of this message (Kress, 2003: 11). Commenting on CD ROM technology, he notes that writing can be combined with other modes:
In a CD-ROM writing can occur with still or moving image, with speech, with soundtrack, with music. All these bring their meaning to the whole textual ensemble, and so have their effect on what writing is and what it does. (2003: 123)

The CD ROM, particularly in its black and white picture versions, is an expression of conjuring up the world of action, as expressed by Ricoeur’s in the mimetic phase of mimesis. I also took a minidisc recorder to record my Aunt (who lives in Enkheim) telling a version of the legend, as we walked down the forest paths. My personal sense in having actually been in the forest where the action was storied, helped me understand the metaphor of the crossroads and the reasons for the development of Rotwelsch, the language of underworld deviants who lived - in the forest. When tracking the five versions of the Schelmensage I dragged some of my family into the medieval roads in the forests of Bergen-Enkheim. Their complaints at my insistence to walk from one town to another via that forest were not satisfied when I tried to explain that I wanted to be in the legend’s original setting where I could imagine what it might feel like to be a hangman “on the road” or to see how easy/difficult it was to get lost in the forest. As I had the chance to be in the story’s domain, I wanted to do more than what Hyde suggested one could imagine:

“If we imagine an ancient road at dusk, a road passing through no-man’s-land and connecting two towns but itself neither here nor there, we will begin to imagine the ancient Hermes, for he is the God of the Roads, identified not with any home or hearth or mountain but with the traveler on the highway. (1973,1979: 247)

The accompanying CD ROM is intended firstly as a creative documentation of the fieldwork I undertook to investigate the legend’s terrain and its retelling. Secondly, it is intended as a counterpart reference to the thesis text in an attempt to better communicate an understanding of the sense of receiving the myth - hearing a story, - in this case the Schelmensage presented in its own historical context.

On the CD ROM and in the printed thesis, my reasoning for using the photographs and pictures is not for decorative purposes, but to serve as textual linkages to the thesis reader as viewer because, as Doniger supports the notion,

Myths are both events and images, both verbs and nouns. To analyze a myth in terms of either element alone (the verbal/philosophical event or the visual/symbolic image) is to reduce and distort it. (1988: 33)

it is my intention to amplify the mythological within the Schelmensage with what I have available technologically. In no way do I intend the photographs and CD ROM to stand for my argument or to be considered as work done instead of the writing. I chose the medium because I found it
methodologically challenging to find a physical place to present the symbolic, crossroads parts of the Schelmensage.

In the third chapter in this thesis, you will meet the trickster Till Eulenspiegel. His name contains the idea that he will mirror (=spiegel) the realities he finds when he comes to town to mess with the rich. The visual elements of the CD ROM and in the thesis are a mirror for the words in the text. Twelfth century Germany produced evidence the building of this notion of mirroring text and image to each other, leaving the reader to make new connections; it can be found in the medieval legal manuscript known as the Mirror of the Saxons, the Sachsenspiegel.

7.2 The mirror of the Saxons

Studying this text in the 1800s, the poet Goethe noted that Sir Eike von Repgow's Mirror of the Saxons was an innovation for its time. It shifted the provenance of medieval illumination from religious documents to legal and cultural domains (Von Rünnssberg, c.1930: 14-15). With the result that it was not a document of how the world should be lived according to the letter of the law; it is a mirror in the true sense of the word: it gives us a snapshot of what the world looked like in the twelfth/thirteenth century - the different situations of daily life, tools, weapons, clothes which are sketched for their historic and interpreted for their symbolic value. The nature of this medieval literature can tell you more than second-hand history, because you're reading the writings of people who are looking out of the window and writing down what's going on. But history isn't about exact dates. It's a feeling for the land you live in now, or the people who've lived and died here. (D'Angelo, 2003: 2)

Goethe recognised that the progression of the pictures were essentially symbolically saturated tableaux vivants of daily German life - legal history expressed in its cultural and historical contexts. Eike von Repgow recognised his challenge as one to find new emblematia to fit legal text. His boldness extended to making pictures of the sense for the land he lived in, and for its people, which enhanced understanding of the legal concept, that which language is often unable to capture in the law: the fear of persecution, the right of fealty, and violence against women amongst other issues.

The pictures do not replace the legal text they are placed next to, neither do they clarify it. As Peiton commented that the purpose of trickster stories “is to put an adult mind in a child’s heart and a child’s eye in an adult head” (Hynes, 1998: 209). So these pictures present a sense which people experience rather as a child does a story or picture: they receive the pleasure of the image; the appreciation of communication of what cannot always be succinctly expressed in words: awe, violence, admiration,
fear and reconciliation and the reception of that sense influences how the text is understood, leaving
the reader to make their own final interpretation. Kress’ insight on writing in a visual age verifies this
medieval ideal:

Coupled as it is with the simultaneous switch from the dominance of the book to that of the
screen, that is, a switch from the medium that privileged writing to the medium that privileges
image, it is clear that the increasing prevalence of image will have profound effects on
writing....no mode fully carries all the meaning. (Kress, 2003: 20, 21)

In the Sachsenspiegel the pictures are placed on the left of the legal text printed in black ink. This text
contains a capital letter in colour which is placed in the illustration which the legal text refers to (see
illustration 3). Printing technology may have changed since medieval times, but it appropriated the
way medieval writers wrote. Kress finds that

...when the printing press became commonly available, and replaced the medieval scribe -
whether at the court or in the church - it was the forms of writing of the medieval scribe which
came to dominate the new technology. (2003: 83 original italicised)

Although it was not my intention when I planned the CD ROM, the photographs are always to the left
of the writing on the screen, as in the Sachsenspiegel. The form of writing as evidenced in the Mirror
of the Saxons, in which the written and the visual influence each other to create a context for a person
to understand, is the form I have chosen to present the mythological moment of the trickster. I added a
medieval music score (an Italian Saltorello), recorded live on musical instruments, to provide an
atmosphere which was in itself a message about shifting the focus to a time when music was not
produced technologically. I included my mother and my Aunt’s telling of 2 different versions of the
stories, with a translation into English of the text, recording a historical, yet mythological moment,
holding a mirror for how the story is told in the year 2001.

7.3 Technologies which influence academic texts

The development of technologies have extended the categories of academic learning, developing a new
“visual sociology” (Harper, 2000: 719). Since the introduction of the “Kodak” (camera) in 1888, the
family photograph has changed the way families document their daily existence. Just over a century
later specialisation in family photography as a sociological discipline, has become a “truly unique field
of inquiry” and books such as Marianne Hirsch’s The Familial Gaze contain the writing of twenty-two
experts who “scrutinize family photographs to reveal their power to shape our personal memories and
self-conceptions” (Hirsch, 1999: back cover).
Such technological changes imply influence on researcher methodologies. It means, that Hirsch’s experts might read images as texts, do research in personal photo albums rather than libraries, “own” the technology - in all senses of that word, and have experienced it personally. For example, taking pictures of oneself, one’s family and then using academic discourse to analyse for the politics the prints produce. As Gergen and Gergen point out, text and thus its argument, method and audience are influenced:

...the technological watershed invites new ways of conceptualizing research methods, along with a refiguring of the very idea of research, including the identities of the researcher, researched, and audience. (2000: 1039)

As academic faculties, the Humanities owe much to the technology of film, video, the World Wide Web to keep alive the interaction between researcher, researched and their audiences. For instance, Australia has seen the humanities defunded with some universities not having any humanities schools at all (Bellamy, 2003: 1). The situation has turned some academics into *bricoleurs*. In 1995, in a world first, Australian Simon Pockley of RMIT University’s Centre for Animation and Interactive Media wrote a Ph.D. which was researched, supervised, and submitted, examined and stored entirely on-line. ‘The Flight of Ducks’, is a controversial work concerned with digital preservation, confronting issues of Aboriginal representation, built around a layered collection of archival material from a camel expedition into the central Australian frontier in 1933.

In the same year, Russell Naughton, also from the RMIT University’s CAI, received a Ph.D. for his work which examined in depth “the history of [Australian] radio and the related media services of telegraphy, telephony, facsimile, television, photography and cinema” (RMIT University Australia, 1999) which was submitted using a ‘traditional’ paper version of the research report, a multi-platform CD-ROM ‘capture’ of the web site, and a four-point international phone link-up.

RMIT’s Dr Craig Bellamy points out that this Electronic Theses and Dissertation (ETD) method is useful for a number of reasons, most notably because it is like the traditional thesis in which most humanities knowledge advances. The traditional thesis is an inexpensive, robust and well understood technology and *does provide a transitory position into new technologies from a position that most humanists can identify with*. (Bellamy, 2003: 2; my emphasis)

The other promoter of the ETD is the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) who have formed a group of one hundred and forty universities worldwide whose aim is in part, to unlock the huge potential of research produced by post-graduate students through the ETD. Their goal is to:
...identify "technologically innovative" theses and dissertations. We want to provide models of new media scholarship for the next generation of scholars and researchers. (Bellamy, 2003: 3; original italicised)

The precedent for the electronic thesis is ten years old, and the traditional, written thesis is being seen as a springboard for new technologies. The CD ROM attached to this thesis has made this jump and is intended to provide a new media contribution to the academic field of Mythology.

I am justifying the purpose of the CD ROM as a presentation of trickster mythos using this “whole textual ensemble”. I have used new technology, retaining medieval form to document for the future the way it was to track a trickster, through my eyes as student, while writing this thesis.
4. Ried River in Enkheim Forest
Chapter One

Eternal yet bearing a date:
the Schelmensage as myth

History is always an invention, a fairytale built upon certain clues...These clues are pretty well established, most of them can literally be laid on the desktop for anyone to handle. But these, unfortunately do not constitute history. History consists of the links between them and it is this that presents the problem. And the link is especially obscure...because the only thing that any of us, - including me - can use to fill the gaps between history’s clues is themselves. (Høeg, 1995: 144)

Myths are nothing but this ceaseless, untiring solicitation, this insidious and inflexible demand that all men recognize themselves in this image, eternal yet bearing a date, which was built of them one day as if for all time. (Barthes, 1957, 1972: 170)

1. Recognising oneself in the image

In the middle of trying to conceptualise a chapter on the word Schelm, I find myself stuck with the connections between definitions and wonder if maybe I’m imagining things, making them up for the sake of my thesis argument, which arises out of the following question: why is the Schelmensage repeated for close on 900 years?

It’s an old story. Does that make it a myth? I’m not sure. Reading about how myth may be defined, reveals two things. Firstly, that it’s impossible to speak about myth without either mentioning the work of published mythologists or categorising myths into types. Secondly, that myths are hand picked, retold stories, used as examples to back up any kind of theorising about the genre itself. I know I am not exempt from doing what I’ve noticed, either. Somewhere between these two possibilities, I want to answer why myths, these stories, are repeated.

I take a break from the theory and visit my 70-year-old nanny, the woman who has been a huge part of my life for 36 years - since I was born. Mrs. Sutton lives in Steenberg, Cape Town, one of the sand filled areas justifying the name “the Cape Flats”. She has cancer. In her lounge sit two men. They appear to me to be exceptionally seedy. One looks quite thin and undernourished; he’s wearing golden rings on every finger, a gold necklace and bracelet. He watches the television set listlessly, examining me out of the corner of his eye. The other man has woken up late from a night’s solid drinking and sits moving his mouth involuntarily, looking spun out.
Mrs. Sutton asks me how my work is going. Just fine, I lie. I figure I can’t tell her about trying to make the connections between words; about the difficulty of finding out why people tell stories over time; analyzing a trickster myth is, after all, an academic activity. Something separate to her daily reality.

She follows my querying glance to the men. After they leave, she smiles at me reassuringly. “Don’t worry about them, they’re just some old skepsels I’ve taken in.”

I sit up. “Skepsels? What’s a skepset?”

“Ach, you know, people whose family don’t want them, who won’t even have them live there by them. Good for nothings, skelms”, she explains. “And I felt sorry for them and told them they could live by me.”

“And they live with you here in the house?” I’m curious.

“Oh no, I’ve given them a room at the back [outside the house]. But in the day I let them in to watch the television” she justifies it to me.

Skepsels and skelms. Afrikaans words derived from Indo-European roots. I realise I’ve taken a story from my German roots and separated it from my daily environment. In elevating it to something other than ordinary I’ve alienated it from life around me in South Africa.

The next time I am in Mrs. Sutton’s lounge, the television set is off. Many people stand around her open coffin. The awful silence is punctuated by sounds near the back of the room. Bejewelled and dressed in suits (which once belonged to Mrs. Sutton’s late husband), the skepsels stand and cry openly. I try and deal with her death by diving into my now inseparable academic endeavour. I re-read Russell T. McCutcheon on myth and am goaded:

Myths thus are utterly mundane and assigning them an “extraordinary” status as a precondition for studying them rightly is to begin our study with a mistake that deflects us from a more interesting and productive scholarly aim: undertaking the difficult study of the mechanisms whereby societies create the extraordinary from the everyday. (2000: 200)

I had tried to run away from the theory of things by the visit, and ended up being confronted by the fact that the separation of theory from the everyday was impossible. I’d classified and
compared, come up with a “new” definition of the story as a trickster myth. The word *Schelm* was German, medieval and extraordinary in that context. I’d been defining its importance by looking, as Roland Barthes warned against, for some kind of religious moral, the “object of its message”, rather than defining “the way in which it utters its message” (McCutcheon, 2000: 201). McCutcheon emphasizes Barthes’ understanding of myth as not being separate or unique in content, but rather a “type of human endeavour displayed in but not limited to storytelling” (McCutcheon, 2000: 201). Over 900 years between medieval Germany and the Cape Flats in South Africa, I’m hearing stories about *skelms* and *skepsels* down to using the (almost) same form of words.

Like the trickster function that *skelm* implies, the discourse in Mrs. Sutton’s lounge catches me out: she makes me see that a *skelm* is not something limited to a medieval context, and that this continuation of words, stories and myths is reflected in the everyday. The discourse humbles me into realising that I’ve elevated myth into something separate from my daily reality.

This reflection amplifies the central thesis question: an ordinary story, through its re-telling, has become extraordinary. Why does this particular story endure over time? To get a deeper understanding in addition to examining the mechanisms of the *Schelm* message, McCutcheon’s “more basic question” must be engaged with: “how is it that individual human beings accomplish, in part by dealing in myths, the all too ordinary but fascinating trick of coming together and acting collectively over great spans of time and space?” (McCutcheon, 2000: 201).

2. Creating the extraordinary out of the ordinary

Mrs. Sutton’s presentation of her lodgers to me as *skelms* and *skepsels* is a mechanism, which has taken the everyday event of two men in her lounge and used extraordinary titles to present the situation to me. Her labels - which echo with meaning for me - also resonate with what she knows I will understand by them. “They’re just *skelms* and *skepsels*” contains textured, layered words and they get me to relax and smile when she uses them. The men’s dubious nature has been emptied and they are filled with understood character traits. In doing this, she got me to transcend my fears.
I find myself wondering how the words could link between the South African context, and the idea of a Schelm, a hangman in medieval times. Mrs. Sutton’s discourse has opened a new way of seeing what a Schelm may be. She created the extraordinary from the everyday, as a matter of course.

To reveal the mechanisms of how where the extraordinary is created from the everyday, and to assist in answering the question of why the legend is still being told, Roland Barthes’ Mythologies (1957, 1972) and Paul Ricoeur’s Time and Narrative (volume one, 1984) will be used. They represent the possibilities of uncovering the politics of the myth, and also the transformative, transcendent potential this legend can contain.

For Barthes, myth is a “ceaseless, untiring solicitation,[an] insidious and inflexible demand that all men recognize themselves in this image, eternal yet bearing a date, which was built of them one day as if for all time” (Barthes, 1957,1972: 170). His critique of myth as manipulation for certain ends - by separating a story or set of facts from the politics of their origins - is a mechanism for understanding the politics of different versions of the Schelmensage. The critique prompts questions concerning who relates which version of the story, and to whom it is being related. By focusing on the manner in which the myth-as-message is communicated to a particular audience, the reasons for that continued communication over time may be explained.

Repeating myths as manipulation for our own ends is only one facet of elevating the ordinary to the extraordinary. In Time and Narrative, Paul Ricoeur posits his thesis that the experience of existing becomes human through the mode of narrative and narrative becomes meaningful when it becomes a condition of existence (1984: 52). The action in the Schelmensage can become meaningful only when articulated through narrative. The Schelmensage as narrative holds different meanings for different readers or listeners, because the conditions of existence are different for everybody. This may account for the telling of different versions of the legend.

Going to the root of the word Schelmensage, and how it functions in its home context as saga and legend will be considered first. An introduction to current views of what myth is today leads to Barthes’ definition of myth, which throws open the possibilities of defining a story
as a myth. This is then applied to three current examples of the story’s usage. Ricoeur’s understanding of the relationship between time and narrative as mediated experience will be used to understand the Schelmensage’s continued repetition.

3. Defining the Schelmensage

The word *sage*, in *Schelmensage*, explains more about the type of story this is: a *sage* about the *Schelme*, who were knights local to Bergen-Enkheim, and thus the story implies status as a local legend. It is recorded in three different ways. Spoken, written and performed. I heard and received the *Schelmensage* from my mother. Inhabitants of Bergen-Enkheim do not attribute versions in the spoken category, to any author or teller.¹ This category contains five versions with a central focus of hangman, emperor and forest, all of them ending with the transformation from hangman to knight. The geographical areas in these versions are located in the Bergen-Enkheim forests and greater Frankfurt: all domains of Frederick the First, Holy Roman Emperor, known colloquially as Barbarossa (Italian, from Frederick’s life in Italy) or *Rotbart* (German), both meaning red beard.

The different written versions of the *Schelmensage* range from poetry by Heinrich Heine to a prose version by Mark Twain and in this century, Umberto Eco’s novel *Baudolino* (2002). This does not include historical descriptions of or written historical background to the story. Some of these versions locate the story away from Bergen-Enkheim to areas and content known specifically to the writer. For example, Heine’s version locates it at Düsseldorf near the Rhine River, while Eco’s novel is situated in Italy and concerns a rascal and not a hangman who is adopted and after various adventures with the emperor is finally knighted by Barbarossa.

Performance versions of the *Schelmensage* include plays, one-act comedies and operas. In the section on ritual, this thesis will consider the local version written by Conrad Weil in 1950s post-war Germany *Der Schelm von Bergen*, a three-act play first performed in 1953, which is still performed every four years in Bergen-Enkheim.

¹In the programme notes to the 2001 performance of *Der Schelm von Bergen*, four spoken versions are documented. They are followed with an explanation which states that nobody knows how these *sagen* originated, but that its dating to a period may be possible. It acknowledges that the play itself is one of the reworkings of one of the versions of the story. They note that it is a sign that the *sage* lives on today.
3.1 Sage and saga

The word saga comes from old Norse *segja*, to speak; this is a prose telling, from oral transmission of old Icelandic origin, for example, family sagas of well known landowners and farmers in the Middle Ages, up until about 874. From 1030 onwards, royal sagas were recorded, (e.g. the *Heimskringla*) as well as sagas from the Viking period. Sagas about knights were written down from approximately the 1300s onwards as in the example of the *Thidreksaga* (Dietrich of Bern who died in 526) (Brockhaus, 1959: 675). The German word *sage* is the root of saga, meaning an orally transmitted story, often poetically rendered, about national heroes (called a *Heldensage*) from a time before those telling the story can remember (Brockhaus, 1959: 675). The versions settle down once written, depending on who is doing the writing. This is also supported by Bruno Bettelheim’s viewpoint, that German has retained the word *Sage* for myths, while fairy stories are called *Märchen*. Myths and fairy tales alike attain a definite form only when they are committed to writing and are no longer subject to continuous change. . All became modified by what the teller thought was of greatest interest to his listeners, by what his concerns of the moment or the special problems of his era were. (1978: 25-26)

The *Schelmensage* is an orally related story, a *sage* about a particular *Schelm*. It a re-telling of events from the past, in which a story about a hero is being documented. As the word *Schelm* has at least two interpretations, we may expect the story to tell us about its different facets: a rascal, trickster, or a badly intentioned person who became a hero and immortalised in the legend.

3.2 Legend and folktale

The *Schelmensage*’s place of origin ties it to Bergen: *Der Schelm von Bergen*. In his article on “The forms of folklore: prose narratives”, William Bascom quotes Jacob Grimm’s *Deutsche Mythologie* on the difference between folktale and legend.²

The folktale...is with good reason distinguished from the legend... Looser, less fettered than legend, the folktale lacks that local habituation which hampers legend, but makes it more home-like. The folk-tale flies, the legend walks, knocks at your door. The one can draw freely out of the fullness of poetry, the other has almost the
authority of history. As the folktale stands related to legend, so does the legend to
history, and (we may add) so does history to real life. (1984: 28-29)

If we follow this definition of legend, the Schelmensage’s meaning and interpretation is
dependent on its location. Unlike a folktale, which can travel easily through a translatable
recognition of characters and morals concerning the good, the bad and the ugly in life, when
telling a legend we are not free to deliver its message without being pinned down to the
geographical, historical circumstances it originated from. This may account for the reason
why the Schelmensage, despite its prose and poetic delivery by people geographically apart
such as Mark Twain in America (who learnt the story from a book he found in Germany) and
Heinrich Heine, is contextualised mainly in the Frankfurt area and told to those who read
those books, or as in my own case - those who ask to hear it. Furthermore, it is a legend
because it contains an emperor, with accepted dates of reign. This definition raises important
dynamics in that although the emperor’s ruling dates are fixed, its hero is not necessarily the
emperor. This story is not entitled a Barbarossasage. Its hero is a Schelm, somebody without
a professional job description at that time.

Estés echoes Grimm’s dynamics by speaking of  “lamar o tocar a la puerta, the fairy-tale
knock at the door...to play upon the instrument of the name in order to open a door. It means
using words that summon up the opening of a passageway” (1992: 6). The implications of
the passageway that transmitting this legend could lead to are discussed in the section on
story and possibilities of transcendence for readers/listeners of and to the legend.

William Bascom takes further these distinctions between folktales and legends. Folktales are
prose narratives which are regarded as fiction. Their action can be set in any time and place,
are secular in attitude and may include human and animal characters. They function as
morality stories or telling for amusement (Bascom, 1984: 8-9).

The Schelmensage is not regarded by most tellers as fiction and doesn’t include animals.
However, there may well be a message in the story, which can be used as a moral when
linked to historical circumstances. It is set in a medieval time and deals with issues of life
and death, a theme which unites sacred and secular. As Bascom continues:

2 Coincidentally, Jakob Grimm was born in Steinau, close to Bergen-Enkheim.
Legends are prose narratives, which, like myths, are regarded as true by the narrator and his audience, but they are set in a period considered less remote, when the world was much as it is today. They can take place in the recent past, can be secular or sacred and the characters are human. The counterpart in verbal tradition of written history. They record migrations, wars and deeds of past heroes, chiefs, and kings and succession in ruling dynasties. (1984: 9-10)

The Schelmenage sits most comfortably with this definition. In all its versions the characters are human. Its dating as an historical event is linked to one of the two main characters in the story: Frederick the First, who became Emperor in 1152 and ruled until his death in 1190. The city walls he built in the mid 1100s can still be seen in central Frankfurt. If one were to place the story’s events within his rule, the story is approximately 900 years old. This distance, counted in years, locates it in the less remote past. But the office of hangman, outcast, hooded god, are older symbols than Holy Roman emperors.

Whatever its interpretation, the presence of historical figures and settings ties the Schelmenage to a particular context and makes it a legend. Is there a mechanism that turns a legend into a myth?

4. Defining myth

Bruce Lincoln summarised this difficult task by sighing, “It would be nice to begin with a clear and concise definition of “myth” but unfortunately that can’t be done” (1999: ix). Russell T. McCutcheon takes up the challenge, with a catalogue of ways of thinking about what myth is or attempts at defining it; for example: “Some workshops in the Myth Industry”, namely, “Tales of heroes, Expression of mythopoeic mentality, Social dreaming, Expressions of the collective unconscious, myths as truth” (2000: 194-197). Ultimately, for McCutcheon, “Mythmaking is a species of ideology production” (2000: 204).

No matter what the criticisms in defining myth may raise, Lincoln and McCutcheon are both faithful in trying to impose some order to make the study of myth easier. To look for the red thread of ideology in all myths is one way of uncovering what myth is about.

A recent opinion on definition in Robert Ellwood’s review “Is mythology obsolete?” (2001: 672) of Lincoln’s and Robert A. Segal’s books on myth considers scholarship which
categorises myth into rational and romantic views, concluding that such scholarship is blind to ideologies produced by myths thus categorised.

Ellwood's point is that whether myth is categorised as romantic or rational, both have political consequences for people and the environment, of a negative kind. The "hardest issues" (2001: 684) he calls them. The not so harsh issues of myth's potential are not really considered here, except maybe where "gnostic considerations" of say, the direction of a person in this world, is concerned. This potential may be considered to have a "conservative" outcome (Ellwood, 2001: 684). However, in his rejoinder to Segal, he softens this by saying that:

history and societies are really just collections of subjectivities, and that hidden realm is the ultimate source of change, just as academic studies, if truly original and powerful, will not stay confined to the library. (emphasis added 2002: 622)

His review raises two very important issues for this study. Firstly, to slavishly confine any myth to one particular category only is to subtract from the possibilities of explaining myth. Myth is all encompassing and needs all encompassing thinking to unlock its meaning. As Thomas Moore put it, "Myth is always a way of imagining; it is not concerned essentially with fact, except the facts can be the starting point for a mythological story" (1992: 222). This is why there can never be a clear, concise definition of it.

If I define the Schelmensage in terms of a false consciousness found in the romantic view of myth, then one could critique its retelling as providing ideological contributions on which the Third Reich was built: the Schelmensage confirms the power, mercy and glory of the legacy of Aryan emperors. If my way of imagining about myth is rational one because the Schelmensage is an explanation for a line of knights with the surname Schelm, then this confinement to certain categories does not assist me in accessing a mechanism to understand why the myths of certain societies appeal in different ways to those societies, and what power lies in the myth concerned to have transcendent potential.

Secondly, Ellwood's review is an injunction that one cannot write about myth without considering the politics behind it. For these reasons, the politics of the period the legend originates from, must be highlighted. While the manipulation of myth for political ends may
be a reason for Lincoln's “provocative” definition (Segal, 2002: 614) that all myth should be seen as “ideology in narrative form” (Lincoln, 2002: 614), to consider the Schelmsage as ideological narrative alone would sacrifice the richness of the possibilities of interpretation.

To answer the question of why a story is retold, the task of this thesis is therefore to show how the myth in question can be open to all the subjective possibilities, and the mechanism which achieves the different versions which result. This task of examining this myth in this new way will hopefully respond to Ellwood’s injunction, stated in his rejoinder to Segal:

Certainly myth’s great narratives, from creation stories to the lives of heroes and religious founders, are tremendously important to religious history and worthy objects of study, but their meaning and place must be understood anew, as must the folkloric sources that underlie them (emphasis added). (2002: 685)

Ellwood conveys the importance of the task of making some sort of order in defining myth and how political consequences cannot be separated from content. His understanding is that stories and myths have a powerful potential, which we wish to unleash, but which must always be tempered by power’s use of them. This puts foundations under myth as a way of imagining; as long as humans keep imagining, mythology will not become obsolete.

4.1 Myth as prose narratives

According to Bascom, myths are prose narratives, which, “in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past. These may be set in a different world and are sacred in attitude, usually with non-human characters. They account for the origin of the world. They are often associated with theology and ritual.” (Bascom, 1984: 9)

It is possible to date the story and account for its possibly practical purpose as historical fact, over many years, in different versions. On one level, it accounts for practicalities. The novelist Peter Høeg put it that while you can put history’s clues or artifacts physically on a desk in front of you, you still don’t have history. History is the links between the physical clues, and this linking is individually done, because (to use McCutcheon’s phrase) the ‘human endeavour’ of storytelling means that every individual attempting this is situated in
and uses a different discourse to do so. The story must have something that inspires different interpretations, versions and performances.

There are many stories which have gathered details over time and grown in weight, but have not continued. However, a legend that collects detail over time is not necessarily a myth. It is the reason for the way the story is used that makes it shift from the ordinary to the extraordinary. The persistent retelling of an everyday act which has become a legend signifies a learning at a deeper level. It has become something extraordinary which must be passed on.

Did the events in the legend actually happen? We don’t know. We have linguistic evidence in the word Schelm, its origin dates back to the medieval skalmo, one of the German medieval names for hangman (Kluge, 1957: 642). Archaeological evidence exists in the emperor Barbarossa’s red sandstone buildings and a part of the city wall, dating to the 12th century, and the Saalhof which was his residence, in downtown Frankfurt. The protective tower he gave the Schelm in the legend, still stands in the town of Bergen. The forest roads where the Schelm and emperor met can still be walked. These are clues which help substantiate that the legend was based on tangible evidence. But all this doesn’t matter half as much - if we take Høeg’s idea that we have to consciously pull together something with our own knowing, our personal intuition, to decide what must fit into the gaps.

The arguments for the physical, verifiable truth of this legend are not the focus here. In understanding myth as human activity, McCutcheon puts forward Paul Veyne’s argument that “truth is the most variable of all measures. It is not a transhistorical invariant but a work of the constitutive imagination” and comes to the conclusion that “we do not find, discern or interpret truths and meanings. Rather, in every age and culture people actively work to selectively make some things true and meaningful and other things false and meaningless.” (2000: 201-202). Rather than establishing the truth or the facts of this legend, the research problem of this thesis is to understand the reasons for telling the five different versions.

How is it then, that a story about a man in a forest giving another thirsty man a drink of water becomes a legend of a hangman gate crashing his Emperor’s masked ball, dancing with the Empress, ending happily with his knighthood, and more currently, mythic status? Is there a relationship here between myth and history? This thesis takes the view that it does not matter
if the historical accounts are factual or not. A dialogue with Roland Barthes and Luisa Passerini may help to address the issues of the actions in the historical part of this story, and the mythic dimensions it contains.

4.2 Myth as message

For Roland Barthes myth is defined as “a type of speech... a system of communication,... it is a message...everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message.” This definition of myth will now be applied to interpret the narrative which opened this chapter in order to see that, as Barthes asks and answers, “... Everything, then, can be a myth? Yes, I believe this, for the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions.”

Passerini has pointed out that Barthes’ critique of myth shows how myth is alienated “from its own origins” (1987: 50). Barthes is critical of the act of history claiming something like the Schelm as an eternal archetype; history is only as ancient as the human race is, and people are arrogant in their claims to make an event out of history into myth, so as to “recognize themselves in this image, eternal yet bearing a date, which was built of them one day as if for all time” (Barthes, 1957, 1972: 170). For Barthes, myth is therefore “insidious and inflexible” (Barthes, 1957, 1972: 170). Passerini states how he takes this view further to condemn myth as stealing meanings from language, and “transforms them into form and through form changes historical time into nature,” and thereby nature loses its memory, with the final product totally separate from all the politics which created it in the first place (Passerini, 1987: 50).

When Mrs. Sutton soothed my fears about the nature of the men in her lounge, her explanation presented me with a seeming statement of fact. Don’t worry, these skepsels, skelms, they’re harmless by day, they sleep outside at night, and that’s that. These labels communicated reassurance. There is a particular South African discourse around what skelms and skepsels are, and what they do: “getting away with murder” is one phrase which comes to mind. She has used these words; she knows I am aware of this discourse. One view of this is that the use of the word skelm, with the mythic associations I make with the term, has a therapeutic value: I am reassured. And yet, she is not pretending or averting my attention from the possibilities of what these men do when they’re elsewhere, at night. Is this a discourse of myth? Barthes argues:
“Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact.” (1957, 1972: 156)

This definition sees myth used for purposes of expedience. In this instance, Barthes would say that what has happened is that mythical discourse has appropriated the word *Schelm*, for its own purposes. It has filled it with new meanings which disguise the conditions of its own production, and is re-presented to me which can be used to explain the situation I observe. Myth has changed the function of the word. This has tricked me into relaxing - without taking away the possibilities about whom these men are and what they do. It closes my query, because the answer is presented as non-disputable. I don’t take issue with it. It’s clear what Mrs. Sutton means; that’s what they are and we don’t need to discuss it further. She has left out any critical analysis or reasoning of why it’s perfectly acceptable to have dubious people on her property.

In agreement with Barthes, McCutcheon explains this functioning of mythmaking which “allows a sleight of hand; it is the art of manufacturing, from raw materials which are by definition only part of the whole, total symbolic systems” (2000: 205).

Myth’s method shown here is seen speech-trickery, manipulation being employed as the particular discourse here: the way in which the words *skelms* and *skepsels* were used as concepts. Barthes adds that this kind of mythical speech is not only spoken. “It can consist of modes of writing or of representations; not only written discourse, but also photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity, all these can serve as a support to mythical speech” (1957; 1972: 118).

The interaction between Mrs. Sutton and myself supports Barthes’ idea of mythical speech. Its message presents itself to me on the authority of reassurance as a listener in a known context with political undertones. The particular discourse understood in Mrs. Sutton’s lounge and the *Schelmenage* have a sleight of hand in common. In Barthesian terms, then, the *Schelmenage* is an example of this alienated concept of myth. It separates me from all the politics within the word and hopes I won’t ask any questions about what is really the case.

In Barthes’ view, then, the *Schelmenage*’s process from event to myth can be analysed as myth swooping on the legend’s facts and separating it from the “labour of its own creation” (Passerini, 1987: 50), filling it with ideas of an eternal theme of tricksterhood, all ennobled and ready for use.
In Barthes' view, then, the *Schelmensage*'s process from event to myth can be analysed as myth swooping on the legend's facts and separating it from the "labour of its own creation" (Passerini, 1987: 50), filling it with ideas of an eternal theme of tricksterhood, all ennobled and ready for use in the future. It has been removed from the people and events that were responsible for processing it in the first place.

According to Barthes, the politics of a man in a forest giving another thirsty man a drink of water, becomes a legend of a hangman gate crashing his Emperor's masked ball, dancing with the Empress, and ending happily with his knighthood, and reaches mythic status when language ennobles the hangman into an archetypal "trickster" which I as listener can recognise as an eternal universal quality of human nature itself, a quality which every person has been endowed with.

How then, would Barthes see the message of the myth, how it "utters its message?"

4.3 The *Schelmensage*'s message

If myth is a message, then what is the *Schelmensage* communicating to us? And are there as many messages as there are variations of the story? The *Schelmensage* is based on a series of events. The narrations of events as shown in versions 1-5, Barthes would call 'material which has been worked on to make it suitable for communication' (Barthes, 1974: 123).

The material in this case, due to the local nature of legend, is confined to Bergen-Enkheim in Germany, after 1152, the time that Barbarossa was elected emperor. He owned the land, forests and buildings spoken of in the story. The five versions of the *Schelmensage* narrate events in which a hangman gets knighted for his actions. All versions end happily, the main theme being the way a hangman creatively defied social norms, his risk paying off by being knighted. These versions show dynamic differences in content. In its simplest and shortest form, it is a story of a hangman in a forest giving a drink to a thirsty Emperor, who knights him for this deed. In its most sophisticated and longest form (complete with a courtly-love triangle), it is a story of a hangman who gatecrashes the Emperor's masked ball, flirts dangerously with the Empress by dancing with her, and thus shames her, and is knighted by the Emperor to get out of the predicament of his consort having danced with 'death'. The *Schelmensage* thus presents us with transparent enough material: a hangman's impudence.
transformed him into a knight. But it is the way these events are subsequently used by their tellers that make for an extraordinary shift out of seemingly ordinary events.

4.4 As presented by my mother
In 2001, I visited Bergen-Enkheim with my family to experience the fifth and most sophisticated version of the story as a play, and to see the different locations of the versions. I ask my mother what work our ancestors who lived here did. “They were in service, they worked in town”, she replies. In service, not unlike indenturement to the knightly upper classes of the medieval period. Like the hangman, I figure. We decide to walk in Barbarossa’s footsteps in the forest, to understand the context of the meeting in the forest. Medieval forests were royal/public domain. They protected royal game, housed émigrés, foresters and poachers. As in the case of medieval outlaw Robin Hood, for example:

“the forest background was essential. The forest was their home, its beasts were their food; its peasantry their allies...If they left it, it would be with the king’s final pardon, and their tale would thereby be ended.” (Keen 1987: 2)

In the case of the forests of Bergen-Enkheim, one could work in the forest and manage the space. Outcasts like hangmen, outlaws, poachers and witches worked them. The annual royal hunt happened there, so the locals could not hunt the animals. They were protected for the emperor’s pleasure - one of the hangman’s tasks was to collect the kill for royal consumption. Versions one and two of the Schelmensage outline this latter task as the intersection for the meeting between emperor and hangman, where the emperor is at the mercy of the hangman, who uses his knowledge of the forest to make a mockery of the emperor, while still delivering him to safety.

As my mother and I walk down specific roads in the Bergen-Enkheim forest, I ask about which version of this story she thinks is closest to an actual event. In school, she says, they learnt about the version of the emperor who got lost, picked up by the hangman, and rode ignominiously into town on his cart, much to laughter of the locals. “I always imagined that the people were at the edges of this forest, digging their crops, and along comes the hangman with the emperor on his cart. The people double over with laughter at the sight of this. So the emperor saves face by knighting the hangman.” This is for her the most realistic, most possible version, and also her favourite version of the story because it makes an emperor look ridiculous.
There is a particular German discourse around what a Schelm is. The word itself includes meanings ranging from plague, hangman, rascal, rogue; it implies “getting away with murder”. The Grimm brothers commented on the word Schelm in the proverb: *Ein Schelm gibt mehr als er hat* (A Skelm attempts more than he is actually able to do). In essence, then, the Schelmensage interprets dynamically the meaning of the word: a Schelm risks, gambles in the places most dangerous to him - in this case in society where he is not wanted - and in doing so gets himself into a difficult situation which he may not be able to get himself out of. In this discourse, Schelm mirrors in the story what Barthes claims myth does: a sleight of hand; using a mask to risk claiming an identity, a reality one does not possess. It asks you to forget the issues and taboo surrounding the death penalty, see him masked as a courtly person, risking, getting himself into trouble and receiving a transformative knighthood for his roguish behaviour.

Using Barthes’ discourse analysis to understand the Schelmensage’s message shows the “type of social usage” which has been added to the pure matter (Barthes, 1957, 1972: 118). My mother’s favourite version is one which makes the hangman a powerful, amusing and crafty player in medieval time rather than an outlaw disgraced by his profession. Understanding the way in which the legend is interpreted is dependent on who is speaking and who uses it to what end: the social usage which Barthes speaks of.

4.5 Said in jest

It is with some relish that my mother tells me her favourite version. She laughs along with the hangman and sides with the locals. The emperor is an idiot who managed to get lost in the very territory he owns and hunts in. The local outcast has to help him out of the forest and bravely risks his own life by making his sovereign a laughing stock by delivering him to the general public on a cart reserved for the condemned and dead animals. But the hangman has also saved his sovereign’s life, albeit in a tricksterish manner. To balance up being tricked, the emperor knights the hangman. This is the sleight of hand here at another level. The humorous actions of the hangman make one see, for a moment, the Emperor as equivalent to the lowly, unfortunate ‘kill’ on the hangman’s cart. He becomes the symbolic “prey” for once. This sleight of hand renders the power structures upside down and places the hangman in a position of power. It is achieved with the authority of humour.
If a listener had been told about a set of events, namely that a hangman gave the lost emperor a ride out of the forest and had been knighted for this kind deed, a response might have been, “Yes, and so what?” Barthes makes the point that “A diagram lends itself to signification more than a drawing, a copy more than an original, and a caricature more than a portrait” (1972: 118). “Many a truth is said in jest” goes a popular saying. To make people laugh to see the truth is part of the authority which the Schelmensage maintains in all its versions. The simple event of one man helping out another, has been worked on and told in a story form which paints a picture in which one can take sides, and communicates a message of how the powerless gain power. It is as if the locals have seized upon the event and use it to communicate that tripping up the powerful is not only possible but also necessary. “Take risks”, it whispers.

Every time this version is told, the power dynamic is turned to the favour of the hangman, with humour. It presents itself as a myth on the authority that the powerless have a voice. A rogue voice. The tension between fealty of royalty and their subjects is up for roguish subversion. But it is a dynamic tension - depending on whose side of the story one is viewing. This myth presents itself on authority of humour and daring from the rogue subject’s point of view. It is also the myth of an emperor who can match roguishness with wit, quick thinking and a sense of how to manipulate such behaviour to his own advantage. Yet every version of the myth shows that it has been done at the emperor’s expense.

Barthes’ critical analysis of myth, while encouraging a reader to be a mythologist and mediate between extreme categories of myth as defined by him, doesn’t assist me to completely understand a transformational aspect which the Schelmensage contains. Is it truly, simply nothing more than a linguistic sleight of hand? An academic reading between categories? Barthes’ theory has shown that to see myths only as separated from what produced them in the first place confines the reasons for why the Schelmensage is still told, to ideological reification.

Both Barthes and novelist Peter Høeg motivate that to think history provides us with certainties is a flawed one. For Barthes, myth is the final product of alienation from the historical context which produced it. If, as Høeg says, all we have is ourselves to fill history’s gaps, then our reading of any narrative is contextualised by our everyday existence, the place where we get the material which engages with specific myths or legends we are
presented with. But Heeg’s suggestion that the personal, the subjective links every individual makes with history’s clues is in fact what constitutes history’s final product. This opens the possibility for using history’s clues to weave different interpretations.

At this level of personal subjectivity, if a person receives a myth and quite unthinkingly it becomes a metaphor to spark transformative action within their lives, then metaphor held in tension with subjective existence, is the key to a transformative experience. This tension is the mechanism that lifts ordinary everyday experience and suffering to the extraordinary state of transformation.

Such a person may find himself or herself embellishing the myth or converting its past features to a current contextuality. If the myth that sparks a transformation is successful, it will be repeated, passed on. As the myth is retold, to more and more people, its ability to be transformational for the collective is increased. The sense of this transformational ability echoes Ellwood’s point that the ultimate source of change can only come from the collective subjectivities that are society itself (2002: 622).

If a myth is received and processed in such a way that it results in life sustaining changes, then the narrative ideology may be viewed as a positive one. If a myth is used for the violent abuse of power which results in death of communities then the myth may be viewed as negative narrative ideology. At another level of collective subjectivity a myth may be received by a community who refigure it as a way to understand a practical circumstance. So the Schelmensage may be received by the Bergen-Enkheim community as a legend which supplies the reason for the curious title of a knight who lived in Bergen in the late 1100s.

Using Ricoeur’s thesis in *Time and Narrative* the following analysis will attempt to show the transformation possible through the subjective relationship between reader and narrative. Myth is a mechanism to get individuals and society to transcend the ordinary and make something extraordinary of their experiences.
5. The mechanism of creation

While reading Paul Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative*, grappling with applying the theory to the *Schelmensage*, an auditory memory surprised me. I was reminded of a high school music lesson. My teacher and I were to listen to Haydn’s oratorio, *The Creation*. In this work, the overture or opening movement is called *The Presentation of the Chaos*. To prepare me, my teacher asked me what I thought a chaos should sound like. Clashing sounds, I said. Notes from the brass section all over the place, the strings out of tune and playing notes that were not in harmony with anything else, simply a mess. Lots of satisfied negative head shaking from the teacher. I was describing a cacophony, he claimed. A chaos implied a set of notes in a melody, not yet following a line. Fragments of melody with no purpose, not even circularity. No beginnings, no middles no endings. No resolution. Haydn represented the chaos, as a set of melodies - going nowhere. But these melodies, they have potential for sense. As Saint Augustine put it in his *Confessions*, describing the creation in terms of sounds preceding song as “Matter [that was] still formless but capable of receiving form and serving the purpose of creation” (Book XII: 29). Melodies could be made to go somewhere. Which is exactly what Haydn does:

From out of the open octaves of the instruments emerges chaos in the form of a dormant monolith containing the sum of all possibilities, the entirety of what is yet to be. In an unflaggingly insistent and soon pressing leading-tone sequence, it manifests its wish that the Creator instill order and meaning into this maelstrom.... (Reinold, 1960: 13)

Haydn, in this overture, mimicked the process of the Hebrew creation story. He created fragments of sound and saw the potential for those melodic fragments. He understood that a chaos has meaning, material that had been worked on, but not followed through and had to be given a sense of containment, an ending. Notes are in search of a melody, melody in search of a theme. In the *Schelmensage* two people were in search of something in a forest and happened upon each other. The result of this interaction is located in at least five variations of a legend. I will argue that Ricoeur’s claim that action is in quest of narrative, means action contains meaningful potential, which, when expressed through narrative mode, becomes human. The narrative reflects thematically what Ricoeur offers in his philosophy of “mediated experience”. It is akin to the creative process that Haydn followed to transform melodic fragments into oratorio choruses. The mediation was developed from melodic fragment to oratorio - musical form.
In order to bridge the cultural gap between the texts in Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative*, which form the basis of the relationship between his Augustinian analysis of time in the *Confessions* and the Aristotelian analysis of plot in the *Poetics*, he constructed intermediary links which show how time and plot correlate. This mediation offers suggestions for seeing the transcendent potential of the meeting between the emperor and the hangman, which became the *Schelmensage*.

### 6. The mediated character of experience

Ricoeur’s thesis in *Time and Narrative* is that “temporal existence becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode”, and “narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence” (1984: 52). We can understand what it means to exist as humans when that process becomes storied in narrative and narratives can only truly exist because they are dependent on humanity for their existence. As Estés summarises it: “if a story is seed, then we are its soil” (1992: 387). Narrative and experience need to intersect if something new is to grow.

The process which brings experience and narrative together is to be found in Ricoeur’s theory of threefold mimesis which “describes the mediated character of all understanding as an arc from practical experience over emplotment in language/narrative back to practical experience” (McGaughey, 1997: 450). The links between narrative and experience are the “three moments of mimesis, seriously and playfully” named mimesis₁ (the prefigured mode) mimesis₂ (the configured mode) and mimesis₃ (the refigured mode) (Ricoeur, 1984: 53). The word ‘mimesis’ suggests a mimed action, but here does not mean an imitation or a copy, but a creative imitation, one which adds to an idea that already exists, by breaking the old open with a new interpretation.
This creative imitation opens up the way for fiction and can be seen in the arc by the way it leads us from a certain understanding of the extant symbolic world (mimesis1), moving from that symbolic world, breaking with it, to emplot something new (mimesis2) which is still connected to the (now old) understanding, but moves the emplotment to the reader and listener who apply their minds (mimesis3) to it and without even thinking about it, allow themselves to make better sense of their world, bringing about changes in their lives as result of reading/hearing it. This should not be seen as a banal circularity, but rather as an upward moving spiral, which allows transformation to revisit the original starting point from a new height.

6.1 The original event behind the Schelmensage

The shortest version of this legend gives clues to an event which becomes the legend. In chapter two, historical background processes will be established. The application of the mimetic theory is to understand the power of transcendence which myth has. Myth uses whatever facts it wishes to, to make its point.

In the Schelmensage, the suggestion is that within the medieval time of emperors, fealty, knights and hangmen, a series of actions which occurred within Bergen-Enkheim, the villagers emploted the actions and became storytellers. Doniger's argument supports this:

Myths belong to a peculiar genre of texts that, after they come into being, seem to create their own authors. The myth must have been told originally by an individual, of course, but once it is accepted by the group it is regarded as having been created by the group, as being multi-authored. (1988: 28)

When retold, the story has a certain impact. The original occurrence and its outcome on which the story may be based, leads to a new understanding of the world. It contains a lesson for emperors and hangmen and through that lesson there may be a transformation for those who repeat it and those who hear it.
The mimetic arc for the event of the *Schelmensage* is as follows:

\[ mimesis_1 \text{ (prefiguration) } \]

Hangman as dishonourable outcast,
lives in forest.
Emperor as most honourable 1st citizen
owns forest, lives in city.

\[ mimesis_2 \text{ (configuration) } \]

Emperor and Hangman happen
upon each other;
Hangman assists Emperor

\[ mimesis_3 \text{ (refiguration) } \]

Emperor knights hangman

In order to understand this theory, let us apply it to the least sophisticated version of the *Schelmensage* and establish how “action is in quest of narrative.” (Ricoeur, 1984: 74)

The Emperor Barbarossa was in the forest, and was thirsty. He came across the hangman who lived and worked in the forest. He asked him for a drink of water, which the hangman readily gave. The emperor made the hangman a knight for the service shown to him. (oral history version 1)

At the core of the *Schelmensage* then, are two protagonists, who are in creative tension with each other in a very particular temporality. At first glance, the interaction seems simple, unquestionable. Who would deny a thirsty person a glass of water? On second glance, what is an emperor doing in the forest? What are the risks involved in meeting a medieval hangman in a medieval forest?

6.2 The prefigured world of the *Schelmensage*: mimesis₁

The action here, is in search of reflective structure, a story to make sense of the interaction. Mimesis₁ is “action”, prefiguration, the melodic fragments which exist in their own right, the first side of poetic composition, before the action is creatively imitated and used to emplot something new. The *Schelmensage* contains and illustrates the three features of mimesis₁: conceptual networks, symbolic resources and temporal elements (Ricoeur, 1984: 54).
6.2.1 Medieval conceptual networks in the *Schelmensage*

The conceptual networks which place the existence and experience of these two characters and their world of action takes place in a medieval temporality, and those men were respectively, an emperor who wanted refreshment and a hangman who gave it.

This information brings into play motives, goals, issues of hierarchy, fealty and risky power dynamics, on the part of the protagonists. A conceptual network of action allows us to understand the possibilities: what would happen if the hangman didn’t give the emperor water, what if the emperor hit the hangman over the head and got the water anyway, what about the consequences of medieval fealty, and so on in endless permutations and therefore possibilities. The particular choice out of the politics of these issues, are implicit in the title of the story; this tells us more about this choice: it is a legend about a *Schelm*, a rogue.

We are able to narrate what happened in this forest, because the importance of the action between the two men proves to be material that contains an ability to be imitated, re-created, and thus interpreted. This is a link to understanding the second feature of mimesis¹, that of symbolic resources.

6.2.2 The symbolic resources of the *Schelmensage*’s world

Why are there are social consequences in the request for a glass of water? The answer lies in understanding the cultural reality of becoming and being - hangman, emperor and knight in the 1100s. To know the rules of fealty; to be able to figure out the political differences of meeting in the forest, with all its signification of centre (the site of a royal hunt) and periphery (the work domain of hangmen) is to give meaning to the processes of contestation of medieval territory and its boundaries. At first glance the Emperor would seem to have the power: he is Lord of the land, in all ways. But even in his own forest, he is on contested land and at the mercy of his servant the hangman for survival.

Everything practically concerned in the *Schelmensage* is retellable in a story form, because its facts are “mediated symbolically”, by “cultural processes” (Ricoeur, 1984: 57-59). The core of this story is about the dynamic of giving and receiving something and the politics that act is centred within. Yet everything that happened in the lives of the protagonists before the moments in this action in the forest, was involved in bringing the action itself about, and the
consequences thereafter. It is not interacted in a vacuum packed time capsule. It becomes circumstance, - storied.

6.2.3 Temporal elements in the *Schelmenage*

The Emperor is dependent on the hangman to slake his thirst and survive the forest and the hangman is dependent on the Emperor’s power to get him out of being a hangman for the rest of his life. The interaction in their lives, will have long term consequences long after the event. Concealed like a seed at the heart of this creative tension between two protagonists, is the idea that temporal features lead to initiating narrative (Ricoeur, 1984: 59). In his novel *Borderliners*, Peter Høeg’s explains it: “Time is inextricably bound up with language, with the sensory apparatus, and with human fellowship. Time comes into being when the mind encounters the world in normal life” (Høeg, 1998: 221).

Temporality would here refer to the way in which the Emperor and the Hangmen experience their time spent together in the forest, and the particular incident of giving and taking between them. Being in *that* here and now, experiencing the suffering, roguish twist and resolution that happened then resolved in the form of a story. In the same way, what it means to have lived that incident in the 1100s, is dependent on what narrative configurations can do to convey the importance of that moment. Although from our viewpoint 900 years later, we could reduce it to a certain circumstance, when we hear the *Schelmenage*, the close on 900 years between the event and the narrative constructed from it, we are within a zone in which measured time no longer matters.

We experience the event with the protagonists. As Peter Høeg put it, “the mind also remembers stretches, fluid passages, connections between what has once happened and what is happening now, regardless of the passage of time” (1998: 235).

When the practical world of giving, receiving and risking is granted the gift of being heard, when narrative takes it up, the *Schelmenage* paints a picture of what it means to give, receive and risk, in a particular moment, without dating it. We relive the event when that picture is told in a narrative. You have to exist first before you can measure something. As Augustine said, to study the self is a metaphor for studying time (Ricoeur, 1984: 231).
6.3 From prefiguration to emplotment: the arc between mimesis\textsubscript{1} to mimesis\textsubscript{2}

Mimesis\textsubscript{1} allows us to see the complexity of an occurrence in a German forest close on 1000 years ago. From it we can see the mechanisms within myth: the seed of the story contains an interaction which has the potential for development. The temporal soil accounts for the reasons this occurrence is repeated: knowing the rules, signs and norms in the medieval context, the action has proved it can be imitated and re-created. The movement from mimesis\textsubscript{1} to mimesis\textsubscript{2} is the process of planting the seed in the soil. Mimesis\textsubscript{1} has thus explained how an interaction of a thousand years ago had the potential processes at work in an interaction which culminated in becoming a story. Mimesis\textsubscript{2} of the arc, is the place of simultaneous arrival and departure: using all that’s gone before it comes to the point where it will create something new: a legend out of a hangman and emperor’s interaction. Emplotment is the pivot on which this shift is achieved.

6.4 The emplotment of the Schelmensage: mimesis\textsubscript{2}

As shown in the second diagram of the mimetic arc, at the core in all the versions of the Schelmensage are acts of generosity: a service given which is followed with a knighthood bestowed. Mimesis\textsubscript{2} has this gift at its core, too: narrative contains rules of development for emplotment (Ricoeur, 1984: 64-69).

According to Ricoeur, the mediating link is the relationship between the chronology of events, the sentences laid end to end as Woolf put it, (action) and the ability to grasp those events together to configure a story about them, (emplotment) which involves bringing together factors such as agents, goals, means, interactions unexpected results and reversals. Grasping together the elements of human experience, to make a new whole means we get more than the succession of events - we get a story line which a reader or listener is able to follow.

In version 1 of the Schelmensage, the power dynamics change when the emperor and hangman happen upon each other. The emperor is at the hangman’s mercy, in his own royal forest. In this case the hangman supplies refreshment to the emperor. This act sets emplotment in motion - the shift from being a reported interaction in a forest to becoming a legend about a Schelm.
Why is it important to understand the act concerning a man who gave a thirsty man a drink of water? Maybe, you’d think that this was a good deed of sorts, but what makes this hangman a rogue? Why isn’t the story called “The hangman who slaked the emperor’s thirst”?

In the medieval context, and particularly in storytelling lore the giving a glass of water to one who asks/is thirsty, is a loaded, political act. Estés gives a version of such a story, to demonstrate how the character of a person with respect to compassion, is tested, to see if she can love the not-beautiful, the difficult parts of herself. A reward gets meted out according to how this test is met.

In the tale “Diamonds, Rubies, and Pearls,” a good but reviled stepdaughter draws water for a wealthy stranger and is rewarded by having diamonds, rubies, and pearls spill from her mouth when she speaks. The stepmother orders her own lazy daughters to stand at the same well and wait upon the wealthy stranger. But this time another stranger in rags comes. When she begs for a dipper of water the evil daughters haughtily refuse. The stranger rewards them by causing snakes, toads, and lizards to fall from their mouths ever after. (Estés, 1992: 146-147)

Applied to the Schelmensage, the hangman meets the test, and is rewarded for his gift of water; his diamonds, rubies and pearls come in the form of knighthood. For an emperor to be lost in the forest and need refreshment, is to dance for a while with death. To not die of thirst in the wild puts the emperor in a vulnerable position: dependent on the mercy of an outcast, a man with a dishonourable profession. The hangman is dependent on the emperor to reward him. When assistance comes from a hangman, the significance of the interaction is intensified. The exchange of refreshment for knighthood has effected a massive closing of a class status gap, in a context where practically, few had power to achieve this. It is a significant transformation.

The story links together two aspects of the word skalmo, namely hangman and rogue in the knight’s official name - Schelm. This word appeals to the two possibilities of acting, compassionately or haughtily, as the Estés story pointed out. The hangman chose to act compassionately. The event would have ended quite differently if he hadn’t done so, if he had exercised his skill as executioner and killed the emperor; or if the emperor had hit the hangman over the head and got the water anyway, the consequences would have been very different: the hangman may have had a claim against the emperor. This version implies that the emperor, fully aware of the possibilities of action on the hangman’s part, bestowed a
knighthood with a disgraced person’s title, but which also brings elements of the rogue into play. In this particular version, the rogue element is not elaborated upon, but only implied.

Ricoeur’s configurational dimension is applicable here. The succession of events display more of the motives embedded in the deceptively simple version. The episodes in this version lead to a new fiction, a new reality reflecting the quality of the human interaction in the forest.

Mimesis partly answers the original thesis question of why the Schelmensage is still told, with respect to the mechanisms for repeating a story. It hasn’t helped account for why this particular version of a legend is repeated. Yet in comparison with this legend, another story about the same emperor in the Schelmensage, being tripped up by knights, whose allegiance he would need to count on may show the difference in transformative potential. For example:

In 1172, when Frederick Barbarossa was supposed to have visited Landgrave Louis of Thuringia at Neuenberg Castle, the emperor remarked that such a fine edifice did not appear to have very solid walls. The landgrave undertook to rebuild them that very night. Next morning the astonished emperor found all around an encampment of helmed and mail-clad men, with their shields and swords. 'Seeing therefore ministeriales, knights, armed men, and other nobles, all subject to his [the landgrave’s] dominion, he was astounded and cheerfully admitted never having seen a more valuable or stronger wall'. (Arnold, 1985: 131)

Arnold comments: “dismissed as fabulous by his modern editor, the story was invented or included by a chronicler sensitive to political reality. Perhaps it was to poke fun at the artlessness of princes” (Arnold, 1985: 131). A succession of events are presented, we know they were considered important enough to be included in a chronicle of events concerning the emperor’s life. It is not an oral history event passed down to us - it is available in a book. You may smile with the chronicler about the artless emperor. Yet this version of roguish behaviour on the part of knights, does not shift itself to the realm of the extraordinary and seems to lack the quality of tension and twist which the Schelmensage holds. Would you want to tell this story over and over again? Not me. What is it that accounts for the difference between these two stories?

Ricoeur holds that “making a narrative resignifies the world in its temporal dimension, to the extent that narrating, telling, reciting is to remake action following the poem’s invitation” (Ricoeur, 1984: 81). Whereas the second story is that for some reason the action has not been
invited by the poetic, to re-create itself. The phrases "story invented", "supposed to have happened", "dismissed as fabulous", "perhaps...to poke fun at...", point to this story's importance of being a shred of written (if dubious) evidence to prove a historical point about whether or not a certain class of knights "ministeriales" existed.

It depends on who is telling the story, and for what purpose it is told. Having configured a story - it is received on a practical level by a hearer or reader, using their "productive imagination" (Ricoeur, 1984: 68). This allows the reader to respond intuitively, and transcend the facts and make a metaphor of it for their own lives, a personal, new meaning of what has been heard or read. The ability of the story to have any kind of effect on the hearer or reader will depend on the nature of the experience given, which is then modeled in the story by the process of emplotment.

Arnold's account is not configured in such a way that makes me as reader, feel sympathy for any party concerned. It hasn't re-created any sort of experience about the boundaries of power in life, which make me want to think about the consequences of the action there. I am not able to make metaphor from it. It is, however, a very useful story for someone who wants to learn more about what categories of knights existed in the 1100's. The Schelmensage on the other hand, is based on a similar kind of event, but emploted so that one is able to learn a lesson from it about the quality of life in the period it speaks of, and can be applied in any period it is received in. It draws on the hearer/reader's involvement because it re-creates the temporality of extremes of power: a change in status achieved with a roguish twist. It contains a universal theme of tricksterhood which we can make our own metaphor in our imagination.

The difference between these two different stories which contain the same emperor and elements of knighthood, lies in the fact that they are dependent on who has received them and how they work on the material to make something out of them that is even more meaningful than before. They reveal that it is the act of emplotment which re-creates a new fiction from the action. But what happens after emplotment?
6.5 From emplotment to reconfiguration: the arc between mimesis$_2$ to mimesis$_3$

Narrative, Ricoeur sums it up, gets its full meaning in mimesis$_3$ when reader and text intersect (Ricoeur, 1984: 71). For the act of emplotment to be experienced, an audience is needed. The link between mimesis$_2$ and mimesis$_3$ is the act of reading. It is I as hearer, reader and writer who have interacted with these stories and responded to each in different ways. To draw down the arc to mimesis$_3$, the process involves somebody more than a text, storyteller or event. It requires witness. Reading or hearing is the joint work between text and reader, teller and listener. It is the movement which draws down to the final stage of refiguring the plot, completing the mimetic arc.

By describing the interaction between the emperor and the hangman, the *Schelmenstage* communicates that it understands something about existing, suffering and its resolution. It contains different voices, and the ones we have empathy for, are metaphors for our own struggles.

Psychologist Bruno Bettelheim explains how this can work - using the myth of Oedipus as an example:

A myth is not a cautionary tale like a fable which, by arousing anxiety, prevents us from acting in ways which are described as damaging to us. The myth of Oedipus can never be experienced as warning us not to get caught in an oedipal constellation. If one is born and raised as a child of two parents, oedipal conflicts are inescapable.... After watching Oedipus, a viewer may wonder why he is so deeply moved: and in responding to what he observes as his emotional reaction, ruminating about the mythical events and what these mean to him, a person may come to clarify his thoughts and feelings. With this, certain inner tensions which are the consequence of events long past, may be relieved; previously unconscious material can then enter one’s awareness and become accessible for conscious working through. This can happen if the observer is deeply moved emotionally by the myth, and at the same time strongly motivated intellectually to understand it...(Bettelheim, 1978: 38)

Viewing a play, reading or hearing a story about an event, is the linking act which connects our understanding to our intuition. It thus tests the capacity of the *Schelmenstage*’s plot to remodel our own experience. Whichever character one sides with, depends on the inner conflict of the listener; “What is resignified by narrative is what was already presignified at the level of human acting “ (Ricoeur, 1984: 81). This implies that a myth like the *Schelmenstage* contains information that will allow human action to make something new of it. Existence and narrative, hangman and emperor, each hold a key to the other’s potential of becoming something new.
Bettelheim’s example shows the possibilities for transformation in watching an enacted version of a written myth. Mcgaughey translates Ricoeur’s process of transformation as the reader or hearer who “understand[s] a symbolic world, emplots it, make[s] a story from what they learn about the world and are transformed in that process” (1997: 311).

6.6 The refiguration of the Schelmensage: mimesis,

Refiguration shows how a hearer/reader (or a group of hearers/readers) fulfills Ricoeur’s mimetic process. Once the emperor has received generosity and bestowed a knighthood, what consequences does this have for the future? Will the hangman still continue his dishonourable profession? Will he continue to live in the forest? Will a new hangman take his place? Are there chances that the emperor will be as generous to those with less dishonourable professions who risk being compassionate? These questions show the possibilities for how the event is considered in later versions.

In listening to the Schelmensage, in which a particular existence is thus re-created, we are “drawn to the denouement” (Ricoeur, 1984: 68): what clues will its resolution give us, as to how to emplot our own existence, differently?

The process of understanding in the act of reading/hearing allows for what is grasped from the text to be a metaphor in the life of the reader. As Ricoeur put it “it is the metaphorization of action and suffering that is easiest to decipher” (Ricoeur, 1979: 70). This shows how the mimetic process extends the role of reader: the original action becomes bearable through being a metaphor for understanding the tensions in life itself. This is created as we make something new of what we’ve engaged with, we tell it anew, in our own turn. This is also a clue for the story’s potential to lift us from the ordinary, the everyday.

This gift of plot to action and action to plot, mediates between temporal aspects in the original action, and configurational temporal aspects which exist, for example, in storytellers. It functions like a metaphor. Making a metaphor of the event and transposing (mediating) the event/action with the story by the organisation of events is emplotment. So the event becomes a metaphor for the action and is thereby a connection between the two. The Schelmensage becomes the metaphor, the “as if” which occurs in the break for fiction.

An example of this metaphor-from-myth process is found in a text of writer Erica Jong:
My unconscious had devised this automyth of aerial/poetic rebirth because I tend to make metaphors of the conflicts I am living. When I began *Any Woman's Blues* I felt dead...I never wanted to write another Isadora book, so I wantonly killed off my most favourite heroine. But as I wrote, she came back to life, thus, so did I. We are saved by our own creations. (Jong, 1994: 323)

Although Jong is describing a novel, not a legend, her methodology exposes the metaphorical weaving that the denouement brings, between the unconscious suggestions and her conscious writing life, which bring about a new creation and effect a change in her life too. Experiencing the Schelmensage means it is possible to transform life, because the history of the legend and the resultant story refigure our lives by giving us an opportunity to consciously or unconsciously make it a metaphor for ourselves (Ricoeur, 1984: 82).

The Schelmensage’s ability to be repeated lies in the fact that its incidents contain material which can produce a metaphor which can increase our understanding of the original interaction, by comparing with a similar situation in our own lives. Narrative gives that action countless possibilities for refiguration. Storytellers are configurers who tell the story, so that others can make the metaphors and in turn pass the story on.

7. Rogue, trickster and hangman

In oral history version 2 of the Schelmensage, the point of transformation is amplified.

The Schelm of Bergen was also the hangman of Bergen and he was on his way on the road through the Dreieich Forest with kill from the hunt, dead animals on his cart. The forest was the private possession of the Emperor Barbarossa. He had been hunting there, and lost his way. He saw the hangman driving his cart, and asked if he could ride with him and sat with him on the cart. But the emperor didn’t know that it was the hangman. Later, as they came to Bergen, he stepped off the cart and then only did he recognise him. One of the additions to this story is that the townspeople laughed at the sight of the Emperor riding on the hangman’s cart. The emperor knighted him. (oral history version 2)
Using the mimetic arc to analyse this, version 2 appears diagrammatically as follows:

In this version, the prefigured stage is given more detail. The explanation by the teller includes background information to make the transformative twist more powerful. The Schelm here is the hangman, amongst other things. Physical details allude to his profession as *abdecker*, the job of collecting dead animals after the royal hunt in the Dreieich forest. The detail concerning the hangman’s cart is important here - it would also have been a condemned person’s last transport to the gallows. The dynamic of the dishonourable professional recognising and meeting with the most noble and honourable one - Holy Roman Emperor, is a loaded one. Despite the fact that the Dreieich forest was the territory in which the emperor had final say and sway over and where game was preserved exclusively for the royal hunt, in this instance he is at the mercy of one of the outcasts who live there.

This moment of meeting and the possibilities it opens for different understandings and endings, can be seen in the work of novelist Umberto Eco. Although the sources for his novel *Baudolino* (2002) are not explicitly the *Schelmensage*, the theme is of a trickster, Baudolino, who is adopted by Barbarossa (and ultimately, knighted) after a lifesaving encounter. Here is Eco’s configuration of the interaction between the two in the forest - countenanced in Baudolino’s earliest attempts at writing.

*I am telling you this story because if I don’t you wouldn’t understand what happened that evening in the fog so thick you could cut it with a knife and it was already April but in our Parts there’s fog even in August and if you’re not from those Parts you get lost between Burmia and Frescheta especially if there’s no saint to take you by the bridle and there I was heading for home when I saw right in front of me a baron on a horse all covered with iron... with a sword he looked like the King of Arragon*

*and I like to die Mamma Mia you want to bet this really is Saint Baudolino whose here to take me to Hell but he said Kleine kint Bitte and I caught on that he was an Alamans lord lost in the wood because of the fog and he couldn’t find his friends*
and it was almost night and he showed me a Coin and I had never seen Money before and he was happy I could answer in his language and in Diutsch I said to him if you keep straight youll hend in the swamp sure as sunshine...

and then I said I know the Germanes come from a country where its always Spring and maybe the seeders of Lebanon grow there but here in Pala/ea theres fog and in this fog there are some bastards roming around who are still the grandsons of the grandsons of the Ayrabies who fought against Charlemain and theyre a bad bunch and when they see a stranger they hit him in the face with a club and they steal even the hair on his head ergo if you come to my fathers hut youll find a bowl of hot broth and some straw to sleep on in the stable then tomorrow morning at daybreak Ill show you the road specially if you have that Coin gratias benedicte we’re poor folk but honest .... (Eco, 2002: 5-6; original italicised)

Eco’s amplification of the transformative moment, as experienced through the eyes of Baudolino the trickster, gives prefigured information also, which allows for the understanding of the risk which the young Baudolino takes, although merely a child, which will influence his and the emperor’s future. This process of emplotment, through this meeting between the emperor and Baudolino, becomes the pivotal point on which the novel’s development is based on.

A similar emplotment process is the case for version two. If the hangman had not played the trick he had, then I am not convinced we would be able to gain the mythical quality which this legend communicates. In the legend, the risk factor for the hangman is this: he offers assistance to the emperor in the forest, yet places his monarch physically on his cart - at the same time the symbol of the condemned person’s transport and then parades his collected “kill” to the villagers, who understandably laugh loudly at that sight. He has acted as a rogue at the emperor’s expense. Yet he has also brought him, (as Baudolino also promised), safely back onto the road. He is rewarded for his helpful deed and his roguish daring, with a knighthood.

In version two the prefigured context, mimesis1, sets up the variables that hold the potential for the transformation. The refiguration process, mimesis3, ends with knighthood and yet begins with a new life for the hangman-no-longer. Referring back from this point to the process of configuration or emplotment, mimesis2, this transformation occurred when the hangman risked making fun of the Holy Roman Emperor while delivering him to safety. The fact that I have the legend to analyse, is proof of that this version of how a hangman transformed into a knight through his own daring, is told further.
In order to see the consequences of the legend’s transformational content in effect as refigured in the mimesis stage, a version entitled *The Knave of Bergen* (Kiefer, undated) collected by Mark Twain on his travels in Europe (*A Tramp Abroad, 1880*) will be used. It is more sophisticated and glamorous in comparison with the first version of the *Schelmensage*, and assists in the following version as text which shows how a hearer/reader (or a group of hearers/readers) fulfills Ricoeur’s mimetic process. Twain comments that “All tourists *mention* the Rhine legends...but no tourist ever *tells* them. So this little book fed me in a very hungry place; and I, in my turn, intend to feed my reader...” (1880: 3). Twain preserves the rather literal translation into English.

In Frankfort at the Romer was a great mask-ball, at the coronation festival, and in the illuminated saloon, the clanging music invited to dance, and splendidly appeared the rich toilets and charms of the ladies, and the festively costumed princess and Knights. All seemed pleasure joy, and roguish gayety, only one of the numerous guests had a gloomy exterior; but exactly the black armour in which he walked about excited general attention, and his tall figure as well as the noble propriety of his movements attracted especially the regards of the ladies. Who the knight was? Nobody could guess, for his Vizier was well closed and nothing made him recognisable. Proud and yet modest he advanced to the Empress; bowed on one knee and begged for the favour of a waltz with the Queen of the festival. And she allowed his request. With light and graceful steps he danced through the long saloon, with the sovereign who thought never to have found a more dexterous and excellent dancer. But also by the grace of his manner and fine conversation he knew to win the Queen and she graciously accorded him [more dances]...how increased curiosity, who the masked knight could be.

Also the emperor became more and more excited with curiosity, and with great suspense one awaited the hour, when according to mask-law, each masked guest must make himself known. This moment came, but...the secret knight still refused to allow his features to be seen, till at last the Queen, driven by curiosity, and vexed at the obstinate refusal commanded him to open his Vizier. He opened it, and none of the high ladies and knights knew him. But from the crowded spectators, 2 officials advanced who recognised the black dancer, and horror and terror spread in the saloon, as they said who the supposed knight was. It was the executioner of Bergen. But glowing with rage, the King commanded to seize the criminal and lead him to death, who had ventured to dance, with the Queen.

So disgraced the Empress and insulted the crown. The culpable three himself at the feet of the Emperor and said, - “Indeed I have heavily sinned against all noble guests assembled here, but most heavily against you my sovereign and my queen. The Queen is insulted by my haughtiness to treason, but no punishment, even blood, will not be able to wash out this disgrace, which you have suffered by me. Therefore, oh King! allow me to propose a remedy, to efface the shame and to render it as if not done. Draw your sword and knight me, then I will throw down my gauntlet, to every one who dares speak disrespectfully of my king.”
The emperor was surprised at this bold proposal, however it appeared the wisest to him. "You are a brave knave" he replied..."however your advice is good and displays prudence as your offence shows adventurous courage. Well then" - and gave him the knight stroke - "so I raise you to nobility, who begged for grace for your offence now kneels before me, rise as knight; Knavish you have acted and Knave of Bergen shall you be called henceforth". (Twain, 1880: 3-5)

This version has refigured a world of action in such a way that it amplifies the tensions between the characters concerned more dramatically than before. It heightens the contrast between royalty and servants; it pushes intrigue and glamour up against the other versions showing a plain enough life in the forest and being an instrument and symbol of death. It is the dramatic foil for the skeletons of the medieval Totentanz, refigured in sumptuous masking as a dance between a hangman and an empress. Whoever refigured a simpler version into this sophisticated version, had a capacity to receive the story and project their own experience of suffering, insight, the human tension of great risk where the odds are stacked against one, shown here against a courtly background as opposed to earlier versions in a forest or castle.

To Twain's version the details at the end of version five must be added:

The emperor...knighted the hangman saying, "I hereby knight you, and you shall be called the Rogue of Bergen. I will give you tenure of my own castle in Bergen. You will also be a welcome guest at my imperial palace in Gelnhausen. You may choose your own coat of Arms." The Knight, Rogue of Bergen chose two bloodied ribs on a silver background, as the coat of arms for himself and his shield. (oral history version 5)

The mimetic arc for these two versions of the Schelmensage is as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mimesis}_1 & \quad \text{Empress, emperor at coronation} \\
\text{mimesis}_2 & \quad \text{Executioner risks going to coronation which is out of bounds; masked, he dances with empress is discovered and faces death.} \\
\text{mimesis}_3 & \quad \text{Executioner suggests knighthood: emperor grants it. Receives coat of arms, castle, title and honourable status.}
\end{align*}
\]
In Twain’s version, the location has been moved from rural forest to urban Frankfurt. The focus is on the scandal caused by the executioner’s masking and daring, the stakes raised even higher when he suggests to his sovereign the way out of the legal impasse.

The development between emplotment and refiguration stages reveals what is at stake in the risk taken by the executioner. As all the mimetic arcs show at the pivotal point (mimesis₂) the hangman turns a situation around by tricking society around him into granting him a transformation. Whatever the risk taken, it results in an honourable future for the hangman. This last arc shows that the transformation in status still carries the association with the past - Schelm can refer to hangman and rogue. These last two versions expose the extent of the gains of knighthood: the castle is exchanged for forest; a title with hereditary rights, exemplified in the coat of arms; and the rest of the Schelm of Bergen’s life will not revolve around executions, but serving the emperor in the honourable office of knight. As the historical context shows, this choice does not necessarily imply no further executions. Barbarossa’s warrior knights or ministeriales, were notorious for showing little mercy, whether on crusade or defending the fatherland (Arnold, 1985; Duby, 1974).

On the one hand this arc shows the executioner to be a scheming strategist prepared by his courage to take an enterprising risk. On the other is the human desire to improve one’s life. And this is the metaphor for the possibility of the transformation in those who receive the legend. When we receive this legend we may get the message that the desire to change one’s life is worth risking for. This desire and its possible achievement in human existence has responded to the invitation of the poetic and is presented in the form of the Schelmsgage.

8. A fabric for the whole soul: transcendence
In this chapter the Schelmsgage has been parsed using the process of mimesis, to see why a myth gets retold. The Schelmsgage lifts itself above the opaque depths of living, acting and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby transcend situations in their own lives. Rather than hand out the message in a purely descriptive form, it speaks through a poetic voice. The process of mediated experience happens within a reader, simultaneously, without thinking about it. If a person is receptive to the material in the myth, then the transformation is possible. Writer and activist Alice Walker explains how this works.
Storytelling, you know, has a real function. The process of the storytelling is itself a healing process, partly because you have someone there who is taking the time to tell you a story that has great meaning to them. They’re taking the time to do this because your life could use some help, but they don’t want to come over and just give advice. They want to give it to you in a form that becomes inseparable from your whole self. That’s what stories do. Stories differ from advice in that, once you get them, they become a fabric of your whole soul. That is why they heal you. (1990: 24)

Ricoeur said that “it is the task of hermeneutics ...to reconstruct the set of operations by which a work lifts itself above the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby change their acting” (Ricoeur, 1984: 53). The transformative potential in the Schelmensage lies in the ability of the hearer of the story, to remake the action in their own lives by going through the process of mimetic movement and culminating in reconfiguration (Ricoeur, 1984: 82-83).

9. Conclusion

The “scholarly aim” (McCutcheon, 2000: 200) of this chapter was to study the mechanisms of how societies create the extraordinary from the everyday. Definitions of saga, myth and legend were considered. Barthes’ theory of myth was used to count a few reasons for its re-telling; an alibi of skelmhood, a trickster myth; a socially used reason for the linea descendens of a line of knights - the Schelme von Bergen. An account of power dynamics between the centre and the periphery in a medieval empire. An example of the benefits of fealty and loyalty.

Above all of these practicalities, the Schelmensage delivers a message which will affect those who hear it and could use that message in a therapeutic way to change a situation in their lives. It presents itself on its authority of creative defiance. It is confident that it contains knowledge which you can apply to yourself. It is seed. If you are its soil, it grows within you by making you change the way you act in the world. If you are not its soil, it shape changes itself into another format, depending on the context, the day and who is available to get its message. Even if we never receive the message of the Schelmensage, the knowing of creative defiance lives in every person. The story holds the potential to unlock it within us.
The mimetic set of operations have exposed the transformative potential of myth: societies create the extraordinary when they find an interaction worth lifting above from the everyday, when it mirrors something in their own experience - “the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering...” (Ricoeur, 1979: 53) and because of its transformational potential, tell it to others, who refigure it in terms of their own interests, passing it on in turn. The power of myth, a story to process the transcendence of a current reality, is one of the “mechanisms whereby societies create the extraordinary from the everyday” (McCutcheon, 2000: 200).

Myth is something elusive existing between the eternal and the dateable. It contains the universal and the everyday and everything in between. In tracking versions of the Schelmensage I have found that at any given moment, it has a life of its own: so you can categorise it, but you cannot tie it down. Myth is rather, as Barthes said, in the broadest sense, a message. I would like to build on this definition.

In one of his strongest criticisms of myth, Barthes motivated that humans consciously and unconsciously made myths “an act of complicity”, as Passerini noted (1987: 55), which glossed over the politics of the personal and historical situations they arose out of. In working with life stories, oral histories which transgress boundaries of history and imagination, Passerini argues: “Clearly the boundary between the imaginary and the real as well as that between the conscious and unconscious is a crucial problem for history, especially of recent times.” A solution? “...life stories help us to unravel it” (1987: 55). In writing about a myth I received from my mother, I have used stories from my own life as solutions that helped unravel the difficulties; Ricoeur’s thesis assisted in addressing the fact that narrative’s relationship (whether poetic or lyric) with history, allowed for refiguring in the life of those who intersect with such narrative texts.

Ricoeur’s thesis that “time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence” (Ricoeur, 1984: 52), mirrors the Schelmensage’s acts of generosity, a service given, a risk ventured, and a knighthood bestowed. In this mirroring, a new theme arises; in applying mimesis to the Schelmensage, a metaphor for theory and practice, and the implications for their indivisibility, is to be seen; this is illustrated by the creative tension between human existence and narrative, and will be discussed more fully in the last chapter in this thesis.
To understand the *Schelmensage* further within the mimetic process, the next chapter considers medieval Germany’s world of action. The earliest historical clue to life and death in Bergen-Enkheim, is one that can be physically handled. Like the *Schelmensage*, it is a tool for survival.
5. Mayoral seal with Barbarossa and Beatrix
Chapter Two
The sons of Woden
The world of action in medieval Germany

Know that you can have three sorts of relations with princes, governors, and oppressors. The first and worst is that you visit them, the second and the better is that they visit you, and the third and surest that you stay far from them, so that neither you see them nor they see you.

Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali, twelfth century Muslim theologian.
(Casanova, 1994: 48)

A man must resist his king and his judge, if he does wrong, and must hinder him in every way, even if he be his relative or feudal lord. And he does not thereby break his fealty. The Sachsenspiegel (Kern, 1948: 84)

Schelm, ... root from (s)kel- ‘to cut’, as in violent forms of death
(Kluge, 1957: 642)

1. Defying time: clues for a world of action

In 1961 a Bergen schoolboy noticed an unusual looking stone pointing out of freshly excavated soil and pulled out a late Acheulean hand-axe, locally called a faustkeil. It is archaeological evidence that approximately 125 000 years ago, there were Neanderthal people living in the area now known as Bergen-Enkheim, in Frankfurt, Germany (Fischer, 1971: 24-26). (A second faustkeil was found in the Enkheim forest in 1984.) It is 10.9 cm in length, weighs 179 grams and is also called a universalgeräü, all-purpose tool of the Neandertalers with three essential uses. It’s solidity made it useful as a hammer, for breaking bones for their marrow and opening skulls; its knife like edge could cut and flay the skins of animals; its shape and weight leant itself to being a club like weapon which dealt the final death blow to an animal or human victim. In addition to this it could also be used as a honing stone, to sharpen the edges of smaller flints that were used for finer cutting (Henschke, 1962: 20-25). It is a clue to the manner of early human survival.

Bergen-Enkheim’s find is also a clue to understand human existence. The hand-axe is evidence, and archaeologists reconstruct a story of creative survival with it. This evidence relies on people to reconstruct its story, using whatever history is available.
From medieval history, we are presented with a legend about creative defiance and survival which finds its symbolic continuation in the stone age hand-axe in the word Schelm; approximately 125,800 years after its creation, Middle High German reveals that the root of the word schema comes from (s)kel- meaning to cut, and its particular context relates to the category of weapons used in violent forms of death. In Middle High German Schelm was metonymous for knacker, flayer and hangman (Kluge, 1957: 642). Albeit with more sophisticated tools, a medieval hangman dealt the final death blow to human victims, flayed the skins of animals, and his place of work was often termed the “knacker’s yard” because of his processing of, and trade in bones (Evans, 1998: 2). The difference in cultural processes in Bergen-Enkheim’s physical landscape in the world of Neandertalers compared to that of medieval Schelm are immense, yet survival, suffering and living, are symbolically the same for both.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the historical context, which allows for the actions of a trickster. The Schelmensage is grounded in what Ricoeur describes as the world of action, here a context in which a Schelm and his King, his judge, find themselves. For a world to be turned upside down, the possibilities for that change to occur must first be understood. This chapter achieves this by applying the three dimensions of Ricoeur’s prefigurative stage of understanding human experience, his thesis of mimesis\textsubscript{1} (1984: 54-64) and is thus the initiating context of action, which moves towards transformation in the configurative stage of mimesis\textsubscript{2}.

The tool of mimesis as mediating experience reflects that to understand the structure, symbolism and temporality of medieval history, is to understand that form of existence, and internalise it as our own experience in our own here and now, by receiving the legend. Mimesis\textsubscript{1} sets up what is to come in terms of processes of change, the practical web of the processes. While these concepts are named as separate from each other, when hearing a story or legend, we experience them together. Barbarossa cannot be understood without the physical context of twelfth century Germany. Nor can one understand his actions, unless one can perceive the cultural process before him and during his rule.
2. Mimesis: Conceptual networks, symbolic resources and temporal elements

In history, people act and suffer according to the world of action they find themselves in. Their actions are the result of power dynamics, hierarchical issues, as well as the motives and goals of emperors, knights and hangmen in the medieval world - and particular to the *Schelmensage*, the practice of fealty. This dimension, called a conceptual network (Ricoeur, 1984: 56) is exhibited in different versions of the *Schelmensage* and is the structure which these dynamics are woven around. Conceptual networks, however, need to be integrated into an existing reality for us to understand them.

This reality is found and linked to the dimension of symbolic resources of human experience. Human action and suffering on the part of emperor and hangman, can be storied because it is mediated by symbolic, cultural practices (Ricoeur, 1984: 57-59). The resources, the physical realities of forest and castle in the *Schelmensage*, are storied through the landscape, understood as symbolic, cultural practices. The physical location of acting and suffering in the medieval world of knights, empresses and hangmen, is understood here in terms of the changing cultural processes of fealty, kingship, Germanic law, Roman law to name a few. This means that we can narrate the *Schelmensage*, because we can compare the process of being human across different time zones. This chapter will examine the cultural processes that made medieval Bergen-Enkheim, in Frankfurt, Germany.

3. Outside of time

While writing this chapter, I teach public speaking skills to the Engineering students. It is an exercise, which gives me a new understanding about temporality. I decide to teach them by first performing a speech showing all the things you aren’t meant to do, and then a speech which has all the hallmarks of good delivery. I pretend I’m a consultant speaking to corporates about the importance of an early morning greeting. I get them to judge me, mark me, and to time me using the stopwatch. They smirk through the first presentation and note the few minutes it took, clicking the stopwatch authoritatively. For the second speech I decide to tell them a story. About Herr Müller the German-Polish farmer, and the Herr ‘Rabbiner’ the Polish Rabbi who would step out with his handsome son-in-law each morning, to greet his fellow person, and about that co-existence in the Polish-German corridor before the second world war. About
how the Jewish man landed up in a concentration camp and how the Nazi man saved him.

The moment I enter that story’s zone, neither the students nor I are in that room. We are in the Polish-German corridor, at the fence of Herr Müller’s field. We are leaning on the arm of the handsome son-in-law. We see the Rabbi lift his tall hat, in greeting: “Good morning, Herr Müller!” We watch the farmer look up from his field to respond: “Good morning, Herr Rabbiner”. Then we shift to the concentration camp and urgently seek the face of the man with the white gloves and baton, who will decide the Rabbiner’s fate. We witness the weak smile on the Rabbi’s face when Herr Müller asks him why he is here, in the concentration camp.

We have done something to time. We have stepped outside it through the story and face with its characters, that moment of luck, of chance, of redemption.

The engineer’s hands relax on the stopwatch. How long did that take me, then? I ask to bring them back to the room. Three and a half minutes. But it didn’t feel like that, says another. No, the others echo. It felt...longer. It’s not three and a half minutes at all. I instruct them. I say, tell me the story of your work. That is a good way to communicate.

To understand the action that takes place in the Schelmensage, is to recognise the dimension of temporality (Ricoeur, 1984: 59-64). To understand how time passes, to measure it, calls for a story. This does not mean measuring time in the medieval period in terms of years, minutes and hours, but rather that the story is a measurement of understanding what it meant to be, in the existence that was medieval Germany. So the Schelmensage can be recognised as a measurement of understanding what it meant to exist in those times. In this chapter this is evidenced in the use of the oral and written versions of the Schelmensage, repeated over hundreds of years, yet in their detail confirm the medieval historical context. Yet we connect with the acting and suffering as if the story were written for our time zone.

The Schelmensage is a narrative concerning an event, which becomes mediated symbolically within a continuing cultural process that is Germany today. This chapter
takes as its lead, the medieval characters in the narrative to redescribe that medieval temporality, as a continuation of an instance of a myth, which is not necessarily only medieval in its application. That this redescription, the mediation of the symbolic truth of what it means to exist in particular cultural processes, transcends a dateable temporality, will later be argued as giving myth a regenerative potential for those who receive it and allow the potency of the myth to act in their lives.

This mimetic process could however, be equally applied to versions of the Schelmsage set in later historical contexts. For example, the conceptual networks of post-war Germany in the last century which informed Conrad Weil's 1952 play entitled Der Schelm von Bergen would curve a mimetic arc with a similar core, yet present different options for its resolution. As the oral history versions all focus on the medieval context of Barbarossa and his Frankfurt milieu, that medieval context has been selected for analysis using the mimetic structure.

4. The ford of the Franks: from palace to town

Another piece of evidence concerning the makeup of Frankfurt's settled population, comes through sifted sand in the Enkheim forest. In 1955/6 at least five Celtic torques were found there; they were thought to have dressed a Celtic woman of nobility for burial (Henschke, 1962: 27). The find included two ankle and two wrist torques and one neck torque, all cast in bronze and inlaid with coral. They were dated at that time to being 2400 years old, which means that there were Celts in the Frankfurt area, approximately 455 before the Common Era (BCE). Archaeologists found that the coral in the jewelry and the designs, showed signs of influences not found locally at the time, and this signified their role as immigrants who settled in the Frankfurt region, and Henschke motivates the torques' construction would have been in or around Frankfurt (1962: 31).

In its history, Frankfurt on the river Main, shows itself to be the seat of power, a place of trade. The Celts held sway there up until 100 BCE, when they were overpowered by the Germanen, who were in turn ousted by the Romans. In 250 CE, The Romans were unseated by the Alemannen who were then conquered by the Franks in about 500 CE (HRG 1, 1971,1203-4) culminating in the crowning of Charles the Great, or Charlemagne, as Holy Roman Emperor on Christmas Day in 800. The name
Franconofurd was in use at that time and refers to a ford, or shallow water, which was used to safely cross the river Main. Charlemagne built a royal palace there and the name Frankfurt appears for the first time in a document recording his presence and leadership of a synod there, in 794.

Charlemagne, emperor of the Franks, chose to build on the stone remains of a church in Frankfurt which contained burial of a girl of Merovingian nobility, as an exhibition hall for his priceless collection of conquest booty. As this site had been a meaningful place for burial, his collection drew visitors and Frankfurt became a centre for the realm’s political pride, palace, strongly symbolic of trade and politics (HRG 1, 1971,1203-4). By 843 Frankfurt had become the centre of what was then known as the East-Frankish kingdom - Germany.

After Roman rule gave way to a division of Germanic tribes, between the 9th and 11th century city-states and lords and vassals were more often than not, involved in conflicts. Cohen summarises what may be considered the strongest argument for how these disparate Germanic groups formed what came to be the feudal way of life, and the origin and development of knighthood in Germany:

To protect themselves they banded together in hierarchical feudal contracts: land was divided into fiefs and each fief had to support at least one armored mounted knight, who swore an oath of loyalty to their liege. As time went on standards of behaviour rose, knights vowed to be honest, defend the existing order, protect the weak and show compassion to a wounded enemy. Good armour was expensive and in light of subsistence economy it made it difficult to raise large armies with the result that fighting became a way of life for the upper classes. (Cohen, 2002: 13)

One of the king’s original functions within the Germanic structure had been to defend the land. With growing attacks from outsiders, medieval emperors would become reliant on the burgeoning soldier class, the knights and princes whose victorious military adventures abroad and at home, had put pressure on their sovereigns for favourable gains such as land, titles, knighthood. By the 1100s Kings were, by necessity, devolving their authority to their princes, equipping them with the rights of rule and discipline. This dependence on their ability to keep the peace, allowed kings to conquer other states, in their quest to build their empires. However, this delegation of power meant the King was vulnerable to the up and coming powerful class of princes and knights. The feudalism, which found its height in the twelfth and
thirteenth centuries, had at its core the weakening of royal control (Duby, 1974: 157, 162).

As an example, Arnold has established that one of the outcomes of Charlemagne's conquests in Germany and Italy, was to reinforce a system of delegating power to landowners, no matter whether they were Frankish or Church prelates (Arnold, 1985: 1). It was a system of authority built on the basis of wealth and lineage, the foundations of which were "not undermined until modern times" (Arnold, 1985: 1). This delegation was to become one of the reasons for the later emperors' rise and later also their fall. The death penalty became the only serious means against crime, which could discipline and ensure the emperor's power and control.

5. Death penalty

Before the medieval period, the Germanic death penalty was used in the interests of the victims of violent crimes, although it was considered only one amongst other options for restoration. Several sources document differing theories regarding these origins of the death penalty in Germany (Schumann, 1978; Meurer, 1992). It is agreed that it is a fixed part of traditional Germanic law and appears in all codified German law. The two main theories centre on the view that it supplied retribution for the victims and their families, and in the older literature, that it functioned as a sacral atonement (Meurer, 1992: 265).

Von Amira saw the death penalty in Germany from the scapegoat theory viewpoint, a form of human sacrifice to appease gods or to purify a society by ridding itself of a criminal; Rehfeldt argued that it was used as a deterrent (Meurer, 1992: 264-270). Connected to this is the theory that a death sentence in this context, branded the criminal as inhuman with the consequence of separating them from what was considered a human world or society The broken societal order needed to be restored (Meurer, 1992: 264-265).

In these periods, the penalty was used not in the sense as we understand it in the 21st century, but used as a deterrent in the sense of enforcing political and clerical power. In the early medieval period, it was held intentionally as a mirror for the people: most executions were public events. The condemned were at times hanged at folk festivals,
and then always naked, with the religious intent to purify the person through the execution. Later they were often clothed in gaudy festival garments (Meurer, 1992: 266).

5.1 Penalties
Since 600 CE, death was the penalty used for murder, manslaughter, rape, robbery, arson, adultery and certain acts of violence such as plundering. In addition to these, it could also be used in cases of treason, disloyalty, traitorship and for committing a crime against the sovereign, particularly in instances of dereliction of duty. During the time of Frankish rule in 500 CE, the penalty could be withdrawn in just about all cases (Meurer, 1992: 267).

Right up until the 1200s, one of the main differences in the threatening nature of the death penalty, was found between those feudal classes of nobility and the free lords, and the mostly (poor) peasants - the unfree class. Medieval records document that while a decree of death had been given, in practice this was not always effected and resulted in situations where an unfree person would lose their life and be executed by hanging as punishment for a crime, whereas a noble could have the penalty waived and would be punished by severing a hand. While all subjects had the right to ask for clemency from the emperor, the law also allowed the rich to buy their freedom from the death penalty (known as to “free the neck”). However, towards the end of the medieval period, this was no longer the case. Some church and non-church dignitaries had a right to grant clemency, too. A virgin could plead for mercy to release a man from the penalty. Up until the end of the medieval period, a failed execution meant that the person won their right to life, as it was viewed as a sign of the criminal’s unjust sentencing. Pregnant beings, mentally ill people and children were not allowed to be hanged, although this was not always followed in practice (Meurer, 1992: 268).

5.2 Stones, rope and swords
The Germanen used to throw their criminals into moors and swamps, whereas the Franks were also known to use the method of stoning to death. These methods imply that more than one person designated for this work, such as a hangman, carried them out. The carrying out of a sentence would have been by a community or group and these people may have been related to the criminal’s victims (Meurer, 1992: 265).
Later, punishments would be differentiated by class. Death by beheading was the acceptable method of execution used for nobility and people of high rank and office, and was carried out using swords or axes. Execution by hanging was considered the most damning; hanging a criminal by the neck until they died, using a rope or willow twigs, later also chains, from a tree or the gallows, was the manner in which non-nobility were executed. Equally humiliating but less popular were death by drowning, breaking the neck vertebrae and inducing suffocation. Particular to the medieval time although not uniformly used were, death by live burial, starvation, being walled into a space, and crushing a body on the wheel, breaking the body to death (Meurer, 1992: 266).

From earliest times on, the death penalty was linked to ritual considerations with respect to the body and effects of the criminal. This was often the earlier reason for burying the body in a moor or later, making it decompose on the gallows, which gives an indication of the dissociation with the "impure" elements of societies as defined in German communities. Eye contact with a condemned criminal was feared as an evil gaze and considered contaminating if this occurred. From the early medieval period onwards, rituals concerning the particular way the body was handled before and after the execution, and from the middle to late medieval time, were left to one person designated to do the killing - who was avoided, because of the inevitable contact they had with a condemned person. The condemned were denied an acceptable form of burial to avoid further possible contamination (Meurer, 1992: 266).

The range of weapons used to apply the death penalty range from the use of the faustkeil by the Neandertalers, the groups among the Germanen who made sure a criminal died by drowning or suffocating in a moor, the stones used by the Franks, all suggest that executions were either the personal or particular group responsibility within society. The Merovingians and Carolingians named their executioners Apparitores, Carnifices, Custodes, Lictores, Milites or Satellites. In Burgundy, the tax collectors (called Witiskalke) effected executions (Pies, 2002: 35). (In 1226 a certain Ulrich Wigand, who lived outside Bergen, signed his name and his profession, carnifex in a Bergen document. It is not known whether he was an executioner or not (Clauss, 1993: 3)).
But by the late 1100s the necessity for the use of the death penalty had increased to the point where a specially appointed person, a professional, competent for the job was required. In nearby Trier, an entry in the *Liber annalium iurium achiepisopie et ecclesie Trevirensis*, circa 1180-90, names the position and lists the tasks of executioner (Pies, 2002: 35). This need for an executioner was in part due to the confine the rise of the *ministeriales*, known in the vernacular as *raubritter*, thieving knights. In the following version of the *Schelmensage* the hangman is described in one of his professional working realms: clearing kill in the forest after the royal hunt. The reasons for tainting the hangman as impure through his contact with dead animals, the dead is alluded to here:

The *Schelm* of Bergen was also the hangman of Bergen and he was on his way on the road through the Dreieich Forest with kill from the hunt, dead animals on his cart. The forest was the private possession of the Emperor Barbarossa who had been hunting there, and lost his way. He saw the hangman driving his cart, and asked if he could ride with him and sat with him on the cart. But the emperor didn’t know that it was the hangman. Later, as they came to Bergen, he stepped off the cart and then only did he recognise him. One of the additions to this story is that the townspeople laughed at the sight of the Emperor riding on the hangman’s cart. The emperor knighted him. (Oral history version 2)

One of the main themes running through versions of the *Schelmensage* relates to the constant threat the emperor and empire were exposed to in terms of the growing bands of knights, who were prepared to betray their loyalty and their honour. In order to keep the peace, German medieval emperors proclaimed *Landfrieden*, an injunction for all subjects to keep the public peace. In 12th century where this public peace was seriously breached, the death penalty was enforced and aimed especially at punishing knights who had committed manslaughter, pillaging, arson and robbery. Arnold relates that when Barbarossa was still the Duke of Swabia and had returned from the second crusade to find some of his *ministeriales* had broken the *Landfrieden* while he was on crusade; he had them hanged (1985: 130). A dishonourable execution for a knight.

In the course of the medieval period, the delegation of the death penalty was established when it was delegated to lords of the land, and was legislated when burgeoning cities started using it as part of their responsibility for carrying out local justice. This was particularly necessary with respect to campaigns against the
raubritter, who pillaged the land of others for their own gain, or when they had fallen on hard times.

The roots of societal changes in Germany in the 1100s owed something to the rise of the ministeriales, the warrior knights. Before they became raubritter, they had become aristocracy through the development of their military experience in the crusades and for the emperor, which strengthened their feudal position. Duby accounts this as one of the reasons for feudalism reaching the height it did in 12th century Germany (1974: 157) This was controlled by an aristocracy who military adventures had strengthened their position.

6. Emperor

In the mid 1100s the German realm lay deeply divided. Two warring houses, the Hohenstaufen and the Welfs, made competing claims for kingship (Pacaut, 1970: 19). At the time, the quest was for power to retain the Holy Roman Empire, of which Germany and Italy formed a part, and also to expand the power base by crusading eastwards in the name of Christianity (Pacaut, 1970: 22). These demanding dynamics called for a leader who could unite a fragmented Germany, heal the rift between the houses, keep the peace in the fatherland while gaining power elsewhere - to expand his empire. In Germanic tradition such a leader was not appointed but chosen.

Kern asserts that while early medieval kings were chosen from the ruling dynasty, this did not guarantee an automatic right to the throne on the basis of inheritance. The king who was summoned by the nation, may have had a genealogy relating him back to the Gods, but it was the quality of virtue “of the blood”, a special divine vocation “that lifted the sons of Woden, the Astings, the Amals...out of the ranks of the folk” (Kern, 1948: 13-14). It was the will of the people who recognised this virtue, which informed the choice of ruler, and gave a prince the right to rule (Kern, 1948: 13-14). This virtue is rooted in Germanic kin-right in which any family had a claim to a certain destiny, vocation or virtue (Kern, 1948: 21).

Once elected, this king was expected to reflect all the decisions made as assented to by his legal advisors and the populous (Kern, 1948: 73). The nature and practice of this
relationship is known as fealty, and claims its roots in legal aspects of Germanic culture (Kern, 1948: 87). “Only a loyal king has loyal subjects” (Kern, 1948: 87) and as the core of this implied that the law bound both subject and king, the law becomes the meeting point where the duties of both are tested (Kern, 1948: 87). Fealty implied that kings and their subjects were not of a master to servant relationship, but were bound with personal ties (Kern, 1948: 62 & 65). Kem points out that the Germanic understanding of the monarch revered by his subjects as the son of God, was not a Germanic tradition, but that of later Roman conquerors and the Church (Kern: 1948: 62).

German Kings were expected to keep the peace with their subjects by using two prerogatives. They could use the power of the royal proclamation of banishment (Pacaut, 1970: 26) with which they could punish any disobedient subjects at will; and they also could exercise the proclamation of the king’s pardon. The old Germanic concept and practice of mercy has been viewed by legal scholarship as being either a sacral right, a private right or as stemming from the power of kingship - and majesty (Krause, 1971: 1715). Among the Franks it was constellated as given by the king alone and in later medieval times, this was connected to the idea of God as merciful. There were very few instances where judges, or others could give mercy - particularly with respect to the death penalty. Mercy was the providence of the King. (Krause, 1971: 1715). With the rise of ministeriales - the warrior knights whose roles developed into professional soldiers and servants of the king in eleventh and twelfth century Germany, a specific legal intervention was developed in the law to deal with the necessity of granting mercy to these ministeriales, for crimes such as desertion of their posts. Known as pro iure et pro gratia (Krause, 1971: 1718) it delegated the King’s prerogative to pardon into law, to enable restoration of the (often violently) erring knight.

This meant in practice, that the “German king acted as chief judge, and...he reserved the right to deal with all such capital offences as arson, treason, rape, abduction and murder” (Pacaut, 1970: 26). Wherever the king went, the local circuit judge’s powers, were suspended. As Pacaut notes, “The king was the personification of justice throughout the land. No one else had the right to interfere” (1970: 27). There is an example of this in Sachsenspiegel, or law of the Saxons, documented in the early
1200s, that “the moment the King enters the country (here denoting the country of the Saxons) he gives judgement on the prisoners” (Von Rünssberg, circa 1930).

Despite fealty being seen as a moral core of feudalism with positive effects, when aggrieved subjects felt that formal justice had not given them the redress they sought, they had recourse to a fundamental Germanic right - that of resistance (Kern, 1948: 90). An example of this right appears in the Sachsenspiegel:

A man must resist his king and his judge, if he does wrong, and must hinder him in every way, even if he be his relative or feudal lord. And he does not thereby break his fealty. (Kern, 1948: 84)

Dissatisfaction with the outcomes of justice allowed for subjects to take matters into their own hands. Practically, this translated into situations where, on the one hand a medieval warrior could swear fealty to his emperor, crusade for him and on that same basis of fealty, fight against the same emperor to claim a right he felt he had been denied (Kern, 1948: 91).

Considering Charlemagne’s precedent of delegating power to landowners, coupled with fealty’s foundation for the right to resistance no matter what a judge ruled, it is no surprise that there were almost “incessant revolts against the king by the local princes of Germany in the tenth and eleventh centuries” (Kern, 1948: 90). Kern notes that whether this resistance could be justified by the successive generations of rebellious knightly dynasties, “contemporaries were almost always willing to grant the possibility that a rebel was acting in good faith, under the pressure of necessity” (1948: 90). The Schelmensage is documentary evidence of this being the case.

Duby regards feudalism’s real core as formed by the “decay of royal authority - Kings couldn’t manage the attacks by outsiders and they lost reins to their power” (1974: 162). Entrenching the system of divide and rule, to ensure peace, justice and political stability, made the emperor vulnerable to attack by the nobility he created; his prowess would come to be sorely tested in dealing with rebellion from the nobility and his knights, whose support to defend the realm he could not manage an empire without.

These were the issues facing the successor of King Conrad III who died in the middle of the twelfth century; a nephew of the king who had accompanied and impressed him
on a disastrous crusade was singled out as a compromise candidate for kingship. His paternal grandmother was Agnes, direct descendent of the Saxon and Salian dynasties, who had married Frederick I, Duke of Swabia of the house of Hohenstaufen. His mother was Judith of the house of Welf, who had married Frederick II, Duke of Swabia; the Prince of Swabia had been brought up in Sicily and he symbolised the hope for a unified Germany (Bäumel 1969:165-168). He sported the Italian nickname ‘redbeard’.

7. Emperor Frederick Barbarossa

On the fourth of March 1152 Frederick Prince of Swabia was elected in Frankfurt as successor to the German throne, whereafter Frankfurt became the permanent place for the election of German kings. He was crowned shortly afterwards in Charlemagne’s chapel in Aachen. The poet Karl Simrock linked the Schelm of Bergen to the Emperor, as black knight at the masked ball, which celebrated Barbarossa’s election:

Zu Frankfurt auf dem Römer war heute Königswahl
und abends drehn Vermummte sich bei der Fackeln Strahl:
Der König ist gekoren, des Reiches Not beschworen,
 ihr Masken, schwingt euch froh im Saal!

In Frankfurt, at the Römer, the King was elected
and by night masked dancers swirl in the torchlight:
The King has been chosen, sworn his oath to the realm,
you masked dancers, dance with joy in the great hall!
(Henschke, 1975: 117; my translation)

In 1152 Frankfurt was still the site of imperial dwellings and churches, but by 1160 the emperor had encircled it with city walls (sections of which still survive) and thus gave it the status of town. Barbarossa built the Salkapelle, new royal chapel, and documentation survives which informs us that a Frankfurt fair was held there in 1160 - an annual institution which has continued into the 21st century. Frankfurt grew as a centre of trade and the areas around the town developed, called the fiscus villages, which supported the demands of the royal retinues (Pacaut, 1970: 130-131).

While he may have been chosen for his noble virtues and possibilities as ruler, as narcissistic statesman he exploited these concepts to the fullest. Up until the twelfth century, Germany was ruled with a mixture of Christian and Germanic ideas. In his
quest to keep the empire in German hands, Barbarossa was constantly questioning as to whether the Pope or the emperor held supreme authority, setting the basis for further disputes of the distinction between the powers of church and state: “There are two things by which our empire ought to be ruled, the holy laws of the emperors and the good customs of our predecessors and fathers” he began his response to Pope Hadrian the IV on this subject (Henderson, 1910: 410-419). Pacaut concurs: “...his most outstanding characteristic was the lofty conception of his duties and of his position. He was the king, he was the emperor, he was majesty itself” (Pacaut, 1970: 49). His most enduring legacy was his imitation of ancient Rome, in its near veneration of the monarch and his insistence that the Empire be named sacred, the sacrum imperium which translates as Holy Roman Empire, a title it kept until 1806 (Kem, 1948: 62 & 65).

Barbarossa wished to restore Germany, Italy and Burgundy under the banner of Holy Roman Empire and in Rome 1155 he was declared Holy Roman Emperor (Pacaut, 1970: 52). After divorcing his wife, Adelheid of Vohberg (on the grounds of not producing any heirs) he married Beatrix of Burgundy in 1156, which gave him control over Burgundy and brought him closer to his political goal of achieving a unified empire.

Unlike the Pope, who oversaw matters from Rome, German emperors did not rule from a fixed centre; they were forever on the road. This peripatetic nature of their government necessitated officials being appointed to do King’s work. The King travelled from royal manor to royal castle, drawing sustenance from his princes and churches throughout Germany, Burgundy, and Italy, and thereby ensured his display of royalty and majesty was seen by all subjects and the power of his nobility and their retinues ensured. In the absence of a centralised government, his princes and knights were expected to keep the peace and govern for him in the rest of the land (Kem: 1948: 8).

Barbarossa ruled over Germany using his prerogatives of Royal Proclamation, with feudal custom and Roman law. (Pacaut, 1970: 49) He held service as the noblest of all ideals (Pacaut, 1970: 49). After his election, in an attempt to stop his princes from illicit feuding, he threatened them with the royal proclamation, and revived dormant
penalties for the empire’s knights, nobility and peasants. On conviction of this crime, “counts were required to shoulder a dog, ministeriales a saddle, and peasants a wheel”, and after these public humiliations they were threatened with the death penalty (Arnold, 1985: 242).

He manipulated the feudal system to his advantage, exploiting the ties between prince and subject, vassal and lord - to work for his personal cause of justice: the empire he was intent on achieving (Pacaut, 1970: 53). He required public oaths of fealty and homage from his appointed knights, which included the principle that his rights as emperor should be recognised by them (Pacaut, 1970: 132). However, later in his rule he allowed the policing of this oath to lapse and this is considered a factor which contributed to the lessening of support from his ministeriales and the weakening of his monarchic power base (Pacaut, 1970: 132). While his fealty may have been loyal in return to those he thought deserved it, his own sense of resistance is shown in his attacks on the Pope in Rome, attacks, which he claimed, were political and therefore justifiable.

His attacks as emperor were known for their violence. While Germany and Burgundy were part of the empire, Italy was harder to force into submission. When he insisted that Milan to surrender to him unconditionally in 1162, his imperial majesty was snubbed and he retaliated with the order to raze the entire city to the ground (Pacaut, 1970: 100).

From 1168 he would remain in Germany for 6 years, to plan his new Italian campaign. In that time he also strengthened his defences in Germany, building his royal castle in Gelnhausen, amongst other fortifications. He strengthened his political authority through a vast building programme intended to build Germany’s wealth. It involved the clearing of forests, founding new villages, and the emergence of a class of free peasants. He split up his private domain into districts, each with a governor in a castle-in-chief, surrounded by fortified and garrisoned towns. In this way he established his control over the German realm (Pacaut, 1970: 132). The following version of the Schelmensage reflects the spirit of this expansion:

On completion of the building of his castle in Gelnhausen, a town in the Bergen-Enkheim neighbourhood, before retiring at night the emperor
announced that the first person to appear at court in the morning, would be made nobility. As the hangman was the first person to walk across the drawbridge in the morning, the Emperor knighted him. (Oral history version 3)

Barbarossa died crusading on the road to Jerusalem in June 1190 while trying to cross the river Salef and the burial place of his remains unknown. After his death, his life became a theme in German legends and mythology. He is mythologised as the eternal emperor, who is only hidden away for a while and who will reappear at an appropriate time and lead the empire once more (Bietenholtz: 1994: 403). For the moment he sleeps between six other knights, on the Kyffhäuser mountain (Pacaut, 1970: 207).

8. Bergen-Enkheim
Long after the Neanderthal people left their hand-axes in Bergen-Enkheim for posterity, and well before Charlemagne held his Frankfurt synod in 784, it may have been the Celts who named the area overlooking a valley, referring to it as Berge - meaning a resting place with water (Clauss, 2002: 11). The Romans settled on this, the higher Bergen side, and built a farm there. The Romans also built a wooden fort over an underground water source. Archaeological evidence reveals that between 487 and 770, the Merovingians built a form of judicial centre, on the remains of a Roman settlement, which came to be called Bornheim, close to Bergen-Enkheim.

The Franks chose to settle in the valley closer to the flowing water. Their legacy is evidenced in the Frankish custom of naming towns with the extension- heim, or home: Enkheim originates from Enicho + heim, Enicho’s home. The Franks turned the Roman fort into a stronger bulwark, and by the 1100s it had grown into a small stone tower, which was called the Gruckau, and it would be used as a place of safety for the King’s ministeriales (Explore, 1989: 3-4). In the Schelmsage, it is given specifically to the Schelm:

**Emperor:** ...[To the hangman] And now on your knees, hangman. A terrible Knave you have been, ...I knight you "Knave of Bergen” [touches him three times with his sword on the right shoulder] in the name of the father and the son and holy spirit. Arise, Sir Knight, “Knave of Bergen”.
[Knave rises] My castle ‘Gruckau’ in Bergen stands empty. You may take possession of it. Your coat of arms is to be “two bloodied ribs on a white background” in order that your bloody trade might be remembered. Tomorrow you shall pledge an oath of truth and fealty to me.
It was rebuilt in 1700 as a baroque water castle and its underground water source still fills its moat (Clauss, 1999, 3-4). It is known today as the Schelmenburg. Descendants of the Schelme of Bergen lived in it until 1830 (Henschke, 1979: 147).

Bergen is officially mentioned for the first time in a document originating from King Ludwig, in 907. Bergen-Enkheim lies east of and en route to Frankfurt, with Rödelheim in the west. It is directly connected to two important roads, walked since prehistoric times, leading to the river Main area. They are known as the "high road" and the "low road" or valley road (also known as the Gelnhauser post road, Poststrasse). These would have been the routes known to merchants, Barbarossa and his retinues, when traveling to his castle in Gelnhausen, Leipzig and to Frankfurt.

8.1 The stone building, the vineyard and the mill
The next written mention of Bergen in a Frankfurt document concerns the Arnsburg monastery (in Bergen-Enkheim) and is dated December 1152; the words "Vineam unam Berge," are evidence that Bergen had wine producing vineyards (Heinemeyer, 2001: 17). According to Clauss, the wine was brought via the Riedstrasse, to Frankfurt (2002: 12). Two houses down from the medieval manor run by monks, the white arched ceiling of the wine cellar became the foundation of the house, which my great-great-great grandparents would build - the Riedstrasse 81, the house in which I was born. That cellar is symbolic of the growth of commerce in medieval suburbia:

The expansion of wine-production represents a vital aspect of twelfth century rural growth. ... [for] many a little monastic country town - it was in the suburbs that viticulture was slowly expanding in a circle so close to the houses.... (Duby, 1974: 238)

Viticulture was only one of the growing changes in medieval Germany economy. Duby adds that it became "a colonial type of economy represented by the stone building, vineyard and mill" (1974: 58-59) and Bergen-Enkheim boasts these three examples of the changing medieval economy. The museum in Bergen-Enkheim displays the growth of the local flax weaving industry made possible through technical developments such as the spinning-wheel; with the increased quality merchandise along with coinage as a form of exchange, the improvements in shipping and travel along the rivers and seas became part of the cultural process which made for the
turning point in the second half of the 1100s (Duby: 1974: 267-268). Small country towns were burgeoning. Encircled around Frankfurt were manorial estates built to serve the King and his retinues; the court which served these estates was established by Barbarossa at the Bornheimer Berg, within the greater judicial region called the Malstatt. It was the official place for executions (Clauss, 1992: 2).

8.2 Miles, milites and ministeriales

In 1102 the knight Eberhard of Bergen designated milites was stationed in Bergen (Henschke, 1979: 15). The words miles, milites and ministeriales signified similar duties, which were owed to lords. Miles signified a smaller group of free knights and therefore implied that they were of the class of powerful lords. Ministeriales or dienstman in the vernacular German, meant the same as the Anglo-Saxon cniht or knight (Arnold, 1985: 37). Ministeriales were unfree knights and as dienstman denotes performing a service in a lord’s ministry, they fulfilled managerial/administrative tasks and like milites, were mounted knights (Duby, 197: 168; Arnold, 1985: 24-25). These ministeriales were not free men, but service was not viewed as a negative indenturement but rather an incentive driven duty “which provided title, land and other statuses and for their wives, children, relatives and more importantly, ensured these privileges for their descendants” (Arnold, 1985: 18,21).

Less than a century before Barbarossa’s rule, these administrative and managerial tasks were outlined in the Bamberg code of 1060: as vassals ministeriales would receive hereditary fiefs in exchange for military service beyond Germany’s borders; they would be remunerated with the “honourable offices of seneschal, butler, chamberlain, marshal and forester” (Arnold, 1985: 41). Although Eike von Repgow asserted in his Sachsenspiegel that it was not worth discussing ministeriales’ rights because they were different everywhere, dependent on the knight’s context (Arnold, 1985: 79).

8.3 Titles

Ministeriales styled themselves on the free-born noble families who employed them and used their system of forenames. They took their titles from the castle, cathedral monastic church, or manor in which they were born (Arnold, 1985: 54, 69-70). One can only speculate that Eberhard of Bergen was born in Bergen, and Arnold points to
the fact that the origin of titles of urban knights “do not leave many clues as to whether their knighthood was inherited or not” (Arnold, 1985: 207). Titles described the type of service given to the lord concerned as can be seen in the title of Conrad, butler of Schüpf (Arnold, 1985: 73). Other titles included epithets, for example Militellus - little knight, de Moro - mulberry (Arnold, 1985: 73) the example of Heinricus der Wildeman ein ritter - Heinrich the wild man, a knight - here shows a title taken either by himself or given by others, but nevertheless describing his behaviour of his brutal manners (Bernheim, 1952: 177).

Before Barbarossa became emperor he had proved himself on a crusade, with the result that his prowess won him the support of knights from other parts of Germany (Clauss, 2002: 12). Once he became emperor many of them followed him to Frankfurt to become one of his growing force of administrators and mounted warrior knights, or ministeriales. One such knight moved from Mainz to Bergen. Clauss speculates that he could have been one of these (2002: 11). He is considered the originator of the lineage of Schelme von Bergen.

8.4 Marcward I of Bergen
Barbarossa was supported by servants, Knechte who were in service of the realm, Reichsdienstmannen and Königsknechte who were servants to the king. Marcward of Bergen, miles was stationed and lived in Bergen, not far from the judicial area of the Bornheimer Berg, which was first officially mentioned in a Frankfurt record in 1194. Clauss reasons that the main task of knights such as the Schelme of Bergen was the securing of the high road especially for the safe passage of royalty. Next, they would have been responsible for the secure delivery of food and living substances (2002: 11). And they would have made a profit from the taxes they extracted as duty for imported goods. Barbarossa’s ministeriales would become famous for seizing the economic opportunities before them for improvement of their social status.

As the empire was growing and expanding, its borders and success had to be protected. The economy was no longer based on inherited title with its attendant wealth and the system allowed for individuals of low birth into the knightly class, proof of which Duby finds in chivalric literature in the “formulation of the theme of the parvenu” (1974: 268). But there were other reasons for blurring the class
boundaries at the time: the emperor needed every fighting man he could get, to defend the empire at home and abroad. The possibilities for social mobility made upstarts risk over their heads to win their fortune to jostle for a higher place within the hierarchical order. Arnold adds to this that they were even prepared to offer money, services or land for the rank of ministeriales to get themselves out of a low social condition (Arnold, 1985: 45).

Duby's point that the "upstart villein" was no mythical figure, and that all ministeriales "dreamt of forcing their way into the nobility, of living without turning a finger, surrounded by their underlings and receiving the income from a lordship" (1974: 258) is only one side of life which people in the 1100s wanted to change, and which motivated their actions. In Weil's play the hangman is asked to give reasons for his action of dishonouring the empress by dancing with her:

**Hangman:** [Looking at the King in the face] My high Lord and ruler. You may torture me, put me on the wheel, break each single bone in my body, I cannot tell you, why I did this. [with an elated voice] It befell me like a drunkenness. I had to do it. I am dishonest, despised and avoided by everyone! Shame and dishonour I bring over all whom my hand touches. [Vehemently, to the councillors] Am I to blame for this grievance? Who speaks the judgement? Is it not you, my Lords? Who speaks the judgement? Who breaks the rod and throws it in front of the evildoer? Who hands him over to me, to put him to death according to the judgement of the court? The judge! I am only the instrument. I do according to the verdict what I am told. No dishonour and shame rests upon the court. Only on me alone!

9. The rise of the ministeriales
The twelfth century was witness to the mounted warrior knights becoming a force in their own right. In 1146 the Pöhlde annalist in Saxony recorded an event previously quite unimaginable:

"the ministeriales...and...other magnates, although not ordered to do so, held a meeting, and without consulting the king or other princes, themselves did justice as magistrates to all wrong-doers. The king had come to Saxony to do justice, but even he had not managed to effect this." (Arnold, 1985: 52)

This rebelliousness was an important facet of the character of knighthood at the time. Duby goes as far as to say that ministeriales' position "and behaviour...governed the whole feudal economy of the eleventh and 12th century" (Duby, 1974: 167). Arnold notes that this social revolution in Germany was noticed by contemporaries at that time (Arnold, 1985: 46-47): Eike von Repgow claimed in his Sachsenspiegel "that the rights and rank of ministeriales in real truth servitude had its origin in force,
detention and unjust power, which men have of old turned into unjust custom, and would now elevate into law” (Arnold, 1985: 49). Duby adds that they were “idle, stubborn, giving only when mutual generosity was ensured” (Duby, 1974: 168).

Arnold has justifiably made a case against the reality of the glittering world of knighthood as portrayed in Hohenstaufen poetry, and has pointed out “the poverty of life in the grim stone towers punctuating the German hillscape” and the struggles between knights which often ended in homicide; (Arnold, 1985: 79) which adds to the reality that knighthood was not as luxurious or gentle an art as is supposed today. It appears, however, that a life of luxury was exactly what ministeriales were striving for. Their desire for status and rank was linked to the wish to dispense the same largesse as their kings and princes but primarily, their vocation was war and their main financial concern lay in arming themselves. As Cohen has pointed out, effective armour was costly and to raise a force of armed knights was difficult considering the contributions of struggling fiefs (2002: 13). To stand a chance of becoming part of the royal retinue, meant that a warrior was required to have the means to arms to begin with and this meant that knights would mostly be restricted to the wealthier classes.

The Schelmensage also contains evidence for this theme. In the twelfth century the offices of hangman and knight were both violent ones, with knights considered honourable, hangmen dishonourable. A desire for upward mobility, which drove the rebellious force amongst the aristocracy, is shown in reverse here, reflected in the hangman’s desire to change from a dishonourable profession for all the benefits of an honourable one.

In the imperial household, with its need to administer and defend the fisc scattered throughout Germany, the four curial titles [seneschal, marshal, chamberlain and standard-bearer] were multiplied by enfeoffment to more than one family of ministeriales, on a regional basis (Arnold, 1985: 86).

10. The spirit of enterprise
Some ministeriales who proved their talents were given administrative and juridical tasks for their lords often acting in the capacity of judges, commissioners and arbitrators for their vassals, or for the Church (Arnold, 1985: 193). Some of these ministeriales may have been recruited out of the servant class as their work attested to
the loyalty of their lords. The problem developed of how to keep them under control (Arnold, 1985: 174). With their familiarity in estates, their new rank would allow them to do private business for their lords but also for themselves where it benefited them financially. Duby views this interest of crafty servants of any stature making themselves indispensable in order to climb to higher social statuses:

...an attempt to enter the seigneurial class was no unusual venture for the lowly-born....This dynamism, the hope of social advancement that could be pursued far by those endowed with the spirit of enterprise, often took the form of steadily increasing the pressure of banal lordship: - the ministeriales of princes and great lords themselves arranged the fiscal system from which they were first to benefit. (Duby, 1974: 229)

Such a shift in status was a huge contrast for the working class, who made up the vast majority of the German population of that time, whose lives of manual labour meant they were not of “free” status. In a feudal society to lords (clerics and knights) “it seemed scandalous, if not sinful, that a worker might haul himself up from his station in life to the point of sharing in the privileges of priests and warriors, of living in idleness thanks to the labour of others“ (Duby, 1974: 169). If this was the case for manual labourers, how much more scandalous must it have been for a hangman to make social change his aim?

As one of the King’s knights, Königsknecht Henricus de Burnheim (Bornheim) had signed his name as the first of nineteen witnesses in a document of 1194 and Clauss (2002: 11) suggests that his relatives may have been included in the other 18 signatories. Among them appears for the first time in writing, a Wernerus, Scelmo. As Clauss has archly noted, Scelmo is not a known office in the King’s retinue. While ministeriales risked condemnation as outlaws, the death penalty, exile and excommunication form the church as reward for their brutal behaviour, a Scelmo was considered many of these things to begin with. In twelfth century Germany the term denotes a potential murderer, a person from a dishonourable class (2002: 10-12). His profession required him to live on the fringes of society, and the forest was his home.

11. The Greenwood
In medieval legends such as King Arthur and his knights “the Greenwood was a dangerous no-man’s land” whereas for outlaw Robin Hood it was sanctuary (Keen.
In the middle ages, the forest included areas which were wooded, others which were cultivated and still others set up for keeping game for the pleasure of the royal hunt (Keen, 1987: 2) (Porteous, 1996: 35). These royal forests may have been sites of pagan ritual which kings eventually made a claim to, and withdrew the wood from use by people as a holy site (Porteous, 1996: 35). There were specific laws, which governed these wooded areas, complete with forest courts where harsh justice was meted out to transgressors (Keen, 1987: 140).

The Latin proverb of the middle ages, *Aures sunt nemoris, oculi campestribus oris* suggests that the field has eyes, the forest has ears (Porteous, 1996: 12). This would make German forests seem like a blissfully quiet place where the leaves do all the whispering to someone seeking solitude. Clauss has pointed out that knights in Bergen would have secured the high and low roads, which led through and around thickly forested areas (Clauss, 2002: 10-11). It required policing, and the honourable office of the *forestarii* was delegated to the King's *ministeriales*. But more importantly, the forest of the middle ages was policed because it was populated with people who formed part of an intricate network that observed any rustle of its greenery; knowledge of who passed through the forest gave them a chance to fight back against the society that had shunned them. Robin Hood and King John never actually met in the forest, unlike Barbarossa and the hangman. (Keen, 1987: 3). With good reason. In the middle ages forests were full of wild men, hangmen and *kocheme*. It was a medieval German underworld society complete with its own hierarchy.

12. Hangmen
Richard Evans defines the German underworld from the middle ages onwards, as a place filled with outcasts whose choice of trade, profession, lifestyle or societal force resulted in them forfeiting their place in society (1988: 1). Evans identifies three discernible groups of people who lived there. First were the vagrants and itinerants, “made up of demobilised soldiers, mercenaries, itinerant entertainers, tinkers, knife grinders, pedlars and other wanderers whose living was precarious bound to no particular fixed point” (1988: 2). It also included those who lived there so as to evade the law.

The second group included stigmatised and thus ignored people, such as gypsies, Jews; *unehrliche Leute*, dishonourable people and it comprised:
...skinners, knackers and tanners, hangmen and executioners, charcoal-burners, prostitutes, shepherds, molecatchers, people whose trade brought them into contact with polluting animals, whose job was particularly dirty, smelly or despised, or who lived much of their lives alone, in the wild, away from the centres of human habitation. (Evans, 1988:2)

In medieval Germany the hierarchy of the Schelmensippe or family of the dishonourable started with the Schelm as the lowest rung on the ladder. They were known as abdecker (one who covers up) or schinder (skinner or flayer) because of their trade in flaying the skin of animals - for profit and in processing and burying dead animals, also corpses of suicides and plague deaths (Knobloch, 1921: 34). Hangmen or henker were often recruited from the ranks of these Schelme. They started out as a hangman’s assistant (termed a halbmeister or half master) and as such they would have to learn the art of torture, and assist at hangings and beheadings (Knobloch, 1921: 34-5).

A hangman would be responsible for the successful torture as directed by the Master Executioner or scharfrichter. The hangman would be expected to carry his duty out, with the help of his assistant or the Schelme. The Master Executioner, belonged to the rank of honourable tradesman.

Knobloch notes however that while these distinctions might have been made, often the master executioner did the work of the hangman and the Schelme and so, often the hangman would do the beheading, or the Schelme could be called on to apply torture depending on who was available in terms of the Court’s geography (Knobloch, 1921: 34-5).

The word hangman, could designate the professional executioner who carried out all death sentences; death by hanging from the neck was considered the most dishonourable and defiling death, beheading by the sword an honourable or clean one. Authors on the subject ascribe the source of aversion to touching the hangman, to the sacral nature of the early death penalties in Germany, where a planned ritual involved a reconciliatory sacrifice to an affronted deity. Contact with the person who carried out the actual sacrificial killing was therefore taboo. Professional hangmen wore gloves at executions, which became symbolic of this necessary distance. In the case of
the Schelme, the distance was more for reasons of the physical proximity with rotting flesh, and the dead.

Their profession was financially rewarded but they were not sought out by society for their company. In life, physical contact with all *unehrliche Leute* implied being infected with the same stigma and this continued with their death: dishonourable people were buried separately from ordinary people (Evans, 1988: 2). Hangmen and their families had to wear bright clothing, which gave those near them fair warning of their presence. They were denied some civilian rights, and this extended to not be able to receive Holy Communion in church.

As growing urban areas used harsher penalties to control crimes, the office of professional hangman was established. The first recorded professional practiced in Augsburg circa 1276 (Schuhmann, 1978: 75; Pies, 2002: 35). A hangman assisted with or inflicted tortures, and his professionalism extended to ensuring that an execution would succeed in a quick “clean” death. A failed execution could cost a hangman his own life (Schuhmann, 1978: 76).

Other tasks depended on his location. He could be an official brothel keeper, be requested to forcibly remove unwanted lepers from villages, and be expected to work at night. He could be called on to break bones and flay the skin of animals and humans which is why he is often known as a knacker or flayer; he was called to remove and dispose of human and animal dead and was the only person to bury suicide corpses. Despite dishonourable status, some hangmen were consulted for their skill as healers and herbalists, their knowledge enabling them to make powerful medicines. They were known to be called on to assist in difficult childbirth, perform surgery on humans, treat and heal animals, and act as psychologist/psychiatrist (Schuhmann, 1978: 76), as can be seen from a German record dating from 1722:

> Payment to executioner Master David Knapp for the healing of broken leg bones, of 15 Reichsthaler. (Pies: 2002: 70)

The late-medieval doctor, Paracelsus (1493-1541) admitted that he gained much of his medicinal knowledge from executioners, amongst others (Pies, 2002: 40).
A hangman was also seen as a magician, familiar with secret arts, which had the effect of either further isolation or requests for limbs of the dead and sections of ropes used in executions, as the latter were desirable amulets for a few people.

In his own view, the hangman perceived his profession as honourable, and his male children often inherited his profession, although even those who didn’t were considered dishonourable. Certain German laws of 1731 and 1772 declared those children who did not take on this family execution business, declared “honourable” (Schuhmann, 1978: 76).

13. Kocheme
The third group in the underworld was made up of “professional criminals, bandits [outlaws] and robbers, thieves and murderers [who] possessed a well-developed social consciousness of their own” (Evans, 1988: 2). This is borne out by their exclusive language known as Rotwelsch, a collection of expressions definitive of the people who populated the underworld (Danker, 1988: 98). The word first appeared in a German liturgy in 1250, as an afeared word connoting underworld deviancy (Girtler, 1998: 20), which even if recorded only then, must have been spoken for as long as underworld deviancy existed (Oppenheimer, 1972: ix). The first Liber Vagatorum appeared in 1509/10 in Augsburg, and its hierarchies of underworld sub-culture became so popular that eighteen editions were published before Martin Luther wrote a preface to it in 1528 (Oppenheimer, 1972: ix).

They categorised the world into the Wittstöcke (or Wittische), the straight person of society: “someone who is neither willing nor able to learn the language of thieves, a stupid individual” (Danker, 1988: 98) and the Kocheme, bent person of society who on the other hand was an “artful, crafty and intelligent man, a member of the thieving profession” (Danker, 1988: 98). By 1755 this Rotwelsch had recorded up to 200 expressions known to the underworld groups, along with routes and paths (known as kocheme streets) intersecting over the German countryside, both marking the boundary between outlaws and the rest of society, from whom they expected no mercy. Girtler notes that apart from the 28 chapters or categories of deviant people, there are other languages specifically relating to executioners and their trades one of which was Schindersprache (Girtler, 1998: 13).
As outlaws, thieves and murderers, no mercy was expected to be given, either (Danker, 1988: 99). They considered themselves above the law.

To be an outlaw in the middle ages meant being an individual who had been put outside the law’s protection by the King and his courts (Keen, 1987: 9). By legal definition, an outlaw was also known as civilly dead (civiliter mortuus) and so the murder of an outlaw was not considered a crime (Keen, 1987: 10). As an outlaw was denied inherited rights he descended in rank to that of a hunted animal. Keen explains; “Indeed, the price upon his head was originally as that upon a wolf; whence it was said...that an outlaw ‘had a wolf’s head’” (1987: 9).

Traditional outlaw stories or ballads with figures such as William Wallace and Robin Hood feature poetic justice as their subject (Keen, 1987: 131). As is also implied in the hangman’s actions across all versions of the Schelmensage, some kind of tyranny or injustice in an existing order is challenged with the intent of arighting the situation. Babcock-Abrahams points out that unlike a trickster, a social bandit “is a real person who operates in a real situation, combating the oppression of authority to protect the existence of a peasant group - a person whose antinomian behavior is a necessity rather than a whim” (1975: 151). This necessity is summed up in the Ballad maker’s adieu to English outlaw Robin Hood:

Cryst have mercy on his soule/That dyed on the rode;
For he was a good outlaw./And dyd pore men much good.
(Keen, 1987: 214)

While medieval hangmen were on the rode literally and figuratively, the Schelm acts more on a personal whim: to get out of this dishonourable profession just once, for the fun of it at the emperor’s expense. This does not imply that social banditry cannot be a part of certain trickster activity - it may be a role in a trickster’s repertoire. There are also documented cases in the later medieval period which show that hangmen became bandits - and were hanged for it (Knobloch, 1921: 34).

The hangman shares with outlaws the motivation of obtaining personal justice. The Schelm uses his ability to risk and set traps - with humour, as the remedy for his dilemma. One of the tricks he holds in common with outlaws is to disguise himself.
Hereward the Wake disguised himself as a potter and then went to spy on his enemies, who admitted him unknowingly in that garb. Of particular importance here is the theme of disguise in the form of what the desired change was (Keen, 1987: 131). In the hangman’s case (in oral history version five), it meant disguising himself as a knight and gate crashing the emperor’s masked ball, to experience some sense of justice from having tricked the court into believing he was in fact a knight, not a hangman and having all those nobles be unwittingly in physical proximity of him.

All these elements of a German underworld, its benefits for the hangman and its potential threat to the emperor, are brought together in the following version of the Schelmensage:

The emperor was traveling to Würzburg and had stopped on his way, at his palace in Gelnhausen. Three men, namely the forester, the hangman and his son/assistant, told him that his enemies were in the forest and were plotting to kill the emperor on his travel through the forest the next day. The emperor sent a wagon with a dummy of himself on it, which was followed by the three men. The enemies pounced on it and the three men circled it, captured the enemies and brought them to the castle. The emperor knighted the three men. The forester was knighted Forstmeister zu Gelnhausen. The hangman was knighted Schelm of Bergen and his assistant von Schleifras - meaning rope, or hangman’s noose; and he took the hangman’s bloodied axe and rope as symbols in his coat of arms. (Oral history version 4)

This version confirms Evans’ classification of the hangman as one of the group of dishonourable men who lived in the forest. The underworld network’s knowledge of the emperor’s traveling plans, (with the resultant coup against him) are the realistic “ears of the forest”. It also shows how hangman, his son and the forester step out of the dishonourable category. They are elevated to knighthood - made honourable.

14. Entering the narrative mode: becoming a Schelm

The application here of the three features of Ricoeur’s thesis of mimesis; reveals that the world of action, the conceptual networks grounded in the reality that was Germany in the twelfth century, an expanding country which encouraged the notion that one’s socio-economic condition within that structure, could be changed for the better. The desire to own stone buildings and the land they stood on, for generations to come, is one example of a symbolic cultural practice, and can be found in this instance in the
ideals within the range from wild man, through to hangman and knights, and it is mediated to us through the *Schelmensage*. This drive for personal transformation can be seen in the practices of the different social classes, which have been described here. Across all its versions, the *Schelmensage* shows different cultural possibilities that made up medieval life.

Ricoeur's idea that to measure time calls for a story has been shown through the temporal elements of the *Schelmensage*, which are revealed when we understand the passage of time, the movement between being a hangman and becoming a knight, by hearing about the lives of hangmen, outlaws, knights and emperors and what it meant to live out those different existences.

This chapter has described the historical context that allows for the actions of a trickster. For the process to move between this world of action (mimesis₁) to a pivotal point of transformation (mimesis₂) an emperor and a hangman had to encounter each other. These encounters were considered dangerous as Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali, the twelfth century Muslim theologian cautioned:

> Know that you can have three sorts of relations with princes, governors, and oppressors. The first and worst is that you visit them, the second and the better is that they visit you, and the third and surest that you stay far from them, so that neither you see them nor they see you. (Casanova, 1994: 48)

A medieval hangman would have had little cause to visit his emperor, except in the latter's defence, as we have seen in this chapter. An emperor in the twelfth century would not have chosen to consort with hangmen. Their offices were at extreme ends of the medieval hierarchy and so it would help them both to stay as far away from each other as possible.

But according to the legend an emperor got lost in his own royal forest domain, an underworld of its own, and he and the hangman happened upon each other. As we cannot know the actuality of what happened at this meeting, the story which results in knighting the hangman with the title *scelmo*, opens the break for fiction. This transformation hinges on the porous moment, the opening in the aporia, a moment which must be seized, the moment when nobody else is conscious of the trickery enacted.
From this chapter, the initiating context of action now enters a narrative mode. From a practical understanding it moves to a narrative mode which means to extract a configuration from the succession of events, displayed in this chapter as historical processes. This Ricoeur terms this configurative process, emplotment. It reveals to the reader the *Schelmensage*'s capacity to be followed, not necessarily in a linear way, but rather an understanding, which is outside measured time, but within the confines of how we understand our temporality, our existence. We make sense of what it means to suffer, and decide to liberate ourselves from it.

The configuration of the legend (mimesis₂) as trickster myth is exemplified in its hero, the *Schelm*, who holds within him the *figurae* which makes the configuration possible. The configurative act here requires al-Ghazzali’s worst possible option. The *scelmo* must risk the visit to his employer. His prince; his governor; his oppressor. His Emperor.
6. Forest road in Enkheim
Chapter Three
The God of the crossroads
the figurae of configuration

All tricksters are “on the road”. They are the lords of in-between...he is the spirit of
the doorway leading out, and of the crossroad at the edge of town (the one where a
little market springs up). He is the spirit of the road at dusk, the one that runs from one
town to another and belongs to neither. There are strangers on that road, and thieves,
and in the underbrush a sly beast whose stomach has not heard about your letters of
safe passage.
(Hyde, 1998: 6)

These cosmic jokers have the important task of staking a claim for the freedom of the
human spirit. They work for the right of humanity to assume the godlike role of
remaking the world even if the attempt on behalf of humanity involves a tendency
towards ludicrous and sometimes disastrous results. (Willis, 1993: 28-29)

Schelm m. [from the] Finn[ish] root kalma ‘death, grave’, Schalme in middle high
German meaning, ‘death, plague, corpse, disease, rot’ (Kluge, 1956: 642)

1. Fertile ground: in-between official and hidden transcripts

Otto of Freising, Frederick Barbarossa’s uncle and a chronicler of his early reign,
presented his nephew in “a totally secular optimistic light” (Bäumel, 1969: 106) as the
following portrait shows. Inscribing the deeds of Frederick, the Gesta Friderici, Otto
noted that Frederick

[has a] sturdy and equal gait, [a] clear voice and a masculine stature. Through
this corporeal evidence, when sitting and standing, his worthiness and
authority can be clearly seen. (Rahewin, et al, 1965: 709)

Otto of Freising must have imagined that the Gesta would be trusted by posterity to be
an actual reflection of what Frederick appeared to “be”. But the Gesta’s modern
editors point out that the avuncular flattery was in fact copied word for word from
Charlemagne’s biography (the Vita Karoli Magni) as recorded by his biographer
Einhard (Rahewin, et al, 1965: 709). It is an example of an official document as public
transcript which reflects the “self-portrait of dominant elites as they would have
themselves seen” (Scott, 1990: 18; original italicised). Barbarossa is made more
powerful by being imbued with the legacy of Charlemagne, a standard he still has to
live up to.
Nowhere is this essence of the public transcript conveyed further than in the
description of the most important of public, formal ceremonies which are organised to
reflect the power of the dominant elite (Scott, 1990: 58), the emperor’s crowning. Otto
of Freising’s record of the symbolic spectacle, describes not the pomp and ceremony
which one might expect to be enchanted with. He wrote, rather, “I believe that I
should also not omit the following” of the unexpected event which serves as a
description of the tone of his nephew’s rule: under no circumstances is any subject to
challenge his royal authority.

In Aachen in the church of Charles the Great (Charlemagne), Frederick the
First, (Barbarossa) had just been anointed with holy unction, and crowned
King of Germany, when one of his servants, whom the King had banished
from his favour, threw himself at the feet of the newly crowned King, in the
hope that he would grant him mercy due to the festive celebration. (Rahewin et

The King, marks Otto, showed his strength and will to all present by refusing to grant
any kind of respite whatsoever and reports that there were compliments from other
notables at the ceremony about the young king’s fortitude in the matter (Rahewin et

When circumstances for challenge are not allowed, the trickster creates new spaces.
When Royalty and their retinue take themselves this seriously, as Hynes and Doty
warn, they create fertile ground for a trickster to appear (1993: 4).

One fine day, the hangman decided to attend the masked ball. Every year
Emperor Barbarossa held this ball in Frankfurt after the royal hunt in the
Dreieich forest. It was rather an exceptional thing for an outlaw like the
hangman to do: he was feared by everybody. It was believed that if you
touched him you would have to die. Because of this the hangman couldn’t
really be seen in public except at the court and the gallows. However, he knew
that if he went to the ball he could hide himself behind a mask. So he put on a
mask which nobody would recognise him in and went to the ball. As he
entered the great hall he placed himself discreetly against the wall, because the
glitter of the light and the music, bewildered him.

He must have been a big good looking man, because the Empress noticed him
immediately. He couldn’t possibly have been an old man - otherwise he
would’ve had a hunched over back and wouldn’t have been able to dance. She
sent a page over to him and had him come to her throne. The page brought the
hangman to her, and he bowed before her and kept silent. The queen
encouraged him to dance with her. The musicians played a particularly pretty
melody and they danced together. As the dance ended the hangman wanted to
return the queen to her throne, but she insisted on dancing further with him.
And they danced and danced and didn’t stop dancing until it was midnight.
That was the hour when all masks had to be removed. The hangman had tried a while before this to leave the queen, but she had insisted on dancing with him.

Now it was too late. He had forfeited his life. The two of them stood in the middle of the great hall, the Empress enchanted with the sight of the hangman's face, while all the others in the hall shrieked "the hangman!" This word was enough to make all the others flee; but not the Empress.

Finally, the Emperor noticed that his wife was standing in the middle of the hall with a good looking young man, whom the people were calling the hangman, but whom she was staring at, enraptured. For the Emperor it was clear that the hangman had to die. He spoke with a powerful voice. "You hangman, you have dishonoured the Empress, now you must hang." The Empress turned pale at his words and fell on her knees before the emperor and asked for the life of the hangman. The Emperor could not refuse the wish of the Empress and knighted the hangman saying, "I hereby knight you, and you shall be called the Rogue of Bergen. I will give you tenure of my own castle in Bergen. You will also be a welcome guest at my imperial palace in Gelnhausen. You may choose your own coat of Arms."

The Knight, Rogue of Bergen chose two bloodied ribs on a silver background, as the coat of arms for himself and his shield. (Narrative 5)

2. Speaking truth to power
When a trickster speaks truth to power and creates transformation it is not done in clear, pretty or neat language, as this story shows. His mere presence intends to cause strife and confusion. This unofficial account, written and told by a host of anonymous and known authors, of a state employee with the most "dishonorable" of livelihoods finds its source in storytelling; in this case - legend, which originates from the popular imagination. Legend reveals detail which officialdom conceals, "what it was that men really believed in and what they really desired" (Keen, 1987: 7). Barbarossa was under great pressure to keep the German princes and their knights under his control. Their support was essential for the success of the empire's crusading expansion to the east and this in part, built up the feudal system of fealty - reciprocal service and loyalty paid for by royal coin. The written public transcript, shows the emperor masked, dressed up in authority and control; this "practice of domination, ...creates the hidden transcript" (Scott, 1990: 27). The Schelmensage becomes the hidden transcript which declares itself by mocking Barbarossa's authority and control and speaks a social truth to his power. Through the hangman masking himself and venturing onto the emperor's territory, the emperor is unmasked.
The repetition of the *Schelmensage* reveals what its tellers really believed about the force of Barbarossa’s power, and what his servants really desired: to be treated fairly, and to be given mercy. The opening lines of the *Schelmensage* as related to me by my mother begin: “One fine day” which I read as meaning - “I’ve had enough; had it up to here (drawing line at forehead level). This is the day when the status quo changes and I don’t care what I have to do to make it happen”.

Bergen-Enkheim historian Gerhard Clauss notes, that hangman, *Sceismo*, was not a known office in Barbarossa’s royal retinue (1999: 2). In considering how he will effect this change, the hangman mediates between the extremes of his trade and the status of knighthood, which he is not a member of. The hangman must disguise himself as if he were a knight. This world of the as if joins two unlikely extremes and creates a new understanding as a result of the connection. Hynes sees the staff or rod which the Greek trickster Hermes carries, as “a divine connector” between two or more fields (1993: 50-51), and the *Schelm* can be seen as playing that connector role.

### 3. The divine connector
The purpose of this chapter is to show how the nature of the event that the *Schelmensage* retells, holds the potential to be a trickster myth. Myth has been defined in this thesis as a message with transformative potential. Using the emplotment phase of the mimetic arc, the work of metaphor is considered as the configurative act. As the *Schelm* tricks himself out of his miserable situation, Ricoeur’s mimesis theoryises that action is mythic metaphor for transformation. Some examples of tricksters in different world cultures are discussed, and the genre in German literature will be contextualised. In order for a trickster to survive, he has to be able to adapt to different situations. In Hyde’s terms, he must have a “repertoire of ways” (1998: 42-43). In defining the *Schelm*, three different figurae of tricksterhood are considered in the form of wild man, hangman and trickster which enable the quick witted moment of configuration. These are interspersed with mythical and my own trickster experiences, which dialogue with the figurae. In essence, “If we laugh at him, he grins at us. What happens to him happens to us” (Radin, 1956: 169) is the configurative, mimetic act.
4. Mimesis: making metaphors from the configurative act

Ricoeur noted that a story contains something which actually happens to someone in order for it to be told to someone else. “To follow a story is to re-actualize the act of configuration...” (Ricoeur, 1986: 127). Even an imagined story, will concern an action or event which has been processed by the person imagining it. As when we dream, we are only able to report what we have dreamt, once we have stopped dreaming; and so the very re-telling or replication of that dream - becomes an interpretation of the original.

In all the versions of the *Schelmenstage*, this configurative act, happens when the hangman accidentally meets the emperor and the interaction’s consequences - whether it’s on the road or at the masked ball; the story is thus the result of the nature of the interaction between them, which contributes to the progress of the *Schelmenstage* as a mythological example.

The chapter on Germany’s world of action gave the symbolic processes at work and a view of the internal worlds of hangman and emperor. I sketched that world with the purpose of understanding what standpoints these two characters came from and why they would have such a powerful effect on each other. Meiners noted that depending where *Schelm* originates from, his attack is at the opposite end of the scale (1969: 124). Making connections between disparate fields is the work of metaphor. Hynes elucidates:

> The work of metaphor is the work of making connections between two or more fields, or as one might suggest in classical terms, it is the sphere of the erotic, since eros was primarily a matter of how people were drawn to one another (and not just the matter of genital sexuality that “the erotic” has become). (1993: 50-51; original italicised)

Two more unlike characters from opposite ends of medieval society one could not hope to find. Ricoeur said elsewhere that within

> the story in life lies what one could call the pre-narrative quality of human experience. Thanks to it we have the right to speak of life as of an incipient story, and thus of life as an activity and a desire in search of a narrative. (1986: 129; original italicised)

The process that was the hangman’s life (Ricoeur’s pre-narrative quality explanation) was the sense of suffering (life as an activity), which got the hangman in search of a narrator who could create a fiction which would change that life (the desire in search of narrative). “Action is in search of narrative” (Ricoeur, 1984: 75). For the hangman
to change his life, he must project a new horizon for himself, a universe different to
the one he has lived in up until his meeting with the emperor.

In the accidental meeting, the hangman has to seize the moment of tricksterish
opportunity which has revealed itself to him, has to decide in a flash which aspects he
will manipulate, and in so doing become a trickster himself - for a moment. The point
of configuration is the metaphorical spark, the ‘erotic’ attraction between these two
opposites, that allows for the break for fiction, the newly interpreted life that may
follow the interaction.

The hangman, with his experience of suffering in a dishonourable professional role, is
drawn to the honourable emperor through his experiments with moment of the “as if”:
“what if I behaved as if I was...” - a saviour (in the forest versions) or a deceiver? (a
knight in the masked ball version). The same could be said of the emperor’s part:
“what if I behaved as if I wasn’t the emperor, but a helpless beggar, and ask this man
for some water?”.

When the hangman mimics something he is not - the fiction of pretending to be a
knight for example, it helps to make his life more bearable, more human. The humour
of making the emperor look a fool in his own royal forest, is a story to repeat for the
satisfaction alone - for a long time to come. These examples illustrate the hangman’s
capacity for risking over his head and entering the intrigue of acting like a trickster.

The private thoughts of the hangman concerning what is at stake in risking some fun-
through his feelings for the unattainable empress which got him to appear at the royal
masked ball - are expressed best in Conrad Weil’s Der Schelm von Bergen, Act Three,
Scene Two in the ballroom:

Hangman: [Appears on stage from the left, dressed in a green doublet, topped
by a hat with a tuft of heron’s feathers; red hose, yellow shoes, a sword
hanging from his belt.] [i.e. knight’s garb]
Well, here I am, following the prompting of my heart. Where is [the empress]?
Ah, there with her ladies. Is this not an outrageous venture? Oh, God, what
trouble I’m in, driven by my foolish heart! I’m leaving! [Laughing bitterly] Go
to a whore, hangman!! [He turns and hesitates]. (1952)

As the lives of hangman and emperor are enriched by their interaction, the story will
provide a metaphorical possibility in the lives of those who hear these events storied.
For a similar moment of configuration to happen within another, the trickster moment
Emplotment: the lord of in-between

In Ricoeur’s mimetic arc the configurative stage is at the midpoint, the process of emplotment, named mimesis₂. This mid-point is defined as emplotment because, like the trickster who can delve between and make sense of events in two different worlds, it “mediates between individual incidents and story as a whole” and “because of its contribution to the development of the plot” (Ricoeur, 1984: 65). Mimesis₂ is the moment where one meets the trickster, as Hyde put it, “on the road” (1998: 6). The hangman literally had duties which bound him physically to know the roads, the towns they led from and to. Psychically, as professional executioner and sometime healer, intimate with death and healing, he fits Hyde’s profile of “lord of in-between” (1998: 6).

Emploting the Schelmensage means a writer or teller must make a synthesis of the stages of the nature of the interaction in the forest, showing that it meant more than an uncomplicated occurrence. Emplotement thus contributes to the progress of the story in relation to the story’s beginning and end (Ricoeur, 1986: 122). Like emplotment the hangman as trickster is in a stage of being in-between: from this vantage point, looking back means observing the reality of the difficult life; looking forward, the future looks improbable, but beckoning with a possibilities and thus worth risking for.

The plot must unify the events in such a way that it gives us a followable succession of events (the hangman is on his cart, the emperor is lost, then they meet on the road, then the emperor asks for him water, then...) and also a “configurational outline” (Ricoeur, 1986: 122) (the hangman tricked the emperor by pretending to be somebody he wasn’t). Narration must organise it into a story, “an intelligible whole” (Ricoeur, 1986: 122).

Doniger motivates that a myth says something that

- can only be said in a story....myth is persuasive to us because the action itself is persuasive....when the event is described in detail, as something that happened, we can see it happening, and so it enlarges our sense of what might be possible. Only a story can do this. (1988: 27-28; original italicised)

When the receiver claims the metaphor of the hangman’s tricksterish action for their own life, and a changed life results, then the story functions as a transformative myth.
The imagined world is the one which wins the better life. Maybe it is this which allowed Brecht to state with such certainty, that the imagination is the only truth.

I have argued that the Schelm is a divine connector, a trickster. Yet I wish to take up Lewis Hyde’s crucial point that people cannot be trickster gods: it is not possible for us to be archetypes. Rather, “there are moments when the practice of art and this myth coincide” (1998: 14). The Schelmensage is one of those moments, of countless trickster myths, in the world.

6. The quality of cunning

The English word trickster first appeared in the eighteenth century, as a term for a person who deceives or cheats, which is now used to denote figures in literature (Hynes and Doty, 1993: 14). Hyde claims Franz Boas’s 1898 introduction to James Teit’s Traditions of the Thompson River Indians is where the term first appears in anthropology (1998: 355).

From trickster stories it is clear that deceiving and cheating are only one side of what the trickster is capable of. One of the reasons it is hard to pin down definitions, terms and qualities of the trickster is due to the fact that tricksterish events “(and often their humor) are specific to and determined by that culture and that moment in history” (Babeock-Abrahams, 1975: 151). The following is a sample of tricksters in different cultures.

6.1 A gallery of rogues

In Greece, Hermes tricks the gods into giving him a place in the pantheon (Hyde, 1998: 318-331); Baubo, with nipples for seeing and vaginal lips for speaking, jokes Demeter back into giving fertility back to the earth (Estés, 1992: 336). The Yoruba of West Africa say the trickster Eshu turns feces into treasure (Hyde, 1998: 27). The Scandanavian prose Eddas relate how Odin entices serfs mowing hay to buy his honing stone - and after throwing it in the air for them to catch it they end up cutting each others’ throats with their scythes, to his great pleasure (Young, 1954: 101). From twentieth century Hasidic Judaism, we learn how Herschel Osterpoler tricks his wife into parting with her money to buy a new coat for himself. In Spain, Lazarillo of Tormes is one of the figures who inspires the literary trickster genre Picaro - the Spanish word for villain or rogue. In India, the baby Krishna steals butter from the pantry store and reproaches his mother’s accusations of theft by saying it is not
possible to steal one’s own belongings (Hyde, 1998: 71). The Japanese Susa-no-o smashes sacred taboos by dropping the body of a dead pony into a room of his heavenly sister, where divine garments are being woven (Ellwood, 1993: 144-145). In England, Shakespeare’s play Twelfth Night has Feste the court fool as professional entertainer, dressed in brightly checked fabrics, describing himself as “Olivia’s corrupter of words” (Novelli, 1998: 186).

Episodes in Radin’s anthropological record of the North American Winnebago Wakdjunkaga trickster cycle amplify a meaning of “trickster”:

25. Trees mislead Trickster in finding water.
26. Trickster mistakes plums reflected in water for plums on tree.
27. Mothers seek plums while Trickster eats children.
28. Skunk persuaded by Trickster to dig hole through hill.
29. Mothers lured in hole by Trickster and eaten. (1956: 355)

In Western Christian theology, Cox contemplates Jesus Christ as a jester:

Like the jester, Christ defies custom and scorns crowned heads. Like a wandering troubador he has no place to lay his head. Like the clown in the circus parade, he satirizes authority by riding into town replete with regal pageantry when he has no earthly power. Like a minstrel he frequents dinners and parties. At the end he is costumed by his enemies in a mocking caricature of royal paraphernalia. He is crucified amidst sniggers and taunts with a sign over his head that lampoons his laughable claim. (1969: 140)

Some of these glimpses into trickster mythology may have made you as reader, smile, even if you weren’t familiar with the social or historical context of the examples. In the context of Germany’s tricksters, the Schelmensage has to date not been presented or analysed as a trickster myth. A brief description of some of Germany’s literary tricksters shows, however, the opportunities, the mythological moment, for the trickster to appear.

Willis summarises the task of tricksters who assume the godlike role of creation:

These cosmic jokers have the important task of staking a claim for the freedom of the human spirit. They work for the right of humanity to assume the godlike role of remaking the world even if the attempt on behalf of humanity involves a tendency towards ludicrous and sometimes disastrous results. (1993: 28-29)

Arendt motivates that the Picaro is a child of his time but will rise again on countless occasions in the next generation, to play (1974: 12).
6.2 Assuming the godlike role

One of the offices in Germany’s sacred past is that of the *Scop/Sceop/Scof*. These words have connections with both modern English *shape* and *scoff* and the German *schöpf* - to create. The old Norse form of the word is *skop* and “seems to refer to mocking or railing” (Bauschatz, 1982: 215). Werlich’s research has found the *Scop*’s origin in the Germanic invasions (circa 300 BCE to about 1100 CE), where he was the poet and priest who ritually sacrificed, played the lyre (like the trickster god Hermes), and sang and danced at cultic ritual (Werlich, 1964: 318). The acceptance of Christianity would reduce these cultic activities, into a *Scop* who was singer, poet and entertainer whose improvisatory skill and the challenger of his ruler’s current practices made him invaluable to German chieftains and later to royalty (Bauschatz, 1982: 215-6). Implicit in the *Sceop* and the German *schöpf* is the present day South African Afrikaans derived from the verb *skep* - to create, *skepsel* means creature, as in “low life form” when used to derogatorily describe a person. In the first chapter of this thesis, I described how my nanny used this word to describe the men in her lounge and led to an understanding of the word *skelm*.

The godlike qualities of the Germanic *Scop* are recreated in language. Deriving from the Germanic, Afrikaans contains, spells and uses the verb *skop* meaning to kick, (as in the colourfully critical put down, “he deserves a kick up the backside”) which preserves this Germanic intent.

6.3 The Feast of Fools

There was a precedent for the nature of upstartish behaviour in twelfth century Germany. Cox believes that the Feast of Fools flourished all over medieval Europe as a holiday because it was celebrated “during a period when people had a well-developed capacity for festivity and fantasy” (1969: 3&161):

On that colorful occasion, usually celebrated about January first, even ordinarly pious priests and serious townsfolk donned bawdy masks, sang outrageous ditties, and generally kept the whole world awake with revelry and satire. Minor clerics painted their faces, strutted about in the robes of their superiors, and mocked the stately rituals of church and court. (1969: 161)

By the end of the twelfth century it was an event in which the church was literally overrun by “worshippers” who burnt old leather shoes instead of incense, and brayed a mass which responded to the priests in the donkeyspeak of ”hin han, hin han” (Jung, 1956: 196). As can be imagined, “the Feast of Fools was never popular with the
higher-ups" (Cox, 1969: 161). Bakhtin relates, it was at these times that clowns and fools turned the feudal world upside down by mimicking royal rituals such as “the tribute rendered to the victors at tournaments, the transfer of feudal rights, or the initiation of a knight” (1968: 5) the theme which was of supreme importance for feudal twelfth century Germany, is discussed elsewhere in this thesis. The Schelmensage, which assumes the godlike trickster role as described in all its versions, deals with such an “upside down” initiation of a knight in the hope for the freedom of the human spirit which is shown to be up against the laws of hierarchy.

6.4 Dialogues with tricksters and rascals

Hoffmeister (1987) finds the origins of the modern German Schelmen novel in the dialogue between Salomonis et Marcolphi in the late 12th century. The name Marcolf is interchangeable with Saturn, both having origins in trickster. In this text, King Solomon is pitted against the peasant Marcolf in a discussion. The dialogue is often presented as a battle of wits, parodying humour or as an exchange of proverbs (Hoffmeister, 1987: 10). Hoffmeister adds that this was a popular story across Europe at that time. The peasant Marcolf assumes trickster possibilities. The following ninth century Anglo-Saxon excerpt replaces Marcolf with Saturn (Branstone, 1957: 96).

> Once there lived a man/who was Mercury called;/he was vastly deceitful/and cunning in his deeds,/he loved well to steal/and all lying tricks;/the heathens had made him/the highest of their gods,/and at the cross-roads/they offered him booty/and to the high hills brought him victims to slay./This god was most honoured/among all the heathen;/his name when translated/to Danish is Odinn. (Branstone, 1957: 96).

Considering the figurae facets that make up the Schelm, the passage quoted here literally sets the mythic context for the Schelmensage to have the effect on its German audience: a Schelm, as we shall see, is the one on intimate terms with the slain victims of the god. A cause for shuddering at the thought of his name.

In 13th century Germany we find the development of the jest-book genre, the Schwankbücher. “To judge from the popularity of jest-books, nearly everyone who could read was prepared to laugh at everyone else” (Oppenheimer, 1972: xxv). One example finds the anonymous author Der Stricker’s book of rhymed verse concerning the character Pfaffe Amis [the provost named Amis] who stems from a middle class setting, and hits out at both high and lower classes with his wisdom (Meiners, 1967: 124) “He eschews generalities, pointedly condemns the lords and ridicules courtly
"love" explains Bäumel (1969 p158-9). Oppenheimer explains further how "He shows a delighted interest in sex...and there are also woodcuts [pictures in the book] in which the hero appears in bed with the women he seduces" (1972: xxxvii).

Pfaff Amis' lampooning of the courtly classes shows him in a tricksterly moment, remaking his own world as an attempt to configure it, for Der Stricker's readers of the 13th century.

The same century reveals an animal trickster known in Europe as a folk hero "engendered by the people, even though as an epic figure his origins must be traced to monastic scholarship" (Sands, 1960: 3).

6.5 The trickster as folk hero

According to Sands, Reynard the Fox is undoubtedly on the side of the oppressed. In the epic Reynard the Fox, the theme of tricking oneself out of death on the gallows, will be repeated in other German trickster tales. Episodes 14-16 find the fox arrested and judged to death by hanging, led to the gallows and where he finally gets to showcase his "devastating flair for fake humility" when he makes his open confession to the King and "all them that would hear it", with the result that he escapes the death penalty (Sands, 1960: 3 & 43).

While Reynard the Fox symbolises the trickster's claim for the freedom of the oppressed, there is nothing of this fake humility in another trickster whose aim in life could be summarised as being as being critical of the upper classes while living off them as parasitically as possible (Arendt, 1974: 61). If there is one figure in literature who has come to symbolise the German trickster, it is Till Eulenspiegel.

6.6 A lazy, strong rogue

Eulenspiegel is a character depicted as a seeming country bumpkin who has come to mess with the urban rich (Meiners, 1967: 124). Unlike the knightly ideal of living off the royal coin, or the crumbs from that table, Eulenspiegel uses his privilege as a Schelm, a rogue, to act. As can be seen in his thought processes while loitering around the market place - he holds the mirror for a moment, reflecting a businessman (Arendt, 1974: 20):
“Da gedacht Ulenspiegel, ich bin auch ein fauler starker Schelm, der nit gern werkt, kunnt ich mich auch so leichtlich ernähren als diser, das diente mir ganz wohl.”

Ulenspiegel thought, “I am a lazy strong rogue, who also doesn’t enjoy working and could fill my own belly as easily this man does; that would suit me very well”. (Arendt, 1974: 20; my translation)

Oppenheimer, using Welsford’s definitions, has pointed out that Ulenspiegel’s Schelm like behaviour is more like that of the professional buffoon: an “entertainer willing to heap any absurdity on himself for a meal, but also for mere love of folly” (1974: lxiv). When Ulenspiegel had done some mischief where he was not known, he drew an owl and a mirror, symbolising his name, over the door. His name refers to the Eul or owl which was regarded as the devil’s bird and symbolic of a hero to be feared rather than celebrated. In the same way as the medieval Mirror of the Saxons mirrored daily activities with legal intent, his spiegel or mirror is that of the stupid and the wicked (Oppenheimer, 1974: lxiii). In German his name also translates/implies the “less delicate image of arse-wiping or cleaning” (Oppenheimer, 1974: lxiii) and may also account for the use of the word “shit” in at least fifteen of Ulenspiegel’s tales (Oppenheimer, 1974: lxii).

The use of the word Schelm by Ulenspiegel to characterise himself, in turn adds to the scatological facet of the trickster, one which “tends towards the ludicrous” (1993: 28-29), as in Willis’ definition and which does not make humanity very comfortable because it tends to make us face the unsightly, smelly side of what it means to be human.

I have selected these trickster episodes to illustrate facets which relate to the pre-medieval, early medieval and later medieval contexts, which inform the analysis of the hangman which follows. Whether the characters of these tales existed or not, Arendt claims their right to exist because they personify a consciousness which goes against justice, in societal eyes (1974: 109). In the pictures of the jest-books, in the societal dysfunction of the folk-hero’s actions, they hold up a clear mirror to the faulty party (Arendt, 1974: 109). Born into a different side of life, and as the hangman in the Schelmensage demonstrates, while he is not a revolutionary leader, he holds the potential to start one, in his actions (Arendt, 1974: 109). What follows is an analysis of this potential behaviour.
7. Categorising anomalous behaviour

In her article on the trickster titled *A Tolerated Margin of Mess* Barbara Babcock-Abrahams' purpose is to elucidate the paradox of trickster on a cross-cultural basis. She lists sixteen kinds of interrelated anomalous behaviour linked to the trickster (1975: 159-160). By her definitions the *Schelm* of Bergen qualifies on 13 out of 16 analytic counts, as a trickster.
Table 3. The Schelm of Bergen as trickster

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anomalous behaviour of trickster</th>
<th>Behaviour of Schelm in Schelmensage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“To a greater or lesser degree, tricksters...” (1975: 159)</td>
<td>As hangman, the dishonourable Schelm has freedom of the city but may touch no one; he violates the spatial boundaries by attending a royal function and dancing with royalty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. are independent of and ignore temporal and spatial boundaries;</td>
<td>Schelm lives in forest, mingles with underworld there as well as crowds in the market place (as seen in Weil’s play), and whosoever he meets on the road while travelling between these spaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. tend to inhabit open public spaces (e.g. market places) doorways and thresholds, spaces between society and the other worlds - or underworld (159);</td>
<td>Schelm is involved with “obscenities” within the medieval age - being involved with tortured bodies, dead animals and humans, the hanged and the diseased. The Schelm is not, however, linked to fecal episodes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. are involved in episodes to do with obscenities, especially ones involving feces which may be “creative, destructive or simply amusing” (159);</td>
<td>Schelm tricks his way out of being in a dishonourable profession, transforms his personal life by being knighted for taking his risk, and is remembered in legend as a culture hero, for taking on authority - and winning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. through their deeds and character take on attributes of the Trickster-Transformer-Culture Hero; (159)</td>
<td>Schelm may be considered “abnormal” in that he is born into a profession which brands him less than human. There are no exaggerated sexual characteristics in the Schelm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. may have some mental and/or physical abnormality, especially exaggerated sexual characteristics (159);</td>
<td>The Schelm’s only libidinous display can be found in Weil’s play, expressed in his private feelings which for the empress. There is no possibility for marriage with her, and so the physical intimacy of dancing the night away, is not developed into a procreative possibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. have an excessive libido without necessarily being procreative (159);</td>
<td>The Schelm knows how to disguise himself, make himself ambiguous: he can be hangman, knight, wild man, whenever he chooses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. have an ability to disguise themselves and be ambiguous in form, “single and multiple” (159);</td>
<td>This may be seen in the two different selves the Schelm presents: he knows the physical underworld and acts appropriately there, and he successfully inhabits the world of knighthood at the masked ball. The Schelm is not associated with mirrors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. have a two-fold physical nature, or a double, and may be associated with mirrors (159);</td>
<td>It may be inferred by Weil’s constant reference to the smart clothes the Schelm must get to win the attention of the empress, that the Schelm’s existing clothes are of the motley sort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. “follow the “principle of motley” in dress” (159);</td>
<td>In the Schelmensage the hangman is portrayed as a good looking young man (narrative 5 in particular)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. are of indeterminate age and/or stature and may be portrayed as both young and old (159);</td>
<td>While the Schelm does not overtly display animal characteristics, he is tainted due to the contact he has with corpses, both animal and human.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. may appear as either animal or human, or each of these exhibiting characteristics of the other (159);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Anomalous behaviour of trickster
“To a greater or lesser degree, tricksters...”
(1975: 159)

12. are mostly amoral, anti-social and can be “aggressive, vindictive, vain, defiant of authority” (160);

13. when not having excessive sex, find their most permanent relationship to be with the feminine in form of mother or grandmother bond;

14. are situated between the extremes of life and death, good and evil, “in keeping with their creative/destructive dualism”;

15. “are often ascribed to roles (i.e. other than tricky behavior) in which an individual normally has privileged freedom from some of the demands of the social code” (160);

16. behave as if there is no distinction between reality and reflection.

Behaviour of Schelm in Schelmsage

The Schelm illustrates this: his profession defines his anti-social behaviour, but he twists this further by defying authority quite pushily, using his vanity to propel him to knighthood.

Throughout history, hangmen were known to have families. In the Schelmsage no wife or family are mentioned. The relationship to the empress is intimate but brief. The Schelm is portrayed with lusty appetite in Weil’s play, but there are no episodes of excessive sex.

The Schelm as hangman walks the line between the extremes of life and death. His profession required him to be a healer and/or helper, in medieval times.

The Schelm as hangman has the privilege of the freedom of the city at any time of day or night - but this comes with its own price of social exclusion.

The Schelm’s action at the masked ball displays this when he acts as if he is already a knight, worthy of dancing with the empress, and action he had contemplated only a few hours earlier (as in Weil’s play).

This analysis confirms the hangman as a trickster in Babcock-Abrahams’ terms. He seems to fit quite neatly into the margins of this grid. But as the title of Babcock-Abrahams’ article suggests, we will always have to tolerate the fact that we can never enumerate his appearances or what he is or does, the trickster is messy and deals typically in sex, corpses and shit. This is because there is no material in this world that the trickster is incapable of using - to transform a situation. To define him is to try to define the world and everything in it. As it is an impossibly eternal task, we find him slipping from our analyses. We can know however, where we may find him. In situations or feelings of limbo; at a personal crossroads in life. We see him in stories which mirror our tendency to be above the stink of human shit, our denial of mortality, and our capacity to make love a moral issue and split it off from sex. We laugh when we see in his mirror how stupid we’ve been. While an analysis is helpful in understanding that tricksters have an underlying modus operandi, it is only an analysis of the trickster’s career in his own context that can assist an understanding of why we laugh at him.

In medieval times, those who dealt in shit, corpses and sex, were tolerated only by being forced to live on the margins of society, “on the road”. In addition to the
tricksters, Hyde has said that "There are strangers on that road, and thieves, and in the underbrush a sly beast whose stomach has not heard about your letters of safe passage" (1998: 6). One category of person on medieval roads was that of students. Universities being literally few and far between in the twelfth century, students were laden with supplies for their sojourn and became targets for Hyde’s hungry sly beast in the underbrush. Emperor Barbarossa was well aware that no letters of safe passage would protect them and he addressed the problem in part in granting a charter to the University of Bologna in 1152 in Italy:

Wer sollte sich ihrer erbarmen, wenn sie heimatlos aus Wissendrang ihren Besitz opfern und arm wenden, ihr Leben vielen Gefahren aussetzen und oft vom minderwertigsten grundlos Tätigkeiten ertragen müssen? (Girtler, 1998: 44)

Who should be obliged help them, when they become homeless in their desire for knowledge, sacrifice their possessions and become poor, laying their lives open to many dangers and must often suffer acts of wrongdoing by the least worthy, without reason? (my translation)

This evidence shows the emperor aware of the situation on Europe’s roads, and it heightens the risk and the tension when considering his getting lost on the paths of his own imperial forest. The configurative moment happens by accident, either in the forest or at the masked ball. In both situations the Schelm, is rather like the trickster at work: you never know when you’re going to bump into him. It could be while he is wandering around on roads, collecting dead animals, or at the opposite extreme - pretending to be a knight at the masked ball. The emperor’s getting lost is the contingency which allows for a tricksterish moment. What the Schelm will do with this moment, depends on which figure of the Scelmo constellation he chooses.

8. Scelmo: nomen est omen: from grave to trickster

Four years after Barbarossa’s death in 1190, one of the King’s knights Henricus de Burnheim (Bornheim) (in Frankfurt), had signed his name as the first of nineteen witnesses in a document of 1194 and Clauss (2002: 11) suggests that his relatives may have been included in the other 18 signatories. Among them appears for the first time in writing, a Wernerus, Schelm von Bergen, signed as Scelmo. The layers implicit in the meanings of the word Scelmo have made for the many versions of the Schelmensage. Between narratives one and five analysed in this thesis, the story’s context changes at least three times: from forest to castle to masked ball. These layered contexts create the different moments of configuration and the Schelm is a
different figure in each of them. Configuration here has a repertoire, a different set of masks to draw on in the Schelm. In each instance, the Schelm in tricksterish fashion manages to stay alive and live well.

Kluge’s entry for the etymology of the word Schelm provides for the following discussion (1956: 642-643). Schelm is the masculine form of the word, although the feminine form of the word is termed as Schelmin. Like the trickster figure it describes, the word has its origin in the earliest Germanic languages, and is borrowed by other languages. An example of its earliest source is in the Finnish Kalma which means death or grave. Kluge motivates that the word Schelm is formed from Kalma and the Old High German word Scalmo to become Scalman. The Middle High German word Schalme includes meanings such as death, pestilence, cattle epidemics, carrion and corpse. The Old High German word Skelmo means one deserving of death, as it does in the Swiss word skelmjan. The Middle North German word Schelm(e) means a villain, or a cunning chap. These words are taken from the root (s)kel meaning to cut, applied to the context of a forceful manner as in execution or killing.

In Norwegian, the word Skelmir means Devil, and skelmisdrep an epidemic, or pestilence. The Norwegian skjelm, the Danish skaelm, the Swedish Skaelm and the Dutch Schalk all mean a person who cheats. In French, Chelme are rioters and troublemakers. All these words originate from and were borrowed from the German at various times.

Schelm also means a cadaver, the bodily remains of a dead animal or person, and this becomes the indirect tradename of the Abdecker (meaning to cover) - the one whose job it was to cover up and dispose of the remains of the dead. As this trade of the Abdecker, torturer and hangman (executioner) were one, the word Schelm came to symbolise all these three aspects.

Kluge asserts that in New High German, the expression Schelm is mitigated and softened in its association with meanings such as cadaver, (as in rotting flesh), a rogue or mischievous person, a layabout, someone who just hangs around; a skelling, scolding woman, cuts someone down to size, is reminiscent of the root skel - to cut.

These definitions are found in context of analysing the Schelm as a wild man, a hangman and a rogue.
9.1 The wild man

Sometimes, in order to receive the healing of trickster tales, one faces the sexual detail which these mythical buffoons revel in. In my introduction to this thesis I spoke of Persephone’s crossing to Hades. When her Mother, the earth Goddess Demeter learnt of this, she stopped the earth from being fertile. In one version of the story, on her search for her daughter, she took a rest at a well - and was visited by a woman,

or rather a sort of woman...[who] danced up to Demeter wiggling her hips in a way suggesting sexual intercourse, and shaking her breasts in her little dance. And when Demeter saw her, she could not help but smile just a little. The dancing female was very magical indeed, for she had no head whatsoever, and her nipples were her eyes and her vulva was her mouth. It was through this lovely mouth that she began to regale Demeter with some nice juicy jokes. Demeter began to smile, and then chuckled, and then gave a full belly laugh. And together the two women laughed, the little belly Goddess Baubo and the powerful Mother Earth Goddess, Demeter. And it was just this laughing that drew Demeter out of her depression and gave her the energy to continue her search for her daughter, which...was ultimately successful. (Estés, 1992: 338)

Before Persephone was kidnapped, the world had only known one prosperous season. During Persephone’s exile the earth was parched. Baubo is not telling jokes for the sake of it, but uses who she is to transform Demeter’s depression into bringing about a different earth: the creative compromise which follows Demeter rescuing her daughter is the division of the earth’s cycle into four seasons. Baubo thus comes to represent both the sexual and the sacred (Estés, 1992: 338).

The seeming paradox in this story is that for the earth to be fertile again, fertility itself must persuade Demeter into bringing it back. She is tricked into this by the trickster goddess, as a personification of fertility, in its most essential, bawdiest form and the laughter results in a redivision of the earth’s cycle. It is also an example of the feminine divinity soothing and being a corrective to another feminine divinity, who has broken down and roams the world in a state of sadness.

The early medieval tale of the provost Amis (Pfaffe Amis) as described earlier in this chapter, who makes fun of the refined courtly love ideal, uses sex to ridicule the upper classes and makes the middle-class man the truly wild paramour.
9.2 Benimet mir mange wilde tat: preventing the wild deed

A Spanish penitential from the 9th century (presumed by Bernheim to be copied from a Frankish source) lists a penitence of one year - for doubting Christians who relapsed into the pagan custom of dancing disguised in the “monstrous fiction” of Orcus, Maia and Pela (Bernheim, 1952: 43). The theme of dancing in disguise appears again in the Feast of Fools, where the church and its hierarchy was parodied for at least one whole day.

Known also as Orke or Lorke, Orcus was the Italic God of death and the underworld and Bernheim extends the association between him and Maia, the wild Holz-moia woman of later German glossaries, and thus links him to the concept of the wild man (1952: 43). This version of wild man as demon of death may be hidden behind the various figures of the Germanic leaders of the Wild Horde, the role of their leader reserved for the wild man. (Bernheim, 1952: 24, 64,79-80). The figure of Orcus as leader of the dead was later replaced with the Germanic club wielding demon Hellekin, whose connection to the wild man is seen in his giant like size and the kind of weapon he is carrying. (Bernheim, 1952: 64-65).

The Wilde Horde were hunters and marauders who worked at night as they rounded up the spirits of the dead and sped over the countryside, “that spectral chase known also as the Furious Host - which races in certain winter nights through the valleys and deserted villages, destroying every living thing it meets in its way” (Bernheim, 1952: 24). In German this swarm of the black clothed and saddled dead riders is also cited in Grimm’s collected legends of the 1800s, as the Wutende Heer (Grimm, 1965: 297).

In literature and art through the centuries, motifs of the wild man are of him pictured in his forest habitat dressed in either leaves or furs, walking on all fours, standing upright threatening with a club or lustfully grabbing at refined women in their boudoirs (Bernheim, 1952). The wild man of the middle ages persists down to recent times as the incarnation of erotic “desire” on the one side and of societal “anxiety” on the other (White, 1972: 10).

Another instance where this idea of the desire which wildness causes, presents itself in the songs of the twelfth century German Minnesingers, symbolic for singing about uncontained passion. One theme concerned the possibility that the woman who was the object of their affection could redeem her lover by soothing his wild state with her
presence. Dietmar von Elst, sings that his lady “benimet mir mange wilde tat, prevents many a wild deed by forcing the submission of his heart to her, as if she were the steersman and he the ship” (Bernheim, 1952: 137). Ulrich von Gutenberg, the 12th century Alsatian minnesinger sang, “I was wild however much I sang; her beautiful eyes were the rods with which she first overcame me” (Bernheim, 1952: 137).

When their paramours disappointed them, some of the strongest knights of medieval legend broke down and found refuge in the forest. Knights Lancelot, Tristan and Ywain, left the civilisation of the court and lived disoriented as wild men until a feminine force restored them back to sanity and civilisation (Bernheimer, 1952: 14). Having been a wild man did thus not prevent a wild man from becoming a knight, but it was possible only when the vestiges of that wild life had been removed (Bernheimer, 1952: 18).

Whenever women entered into a triangle with a wild man and knight, the wild man becomes the antagonist of the knight and the two must fight for possession of the lady: “The knight usually wins. It marks a major turning point in the history of European civilization that...the wild man is sometimes allowed to win in works of art describing [this] conflict after the middle of the fourteenth century” (Bernheim, 952: 121). This turning point theme of wildness tamed is found in Weil’s play in the court jester’s advice to his King after the Queen has been dishonoured by the hangman:

Jester: ... Listen then to me. The Queen has not been dishonoured. On the contrary. Just as the Queen put her hand into the hangman’s, she pulled him out of dust and lowliness -- and enobled him. Not with the hangman, but with a nobleman did your Queen dance. Be advised, noble Lord, give him his life back today, instead of taking it. This is within your power. Knight him at once -- and all shame and dishonour are taken off the Empress. (1952; my emphasis)

The grasp of the Queen’s hand had the soothing effect of changing the wild passionate behaviour of the hangman from his status as a man who lived in a hut in the forest - to a knight with a castle. As Bäumel explains, knighthood was an estate in life which was earned, or achieved. Even princes were not exempt from proving themselves through various criteria that they were worthy of the title (1969: 119).

Right from the beginning in Weil’s play, (narrative 5) the hangman’s attraction to the empress conceals within it, an element of being soothed by her presence; and it is this which motivates him to risk dancing with her at the emperor’s masked ball. The
Schelm here, configured his life in the mythological moment of the wounded wild
man, yet played it out as if he was a worthy knight. At the ball he is apprehended
when trying to leave before his identity can be revealed, and has an unexpected
meeting with his emperor. However, the interaction is what releases him from a
dishonourable profession by being knighted, bringing him into a “civilised”
profession. As the definitions of Schelm have shown, the trickster has more than a
wounded wild man in his repertoire, to configure his life differently.

By the sixteenth century, the period of the wild knights had come to an end. Their era
was commemorated when a builder-craftsman incorporated a design of a “wild man”
made of wooden beams, showing the legs, torso and arms of a man holding a semi-
circular saddle, into the exterior of Bergen-Enkheim Spilhus, playhouse and town hall.

10. The hangman

The etymology of the word Schelm includes the meanings death, grave, coverer of the
dead, pestilence, corpse, carrion - as well as hangman, implying that he is the one who
spills blood through torture and execution. These definitions provide input for
understanding the background to the disorder the Schelm provokes when he attends
the emperor’s masked ball. His profession creates a taboo around him, makes him
untouchable.

The anthropologist Laura Makarius asserts that the trickster’s paradox lies in the fact
they get favourable outcomes by transgressing the boundaries they are not meant to
transgress (Hynes and Doty, 1993: 68). For the medieval hangman to go from death
row to royal masked ball, and to touch others, to go as far as dancing with royalty, was
to turn the world upside down. He was a man with blood and disease on his hands.
Literally.

10.1 Between death and life

When I was seventeen, I had just finished school and wasn’t too sure whether or not I
would make it to university. I was in limbo. While waiting to hear my results and
ostensibly to earn some money, I worked for two months as a pupil-nurse’s aid in the
local hospital’s female ward. Under apartheid, this hospital had segregated wards and
I would work on the ward with white nursing sisters and patients but with black
cleaners. The work was to see if nursing was a possible alternative to university.
In the first month I was asked to pay particular attention to an elderly woman who had suffered a stroke and was unable to speak. “Push fluids” the Sister on duty instructed. I ended up syringing small amounts of water down her throat. One day, she unexpectedly bellowed “thank you”. Soon after that, I witnessed her dying while two nurses suctioned fluid out of her lungs. I was dreading to have to be the one who would clean the container with the muddy liquid in it - tasks pupil nurse- aids specialised in. But my eye was drawn away from that to the symbolic, swift gesture of the nurses pulling up the white linen sheet covering the corpse from foot to head. And then they left the room, container and all, with me staring incomprehensibly at the whiteness.

In the second month, I was allowed to witness the birth of a second child to a couple who didn’t mind having a pupil nurse-aid observing. The mother was relaxed, it was a quick labour with no difficulties. But somehow I was not prepared for the amount of blood that spilled out of the mother and consequently cloaked the baby. Once the baby had been checked, it was whisked away to be washed and was swaddled up in clean white baby clothes, placed in a cot in the nursery. Behind the nursery window, the father stared intently at his baby’s red head lying on the flat white sheet. I helped to wheel the bed from maternity ward to the mother’s room. The ward cleaner was called in to mop up. She arrived beaming, but paid very little attention to the fetal stains on the sheets. She flashed a toothless grin at the mother and said “Congratulations on your baby! Can I make you a cup of tea?”.

10.2 The dangerous quality of the blood

Makarius sets the trickster into the sphere of ritual magic, viewing the trickster-figure as both magician and the taboo-transgressor (1993: 66-67). She locates these “most often imaginary taboos” from a common source: “the dangerous quality of the blood”:

When it is not invested with a specific significance that wards off danger, spilt human blood is considered to be the malignant, frightful, and dangerous element among all human beings. The fear of blood is extended like wise to fetal materials...to newborns...and finally to anything whatsoever coming from a cadaver. All these materials are subject to taboo: that is to say, they are removed from contact with or the proximity of others, or even from public view, because of the danger they represent to the community. (Hynes and Doty, 1993: 68)
Makarius qualifies this taboo theory by pointing out that contact with blood is not always feared. It can be called on or spilt for protection, and the term “blood-brothers”, or blood pacts made between people signifies a positive symbolic practice (Hynes and Doty, 1993: 225). The hangman’s trade specialised in creating, covering up and dispensing cadavers. Even though in times of plague he was not responsible for creating the death of people, he was considered one of the only people who would bury those afflicted with the plague; the *pestilentiae*.

10.3 Plague and the scum of the city

The Bubonic Plague came from the East in the 600s to Germany. One of Barbarossa’s ancestors succumbed to it. By the time of the Black Death of 1348 in Europe the task of burying the dead became employment for marginal social groups, beggars, and the urban jobless (Herlihy, 1997: 41). Bocaccio describes the nature of the gravediggers, the *becchini*, in the words of a young woman in his *Decameron* who urged her companions to flee the city because of them:

> "We see the scum of our city, avid for our blood, who call themselves *becchini* and who ride about on horseback torturing us by deriding everything, making our losses more bitter with their disgusting songs". (Carmichael, 1986: 29)

By the 1400s, the “black death” affected Germany the harshest. By 1450 grave digging became a regulated profession (Carmichael, 1986: 29) and by 1634, the Oberammergau community in southern Germany made a vow to perform the passion of Christ every ten years, as a sign of deliverance from that plague (Shapiro, 2000: 103).

With the plague came a reassessment of death. The change can be found in the image of death in later medieval literature and art where it is portrayed as a monster in a macabre dance, “the master of a dance in which all must join” (Herlihy, 1997: 41). These images depict death as a dance partner - usually in the form of a grimacing skeleton who takes everybody - no matter the social stance, by the hand and dances them away from life (Nohl 1926, 1971: 24).

To appreciate what was involved in the medieval hangman’s daily work, Pies (2002) gives an account of the *Rotwelsch* or *Schindersprache*, the professional language of the executioners.

The hierarchy beneath the Master Executioner or *Dallinger* included an assistant known as the *Fetzer* who would be prepared to assist with *Roschabmacheyen* (beheading), *Taljen* (hanging), or *Reppeln* (torture on the...
wheel); he was expected to carry the wheel, known as a Galgel. The task of Kohlen, flogging, was left to other assistants further down the hierarchy, namely the Maschores (hangman’s apprentice) who, with the permission of the Master executioner could be given work as Dalljone, hangman. Beneath the hangman were those who worked with them in the skinner’s yard - the schinder, or Kafler. Using the blosssen Meichel, (skinners’ knife), they stripped the Kuffert (animal) of its sturtz (skin), then abfältete (loosened) the Schmuck (animal fat), before burying the animal remains which were not processed. (Pies, 2002: 42-3; my translation)

In addition to this, a hangman could be expected to carry out any of the following tasks:

to hang offenders; to torture by whipping with twigs; to cut off fingers, hands, noses, ears and to sever tongues or incise them; to brand offenders; to pinch the skins with heated iron tweezers; to dunk and drown, draw and quarter; to ram stakes into chests; to execute by burning and breaking limbs on the wheel; to bury suicide victims in the flayer’s yard or under the gallows; to break shields and coats of arms of those proclaimed dishonourable and to nail their names onto the gallows; and finally, die erklärung zum Schelmen, to declare those of honourable class to be Schelme the lowest in the ranks of the dishonourable. (Knobloch, 1921: 59-60)

It was also their job to clean the sewers and deal control inmates in prisons. Thus, to be called a Scelmo as the etymology of the word has revealed meant, to be identified with a class of people who were physically despised because of their work with rotting animals and unsuitable kill from the forest hunt. Due to the nature of their contact with any sort of corpse, they were considered the scum of the earth, unclean in body and due to their proximity to the moment of death, were considered to be have no feelings whatsoever.

Anyone for a dance with such a Schelm?

10.4 The necessary transgression

It is precisely transgression, which is a transformative dance for the hangman as seen in narrative five. The empress has to touch the taboo - literally touch the carrier of death, be made unequal, for him to be made equal - even if it is in his mind, only for an evening. The paradox lies in his dance with her (something not permitted) and the result in his gaining a knighthood (something which is permitted). To dance with death is to be made equal, no matter what your stance in life is (Meiners, 1967: 127). The knighting is the way out of the dilemma of the tainting, but it is also the tainting
act which forces the knighting to take place. The tricksterish moment comes when those of royal standing are forced to incorporate the taboo which they had previously split off: intermingling with those of the lowest rank, with death and rotting flesh as symbolised in the hangman.

The Schelm as wounded wild man configured his transformation from a place of wounded male pride, seeking the soothing feminine to cure him. The professional Schelm or hangman configured the moment of change in his risk of facing royalty with the mask of hypocrisy (his disguise as knight) and broke the taboo of the blood by transgressing through his status as scum of the earth and dancing with the empress.

This hangman is far from the ideal of the Germanic Scop, in his accepted role as ritual sacrificer, singer and dancer at cultic ritual. He comes closer to Reynard the Fox in his ability to “get away with murder”, to escape the gallows. However there is at least one more configurative moment drawn from the definition of the word Schelm. It is one which is similar to the Scop in that it allows for the mocking and railing of authority. The word Schelm may also be translated as troublemaker and rogue and it provides the defining tricksterish moment: the one that makes us smile.

11. The rogue

The word Schelm is a word close to the muck of the earth. It also includes the definition of the Middle North German word Schelm(e) to mean a villain, or a cunning chap, or the French Chelme, troublemaker (Kluge, 1956: 643). These facets coalesce in a character like Till Eulenspiegel, who makes us laugh at his naive way, in which he uses what society considers the “base” elements, feeding his face without paying anything for it at all; using the mud of the earth, to make his point. To be close to dirt, is to be close to shit, manure; but also close to the fertile earth, “the mud, the muck of the psyche - the creative substance from which all art originates” (Estés, 1992: 336). It is tool for the configurative moment in the repertoire of tricksters.

12. Signifying the human condition

While thinking through the thesis, I had, at times, discussed the story of the Schelm with a couple I knew, he a German professor and she a South African artist. I found their devil’s advocate position in supporting Barbarossa as the hero of the story a different perspective. An exhibition of her most recent artwork was to be on display in a museum which was once an artist’s home. I was invited to the opening night, which
turned out to be spectacularly hot. Amongst other paintings, stood her sculptures. The very manicured guests mingled, murmured and stood, wineglasses in hand heads inclined towards her statues, waiting for the invited speaker, a constitutional court judge, to open the exhibition. While they waited, a discomforting but familiar smell wafted around the room. Some guests discreetly wobbled outside to check their shoes in the garden, others went about pretending not to be disconcerted. As more people streamed into the house, the heat intensified, and the smell became overpowering. I decided to track down where it was coming from and found myself in one of the largest rooms which held her installation work entitled God, ons vrug is vrot (God, our fruit is rotten). There, lying in a white damask tablecloth sheet which was gathered up and held by four thin ropes suspended from the ceiling, the four outer corners, with objects such as oxygen masks tied to them, creating a manger like effect, lay quite a large undressed, vulnerable looking ceramic Christ-like doll smeared with dogshit. The artist herself was standing next to a perplexed woman who asked her what it was. Well, replied the artist, it signified the human condition. Us. Every one of us. As the artist and some of the more suitably distressed left the room, I found myself looking into this manger and then met another woman’s eye across the room. We couldn’t stop laughing. The artist had this captive audience, forced to look at the vulnerability of the human condition. They had come to look at her strong sculpture with their eyes and she had provoked them to understand their fragility with a sense of smell.

Artists who behave in this rogue-like fashion understand something of the nature of the trickster. When a facet of life is split off, they will make sure their audiences come face to face with it. Artists whose work is considered by mainstream society to be hard to understand, also share something with the Schelm: they live on the outskirts of life. They’re left out.

The Schelm’s antics in two of the narratives show the configurational moment as cunning ones, where they get back at the forces which have excluded them, in such a way that they make us smile. Campbell noted that humour “is the touchstone of the truly mythological as distinct from the more literal-minded and sentimental theological mood” (1985: 180). In version two, the lost emperor trusts the Schelm to bring him safely out of the forest. Considering who the Schelm is, the change in power dynamics is an amusing situation to start with. The hangman has connived a joke at the emperor’s expense.
The emperor owns the forest, but is lost in it. He is of the most honourable standing possible, but for that cart ride he is at the hands of the most dishonourable citizen, and dependent on his goodwill to get him out of the situation. As the Schelm knows his way around the forest, he chooses to deliver his passenger at a place where he knows there will be people who will be very amused at the inconceivable spectacle of the emperor seated next to the hangman on his cart. The risk is planned, and huge. It requires thoughts of subordination and disrespect and a weighing up of the consequences of the act that could include torture at the least, and possibly even the death penalty itself. The other side of this risk is that the hangman knows he will have delivered the emperor safely, and that the emperor is in his debt. Wilhelm Grimm recorded a proverb which fits this risk: Je grösser der Schelm, je grösser das Glück; the greater the rogue, the greater the reward (www.deproverbio.com, accessed 14.02.2002, my translation).

When the emperor is delivered safely to a laughing crowd, he responds to the situation he has been trapped into with great largesse, and knights the hangman in return. This version of the Schelmensage continues the theme of the battle of wits in the early medieval dialogue where the wise King Solomon is pitted against the peasant Marcolf - a pseudonym for Saturn, or Mercury, who was described in that dialogue as deceitful, and as a god whose worshipping places were the crossroads. We do not know the dialogue between the two men on the cart, but we do know the tricksterish outcome - the hangman wins the day and changes his fortune forever.

Implicit in the emperor/hangman dynamic, lies the desire to change the status quo. Like Eulenspiegel modelling himself on the businessman at the marketplace, the hunger for the life which has not too much work or suffering attached, is what drives the moment of configuration. As Mercury’s Greek predecessor, Hermes, put it, “either they give me honor or I steal it” (Hyde 1998: 219; original italicised). The importance of the theft in this case is somewhat masked behind the humour.

What has really been turned upside down, is the concept that the dishonourable hangman living as an outsider, is able to become an honourable insider in medieval society. Considering the history of the Schelme it is hard to believe that a hangman would have been wholeheartedly accepted as a knight. The hangman has rattled the concept that the boundaries of society are rigid. More than gaining a new life for himself, he has championed the idea that the world is a flexible place. True, the death
penalty will always be in place in some way or another in the world. But the trickster shows that it is possible to change the way we live in that world and that humour is one of the configurative moments, the touchstone to achieve this.

13. Conclusion

The moment of configuration at mimesis$_2$ is shown in all versions of the Schelmensage when the hangman meets the emperor quite unexpectedly. The hangman becomes an artful trickster, acts on the opportunity contingency presents and risks above his own head. This tricksterish moment is the point where “the practice of art and this myth coincide” (Hyde, 1998: 14). The trickster is responsible for the situation, a change agent who brings the message about the way things could be. Or in other words, as Doueihi stated, “the trickster is thus not a sacred being, but the way the whole universe may become meaningful, sacred, and filled with “power”” (1993: 201; original italicised).

As in the middle of Ricoeur’s mimetic arc, when the “coincidences are fruitful - they make us think again” and make new connections (Hyde, 1998: 14). The link between configuration and refiguration is the mediation between what one has encountered and the processing of it within one’s own situation to reach the refigured life. The new connection is what mimesis$_2$ requires for refiguration to take place, bringing the mimetic arc down to mimesis$_3$. As Ricoeur himself expressed it, “the meaning or the significance of a story wells up from the intersection of the world of text and the world of the reader. ... On this act rests the ability of the story to transfigure the experience of the reader” (1986: 126; original italicised).

Seven years after the Second World War, Bergen-Enkheim’s own Eulenspiegel known as a Kauz, a male screech-owl, (the word is a metaphor for an eccentric fellow) would mirror the Schelm and narrate a story which reflected moments of history, that would rather have been forgotten. Torbert summarised an understanding of the mimetic function when he said that the clown or trickster role could be seen as “archetypal for the Magician stage. It unites the opposites of masked performance and authentic spontaneity. It unites, as well, the opposites of actor within a setting or story and narrator of the story” (1991: 71). Weil was versed in history and familiar with the legend in its various forms. As the playwright of Der Schelm von Bergen, he became a narrator of a story, and placed parts of his own history within the characters. In so doing, Conrad Weil refigured his life, and the identity of Bergen-Enkheim itself.
7. The black knight
Chapter Four
Mimesis Praxeos
the refigured life

I think that one who tells stories must always have another to whom he tells them, and only thus can he tell them to himself. You remember when I wrote letters to the empress, but she didn't see them? If I committed the foolishness of letting my friends read them, it was because otherwise my letters would have had no meaning.
(Baudolino, Eco, 2002: 207)

European comparativists were particularly frustrated by trying to elicit the originating meaning of the widespread African practice of placing stones or sticks on cairns...People performed this ritual act for absolutely no reason. Beyond interpretation or explanation, the analysis of ritual must begin precisely at this point, at the juncture of thought, feeling, and action that coalesces in embodied practices that mark out the world. In each act of placing a stone on a cairn, people did not reenact some original meaning. Rather, they marked a new crossing, a new transition, a new journey. Through embodied practice, they redrew the map of their world. (Chidester, 1996: 262)

Schelm m... Schelm(e) meaning villain, cunning chap, rogue, rascal; in Dutch Skalk means one who cheats; the French Che/me means rioter.... (Kluge, 1956: 642-3)

1. Matching up

When my mother was a girl, she used to visit Frau Anna-Maria Lack, a grandmother of German-Italian descent, who lived in the house fashioned entirely of stone - an indication of wealth since medieval times - curious about her talking parrot. Frau Lack considered herself a poet and wrote verses such as the one that commemorated the arrival of the new church bells. Despite its spectacular inability to transcend the sum of its parts, the poem was parroted out to the whole congregation. Conrad Weil couldn't abide her self-righteous sense of poetic importance and living up to his reputation as kauz, he made up a verse about her, not unlike Eulenspiegel in style; it was reported to my mother's family by my great-aunt Lina, who was a child minder for the owners of the leather factory where Weil worked:

Ich bin die heilige Anna Lack/und was ich dicht ist grosser kack
Ich passe zu den Dichtern/Wie der Hintem zu den Gesichtern

I am the holy Anna Lack/and the poems I write are a load of kak
I match up with poets/ like the backside matches the face

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Born in 1893 in Enkheim, the youngest of three sons Conrad Weil lost his father at four and his mother was unable to afford him a tertiary education; after school he went to work in the Enkheim leather industry, becoming a watzemacher, producing cheap leather purses. He and his family were physically short people, and he lived with asthma and a heart problem – which kept him out of the war. From 1933 until his death, he lived opposite the synagogue in the Erbsengasse, once known as the Rewwesgass, the Rabbis’ lane. It was later renamed Conrad-Weil-Gasse. (Heinemeyer, 1994: 8). While still young he was politically involved and from 1921 to 1931 was the head of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in Bergen-Enkheim. After the Second World War, he was appointed to deputise for the mayor, when necessary, and was an executive member of Bergen-Enkheim’s city council from 1946 to 1952 and from 1952 he was the chair of the legislative city council until his death in 1960 (Heinemeyer, 1994: 8).

In his spare time he read voraciously and had a talent for research and writing. He was a gifted storyteller, and despite the derogatory comments about his person, he is remembered for his verses and rhymes in Enkheim dialect, which have since been collected in a volume and are performed at social evenings in Bergen-Enkheim. He drank, smoked cigars and published, with other local historians such as Wilhelm Koch. He published his research essays in the local publication Aus der Heimat (From the Homeland).

While he busied himself with writing about local history, a theme close to his own life was that of the pagan crafts, considered as the witches’ occult practice that his own grandfather knew a lot about. He published an article about his grandfather’s life, which revealed him to be one sympathetic to both pagan and Christian culture. He managed the dualities of church presbyter and pagan healer, and he knew how to cast spells. Weil lists the incidents such as when a child lost weight very suddenly, or screamed all night long without any explanation, that when neither doctor nor professor could help, then mothers would go and ask his grandfather’s help as a last resort. He never asked for payment but was allowed to receive whatever donations people were able to give. After eight days the child would be healed. Weil himself was disappointed at being unable to learn the craft. This was due to the fact that it was
supposed to be passed down from woman to man to woman, alternating gender, and the women on Weil’s matriarchal side of the family kept to a Christian life (Weil, 1955: 43-45).

*Aus der Heimat* published Weil’s essay on *Plants in popular belief - magic plants used by witches* where he articulated that “one of the darkest chapters of human culture, is the time of the witch hunts” (Weil, 1955: 81; my translation). The botany of pagan traditions fascinated him, as from that time every healing plant was known to have a demonic role as well. In this article he gives a recipe listed in documentation from witch trials - including the seven ingredients and the fixative (snake fat or the fat from a victim burned at the stake) for an ointment that enabled a person to “fly”. Weil motivated that this ointment induced a state similar to modern drugs; the delusion that one was flying and seeing landscapes, dancing with demons, the devil and so on, due to the herbal mixture. He does, however, also include an inquisitor’s record where a condemned witch was offered to spare her life, if she could show them how she could fly. The woman asked for her herbs, prepared them and rubbed her body with the ointment. Soon after this she climbed up a high tower, and then flew from it, to her freedom. There were far too many who weren’t that lucky. For Weil, the Middle Ages punished this drug addiction unfairly with the death penalty (Weil, 1955: 81-83).

A few years after the war, the Bergen-Enkheim cultural society commissioned an open-air play (many theatres had been bombed), about the *Schelmensage*, to be set in the local Frankfurt context. The poet Martin Dietz was asked first, but when he was unable to produce anything they asked Conrad Weil. His three-act play, *Der Schelm von Bergen*, is the work he is best known for (see CD ROM track 7. *Dancing with the Hangman*). It was considered remarkable as he had never worked in the theatre in his life. Thematically it follows narrative 5 as outlined in the structural analysis. In the first act, the action is at the marketplace in central Frankfurt, which allows for the setting of the medieval world of action. The devious dealings of knights, the mysterious potions of herbalists, and the announcements given by royal heralds, are the background for the arrival of Barbarossa and his beautiful queen. After their arrival, subjects beg for mercy of imprisoned spouses from the death penalty, and mercy is granted. The hangman is noticed and shunned by a group of children. In the
second act the hangman and the witch meet, and for the jar of fat from an execution, she gives him a mandrake root, to enable him to win the queen’s favour. In the hangman’s dialogue with the town watchmen, the hypocrisy of the “dishonourable” executioner and “honourable knight” is exposed. The action also gives insight into the way the hangman decides to risk going to the royal masked ball. In the third act the hangman dressed as knight, and masked, attends the ball and dances with the empress. His true identity is discovered at midnight, and it is the court jester who proposes the solution of knighting the hangman, which is what Barbarossa does. He is bestowed with castle and a coat of arms: two bloodied ribs on a silver shield.

2. The stone heap

The purpose of this chapter is to give an example of how the Schelmensage has been used to refigure a life, using mimesis in Ricoeur’s mimetic arc. In this case, the refigurer is a Bergen-Enkheim historian who used the mimetic moment to interpret the history of his town and his personal past. Weil’s version of the Schelmensage, is a dramatic one, and its performance in Bergen-Enkheim prompts this chapter’s consideration of it as a ritual performance. His act of writing was a way of redrawing Bergen-Enkheim’s historical map.

Travellers used to put rocks onto cairns by the road to summon Hermes’ protection for their journey. Hyde reminds his readers that the name Hermes once meant “he of the stone heap”, “which tells us that the cairn is more than a trail marker - it is an altar to the forces that govern these spaces of heightened uncertainty, and to the intelligence needed to negotiate them” (Hyde, 1998: 6). David Chidester has commented on this practice as an approach to ritual analysis; “In each act of placing a stone on a cairn, people did not reenact some original meaning. Rather, they marked a new crossing, a new transition, a new journey. Through embodied practice, they redrew the map of their world” (1996: 262). This chapter takes the view that the mimesis in refiguration is not the act of imitating or copying the Schelm’s risky behaviour. Rather, by starting the analysis of the play as ritual, I have begun at Chidester’s suggested juncture of “thought, feeling and action” (1996: 262) as I have perceived and interpreted elements in Weil and Bergen-Enkheim’s history, and have observed how this “coalesces in embodied practices that mark out” the world of the Schelmensage (1996: 262). With
each telling the gesture of the *Schelmensage* grows bigger, or becomes more ornate, as evidenced in the 33 versions listed in the introductory chapter. Each time the story is told, it is told differently and it marks the beginning of a new journey for those who are receptive to it. When one is able to receive a story, one is able to change one’s actions.

3. Mimesis; reaching fulfillment, redrawing the map

Mimesis, Ricouer has argued, is not an imitation, but the break for fiction and reconfiguration of a life. Taking the context which produced the *Schelmensage* the chapter on history sketched the world of action, the symbolic processes that held the possibilities for medieval hangmen and emperors meeting up. This is Ricoeur’s prefigurative stage of understanding human experience, called mimesis1. It precedes the stage of configuration, because it contains the action that wishes to be storied. The chapter on the trickster explained the point of configuration, called mimesis2, in all the versions of the *Schelmensage*, which happens when the hangman uses all the wit he has and negotiates the space of “heightened uncertainty” (Hyde, 1998: 6) and exploits the contingent moment to his best advantage. He tricks the emperor into giving something he was not planning to give – a knighthood to a man in a dishonourable profession.

In the *Schelmensage* the refiguration comes when the hangman is transformed and lives a new life – that of an honourable person, a knight. This refigurative stage is called mimesis3. It is the stage of realization, of all that has gone before, which has been brought to fulfillment and gives it a sense of conclusion. This ending is what proves the embodied practice of the configurative moment which shows that the map has in fact, been redrawn, a new meaning been made, a life refigured.

However, apart from the hangman and emperor, to whom does the result of the interaction in the forest mean anything to? As Eco’s trickster Baudolino (also in love with the empress) discovered:

I think that one who tells stories must always have another to whom he tells them, and only thus can he tell them to himself. You remember when I wrote letters to the empress, but she didn’t see them? If I committed the foolishness
of letting my friends read them, it was because otherwise my letters would have had no meaning, (Eco, 2002: 207)

For the story to mean anything outside of the meaning to the original protagonists, it needs to be told to someone else, or recorded. The transcending action and potential change which the Schlemensage contains, is realized only when it is received. It is not complete until it is passed on. It is the act of reading (or hearing) which completes the work, which transforms it into a reading guide with its zones of indetermination, its latent richness of interpretation, its ability to be reinterpreted in novel ways within historical contexts that are always new. (Ricoeur, 1986: 127; original italicised)

In this third stage of mimesis, the reading is a way of reconciling life and story, because one starts to imagine oneself, as Weil did, in the “fictitious universe of the work” (Ricoeur, 1986: 127).

4. The narrated life: mimesis praxeos
What is the narrated life? Ricoeur answers that if one applies the Socratic maxim that the unexamined life (i.e. enumerating the biological basics alone) is not worth living, then fiction is what helps to make the business of living, a human endeavour (Ricoeur, 1986: 121). The examined life is thus the narrated life (Ricoeur, 1986: 131) that becomes meaningful, through the mediating role of fiction. According to Ricoeur, Aristotle’s definition of story is the imitation of an action, or mimesis praxeos (1986: 127) and he argues that a story can offer points of support in the daily experience of living, acting and suffering (1986: 127). Weil’s denied inheritance of pagan healing and wisdom, combined with his research and talent for writing, perfectly positioned Weil to create the play, Der Schelm von Bergen - a ritualised version of the Schelmensage. Without being the author of his own life, Weil imitated the action of the Schelm himself and narrated a way of life that he had been allowed only to imagine. The tricksterish element in his writing, was that Weil made a public transcript out of a hidden one (Scott 1990: 49). A man who was ostracised for being different and holding minority beliefs, had the chance to make his community see a work in which he included some of its own split off history, performed by themselves and for themselves and others, and who had little choice but to accept what they had commissioned him to do. Scott elaborates on the importance of this:
The deference, obsequiousness, and humiliations of subordination are extracted as part of a public transcript... a public humiliation can be fully reciprocated only with a public revenge. (1990: 214)

To say that Conrad Weil was extracting revenge in writing his play is too harsh a motivation. Rather, as Arendt suggests, there is something Schelm-like about authors of Schelmensages (1974: 7). Schelme, are not revolutionaries, but the potential power to start a revolution lies in their actions (Arendt, 1974: 113). What is schelmisch about Weil's action is rather that he refigures the pagan past in his presentation of the Schelm of Bergen. His defence of what "witchcraft" was all about, is summarized in the witch Sybille's explanation to the hangman, of her work, in Act two, scene one of Der Schelm von Bergen:

**Sybille:** Oh, no. I don't practice devilish delusions, nor do I have a pact with the evil one. In the name of the Almighty God, the holy trinity, I search for herbs and roots. Not everyone has got the gift to know, whether the juice of the plants is healthy or poisonous. Now I must make haste, I have to collect many herbs before daytime, damp from the dew of night in the light of moonbeams.

Martin Dietz's loss became Conrad Weil's *hermaion*, the gift of Hermes (Hyde, 1973, 1979: 129). His historical, botanical and geological research, phenomenal memory and Eulenspiegel type of humour, and more importantly his own life experience, prepared him for the *hermeneuein*, or hermeneutic art of interpretation which has an ancient connection to Hermes (Doty, 1993: 62), the god of the crossroads, he of the stone heap. In the few weeks he took to write the play, Weil became the *hermeneus*, a bargainer with words, a messenger. The work of hermeneutics, of interpretation, begins where linguistics stops (Ricoeur, 1986: 127). The gift of the commission to write the play enabled Weil to interpret, to take hold of "the hinge between the (internal) configuration of a work and the (external) re-figuration of a life" (Ricoeur, 1986: 127). The transfiguration allowed him to make the hermeneutic work, the opportunity to use all his received knowledge that resulted in his being seen as a writer of some importance. The play itself was a way of Weil transfiguring his life. As Ricoeur puts it "Hermeneutics reconstructs the operations whereby readers who receive it change their actions" (1984: 80). From the ability to emplot a story, to grasp a configuration from events (mimesis₂) the persuasion to refigure a life (mimesis₃) will be governed "by the hearer's capacity for receiving the message" (Ricoeur, 1986: 148).
127). This gift of Hermes is passed on once more when those who go to see the play Der Schelm von Bergen, may consciously or unconsciously receive the metaphor and influence their world of action, their lives. For example, it is the theatre spectator at Weil’s play who is required to bring down the arc of mimesis from his emplotment to their refiguration (Ricoeur, 1984: 77).

5. Ritual: intersection of myth and the world
Catherine Bell’s work reconsiders traditional questions about analysing ritual. She seeks to restore ritual to its rightful context as a multitude of ways of being and acting in a particular culture (1992: 140). Bell cites Rappaport’s motivation that while drama is not ritual, performance is inseparable from ritual. Furthermore, as Bell’s applied framework suggests, the play as performance, culturally mediates many things. Part of the reason I have sketched something of Conrad Weil’s life, in opening of this chapter, is to consider Bell’s injunction that if I am going to define the performance of the Schelmenage as ritual, then I must understand the “nature and relation of nonritual activity” (1992: 69).

Germany has a well defined culture of dramatizing its heritage. In Germany, the first surviving passion plays in Latin date from the twelfth century, whilst the earliest plays in Latin and German appear in the thirteenth century (Shapiro, 2000: 57). With the devastating effect of the plague in Europe in the 1600s, the southern German community of Oberammergau made a vow that if their village was spared from the plague, they would perform the “Tragedy of the Passion” every ten years, in perpetuity. Since 1634, every ten years, the Oberammergau community, perform Christ’s passion (Shapiro, 2000: 103) a day long performance, which continues for approximately two of Germany’s summer months. After three hundred years of performance, it could be supposed that the village may feel the weight of the tradition they established. However, every performance is different along with its own power dynamics, some of which Shapiro discusses in his book titled Oberammergau: the Troubling Story of the World’s Most Famous Passion Play (2000).
As Bell comments, “Ritual is never simply or solely a matter of routine, habit, or the dead weight of tradition” (1992: 92). The practicalities of putting on a play create situations where people vie for status, power and remuneration. It involves much more than writing the text, and Oberammergau and Bergen-Enkheim’s two very different scripts show that the politics of what is written and who writes and interprets material, are not straightforward: in Oberammergau, at least, especially constituted committees make decisions about what changes may be made to the text and stage settings. The passion play has had literally hundreds of years in performance, and its high standards of polished performance has brought it international fame, as Shapiro’s title suggests. As a teenager, I had seen the 1980 performance of the passion play and although there is no comparison with what I saw in the 2001 performance of *Der Schelm von Bergen*, the day I spent in Oberammergau was to have an enduring effect on my understanding of German performance. It alerted me to issues of text, reception and impact.

Bell states, that “since practice is situational and strategic, people engage in ritualization as a practical way of dealing with some specific circumstances” (1992: 92). At the intersection between the *Schelmensage* with its implied trickster mythos, and Weil’s *Der Schelm von Bergen* lies the politics of performance and its implicit power struggles. The play is thus loaded with many agendas, the ritualizing of the *Schelmensage* a “strategic arena for the embodiment of power relations” (Bell, 1992: 170).

6. Embodied practice
The overt reason for the Oberammergau performance is a bargain with God to spare lives in the time of plague, and the event of the vow changed the village forever. As a former director put it, “No Oberammergauer can talk about the village without talking about the play”; for many, the play is “cradle to grave” (Shapiro, 2000: 4-5). The political sub-culture of the village’s dependence on the play runs through from issues of anti-Semitism, the revenue it gets from international tourism, down to who gets what role, and the chance to direct the play. Shapiro found that people don’t say someone acted or played the part of Caiaphas; they say he was Caiaphas; in the minds of many of the performers-and of their fellow villagers - acting goes well beyond ordinary impersonation. (2000: 4; original italicised)
Shapiro’s commentary shows that the ritualised drama of Christ’s passion deals with the circumstances of survival: issues of politics, identity and power. When applying Bell’s notion that such performance is a way of dealing with “specific circumstances” (1992: 92) in a practical way, the specific circumstances that the *Schelmensage* embodies in practice, must be established.

In his work on ritual studies, Grimes poses a few questions concerning “ritual time” which can assist in answering such questions (1982: 24-25). Weil’s play *Der Schelm von Bergen* was first performed in 1953 one of the most recent of all the seven that have taken up the *Schelmensage* in this genre. Its commission was based on the fact that all the other plays did not locate the action in Bergen itself, the legend’s originating context. A point of pride and focus after the consequences of the Second World War; its production involved the townspeople of Bergen-Enkheim themselves, performing the legend that their local context had originated. Financially, the gains from first performance of the play, helped to pay for the repair of the canalisation system in Bergen-Enkheim.

The *Schelmensage* was performed again in 1957 and 1961 to audiences totaling between 12 000 and 15 000 people per season (Henschke, 1974: 143). It was performed in 1981, and in 1994 it was performed in the open air, in central Frankfurt at that city’s 1200 year anniversary as “town” status. Some of Bergen-Enkheim’s historians get involved with the play, but at least one boycotts the performances, due to the historical liberties he perceives the text takes. The play now follows a four-year cycle, and due to the fact that the volunteers are usually employed, preparation often begins a year in advance. I attended two of the 2001 season’s performances as part of my fieldwork (see CD ROM). The performance initiates a week of activity: the play is followed by the agricultural fair, and then by a lecture given by the writer, who has won the award of “Stadschreiber of Bergen” (Heinermeyer, 2001, 143), a grant which allows the writer free residence in Bergen-Enkheim. The prize was instituted in 1974 and for the period of one year, the remunerated writers may write what they please.
In keeping with its origins, Der Schelm von Bergen is performed as an open-air play over four evenings, usually in the summer month of August, just before the annual agricultural fair held in Bergen. The original performance, was originally staged outside the Spilhus the original playhouse and then town hall, but subsequent performances were moved to the nearby Schelm's residence, the Schelmenburg, which strengthens the symbolism between the legend and the play. As sign of its importance in the area, the Spilhus (now a museum) houses models of the scenes from the play as well as an exhibit of the first casting list. As in the passion play, people often start with the roles of extras, and aspire to those characters with the more important dialogue. The current director of Der Schelm von Bergen, for example, has played the role of the witch since the 1957 performance at the age of nineteen. I learnt something about the reception of the work, from my mother's experience of it. She played the role of the witch in the 1953 premiere of the play, also aged nineteen. She perceived and played the role of the herb woman, to be more of a sinister character, one whom people would be frightened of. The over-identification with the characters which Shapiro describes, is also evident in Bergen-Enkheim. My fundamentally Christian grandmother refused to see my mother perform in the play, due to its association with witchcraft and that particular role my mother played. At the 2001 performance, a man who had performed with my mother in the 1953 play, came up to her and introduced himself as the "mayor", his role in the play, before giving his actual name.

In the 2001 performance, the witch is portrayed as a caricature. She wears a profuse grey-haired wig, and an overly obvious plastic pointy nose. Her actions provoke much laughter, and she is received as a comic character rather than a serious one. The attention seems to be focused on the risky interaction between the hangman and the empress. In the 2001 programme notes the characters get to relate their personal reasons for their performance. Some sketch their rise from small roles to the more important ones, and one of the pairs who played empress and hangman in that year, stated that they were also offstage partners.

While the Schelmensage commemorates a triumph of the underdog over royalty, Conrad Weil took the opportunity to make explicit, a split off history that was implicit in the Schelmensage and thus reclaimed his past; it empowered him to present that
history to a captive audience, who lived in fear of that past, and preferred to treat it as if it had never existed. Weil added the characters of the court jester to Barbarossa retinue, and the witch as the hangman’s friend, plus a voice-over for the spirit of the goblin/mandrake root. In his treatment of the Schelmsage Weil prizes highly the role of fool, and sidelines Barbarossa by giving the task of resolving the emperor’s dilemma, to the jester, as Act Three Scene Five shows:

Jester: Yes, my lord. Though I have not attended the [legal] school at Padua, the proverb says correctly, that fools and children’s mouths always speak the truth. Listen then to me. The Queen has not been dishonoured...Not with the hangman, but with a nobleman did the Queen dance. Be advised, high Lord, give him his life again today, instead of taking it. This is within your power. Knight him at once -- and all shame and dishonour are taken off the Empress....

King: [happily surprised, impulsively] By God and all the martyrs, you have given good counsel. And I shall act accordingly. You are the only wise man, even though you wear the fool’s cap. I shall entitle you to become my private councillor, to be on the safe side of you for the future.

The characters of the hangman and the witch are reminiscent of Orcus and Maia which were referred to in the section on the wild man in Chapter Three. Bernheimer has noted that these two – the wild man and the shriveled hag - form the same couple, which appear in the spring Carnivals in the Balkans and in central Europe (1952: 81). This symbolic pair, Bernheimer believes, are “one of the remote sources of origin of later medieval masquerades”, a historical image that the well-read Weil has may have encountered in his research. In the play, the hangman learns much from the witch – presented as herbalist. Act Two, Scene One, sees her teaching him about the mandrake root’s powers:

Sybille: The hangman doesn’t know a little gallows-man?
Hangman: A little gallows-man? I have heard about it.
Sybille: It is also called the mandrake root. Fortune, honour and ladies’ favour it brings to him who owns it.
Hangman: Well well, but tell me, where did you get this mandrake from?
Sybille: Hee hee, wouldn’t you like to know? Seriously: you don’t know where this root comes from? Well, I shall tell you. Listen! It grows where you practice your bloody handwork, underneath the gallows.
Hangman: Underneath the gallows - I have never seen such a plant.
Sybille: I believe you. You need to have a penetrating eye to recognise this insignificant herb in that place. On the night of the new moon you must dig for it.... (Weil, 1952)
Weil also extended the reasoning for the hangman's attending the masked ball, which gives insight into the magnitude of the risk that the hangman took in gatecrashing a royal ball. Weil's hermeneutic act, is to interpret the Schelm's risk as a passion for the empress, and his desire to have one night of enjoyment with her. Through this, Weil constructs the operations of metaphor's transcending action by letting us in on the hangman's pitting his tricksterish courage up against the forces, which govern the world he is peripheral to. He does this through dialogues between the hangman and the witch, the helpful herb woman, and the night watchman. In Act Two Scene Two he describes the hangman's world of action and possible risk, in his interaction with the herb woman in Act Two Scene One:

**Hangman:** [laughing angrily] Sybille, you have gone mad, or you have had too much mead to drink. At this rate I may even dance with the Queen at the festival tomorrow. I, the hangman, disgraceful and shunned by everyone. Ha ha ha!

**Sybille:** [seriously] And why shouldn't you? You are a handsome man, slender as a fir tree with a handsome face and young on top of it all. If you would wear a doublet of Florentine silk or velvet, two silken shoes as long as the rich young nobles wear them, a sword hanging from a richly embossed belt and a mask, who would recognise you? (Weil, 1952)

The performance of the play is by far one of the most ornate versions of the Schelmensage. These excerpts show Weil's meticulous research into the medieval way of life, and as a result the hangman's difficult risk – which pays off more than he could have ever imagined.

7. Occasion for reflection

Weil's dramatization of the Schelmensage is one of the ways in which the Schelmensage is passed down to those who live in Bergen-Enkheim. My personal and academic curiosity after receiving the legend myself, has impacted irrevocably on my life. To measure the impact of the play and to find out whether or not those who experience it receive it at another level – is not within the scope of this work.

Having given some of the reasons and the politics of the text and performance of the play, I would like to motivate that there is one further reasons for the Schelmensage's
ritualisation in the form of Weil’s play. Jonathan Z. Smith has written that ritual is a means of performing

the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled, course of things. (1976: 63; original italicised)

In other words, the action of the play shows us what we are unable to achieve in our own lives, the discrepancy between life as we live it as opposed to life as we think it ought to be. The play does not function as an interesting bit of historical comedy that is repeated in cycles for the sake of keeping a legend circulated. Whether consciously or unconsciously, those who attend the play must wrestle in some way with the gap between what is performed, and what their own lives reflect back to them about the nature of tricksters. The play is a way of facing the action of a trickster’s challenge to risk over and above our heads. The location of the action is medieval in context, yet it is one in which the character’s concerns are close to the viewer’s hearts: the desire to live in a different better world, to be recognized for who one really is, and to be loved for that, can be seen in the exchanges between the hangman and the empress in Act Three, Scene Two:

Hangman: Pardon me, noble lady. Consider that this is the first time I am attending a festival like this. I am quite giddy and confused as if I had had too much wine. The fortune to dance with you makes me quite dizzy. How could I have expected to win your favour?
Queen: I don’t know myself what moved me to choose you, a stranger, as my partner.
Hangman: We all must follow the call of our heart. What would love be, if the heart was not involved? A May day without the sun.
Queen: How truly you speak, dear knight. Believe me, many a heart burns painfully in the flames of love, because it could not join another in love.
Hangman: Oh God, why do you speak such bitter words? Do you have grief in your heart, you who are the first lady in the country? (Weil, 1952)

The responsibilities of living everyday life are not often the fulfillment of long held aspirations. As viewers of the performance, we know what our lives ought to be, or should be, but that it would take a lot, in fact maybe too much to change our lives. Smith states, that "by the fact that it is ritual action rather than everyday action, it demonstrates that we know 'what is the case'" (1976: 63). In Smith’s framework, this play as ritual provides an “occasion for reflection and rationalization on the fact that what ought to have been done was not done, what ought to have taken place did not
occur" (1976: 63). One of the reasons the play may be thought of as ritual, is that it is performed precisely because it mirrors to us the risks involved in changing a life, which we may be unwilling to take for ourselves, reasoning that risks may be so great, they could result in losing life itself.

If a spectator of Der Schelm von Bergen receives the work in such a way that it sets in motion a new emplotment and a consequent refiguration through the work of interpretation, then they have imitated the trickster’s balance of being able to live in one world while constellating another. In Smith’s view then, the play could give occasion for reflection on a life, and the mimetic act becomes an “offensive against the objective world” (Smith, 1976: 64). Watching the play will make one who is receptive to it, not necessarily copy the hangman’s actions, because to live in the world the play portrays, is not possible. Rather, the change brought about by the mimetic intervention happens as a result of thinking about the incongruities between the play and reality.

8. Conclusion
At the end of Weil’s play, the court jester has the last word and he hints at some of these incongruencies.

Jester: What you saw happen here
I don’t know if it is true.
To judge by the applause
You must have liked it!
Our time is up, the play is done
and so dear people, please go home!

Epilogue to the 1952 version of the play Der Schelm von Bergen. (Weil, 1952; my translation)

Ricoeur noted that the intrigues we receive from our culture combined with our capacity to apply them to ourselves, and our experimenting with the figures in the stories we love best, allow us to narrate our lives differently (1986: 132). Conrad Weil achieved this for himself when he wrote his play. In its turn, the play affords all those who watch it, the same opportunity of refiguring their lives.
8. Bergen-Enkheim coat of arms
Conclusion

The trickster is thus not a sacred being, but *the way* the whole universe may become meaningful, sacred, and filled with “power”.

(Doueihi, 1993: 201; original italicised)

To say that theory and practice belong together is a truism. Of course they do. Who could disagree? But in what proportion and under what circumstances? How do they belong together? Do we apply theory to practice, or do we infer theory from practice? Or do we merely derive theories from other theories?

(Grimes, 1982: 162)

1. Symbol, myth and ritual

This thesis set out to answer the question of why the *Schelmensage* has been retold over the past 900 years. Having received the story personally inspired a synthesized CD ROM documenting a field trip, plus the use of a reflexive methodology. Ricoeur’s mimetic arc was cast and this unpacked the world of action in Germany’s history, the transformative moment in myth and the refigured lives as a result of the emplotment. At a second level within this arc, the *Schelmensage* was examined in terms of symbol, myth and ritual.

The word *Schelm* is the central symbol of the legend which, when trying to define it, lives up to the contention that tricksters are much too ambiguous, too slippery for definition. In each chapter, the word’s different symbolic meanings were reflected in different contexts. From the literature surveyed, the word *Schelm* is used to mean rogue, or knave in German, the equivalent of the English word *trickster*. I was unable to track down any written examples of the word prior to its first written appearance in a Frankfurt document of 1194; the word’s pre-1194 origins and history is a topic for further research in German trickster mythology. *Schelm* has come to symbolize the genre of trickster literature in German prose. However, one of the gaps this thesis has addressed was the fact that no analysis had been made of the *Schelm* as trickster and the *Schelmensage* as mythology.

Examining the *Schelmensage* as symbolic narrative or myth, revealed the figure of *Schelm* or hangman as symbolic connector between the upper and underworlds,
playing the pivotal role of transformer. In the Schelmensage’s case the transformation was one of hangman to knight. Treating the performance of the play as ritual, revealed that the symbolic practice that occurs in Bergen-Enkheim every four years, is precisely because it mirrors a level of risk taking over and above one’s own head, something which its audience may not feel up to doing for themselves. Implicit in the life of the playwright, was the fact that to receive the message in the legend, means to be able to refigure one’s own life, using fiction as mediating experience.

Out of these analyses comes my conclusion that the Schelmensage is repeated because it holds within in it the potential for transformation in people’s lives. This transformative potential is what elevates ordinary stories to the realm of the extraordinary because it contains transformational possibilities when retold to those people who are able to receive it and act on what has been told. This is why myths will be repeated - until the human need to remake the world is no more. Our human interest in naming, labeling, analysing what transformations can bring, have made us name these situations as godheads. Hermes is the name of trickster god. We have accoutered him in ancient Greek and German styles, but as Anne Doueihi stated it, we should not see the trickster as a sacred being, but rather as “the way the whole universe may become meaningful, sacred, and filled with “power”(1993: 201; original italicised). As my own experience in the preface demonstrated, my personal crossroads led to my hearing a story, which contained a techne, a method, a way of dealing with how to move on from those crossroads; in other words, how to get one’s power back and live life more meaningfully than before. To be able to do this requires the capacity of imagination. It is this, motivated Taussig, which lifts us through “representational media, such as marks on a page, into other worlds” (1993: 6) Thus, while characters in trickster mythology change according to the context, these myths may be told and received through novels, legends and anecdotes, amongst other media. If we are open to living in another world, we are given the means to live differently.

2. Seed and soil
In the introduction to this thesis, I used Estés’ idea that “If a story is seed, then we are its soil” (1992: 387). Initially this was used to understand the connection between
myth (seed) and the human capacity to receive it (soil), as mutually beneficial interaction with transformational possibilities.

In Ricoeur's theory of mimesis, this connection was encountered in the fact that the action - the symbolic processes of living - become meaningful when we are able to narrate them. Fiction is the necessary mediation to make life meaningful. To live the examined life means to have the capacity to imagine something other than the situation one is in. This mimetic act, "To make an image [,] is to resurrect a soul - the invisible counterpart of the (mimetic) world" (Taussig, 1993: 111). Implied in this mimesis is the fact that life as a world of action, and narrative - the capacity to emplot a story, have to be given to each other if something is to become transformative, as the growth which results when a seed is planted in the soil.

This theory of the gift is played out in practice in the Schelmensage. There is a possibility of true gift giving in this legend. The reversal of power in the forest finds hangman and emperor dependent on each other for a change to occur: the emperor requires the hangman to help him out of the forest, and the hangman wants to hold the power for a little while, and thereby creates the chance to have a joke at the emperor's expense, within the situation they inadvertently find themselves in. It is within the hangman's power to safely deliver the emperor, and it is within the emperor's power to make the dishonourable man an honourable one. Within this exchange, lies the paradox of the gift. Derrida has said that

...a gift is something that is beyond the circle of reappropriation, beyond the circle of gratitude....As soon as I know that I give something, if I say "I am giving you something" I just canceled the gift. I congratulate myself or thank myself for giving something and then the circle has already started to cancel the gift....If the gift is given, then it should not even appear to the one who gives it or to the one who receives it, not appear as such. That is paradoxical, but that is the condition for a gift to be given. (Caputo, 1997: 18-19)

In the legend, both characters are required to give to each other, but according to this definition above, it is not a gift in that sense. It required a trick, a jesting test of sorts from the hangman (the receiver), to elicit the gift from the emperor (the giver). It required a risk, which could have cost the hangman his life. While the emperor
granted the knighthood, he may well have another agenda in response to the hangman’s daring. Historically speaking, Barbarossa made knights of men who had not inherited or earned the title. He bought their loyalty, and this commercialisation of knighthood corrupted the strong society that he sought to maintain. When their greed could not be matched with the royal coin and the empire refused to support the knights, their loyalty turned inward and the knights became bands of raubritter, thieving knights set against authority. So it is arguable that in the medieval economy, appointing a hangman as a knight, is to get the potential power of a troublemaker, on your own side. As Hyde summarises this position, “A market exchange has an equilibrium or stasis: you pay to balance the scale. But when you give a gift there is momentum, and the weight shifts from body to body” (1973: 9). If however, the legend is retold as an explanation for the gift of knighthood (the line of the Schelme von Bergen) then the telling itself may function as a gift to one who requires it.

3. Theory and practice

From the understanding that story and method are “given” to each other in order for mythology to do its transformative work, I have seen that the dynamic of the gift is mimetic in nature. Taussig said that “Pulling you this way and that, mimesis plays this trick of dancing between the very same and the very different” (1993: 129). In dealing with Ricoeur’s work, I became aware of the fact that he constructed his theory by making a connection between the very different worlds of Aristotle’s Poetics and Augustine’s Confessions; it was my sense that without them, his theory would not have taken the direction it did. It was as if he became their spectator, the hermeneut who made the spark, that connection between two works, whose worlds were hundreds of years apart, yet had some commerce with each other. He reflected on them and used them as his metaphors to build his theory about discord and concord, temporality and narrative. In turn, I have used Ricoeur’s gift of theory, as a method to understand the Schelmensage. To answer Grimes’ question, theory and practice are gifts to each other. Theory is seed, practice, its soil. As academics, it is our task to bring the two together, to grow something new, and break open new meanings.

After hearing and receiving the Schelmensage itself, I realised that I had been given a second chance to transform the situation I was in. The writing of this thesis and
producing the CD ROM allows me to understand Hyde’s statement that “We know that art is a gift for having had the experience of art” (1973, 1979: 280). In being given the gift of the mythological legend, I have responded in an academic manner, and have endeavoured to continue the mythological gesture by telling the story, and explaining its *bricoleur* method as the “faint clues and indirections” I received along the way (Hyde, 1973, 1979: 280).

As Hyde and Derrida agree, a gift has to move on, to be a gift. With the end of the patriarchal lineage of the Schelme of Bergen in the 1800s, the town of Bergen-Enkheim claimed the *Schelm* of Bergen’s coat of arms as its own in 1968 (Clauss, 1993: 4). With the town’s incorporation into the city of Frankfurt, the hangman’s symbol of bloodied ribs on a silver shield graces the red sandstone wall in Frankfurt’s city hall.

While I wrote this thesis, it felt as if I was custodian of the *Schelmensage* for a little while. I know, however, that this legend is not mine. If I treated it in that way, then it would lose its tricksterish currency. Through re-writing it, it hovered under my hands as I wrote and I have come to understand the structures that underlie its meaning. Watching the hangman, I learnt that the other side of death - is life. And that to interpret these dissimilar worlds means to see the spark between them: life and death are gifts to each other. From their commerce we become hermeneuts. The legend has given me more of a capacity to imagine the other worlds I have written about and in so doing, I changed the world I live in. It made me realise, as Bertolt Brecht said, that the imagination is the only truth.

As the *Schelmensage* slips through my fingers into this work, surely, my loss must become another’s gain?
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